Conscionable Consumption: A Feminist Grounded Theory of Porn Consumer Ethics

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Abstract

Much scholarship on pornography consumption has revolved around porn harms or porn empowerment discourses. Moving away from pro- and anti-porn agendas, the research presented in this thesis was designed as an exploratory, qualitative investigation of consumer experiences of pornography, using grounded theory in an effort to transcend the polarised porn debates. By means of a two-stage data collection process involving an online group activity and in-depth interviews, this research set out to extend our understanding of how feminists experience, understand and articulate their engagements with porn.

Grounded theory's focus on iterative data collection, structured analysis and inductive theory development lent itself to several key aims for this project: (a) eschewing, as far as possible, commonly-held assumptions about the research topic and research subjects; (b) resisting agenda-driven frameworks that seek to validate pro- or anti-porn stances; and (c) allowing for the voices of porn consumers themselves to be heard and taken seriously, in a way that hasn't tended to be prioritised in pornography effects research or the public arena more widely (Mowlabocus and Wood 2015: 119).

The iterative approach to data collection advocated by grounded theory also enabled participants to take a more agentive role in determining the direction of the research. As a result, certain elements of the project took unforeseen trajectories, shedding light on additional substantive areas for inquiry beyond those initially intended. Namely, the study provided key insights into the interaction between ethics and practice in porn consumption amongst London feminists. This gave rise to the development of the 'conscionable consumption' model; a theoretical framework for conceptualising the experiences and processes described.

Results indicated that feminists' experiences of porn consumption were heavily influenced by their beliefs about what constituted 'ethical enough' (conscionable). These were accompanied by contemplative moments, whose nature tended to correlate with the degree to which the individual felt they had strayed from their own conceptions of conscionable practice, and the degree to which these decisions could be justified or dismissed afterwards. Respondents described an interactive relationship between such reflections and future intentions and/or attitudes, illustrating a cycle of evolving and adapting behaviour complemented by fluctuating definitions of conscionability. In this

way, rather than referring to an achieved or failed 'ethical consumer' status, the porn ethics project was conceptualised as an ongoing process of 'conscionable' negotiation.

Such findings enhance our understanding of the ways in which ethics and porn use are woven together and navigated by feminist consumers of pornography, whilst simultaneously extending our knowledge of a demographic hitherto unexplored within both the fields of porn studies and consumer ethics research alike.

Keywords: *feminism, pornography, consumer ethics, conscionable consumption*

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My gift to you: permission to stop reading after the acknowledgements. You're welcome.

Contents

1. Introduction

The world of online pornographies has been identified as both pivotal to the sexual expression of a new generation, and as simultaneously representing a dangerous space for the proliferation of harmful attitudes towards sex and society (O'Brien and Shapiro 2004: 118). It is perhaps for this reason that "qualitative research into the consumption of sexually explicit material is more desirable than ever before" (Attwood 2005: 84). Indeed, it is frequently noted that, in spite of the estimated size and undeniable significance of that which we call the 'online porn industry', comparatively little is known about its audiences (Attwood 2007: 1; Hardy 1998: 98; Jenkins 2004: 2). There currently exists very limited research into how women use pornography (Attwood 2005: 72; Marques 2014) and little to none on feminists' use thereof. In its design and delivery, this project has sought primarily to address this research gap.

Until very recently, scholarship on pornography consumption has been dominated by psychoanalytic and media effects theories (Smith 2007: 12), which have often revolved around porn harms discourses. As Barker (2014: 122) notes, with reference to the psychology literature in this area:

> *There are underlying assumptions in conventional psychological research on pornography that it is possible to determine cause–effect relationships between outside stimuli and human behaviour, to label effects as straightforwardly 'positive' or 'negative', and to assume that people's attitudes will predict their behaviour – although there is much evidence, even within mainstream psychology, that the relationship between attitudes and behaviours is not a simple one.*

In light of the widespread criticism levelled at these approaches, particularly with regards to their reliance on seemingly unsophisticated, linear understandings of media reception (Attwood 2005: 67; Jones and Mowlabocus 2009: 615), the research presented in this thesis adopted a different method of inquiry and broadened its scope beyond questions of porn effects. Equally so, it sought to avoid taking for granted the similarly simplistic 'porn-as-empowerment' discourses that have been invoked to take on effects-based 'porn-as-harm' perspectives. Rather, this study was designed as an exploratory, qualitative investigation of consumer experiences of pornography, using grounded theory in an effort to move beyond the polarised porn debates. It focused specifically on feminist-identified consumers, due to the way in which this demographic could be said to occupy a unique position both within and outside of feminist critiques of pornography.

In this way, the project diverged from the theory-testing approaches common in media effects research and qualitative research more widely (Urquhart 2013: 180). This was, in part, due to there existing so few theories of pornography consumption at the time of commencement, and even fewer that made efforts to locate themselves outside of the porn-as-harm or porn-as-empowerment agendas (Boyle 2006). As Paasonen (2014: 137) asks, drawing upon Sedgwick's notion of 'paranoid' inquiries, if we are already convinced of pornography's fundamentally harmful – or empowering – nature, "then what can the ensuing investigation uncover that we do not already know?" It was felt that grounded theory's focus on inductive theory development, and its iterative approach to data collection and analysis, would thus lend itself to a number of key aims for this project. Chief among these goals was a quest to capture the experiential subtleties that might lie between and beyond porn harms-versus-liberation discourses or that may otherwise extend our understandings of porn and its consumption. Such insights could provide opportunities to transcend the pro-/anti-porn debate in favour of a more critical understanding of the contexts and means by which people generally, and feminists specifically, engage with pornography.

Due to the inductive nature of the grounded theory approach, the project was ultimately able to go beyond these initial aims. As well as shedding light on some of the specificities inherent to feminists' experiences of porn consumption, this research project furthermore grappled with questions of consumer ethics, and the – harmonious or otherwise – coexistence of ethical principles and pornographic encounters/desires in the feminist imaginary. Lengthy conversations with participants in and around these central topics resulted in the eventual development of a new theoretical model for understanding feminists' porn consumer ethics. It is this theory of 'conscionable consumption' that is presented and explicated over the course of the thesis.

Foundations

It has been asserted that pornography viewers – often assumed to be male – remain largely ignorant of or apathetic to practices of women's subordination in society, troubling sentiments that are thought to be further promoted by the consumption of pornography depicting derogatory sexual interactions between men and women (Dworkin 1974; Dines 2010). Complementing this declaration is the claim that female

viewers of pornography and women within the industry can be dismissed as victims of 'false consciousness' or naive complicity in their own subjugation (Mackinnon 1983; Levy 2005); a predisposition that is, itself, believed to be borne of patriarchal structures of oppression. Such views have been met with criticism from within and outside of feminist spheres, where questions of women's sexual liberation, expression, bodily autonomy and self-determination have gained traction (Segal 1993; Duggan et al. 1985). Supporting this opposition to anti-porn sentiments is a movement insisting that the solution to patriarchal pornographic conventions isn't to abolish porn, but rather to improve it (Penley et al. 2013).

These 'feminist porn wars' began in the 1980s with the abovementioned pro-sex feminist backlash against anti-pornography sentiments articulated by 'cultural' or 'radical' feminists of the 1970s (Lišková 2009). Brownmiller's (1975: 395) categorisation of pornography as "anti-female propaganda" implies the irreconcilability of porn and feminism. This is a stance echoed by Dworkin and MacKinnon who decry the depiction of women as "dehumanized sexual objects" (in O'Toole 1998: 28). Meanwhile, feminist voices deviating from this stance have surfaced, some falling into the category of what we might call "sex-critical" perspectives (Downing 2013), and others that have been identified in terms of pro-porn or 'sex-positive' views (Queen and Comella 2008).

The subgenre of 'feminist porn' emerged in the 1980s, as a response to the anti-porn sentiments being expressed by many in the feminist movement – as well as a reaction to what were seen to be sexist and otherwise negative representations of women and marginalised groups in 'mainstream' pornographies (Penley et al. 2013: 11). These reformative convictions can be contrasted with a large body of literature maintaining that pornographic material depicting women is inherently harmful insofar as it represents their objectification and sexualisation. From this perspective, the political intentions of feminist pornographers could never overcome the fundamentals of pornography's perceived sexism. In this way, an impasse between the two 'camps' was established, and "meaningful dialogue has long since broken down" (Boyle 2006: 4).

For the purposes of this research, it was anticipated that a better understanding of how self-identified feminists navigate the complex terrain of pornography might elucidate some overlooked aspects of the 'porn wars' debates. It was tentatively speculated that such insights could ultimately support the development of a new model

for understanding porn selection and reception; one that would be better equipped to conceptualise potential alternatives to the apathy/victimhood dichotomy and harms/empowerment agendas. This was not to claim that those who identified as feminist consumers of porn would necessarily be better positioned to negotiate pornography than non-feminists, but simply that that their voices could be considered to have the unique characteristic of being located both within and outside of feminist critiques.

In this way the project aimed to tackle certain priority areas identified by Attwood (2005: 83) as in need of further study; namely around: (1) how different groups of people engage with a range of sexually explicit representations; (2) the range of responses articulated by these people; and (3) the political significance of the explicit. Whilst in the last decade scholars have begun to delve into these previously underexplored areas, inquiries into the uses, understandings and experiences of pornography amongst *feminist* audiences remain conspicuously absent from the extant literature. Given the potentially vital insights such an inquiry may yield – for academia, activism, policy and industry – this research piece aimed to address this noteworthy research gap.

Grounded theory was chosen as a methodological approach to the research due to the tools it offers for bracketing – as far as possible – pre-existing assumptions about the area of inquiry. By insisting upon the importance of inductive theory development, emphasising the need to resist embedding oneself too deeply in the extant literature, and providing rigorous qualitative data coding techniques, grounded theory is well equipped to help researchers seeking to eschew conscious or unconscious agenda pushing. This was deemed especially important in a field dominated by such polarised debates. With its bottom-up, inductive approach to data collection, grounded theory furthermore lends itself to the task of capturing unanticipated insights that may lie beyond existing expectations of consumer apathy, victimhood or other assumptions made elsewhere in the field. This approach also enables the voices of porn consumers to be elevated; voices that have rarely been taken seriously in pornography effects research (Mowlabocus and Wood 2015: 119), and whose 'standpoint' arguably, ought to be foregrounded in studies claiming affiliation with feminist epistemologies (Collins 1998).

A side effect of grounded theory, however, is that research questions remain in purposive flux for the greater part of the project timeline. Whilst this, for the project at

hand, enabled participants to have greater agency in directing the focus of the interviews and the inquiry at large, it ultimately saw the research travelling along an unpredictable trajectory. Indeed, the project began with an intentionally open-ended question about what feminists' felt to be most important with regards to pornography. This progressively moved towards a more specific focus on porn consumption ethics as the interviews unfolded. By virtue of this somewhat unforeseeable turn, the research was thereby able to address a further gap in the literature over and above those noted earlier. Namely, in addition to advancing our understanding of feminists' experiences of pornography, this project was ultimately able to take on the unprecedented task of formulating a theory of feminists' porn consumption ethics. The aim for the thesis henceforward is to elaborate upon the key pillars and concepts that constitute this new theory of 'conscionable consumption', as well as demonstrating the process embarked upon in its development.

The literature review that follows serves a very functional role, demonstrating the initial orientations for the research piece, and the context in which the project was originally situated. As will become apparent in the subsequent methodology chapter, however, these initial orientations were prone to shift with each iteration of data collection and analysis, in accordance with grounded theory's inductive theory development processes. Following this methodological overview, the thesis proceeds by presenting the results of the research, the final theoretical model proposed, and a dissection of how this model and the key concepts that constitute it were reached. Woven into the presentation of findings are discussions of pertinent questions, tensions and observations generated by the analysis and its juxtaposition with existing literature. As such, much of the analytical content that might normally be found in a literature review, rather, serves to punctuate the subsequent empirical chapters. The thesis concludes by asserting a number of applications for the findings of this research, and suggests further areas for academic exploration in a field that remains rich in insights and ripe for scholarly inquiry. As such, the structure of the thesis as a whole reflects the iterative process of the research itself.

2. Project Scoping: Literature Review

Traditionally it is the act of situating one's research findings within the body of existing, relevant work that constitutes the main goal of a PhD literature review within arts and humanities disciplines. This often includes a critical analysis of extant theories and any empirical outcomes, along with a discussion of the implications such research may hold for the inquiry at hand, and vice-versa. However, given the sociological/interdisciplinary orientations for the research and its grounded theory approach, this literature review performs – or performed – a rather different, more functional role.

Whilst some level of familiarity with the studied phenomenon is necessary when designing and delivering a research project, Glaser (1992: 31) states that an extensive review of existing literature "might contaminate, stifle or otherwise impede the researcher's effort to generate categories" in grounded theory studies. Thus, a tension emerged between the grounded theory approach and the framework of assessment for PhD researchers. Whilst grounded theory advocates against conducting a comprehensive literature review at the early stages of research in order to minimise the influence exerted by existing theory on the analysis, academic institutions often require a literature review as an indicator of progress. To combat this, a top-level 'project scoping' literature review was conducted in the first instance, consistent with Dey's (1993: 63) principle of keeping "an open mind, not an empty head". This piece of writing aimed, first and foremost, to provide an overview of the research context surrounding porn audiences, and to delineate the knowledge gap that this project set out to address. It also sought to explicate the seed concepts or theoretical "hunches" (Urquhart 2013: 131) underlying the proposed substantive area of inquiry and the intended direction for the research.

It is this functional literature review that is presented here to lay bare the initial foundations of the project and its orientations. Meanwhile, the more comprehensive and critical engagement with extant theory that might ordinarily be expected of a literature review is, instead, woven into the proceeding chapters of the thesis. With that in mind, the chapter at hand will proceed by outlining the substantive area in question and the academic landscape within which it was located at the time of writing, as well as the seed concepts that formed the foundations of the research itself.

Porn Audience Research

Research thus far in the field of porn studies has helped to shed light on some of the many ways of receiving and engaging with pornographic material. These include erotic value versus political and ethical considerations; views of porn as fantasy versus perceptions of authenticity; conceptions of porn as sex education; and the intersection of gender and sexuality with pornography spectatorship (Boynton 1999; Loftus 2002; Ciclitira 2002; Mowlacobus et al. 2013; Tzankova 2015). This work has helped to shed light not only on people's variable relationships to pornography, but also on the tensions and complexities implicit within and between them. A selection of these studies is presented here with a particular focus on those making use of grounded theory techniques and/or those exploring distinct, predefined porn audience demographics. Each, it is argued, emphasises the contradictions and complexities expressed by porn audiences and, together, highlight the extent and prominence of such subtleties in experience that have yet to be fully grasped.

A suitable starting point for this review is the study by Mowlabocus and colleagues (2013), which provides an excellent example of such complexities by means of a grounded theory exploration into pornography consumption amongst gay and bisexual men in the south-east of England. Whilst the authors do not necessarily scale up their findings for the purposes of theory development – a task that the grounded theory approach would normally facilitate – they make use of grounded theory coding techniques in their critical reading of the "anxieties and pleasures" experienced by viewers of bareback pornography. Their study discusses how participants view the presentation of barebacking in porn as posing dangers to some consumers who may seek to replicate risky sexual practices, whilst simultaneously stressing that they do not consider themselves to be at risk due to their age, experience and/or educational background. Scarcelli (2015: 247) also notes this "third person effect" in his study of adolescent girls' relationships with online porn, pointing out that interviewees express concerns about porn viewership, though especially with regards to audiences perceived to be younger and less informed than themselves.

Exploring porn reception amongst men specifically, Loftus (2002) meanwhile finds that straight male respondents adopt a similarly critical stance to the porn that they use. LIkewise Hardy's (1998) study indicates that, in the face of what they recognise as

potentially problematic relationships with pornography, men often adopt complex means, by which to reconcile their porn usage and the material they enjoy within their own sexual partnerships and erotic practices. More recent research into men's consumption practices includes Vörös' ethnographic inquiry into the gender dynamics at work in gay, straight and bisexual men's use of porn, in which the author's 'hegemonic complicity' helps to reveal how "female and feminist views are demeaned in homosocial male bonding" (2015: 137). Furthermore, Edelman turns our attention to the experiences of trans and cisgender (non-trans) men's experiences of pornographic imagery depicting trans-male orgasms, discussing how audience reception processes "both reproduce and destabilize hegemonic notions of maleness" (2015: 150). These studies extend our understanding of the tensions inherent to many consumers' interactions with and experiences of pornography.

Such work can be contrasted with Smith's work on female audiences of pornography (2003; 2007; 2007b). Extending our understanding of women's engagement with sexually explicit texts, Smith's work on 'For Women' magazine and its readership highlights women's enjoyment of, but simultaneous disappointment in, the pornographic material presented within its pages, as well as their complicated relationships with porn more generally (2007: 27). She argues that women arrive at the materials with complex understandings of gender, sex, sexuality, relationships and power, which impact their experiences, understandings and readings thereof in a variety of ways. Equally so, Neville's (2015) exploration of the 'female gaze' and women's experience of gay male erotic fiction emphasises the complexities of female sexuality in their engagement with porn. Neville adopts an iterative, inductive approach, making use of questionnaires, interviews and focus groups, responses to which suggest a variety of reasons for which women might enjoy gay male pornography. Over and above an attraction to men, these include a wish to avoid pornographic material that they perceive to be exploitative or degrading to women, and a disinclination to see female models "who they would otherwise 'be jealous of'" (*ibid*.: 199). Thus she exposes not only tensions inherent to some women's experiences of pornography, but also some of the methods drawn upon to navigate such anxieties.

This notion of an outward-facing 'female gaze' along with a critical, self-directed one can also be observed in Boynton's (1999) study, exploring women's responses to

female representation in “top shelf” magazines. In this research, preoccupations with hierarchies of attractiveness emerge amongst focus group participants, alongside self-comparisons with porn models and anxieties about their relative attractiveness to men. Similarly, in her study of how men and women respond to sexual images of female and male bodies, Eck (2003) observes a relationship between women’s reception of imagery depicting sexualised female bodies, and their own negative self-image. As such, anxieties to complement the potential pleasures offered by pornographic materials are once again exposed.

Taking stock of feminist influences on porn reception amongst women, Ciclitira’s research shows how the “politicization of porn as negative can also exacerbate women’s guilt, shame and confusion about their own sexuality” (2004: 297). Her study reveals female porn consumers’ multifaceted relationships with sexually explicit materials, and discusses the contradictions expressed by women who enjoy pornography but simultaneously have concerns about the representation of women in porn and the treatment of sex workers within the industry. Drawing upon these notions of contradictory feminist feelings towards porn, Paasonen (2007) suggests a reparative reading of pornography and calls on us to be accountable for our conceptualisations of pornography. She speaks about the danger of paying attention only to feminist readings of pornography framed as ‘disgust’ or ‘pleasure,’ urging us to acknowledge the areas in which those feelings may coexist, and emphasising that “a great deal remains to be critiqued in the scenarios and institutions of porn” (*ibid*.: 55).

Meanwhile, Liberman (2015) makes use of interviews and focus groups to explore the discursive foundations of feminist porn and the meaning-making processes amongst audiences arriving at the genre. Feminist porn, she argues, represents a “heterotopic” site, both reifying mainstream pornographic conventions whilst simultaneously intervening in them, to form a specific taste culture amongst certain female and feminist-identified groups. Ryberg also discusses feminist interventions in pornography, however, prefers to describe this phenomenon in terms of a (queer and) feminist “porn film culture” (2015: 161). She draws upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a number of queer and feminist porn film screening and production contexts, concluding that, whilst desire and fantasy may not always align with political convictions, “sociopolitical subjecthood” may nonetheless “have impacts on different subjects’ engagements in porn scenarios”.

Thus, we are increasingly seeing work that explores the nuances of engagement with and reception of pornography; which looks at the online porn context; explores both mainstream and alternative pornographies; and recognises women – perhaps even feminists – as consumers.

Seed Concepts

Making use of grounded theory to engage with feminist consumers of porn in London, this project has sought to build upon these new trends and approaches to porn audience research in order to extend formal theory in this area, expand it in new directions, and intervene in the gridlock of feminist debates on the topic. As grounded theory warns against pre-empting themes, it has been vital to maintain an open mind with regards to the trajectory the research might take. Nonetheless, three 'seed concepts' were initially identified to provide the general orientations required to begin the inquiry. These concepts tentatively asserted that:

a) There exist very different definitions of pornography
b) Equally so, understandings of feminism may vary
c) Feminist consumers of porn may thus hold vastly divergent attitudes towards pornography and its consumption

The sections that follow will address each of these seed concepts individually, presenting the literature upon which each conceptual 'hunch' was based and outlining how they fed into the research rationale more broadly.

a. Definitions of 'pornography'

Much like the related topic of sex work, pornography "is one of those issues that everyone has a view on, and rarely are these neutral" (Barnard 2005: 1014). Discussions about pornography often incite debate, with the perspectives most regularly articulated falling into two diametrically opposed 'pro-' and 'anti-porn' camps, each fuelled by contrasting speculations about pornography effects. For this reason, it is somewhat alarming that there appears to be very little agreement, in the UK and worldwide, on what is actually being described when invoking the term 'pornography.' Regardless of the arena – from academic spheres to activist groups – a single definition of what constitutes pornography continues to evade us. As Rea (2001: 118) notes, "the definition of 'pornography' is as elusive as the referent is pervasive".

Attwood and Smith (2014: 10) contend that delineating the referents and parameters of that which has come to be known as 'pornography' is key to moving past the harms paradigm, which often serves to limit rigorous inquiry and nuanced analyses in pornography research. In 1964, the United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously declared: "I can't define it, but I know it when I see it" (Lederer 1980: 40). More than 50 years later, this inclination towards intuitive modes of distinguishing the pornographic from non-pornographic, still appears surprisingly prevalent. Yet, questions around the meanings or nature of pornography emerge, somewhat inevitably, as central to any and all debates about porn – from inquiries into porn effects to observations of industry practices. Discussions about porn effects become meaningless if we have not first examined our own understandings of the referent. Equally so, debates about the 'porn industry' are of little value if we have not first explored the parameters of such an industry and its outputs. Indeed, I use inverted commas throughout this thesis to reflect the constructed nature of 'the porn industry' as a term and the way in which it has come to represent a vast array of arenas pertaining to the production and distribution of diverse sexual media.

Highlighting the importance of defining pornography, particularly in the context of debates about ethical and political feminist values, porn performer and Marketing Director of porn studio Pink and White, Jiz Lee (2013: 211) asserts:

> *Whether you think I am a feminist, or even a moral person, has everything to do with your own definition of what pornography is, and yet when arguments about pornography are made, the word is almost always used without further explanation – as if we all 'know it when we see it.'*

The issue of how to define pornography has been pertinent for some time and will undoubtedly remain so for the foreseeable future (Donnerstein 1984: 79). Meanwhile, attempts to ascribe the term with a concrete definition are numerous and ever proliferating (Kendrick 1987: xiii). These range from descriptions that focus on the content of pornographic material itself, to definitions that centre on the intentions of those who have produced it, and others still that shift the focus towards consumer reception. We see how porn has been described legally (Beresford 2014; Prygoski 1987; Helgadóttir 2014), sociologically (McKee 2014), psychologically (Barker 2014b) and historically (Kendrick 1987; Mercer and Perkins 2014; Bull 2014). We can furthermore identify descriptions of pornography's variable status as "texts, productions or performances" (Attwood and Smith 2014: 4), popular culture (Penley et. al. 2013: 13),

social movement (Young 2014: 187), media form or genre (Williams 1991: 3; Dyer 1992: 121–2), industry (Berg 2014: 77) and beyond. It is perhaps for this reason that Clarissa Smith (2007: 12) laments:

> *A literature review [in the field of porn studies] often results in an extremely confusing array of different definitions that hardly seem to explicate any one instance of 'pornography' let alone the umbrella category 'the pornographic'.*

It is in view of this murky semantic backdrop that I seek to elucidate – and, importantly, organise – the range of ways in which pornography has come to be understood, whilst also shedding light on the specific ways I deploy the term in my own research.

Content-Based Understandings

Pornography has often been defined, at its most basic level, as 'sexually explicit material'; a definition that emphasises the nature of its content over and above, for example, intent or reception. This designation, however, makes a number of semantic assumptions, failing to delimit how we might characterise the 'sexual'; what qualifies as 'explicit'; and which types of material are eligible for inclusion. Similarly, descriptions of pornography as productions "driven forward by sex scenes" (Bright 2013: 38), are limited insofar as they assume that pornography always manifests itself in textual form – whether filmic or literary – and that it is necessarily supported by some form of narrative device. As Attwood (2010: 55) points out, when reflecting upon the images, texts, performances and productions that have at one point or another come to be described as pornographic – a vast array of artefacts ranging from the first "Pompeiian frescoes…to a decorated deck of cards" (Kendrick 1987: xiii) – the difficulty of identifying any common characteristic at all becomes all too apparent. At the very least we are forced to acknowledge the inadequacy of definitions that simply equate 'pornography' with depictions of sex and sexual narrative.

Further to this, questions around whether pornographic content may be defined as representation or documentation remain unanswered. The role of fantasy in our understandings of pornography, for example, has been highlighted as an area of contention, particularly in discussions around pornography harms (Kipnis 1996: 3-64; Barker 2014b; Williams 2014). Reflecting on Tim Dean's (2009) ethnographic explorations of barebacking, Linda Williams (2014: 36-37) highlights the tensions between pornographic films or videos understood as material that on one hand documents actual bodies, sexual acts and existing power relations; and on the other represents fantasy and

particular imaginaries of a social reality. From the perspective of many anti-porn proponents, it is both the 'reality' itself of (women's) involvement in the production of pornographic imagery, and the representation of 'real' power structures, that are objectionable.

This view is exemplified by MacKinnon and Dworkin, who contend the very act of women performing sexual acts for photographic or filmic reproduction can be considered a "documentary of abuse", and furthermore, that the production and consumption of material seen to depict fantasies of sexualised subordination constitutes violence against women (MacKinnon and Dworkin 1997: 312; Dworkin 2004: 137). It is thus unsurprising that they define pornography in terms of its ability to harm, going so far as to describe it as "a civil rights violation":

> *We define pornography as the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and/or words that also includes one or more of the following: (i) women are presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things, or commodities; or (ii) women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy pain or humiliation; or (iii) women are presented as sexual objects who experience sexual pleasure in being raped; or (iv) women are presented as sexual objects tied up or cut up or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt; or (v) women are presented in postures of sexual submission, servility or display; or (vi) women's body parts-including but not limited to vaginas, breasts, and buttocks-are exhibited, such that women are reduced to those parts; or (vii) women are presented as whores by nature; or (viii) women are presented being penetrated by objects or animals; or (ix) women are presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual.*
>
> (MacKinnon 1985: 1-2)

Accordingly we see how, as Smith (2007: 14) contends, radical and anti-porn feminists such as MacKinnon have tended to disavow possible distinctions between different forms of sexually explicit materials in favour of a broad-brush harms-based understanding. Similar definitions revolving around the purportedly damaging content that constitutes pornographic representation are echoed elsewhere (Morgan 1980; Jensen and Dines 1998), amongst other negative characterisations of pornography content, such as the seemingly absent representation of women's sexual pleasure (Long 2012: 77).

If we are to accept that pornography – by definition – presents male sexual pleasure at the expense of women's; always depicts women's subordination to men; and in and of itself represents violence against women, then accounting for porn that claims to overtly resist such characterisations becomes difficult. In light of this, Penley (2013: 13) challenges the harm rhetoric put forward by anti-porn proponents, claiming that 'feminist porn' – a genre emerging in the 1960s in response to what were considered negative

elements of mainstream pornography – "defies other feminist conceptions of sexuality on screen as forever marked by a threat". This is echoed by feminist porn professionals, such as Shine Louise Houston, who attest to the personal, political and pleasurable potentials of producing pornography:

> *There is power in creating images, and for a woman of color and a queer to take that power… I don't find it exploitative; I think it's necessary.*
>
> (CrashPadSeries.com)

Definitions of pornography that depend on its essentially harmful nature are also challenged somewhat by the existence of gay and lesbian porn, where hetero-patriarchal norms may arguably be more easily resisted. Based on radical and anti-porn feminist perspectives, pornographic representations that have come to be considered 'feminist', 'queer', or 'for women' are either mistaken about their ability to prioritise female desire and resist heteronormative ideologies, or otherwise, do not actually qualify as 'porn' at all.

Thus definitions such as those espoused by MacKinnon and Dworkin, which emphasise pornography's inevitable harmfulness, require that we accept without further consideration that an inherent characteristic of pornography is the perpetration of violence against women. Moreover we must extend that rhetoric of violence against women to material that does not involve women as performers at all; porn that aims to portray 'authentic' female desire; as well as productions that claim to explicitly challenge heteronormative porn conventions. Alternatively, such definitions of porn as inherently anti-woman, require that we declassify or even disavow the existence of genres such as gay, lesbian, queer, for-women, and feminist pornography all together.

Arguably, these definitions are ultimately constrained by their focus on one specific idea of what pornographic content may comprise. If we are to take seriously the emergence of – or even just the potential for – 'alternative' sexual representations that can challenge the popular pornographic narratives deemed patriarchal and harmful in nature, we must ensure our understandings of the term can at the very least acknowledge and account for their existence. Such a task may require moving beyond the polarising debates that frame pornographic content as good/bad, harmful/empowering, sexual violence/sexual expression, in order to appreciate the complex landscape of potentially diverse pornographies.

Context-Based Understandings

When reviewing definitions of pornography, it becomes necessary to consider the extent to which material may be understood as pornographic, or not, based on the context in which they are presented, created, or viewed. This is of particular relevance when considering the links between the industrial context in which an image or text is seen to have been *produced*, and the way in which that product then comes to be viewed. With regards to pornography, it is possible to identify a relationship between the individuals and organisations said to constitute the landscape of 'the porn industry' on one hand, and the material that comes to be labelled 'pornography' on the other. To demonstrate this, we might contrast images in the press of political demonstrations by the topless protest group, FEMEN – ostensibly produced in the context of media reportage – with images of topless women created by and for the adult brand, Playboy. In these instances, the diverging contexts of creation and production serve to complicate conceptions of pornography defined only in terms of content.

This example also foregrounds how intent behind production and distribution plays a part in the designation of an image or text as pornographic. Indeed, some definitions of pornography specify that such material should have as its primary purpose the sexual arousal of a consumer, including current dictionary definitions of the term (Merriam-Webster 2016) and definitions enshrined in English and Welsh law (Beresford 2014: 395). Following this, however, Rea (2001: 118) draws our attention to the inconsistencies apparent in definitions of pornography that do not also address the contexts in which sexual images and texts are *presented*. To this end, he provides the example of an individual sending a suggestive photograph to a partner for private consumption, questioning whether this could reasonably be regarded as pornography. Furthermore, Rea references a photograph of Marilyn Monroe, not widely considered pornographic at the time of its publication in a 1996 issue of Life – a US general interest magazine – pointing out that many would perceive this image to be pornographic had it instead appeared in the pornographic magazine, Hustler. In addition, the temporal context of pornographic publication becomes pertinent when considering that the photograph in question was banned in the US when it was originally published in the late 1940s. As such, we are able to identify ways in which the contexts of creation and of

presentation intertwine to complicate conceptions of what may or may not be considered porn.

Rea goes on to highlight the "common joke that American boys have treated the Sears catalogue and National Geographic primarily as sources of sexual arousal", drawing our attention to how the conditions of consumption become relevant when seeking to delineate the parameters of what may be considered pornographic. Thus, it becomes necessary to ask how the divergent modes by which images and texts pornographic images and texts are received might affect our understandings of pornography. Albury (2014: 174-5) highlights the idea of 'porn-as-pedagogy', drawing upon research carried out in the US, New Zealand and Australia, which indicates a tendency for both young people and adults to view pornography – at least in part – as a form of sex education. Other audience studies have found that, in addition to sexual stimulation, pornographic representations have been experienced as fantasy, authenticity, experimentation, and entertainment, amongst other modes of relating (Boynton 1999; Loftus 2002; Ciclitira 2002; Mowlabocus et al. 2013). This begs the question of whether pornography's characterisation as text or image whose function pertains only to sexual arousal, as described in the UK Coroners and Justice Act 2009 for example (Beresford 2014: 395), is invalidated by the different meanings that may be inscribed upon pornographic material by consumers.

Furthermore, such alternative consumer interpretations of pornography, which deviate from notions of debasement and shame, may have wider implications for legal – and indeed non-legal – definitions of pornography, when we consider that the regulation of sexually explicit material has often been enforced according to bourgeoisie perceptions of what would be 'corrupting' for the general public (Kendrick 1987). This leads us onto the next section, which explores pornography as a taxonomical construct reliant on dominant perceptions of social acceptability, at a point where notions of morality, obscenity and class structures intersect.

Construct-Based Understandings

With the "democratization of culture" to which Hunt (1993: 12-13) attributes the dawn of pornography regulation, legal bodies have sought to restrict certain types of material deemed immoral, harmful, corrupting or otherwise unacceptable. This has given rise to a number of attempts to define pornography and obscenity within a legal framework,

concepts which are now commonly “collapsed into one another” in legislation (Beresford 2014: 395). However, as is inevitably the case, such endeavours – despite efforts to maintain political neutrality – tend rather to “consolidate and reproduce aspects of social relations at a formal institutional level” (Wells and Quick 2010: 483). Furthermore, in much legislation worldwide, comprehensive delineations of what qualifies as pornographic remain conspicuously absent, with definitions often depending more on the perspectives of individual law practitioners (Lederer 1980: 40). This is exemplified in the example given by Helgadottir (2014: 302) of the Icelandic Penal Code, which makes use of pornography as a conceptual term, but provides little explanation of its composition, preferring to delegate this task to the courts. It is perhaps in this way that Ellis (1980: 81) describes definitions of pornography as a worrying “combination of vagueness and moralism”.

Helgadóttir (*ibid*.: 305) makes apparent the ways in which social mores are reflected in legislation, by spotlighting three cases from separate time periods in Iceland’s recent legal history. She presents a trajectory that defines pornography firstly as images or texts deemed ‘more explicit’ than other material in circulation at the time, through concerns around political provocativeness, to contemporary understandings of pornography as that which is intended for sexual arousal, financial gain, and/or women’s exploitation. Similarly, evolving definitions of obscenity and pornography can be identified in the UK context, with the Obscene Publications Act (1959) focusing its descriptions on the prevention of potentially harmful consumer effects; and more contemporary legal stipulations emphasising that the content of sexual imagery align itself with dominant conceptions of acceptable moral values (Beresford 2014: 395). Indeed the recent legislation introduced by the Audiovisual Media Services Regulations (2014) which banned a number of sex acts from appearing in video-on-demand pornography produced and consumed in the UK – many of which could be associated with enhanced sexual pleasure amongst women – seems consistent with this focus on permissible pornographic content adhering to dominant conceptions of ‘correct’ sexual conduct.

In these instances, we can thus identify how pornography legislation may serve to reflect, and perhaps perpetuate, “ideologies, patriarchal relations and normative claims regarding sexuality” (Beresford 2014: 385). This is echoed by Ellis (1980: 81), who urges

us to view pornography not as “an inherent attribute of certain representations” but rather, as a “designation given to a class of representations”. As such, Wells and Quick (2010: 483) suggest that we examine legal definitions attributed to pornography in the context of the socio-political structures in which they are embedded. In particular, if we are to agree with Kipnis (1996: viii) that porn and other forms of culture share more similarities than they do differences, then it seems prudent to consider pornography in terms of its location within a wider discursive network of regulatory power wherein certain phenomena are condemned to a status of low culture, and others lauded for their artistic merit. This “vocabulary of distinction” is one that associates high-culture art with “reason, cleanliness and order” and low-culture porn with “passion, dirtiness and disorder” (Attwood 2002: 96). Indeed, some have claimed that it is at precisely this intersection, marking the border between conceptions of ‘art’ and perceptions of ‘obscenity,’ that prevalent oppositional understandings of pornography begin to form (Nead 1992: 91).

With reference to this distinction between high and low culture, Williams (1991: 3) comes to define pornography as a ‘body genre,’ likening pornographic film to the ‘gross’ and ‘excessive’ filmic categories of horror and melodrama. Here Williams points to processes that relegate material falling within these ‘body genres’ to a social imaginary constructed as somehow inferior to their less “sensational” counterparts. Thus, we see how definitions of pornography take shape in the context of socio-cultural understandings of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ taste, reflecting the boundaries of a given culture’s respective anxieties (Kipnis 1996: 164). Indeed as anti-pornography feminist Lederer (1980: 40) asserts: “If pornography does not offend local community standards, we say, then something is wrong because it should!” In this way, we might conclude that understandings of pornography are derived less from particular, tangible or measurable characteristics common to all material labelled as such, and more from the extent to which such material is viewed as objectionable or transgressive. Indeed the association of pornography with transgression is one that has been well documented (Kipnis 1996), and is a link so prevalent that contemporary usages of the word ‘porn’ appear now to describe contexts and activities that have seemingly little to do with the adult entertainment industry at all (Hester 2014: 186).

If understandings of what constitutes this term are therefore liable to change according to time, place and fluid notions of transgression, 'pornography' – figured as genre, industry, construct, or otherwise – appears to resist concrete definition. In this sense, we might describe pornography as a performative term; a discursive construct, which is brought into being through 'speech acts' that are performed and reiterated to create the illusion of an original or universal referent (Butler 1990). This is not to disavow the existence of, or discount the significance of, 'pornography', but rather, to complicate notions of pornography as a coherently and universally intelligible unit in favour of understandings that allow for more complex conceptions of what porn is, does or could become. As such, a more useful task than the quest for an authoritative definition, may be "putting cultural classification itself under scrutiny" (Attwood 2002: 94). By doing this, we are better able to avoid the "paranoid readings" that Sedgwick (2003: 145-146) warns against, and to resist the invocation of totalising definitions that result only in circular reasoning for the purpose of making a point or justifying one's own argument.

A working definition of pornography

Thus, I tentatively align myself with Ryberg's (2012: 17-18) approach to defining pornography – one that uses as its starting point a 'standard' definition of "representations with explicit sexual content aiming at arousing sexual excitement" but that welcomes the inclusion of "many different objective and visual strategies that also challenge and expand the standard definition". This characterisation addresses the pornographic in terms of representational content, the context of its production, and also as a construct with fluid parameters. Importantly, it is also able to account for the observation that 'pornography' is not a *thing* as such, but "a concept, a thought structure" (Kendrick 1987: xiii) which may gain the illusion of a concrete referent through reiterated speech acts that come to produce the thing/s they are supposed to describe. It hence allows for the way in which definitions of 'pornography' shift and expand over time and space, and acknowledges that any authoritative definition proposed will for this reason be inevitably undermined almost as soon as it is articulated. Accordingly, this project seeks to explore participants' understandings of pornography rather than asserting a universal definition, and leaves room for alternative conceptions of the subject matter on the part of respondents.

b. Definitions of feminism

As Offen (1988) notes, feminism remains a controversial term, with those within and outside of academia often expressing contrasting and even contradictory understandings thereof: "Everyone seems to have different answers, and every answer is infused with a political and emotional charge" (*ibid*.: 119). In this section, I will give a brief overview of some key elements in (Anglo-American, European, post-colonial and inter/trans-national) feminist thought, in order to delineate the landscape of gender politics that may underlie participants' feminist self-identifications.

Naturalising Approaches

Naturalising approaches to gender and feminism often seek to uncover and dismantle the source of what Ortner (1974: 67) describes as "the universality of female subordination". This school of feminism tends to support the idea that there are fundamental differences between men and women, but opposes the socially-assigned roles and gender hierarchy ascribed to them. Ortner hypothesises that women's supposed universal subordination can be attributed to a universal association of women with the concept of 'nature' and men with the concept of 'culture'. She claims that the association of women and men with nature and culture respectively can account for the sexual and domestic roles historically ascribed to women and the socio-political ones traditionally situated in the male domain. Furthermore, she asserts that society has come to view culture as 'transcending' and dominating nature, and that this nature-culture dynamic is reflected in the apparent gender-based hierarchy across societies. This strand of feminist thinking has manifested itself most prominently in second wave feminist activism in the West, such as radical feminism and eco-feminism, which have sought to challenge the devaluation of femininity, nature, and qualities associated with an essentialist understanding of womanhood.

In the porn context, we perhaps see this being manifested most prominently as second wave and radical feminist opposition to pornography, which understands porn to be a manifestation of and contributing factor to women's ongoing subordination to men in society. Such perspectives also frame pornography as a ubiquitous reminder of how women are associated with sex and sexual conquest in a way that men are not. This view holds that, according to the predominant societal discourse, women are sex, whereas men own sex (Marques 2014). Indeed, as will be seen later in the thesis, this type of

radical feminist anti-porn critique featured heavily in some respondents' understandings of pornography and consumption, with existing cultural scripts that classify women as little more than sex objects for male consumption sometimes invoking doubts about the degree to which any porn could ever truly be considered 'feminist'.

Psychoanalytic Approaches

Conversely, psychoanalytic approaches to feminism focus strongly on notions of the 'unconscious', and the conviction that the construction of gender identity and associated roles and behaviours can be traced back to developments occurring in early childhood. Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis revolves largely around the 'Oedipus complex', which sees children subconsciously seeking to take on the symbolic qualities of the 'phallus' and developing sexual and gendered subjectivity as a consequence of that process (Freud 1900). However, Freud's attribution of gender identity development to the Oedipal crisis has been criticised for its 'phallocentrism', its patriarchal outlook and its overemphasis of the role of the father in the construction of gender (Minsky 1996: 47). Whilst Lacan has faced similar criticisms, his work is simultaneously seen as having paved the way for alternative, feminist, psychoanalytic theories, which have built upon – and critiqued – the structuralist foundations underlying his accounts of the psycho-sexual development process (Irigaray 1977; Cixous 1975; Kristeva 1984). Psychoanalytic approaches to gender politics have been practiced primarily by French feminists, who seek to challenge the 'masculine' psycho-social language of hierarchical binaries. This is achieved by, for example, purposefully employing a form of non-binary poetic language known as "*écriture feminine*" (Cixous 1975) and by "mimicking" (Irigaray 1977: 75) projections of male castration, fragility and femininity. They make a connection between women's sexuality and women's language by developing the concept of "*jouissance*" – a term representing the diffuse multiplicity of 'the feminine', in contrast to the limited dualistic structures associated with its masculine counterpart (Cixous 1975: 91).

In many ways we see strategies of mimicry and *jouissance* being enacted in 'feminist porn' and 'porn-for-women' aiming to provide more 'intelligent', diverse and/or sensual representations; feminine alternatives to other types of porn considered more male-focussed; content that resists phallocentric sexual representations; and satirisations of binary gender stereotypes. Whilst participants expressed mixed views about the degree to which these pornographic genres satisfied their own needs, many did associate

women's sexual pleasure with greater complexity and multiplicity. This was supported by a number of respondents reporting that somewhat thoughtful and/or sensual pornographic representations often proved more appealing.

Materialist Approaches

Materialist approaches tend to be based on the idea that people and social norms are shaped by the socio-economic mode of production dominant in society at any one time. As such, materialist feminists often view contemporary gender relations as inextricably linked with the capitalist mode of production, believing that a classless society would result in the simultaneous dissolution of both economic and gender inequalities (Hartmann 1981). This approach revolves around a quest to dismantle the capitalist system, rather than seeking transformation within the current socio-economic structure. It is a feminism that focuses on interrogating the material conditions that give rise to discriminatory social arrangements and norms, rather than assuming that they originate from some distinct source: "[It] avoids seeing this gender hierarchy as the effect of a singular...patriarchy and instead gauges the web of social and psychic relations that make up a material, historical moment" (Wicke 1994: 751). Materialist approaches to feminist thought and practice can be identified in socialist, anarchist and Marxist feminisms, which continue to have a large following and strong movement in the UK and beyond.

Today, we can see materialist feminist approaches to porn being articulated by a number of academics and activists working on issues of labour and sex worker rights (Stardust 2015; Berg 2015; Smith 2015). Equally so, it should be noted that the capitalist economy in which the porn industry operates, and the material conditions of sex workers – in terms of their socio-economic position, labour conditions, remuneration and rights – featured heavily in participant discussions of porn ethics.

Post-Structural and Constructivist Approaches

Constructivism and post-structuralism focus on the destabilisation of fixed subjectivity and social normativity by dismantling the systems thought to perpetuate them. Foucault has been influential within feminist thought in his assertions that subjectivity is constituted of a variety of discourses, or sequences of signs, interpellated by individuals in a given social context (1969: 141). The structures upholding such discursive norms, he claims, can be found at the root of all power relations. Foucault's concept of discursive fields offers feminists a framework within which to examine power relations in a way that

does not rely on single-cause assumptions, such as psycho-social development or class struggles. Thus, the potential of post-structuralism can be seen to lie in its capacity for simultaneously addressing dominant discourses of gender and sexual hierarchies (Weedon 1987: 1) along with other axes of the hegemonic social order. It is perhaps for this reason that we see post-structuralist approaches playing out in queer and intersectional feminist political spheres alike. Notably, queer theorist Judith Butler draws on Foucault's account of the historical construction of sex and sexuality to reframe gender as the "cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as…prior to culture" (Butler 1990: 7).

Post-structuralist feminisms can perhaps be said to have influenced much queer and alternative porn aiming to dismantle essentialised notions of binary gender and disrupt the sexual social order. In keeping with these perspectives, many participants attested to the socially constructed nature of gender and sexuality, point to the web of social structures that perpetuate such norms – including pornography and other media forms – and discuss their efforts to challenge their discursive foundations in society.

Intersectional Approaches and Black Feminism

Intersectionality is a term originating and gaining traction in Black feminist thought (Crenshaw 1989) and invoked to theorise varied axes of oppression with which sex, gender and sexuality can be said to interact – such as race, class and nationality (Collins 1998). The concept emerged as a reaction to the tendency of white, Western feminists to erase the experiences and socio-economic positions of their non-white counterparts. bell hooks (1984: 34) asserts that that race and class identities "create differences…that take precedence over the common experience women share". Equally so, Collins claims that, just as Black people share a common experience of oppression, so do women under patriarchy (1998: 188-189), but crucially, that race and social class introduce certain variations. She asserts that Black women resemble Black men as well as white women, but that they also stand apart from both groups, describing this position as the Black feminist 'standpoint' (*ibid*.). Black feminism thus highlights and embraces the differences between women and seeks to create an intersectional feminist movement that recognises the ways in which gender inequality is inextricably bound up with race and class politics. Intersectionality has also become central to post-structuralist and queer approaches to gender and feminism, which emphasise the multiplicity of bodies and

identities along the lines of race, class and nationality, as well as sexuality, cis/trans gender, dis/ability, size and age, amongst others.

Intersectional approaches to porn could be understood as those that emphasise the gendered, but also racialised and classed dimensions of pornographic representations. They are perhaps also approaches that pay attention to the cross-sectional strengths and vulnerabilities of those working in the porn industry, and the privilege and inequality that may be differentially experienced within it. Notably, these represent key concerns raised by participants in this study.

Postcolonial Approaches

Mishra and Hodge (1991) differentiate between the hyphenated form of 'post-colonialism', which they describe in temporal terms, and the unhyphenated 'postcolonialism', which they refer to as a concept characterised by the binding together of coloniser and colonised. Postcolonialist feminism tends to focus its gaze on the – often gendered and sexualised – impact of European colonialisation in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Whilst drawing upon on geographically and historically specific moments during the colonial and post-colonial periods, postcolonialist feminism also posits a broader narrative of patriarchal imperialism, thought to have had a significant effect on the construction of gender relations in African and Asian colonial contexts (Mama 1997: 47). Moreover, postcolonial feminists look to the present day socio-political environment and the impact of neo-imperialist Western powers. Spivak (1988: 66), for example, exposes the ways in which the West continues to see itself as the 'sovereign subject'. Similarly, Mohanty and colleagues (2008: 1) highlight how women's emancipation has come to be seen as a justification for American interventions in the developing world, describing these interventions as neo-imperialistic acts of 'civilisation' that ultimately fail to improve women's lot both at home and abroad (*ibid*.: 9). As such, postcolonial approaches to feminism seek to take stock of the historical legacy of colonialism and the ways in which present day imperialist power may be impacting upon gender relations within and across borders.

With regards to pornography, postcolonial feminism perhaps manifests itself most strikingly in the critique of porn depicting sexual power and domination exerted by white men over their African, Asian and Middle Eastern male and female counterparts. Indeed, this is a dynamic noted by a number of participants, who expressed a range of concerns in

this regard – from anxieties around the vulnerability of women from poorer, often formerly colonised, nation states; to those pertaining to the lack of, or feminisation of, Asian men in porn.

Defining 'Feminist' Audiences

As this section makes apparent, the various interpretations, orientations and manifestations of feminist thinking and practice are wide-ranging, and very much contingent on socially, politically, geographically and culturally defined contexts. Nonetheless, we see elements of each feminist genre being manifested in debates around pornography, consumption and feminist responsibilities. Indeed, as is discussed in more depth later in the thesis, such conflicting understandings of the feminist project were reflected in the responses of feminist porn consumers interviewed for this research. The "slippery definitions" (Stoya 2014: 201) of the term 'feminist' become all the more apparent in discussions around 'pornography' – a phenomenon with equally contested meanings.

With regards to pornography – as well as sex and sexuality more generally – the range of acts, groups, movements and organisations that have come to be considered 'feminist' in nature range from NGO initiatives seeking to eliminate "raunch culture" (Levy 2005), to sex worker rights initiatives (Gall 2006); from the fight for sexual revolution in the Middle East (Eltahawy 2015), to calls for feminist veiling (El Guindy 2005). The myriad ways in which feminist principles may be converted into action and discourse is demonstrative of how feminisms – in the plural – form part of a diverse and ever-evolving movement, system of beliefs, and socio-political phenomenon. For this reason, it is not my aim to classify or assess participants' feminist credentials; it is only my aim to inquire into the experiences of feminist consumers of online pornography amongst those who *self-identify* as such.

c. The Feminist Porn Wars

Given the diverse understandings of feminism discussed in the previous section, it may be unsurprising that widely divergent attitudes towards pornography and its consumption have developed within feminism over the past half century. In particular, as touched upon earlier in the thesis, the 'porn wars' of the 1980s saw the formation of stark divisions within the feminist movement, largely separating those who opposed pornography from those who were either in favour of porn or who, rather, opposed

censorship. These tensions are reflected in the academic literature that followed thereafter, debating where exactly the most crucial issue lies: in the victimisation of women, which some believe to be portrayed and promoted by pornography; or in the repression of women's sexuality, which others believe to be represented by censorship. As Marques (2014: 9) notes, many feminist activists and scholars regard pornography as a manifestation of men's violent sexual fantasies, exposure to which has resulted in some women having adopted 'false' understandings of their true sexuality. Others, conversely, assert the value of pornography for the purposes of sexual expression, liberation and resistance (Strossen 1995). Meanwhile, others still can be said to hold anti-censorship positions that may include – or not – pro- and/or anti-porn positions. The remainder of this section will elaborate on these three prominent orientations to porn that have featured in feminist debates on the subject.

Anti-porn perspectives

Smith (2007: 32-3) highlights how the denigration of pornography has historically been rooted in ideas around morality and its corruption. Citing Hunt (1998), however, she goes on to note that in the 1960s and 1970s, as more sexually liberal attitudes took hold in the West and the sex industry expanded, protestations to pornography moved away from arguments around moral corruption in favour of political objections. These were propelled by key feminist voices that, in keeping with the feminist adage that the personal is political, asserted that "pornography is the theory, rape is the practice" (Morgan 1980). These radical feminist voices argued that "pornography degraded women, lied about [their] sexuality, and encouraged violence against women and children" (Ridington 1992 in Marques 2014: 32). In this way they made links between pornographic representations of men's power over women and unequal gendered power dynamics in society at large, while claiming that porn reinforced a view of women's value residing largely or wholly in their sexuality (Smith 2007: 34).

A potent detrimental effect of pornography, according to radical feminist opponents, lies in the way in which it able to convince women of the appeal and naturalness of the types of 'toxic' sexuality it presents. It is argued that porn untruthfully depicts women's enjoyment of derogatory sexual scenarios, a construction that is then purportedly adopted by some women who – in a state of false consciousness – come to embrace these sexual power dynamics as liberating (Dworkin and MacKinnon 1988;

MacKinnon 1983). At the heart of these perspectives rests an assumption that no woman could ever freely choose to use or participate in pornography (Smith 2007: 35). Such views were, at one point, sufficiently influential in the US to impact legislation, leading to:

> *the successful passing of anti-pornography ordinances in Minneapolis and Indianapolis in the 1980s, which were later overturned. The proposed law, if it were in place, would have allowed women or groups of women to take producers or distributors of pornography to civil court for damages. Defendants would be charged with 'coercing the plaintiff(s) into pornography'*
>
> (Marques 2014: 35)

Smith draws our attention to that way in which, underlying these perspectives, there exists a set of 'sexual value systems' (Rubin 1993) that appear curiously similar to those espoused by moralists and traditionalists – groups that are often diametrically opposed to many of the aims of radical feminism and feminism at large. Each relies on notions of normality, naturalness and healthiness to construct a strict understanding of that which can be considered 'good' and 'bad' sex. Today, such conceptions of bad sex and bad sexuality can be said to manifest themselves in concerns about the pornographication and/or sexualisation of culture (Levy 2005, Paul 2005).

Pro-porn perspectives

Other feminists have challenged claims about porn's inherently victimising nature, instead preferring to emphasise its potential as a tool for sexual liberation (Duggan et al. 1985). They also question the degree to which a woman being presented as sexual necessarily undermines her personhood and subjectivity (Marques 2014: 35), furthermore suggesting that porn might be used as a way to resist the patriarchal suppression of female sexuality and defy heterosexual normativity (Barker 2000; Lee 2013; Flores 2013; Angel 2013; Shimizu 2013). This view has been bolstered by queer theorising on pornography highlighting the ways in which porn, sex work and 'obscenity' more broadly can serve to break taboos and challenge norms that present certain narrow forms of 'good' sexuality as natural or healthy (Smith, Laing and Pilcher 2015). Central to pro-porn feminist arguments then, is the conviction that pornography can be best understood in terms of (hetero)norm transgression rather than patriarchal propaganda (Jacobs 2007, Rubin 1983, Smith 2007).

Porn-critical perspectives

Yet another subsidiary of the feminist movement has framed the debate about pornography in terms of censorship concerns (Ellis et al. 1988, Rubin 1993, Strossen 1995).

They argue that restricting sexually explicit representation poses a greater threat than the content itself. In this regard, Marques (2014: 35) draws our attention to a number of academics and activists who warn against the detrimental consequences of such regulation which, it is argued, include prolonged and exacerbated sexual shame and stigma around female sexuality (Willis 1983: 462) and other obstacles to women's sexual exploration more widely (Crawford 2007).

For porn-critical anti-censorship feminists, pornography is believed to reflect and reify the sexual discourses that are already prominent in our society, rather than creating them anew. In that way, porn may pose a risk; but a risk no greater than other mainstream media images of sex and sexuality, including adverts, films, television narratives and music videos (Rubin 1993, Rodgerson and Wilson 1991). Although often concerned about the apparent dominance of female submission in pornographic media or the lack of diverse sexual representation on offer, porn-critical and anti-censorship feminist voices challenge the ethicality and efficacy of censorship legislation, suggesting that such legal interventions treat the symptom rather than the cause (Marques 2014: 34).

Resisting a singular feminist porn position

As such, we can observe the impossibility of asserting one singular feminist position on pornography. Likewise, we inevitably come to acknowledge the shortcomings of the 'premature orthodoxy' of radical feminist proclamations that anti-porn censorship imperatives represent the ultimate feminist goal (Rubin 1983). In view of such divergent feminist perspectives on porn, I sought not to define pornography users interviewed for this project as pro-porn, anti-porn, or porn-critical at all. I also aimed to resist making assumptions about their feminist orientations to pornography. Rather, it was my goal to explore attitudes to and experiences of pornography in an open, non-judgemental manner, tailoring the interview guide accordingly.

Indeed, as is revealed later in the thesis, one of the clearest observations made of the data was the lack of consistency amongst respondents about which position could be said to prevail. No participants identified themselves as 'anti-porn', one person considered themselves to be 'pro-porn' and nobody defined themselves as strictly 'anti-censorship'. Nevertheless, many expressed positions that highlighted concerns about porn harms, hope around porn's potential for self-representation and sexual liberation,

and worries about government moves to restrict the types of content being produced in the UK. In fact, sympathies with each of these strands were often expressed simultaneously.

Concluding Remarks

The literature reviewed during the project scoping stage thus helped delineate the substantive area of inquiry frame and suggested the three key conceptual 'hunches' required to begin this work. However, given the unknowable direction of the research – due to grounded theory imperatives around the inductive evolution of the research question – a significant body of literature from various fields, beyond those introduced here, ultimately reveals itself to be equally pertinent. This literature will, instead, be introduced throughout the course of the thesis alongside the presentation of interview data and analysis of findings.

3. Methodology

Methodological Approach

This research project adopted a grounded theory approach, setting out to develop a theoretical framework for understanding London feminists' experiences of online pornography consumption. Grounded theory is discussed here as a methodology rather than a method, in order to differentiate it from those instances in which grounded theory is deployed purely as a coding technique or data collection strategy. Instead, this research sought to more closely adopt the overarching principles that frame grounded theory in Glaser and Strauss's seminal text (1967), namely those that emphasise a 'bottom-up', inductive, theory-building approach.

In this way, the project diverges somewhat from the theory-testing approaches that are common in qualitative research (Urquhart 2013: 180), in part due to there existing so few theories of pornography consumption at the time of writing, and even fewer that seek to locate themselves outside of a harms/empowerment approach to porn studies (Boyle 2006). Further to this, however, grounded theory's focus on inductive theory development, and its iterative approach to data collection and analysis, lent itself to a number of key aims for this project, essential to capturing the subtleties of those insights that lie between and beyond apathy/victimhood understandings of porn consumption. These objectives included eschewing, as far as possible, commonly-held assumptions about the research topic and research subjects; resisting agenda-driven frameworks that seek to validate pro- or anti-porn stances; and allowing for the voices of porn consumers themselves to be heard and taken seriously, in a way that hasn't tended to be prioritised in pornography effects research or the public arena more widely (Mowlabocus and Wood 2015: 119).

As Attwood (2005: 84) notes, "qualitative research into the consumption of sexually explicit material is more desirable than ever before". Whilst we have seen more and more qualitative porn audience research emerging over the last few years (see for example Vörös 2014; Neville 2015; Ryberg 2015; Liberman 2015, Scarcelli 2015, Tzankova 2015, Wood 2015, Jacobs 2016), there remain noteworthy gaps. Given that women and feminism have always been central to debates around pornography, this project was designed on the premise that the need for a deeper understanding of porn audiences within these demographics persisted. Indeed, Mowlabocus and Wood (2015: 120) remark

that a more nuanced understanding of women's – and, I would also argue, feminists' – porn consumption is imperative if we are to "make an intervention into the ongoing discussions of pornography use and effect". Qualitative approaches enable us to explore the complexities of such lived experience, in a way that quantitative approaches often struggle to do (Soltis 1989).

Grounded theory specifically was chosen over and above other potentially relevant qualitative methods for a number of reasons. On the one hand, ethnography may seem like the obvious choice for this project by virtue of the ethnographer's quest to understand human experience and emphasis on the socio-cultural dimensions of knowledge. Whilst these remained key priorities for this study, ethnography brings with it certain criticisms that this project set out to eschew – namely "that it is overly subjective and hence 'unscientific'; that it is too limited to enable…theory construction; and that it ignores the conditions of its own production" (Herbert 2000: 551). Whilst there are, of course, many recent examples of ethnographic research that seek to combat such critiques by engaging in reflexive practices and challenging the notion of the ethnographer as 'omniscient observer' (Foley 2002), it was felt that grounded theory could offer a much more explicit and systematic means by which to defend itself against accusations of radical subjectivity, by virtue of its emphasis on inductive emergence, theoretical sensitivity and rigorous coding processes.

Similarly, phenomenology may be considered a suitable approach for a study of porn consumption, in part due to its capacity for exploring and describing the complexities in meaning inherent in embodied experience, as it "calls for the researcher to delve into phenomena in depth and to provide descriptions that are detailed enough to reflect the complexity of the social world" (Denscombe 1998: 102). Whilst a key priority for this study was to embed itself in the nuances of participant experience, at the same time, it sought to move beyond descriptive insights towards theory development. Grounded theory not only enables the researcher to capture rich descriptive data, but also provides tools for achieving the degree of abstraction necessary for developing a broader theoretical framework.

Discourse analysis likewise presents an approach that is seemingly commensurate with the premise of this study. In particular, the position held by discourse analysts that "language both mediates and constructs our understanding of reality" (Starks and

Trinidad 2007: 1374) and that such understandings are constructed through interaction with multiple discursive sources, fits well with the post-structuralist feminist underpinnings of this project, as discussed later in the chapter. The emphasis on interaction as pivotal in the construction and negotiation of meaning is one that discourse analysis shares with grounded theory; the latter, however, locates this interaction within the context of social processes rather than linguistic constructions. Where discourse analysis is often criticised for its perceived lack of analytical rigour, tendency towards partiality, and dislocation from the material realities of the social issues it interrogates (Antaki et al. 2003), the focus in grounded theory on social processes, along with its strict analytical protocols, arguably renders it better suited to the kind of contextually-bound, substantive theory development that this project seeks to produce.

Nonetheless, whilst grounded theory brings many virtues, its positivist influences simultaneously posed significant challenges to be overcome in this project, particularly insofar as its feminist and philosophical allegiances were concerned. In light of this, before reviewing in more detail how and why grounded theory was utilised in this study, a discussion of the underlying ontological and epistemological positioning of the research is necessary. Of note, however, is that defining one's ontological and epistemological perspectives is of little value if such insights do not also impact on and interact with the processes involved in research design, development and delivery (Crotty 1998). For this reason, the first part of this chapter seeks not only to elucidate the theoretical underpinnings of the research, but also to engage in a meaningful articulation of how the methodology and methods employed relate to and wrestle with these foundations.

Ontological and Epistemological Framework

As Charmaz (2006: 228) notes, grounded theory has been influenced by, and can comfortably be employed within, both positivist and interpretive frameworks. Whilst positivist approaches to grounded theory tend to prioritise universality and focus on the inductive emergence of data to explain 'objective reality', constructivist grounded theory prefers to acknowledge multiple and changing realities and therefore explores questions such as, "*What* do people assume is real? *How* do they construct and act on their views of reality?" (*ibid*.: 230-1). As a researcher whose ontological and epistemological allegiances find their roots in post-structuralist thinking, I align myself closely with the latter of these

two approaches. Furthermore, if "most aspects of positivism [are] antithetical to feminist principles and practice", as Stanley and Wise claim (2002: i), then to take a purely positivist approach to this research would be to defy both the feminist orientations of the work and my own feminist roots.

That being said, there are a number of aspects to the research that appear to resemble those of more positivist frameworks, particularly its emphasis on the strictly inductive emergence of theory from data and its focus on seeking – as far as possible – to remove researcher values from the process of data collection and analysis. Indeed, it is grounded theory's capacity to accommodate these aims that influenced the decision to make use of it as a methodology. Though, it must be noted that the quest for induction in this particular project was motivated less by an epistemological commitment to positivist notions of objectivity, than by the need for porn audience research that avoids agenda-driven outcomes.

At the same time, it is also important to point out that positivist assumptions do influence grounded theory more than other types of qualitative research (*ibid*.). As Urquhart (2013: 60) highlights, the very nature of Glaser's (1992) notion of 'emergence' "implies that there is some objective truth waiting to be discovered in the data". In this way, grounded theory appears to combine both positivist and interpretive elements in its reliance on empirical observations, yet simultaneous dependence on the researcher's constructions of them (Charmaz 2006: 231-2). In light of such acknowledgements, this research has heeded Charmaz's suggestion that we view positivist and interpretivist approaches as part of one continuum, on which we can locate our research and ourselves. Whilst as a researcher I may currently consider my ontological and epistemological convictions to be post-structuralist in nature – and thus firmly non-positivist – the research itself may be somewhat more flexibly defined. More specifically, if considered in terms of a sliding scale, we might describe this project as occupying a critical '*interpretivist-of-centre*' approach by virtue of its methodology and methods, which, while commensurate with interpretivist approaches, simultaneously demonstrate positivist influences that must be grappled with and embraced. The next section of this chapter aims to expound some of the ways in which such apparent contradictions were tackled in this context.

Philosophical-Methodological Negotiations

Over and above the aforementioned 'emergence' argument, arguably applicable to all grounded theory research conducted within a constructivist paradigm, one instance of positivist influences on this research more specifically may be identified in the apparent 'verification' processes that I have adopted. As Urquhart (2013: 60) observes, readers of research undertaken within a positivist frame will undoubtedly require assurances that conclusions drawn from the coding process do not reflect the subjective interpretations of one person alone. In a similar manner, whilst not working within a positivist frame, this project did seek to corroborate key analytical findings with another researcher familiar with the subject matter, as well as, importantly, participants themselves. This may seem to represent a somewhat contradictory, or even redundant undertaking, given that interpretivist grounded theory rejects the underlying assumption that there exists some external reality against which to verify findings in the first place:

> *Generally, using GTM in an interpretivist paradigm, where researchers construct interpretations of social practices, is easier because there is more commensurability between the notion of coding (generally subjective) and the idea of constructing interpretations. So, generally, verification of the coding is not required.*
>
> (Urquhart 2013: 61)

The purpose of engaging in this process of verification, however, related to a feminist-oriented imperative to ensure that participant voices and 'standpoints' (Collins 1998) were either heard directly or were otherwise well-represented in analytical and theoretical observations made, rather than privileging the perspectives of one researcher and/or appealing to notions of uncritical universality. This choice thus represented an attempt to address the relative invisibility of consumer perspectives in porn research and public debate, and also to reflect the co-constructed nature of the research itself.

Accordingly, whilst this project did seek some level of corroboration of findings, the extent to which verification features as a useful tool in this research pertained more to post-structuralist thinking, and the idea of co-constructed meaning, than to positivism. If we are to understand post-structuralism in terms of its emphasis on a discursive social reality; on subjectivity as being made up of interpellated discursive structures of understanding; and on the intelligibility of reality and materiality as being dependent on 'speech acts' that both describe and produce the things to which they refer (Butler 1990), then it is necessary to consider this research as a project serving to describe, but also potentially intervene in and influence participants' understandings of their porn

consumption practices. As such, I wish to acknowledge the eventuality of this research process elucidating, but also creating and expanding, shared meaning. The very act of asking individuals to discuss pornography, for example, whilst remaining a very broad topic, still encouraged people to think critically about a part of their life to which they may not hitherto have given much thought. As one participant in the online group activity anonymously stated:

> "I probably have never consciously thought about what is important to me in porn, although some things work and some really don't so there must be things that take precedent."

Thus, the research process emerges as more than the simple collection and analysis of data; it also comes to play a role in the formation of the very experiences it seeks to explore. It is in this way that research findings expose themselves not as mere descriptions or understandings of phenomena, but rather as co-constructions thereof. Accordingly, I sought to reflect this co-constructedness by providing the opportunity for key analytical findings to be reviewed by participants, thereby helping the analysis to reflect an inter-subjective understanding of the research topic.

Triangulation is another tool commonly used in positivist research, whereby two or more methods are utilised to collect data on a single phenomenon. Making use of an online group ideation exercise, demographic surveys, and in-depth interviews to gain insights into participants' pornography consumption practices, I appeared to draw upon a strategy of data triangulation. However, whilst triangulation tends to be a tool for verifying findings, this research employed such varied data collection methods only in part for this purpose. Indeed, a significant part of the decision to use the online 'group ideation' activity, for example, in addition to conducting interviews, was the potential for the former to help delineate the parameters of the research topic without relying on my own interests and pre-existing assumptions as researcher. By facilitating unstructured participant discussion on the research topic, the online group activity enabled a shallow but broad exploration of themes that participants deemed most significant, rather than relying solely on my own insights or potential agenda for research design and development. By means of line-by-line analysis, open and selective codes were developed from the data collected during this initial group discussion, which subsequently formed the basis of the survey and interview questions posed in the second phase of the research. As such, this strategy formed another attempt to dissociate, as far as possible, pre-existing researcher assumptions and values from the data. However, as before, we see

how this was driven not by positivist inclinations, but rather stems from a wish to eschew some of the pitfalls common to research that takes certain assumptions about pornography and its consumers for granted (Mowlabocus and Wood 2015: 118).

Following on from this is the notion of reflexivity, which permeates much qualitative research, particularly that which operates within the interpretivist/constructivist frame. Interpretivist research often seeks to explore the nuance in experiences of time- and context-bound phenomena, over and above the more positivist quest for broadly generalisable and universal truths. Indeed one criticism of positivism in the social sciences is the idea that:

> *when laws are derived from empirical regularities at particular points in time and place, they do not address generic and universal processes but, instead, make time-bound events sound more universal and generic than they actually are.*
>
> (Turner 2006: 453)

Thus, interpretivists often spend a great deal of time situating their research in a social, geographical, political, cultural and/or temporal context; delineating scope; acknowledging their own role and involvement in the research process; and accounting for the impact of this on data collection and analysis. Whilst researchers with positivist inclinations may see reflexivity as another mechanism by which to approximate objectivity, by highlighting – and ultimately seeking to eliminate – pre-existing assumptions and values from the research process, interpretivist feminist researchers often prefer to adopt reflexive practices as a means by which to acknowledge and embrace the subjectivity of the researcher and the experience they bring to the analysis:

> *reflexivity enables the feminist researcher to locate herself as a subject of history so that her perspective develops from understanding her situatedness in a particular context. Reflective practice also promotes transparency in taken-for-granted power relations embedded in the researcher-participant relationship.*
>
> (Plummer and Young 2010: 313)

Once again, a tension reveals itself between the interpretivist foundations of the research – and indeed my own feminist allegiances – on the one hand, with the project's somewhat positivist aim of detaching the researcher's values and experience from the research as far as possible, on the other. For example, this project made use of memo-writing not only as a tool for inductive theory development, but also as a means by which to highlight assumptions pertaining to the research topic that did not emanate strictly from the data. By making my own personal, social and political reactions to participant responses textually visible, memo-writing served as an attempt to safeguard against the

possibility of these interests somehow impacting the direction of the research in a non-inductive manner. Whilst this, in many ways, resembles a more positivist approach to reflexive practice, once again it is necessary here to remind ourselves of the underlying reason for wishing to minimise subjective researcher perspectives; namely that of elevating participant voices and emphasising the co-constructed nature of the research, in a way that is much more commensurate with constructivist thinking. Furthermore, whilst I sought to diminish any personal or political influences exerted on the analysis of emergent data, seemingly in accordance with the positivist tradition, I also recognise the ultimate impossibility of ever fully achieving this separation between researcher and data, and thus between 'fact' and 'value'.

In these ways, we might conclude that this project adopts a form of 'weak' or 'mediated' constructivism (Plant 2004). In contrast to 'strong' constructivism, which dismisses attempts to triangulate and verify findings, due to there being "no point of reality on which to triangulate" (Urquhart 2013: 61-2). Mediated constructivism can be seen in terms of an attempt "through various data collection techniques, to understand existing meaning systems shared by actors" (*ibid*.) This remains in keeping with the ontological and epistemological foundations of this project, which lean towards post-structuralist feminism, whilst also acknowledging grounded theory's positivist influences and the ways in which they may serve to strengthen qualitative research within an interpretivist-of-centre frame.

Grounded Theory in Practice

As has been touched upon, a number of distinct epistemological threads can be identified in the explication and utilisation of grounded theory. When we consider the first iteration of grounded theory as posited by Glaser and Strauss (1967), we notice how the approach put forward represents both Glaser's academic roots within the positivist tradition, and Strauss's pragmatist/social interactionist background (Charmaz 2006: 9). The latter lives fairly unproblematically with (feminist and) post-structuralist thinking, particularly with regards to the focus on social processes and relationships upheld in symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969: 2). Some of the former's positivist influences also appear to fit well with the aims of this project, namely vis-à-vis the quest to minimise the impact of researcher assumptions on the direction of research and the desire to elevate participant

voices. Nonetheless, the positivist epistemological assumptions at the heart of grounded theory remain at odds with the interpretivist-of-centre approach adopted for this research.

The constructivist turn of the 1990s (Charmaz 2006: 12) saw grounded theorists moving away from the positivist traditions of Glaser and Strauss – and Corbin (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Glaser and Strauss 1967). Charmaz introduces the idea of 'constructivist grounded theory' in her (2000) paper, which emphasises social reality as a construction and research as a similarly constructed process and product, whilst retaining the inductive, comparative, emergent, and open-ended approach on a practical level. In this way, Charmaz (2006: 13) provides a way to make use of grounded theory strategies "without endorsing mid-century assumptions of an objective external reality, a passive, neutral observer, or a detached, narrow empiricism". If, following this, we are to assume that social reality is "multiple, processual and constructed" the role of researcher reflexivity becomes key to any constructivist/interpretivist renderings of grounded theory. Acknowledging the researcher's positionality and its impact on analysis and participant interactions, is described by Charmaz as representing an inherent part of the research reality: "It, too, is a construction… [and] viewing the research as constructed rather than discovered fosters researchers' reflexivity about their actions and decisions" (*ibid*.). Accordingly, ideas around reflexivity and co-constructed meaning remain inextricable from one another within a constructivist/interpretive grounded theory frame, and thus went hand in hand as central principles throughout this research.

Whilst all grounded theorists arguably share an inductive logic, engage in comparative analysis, and usually seek to develop theoretical analyses, Charmaz's (2006: 14-5) constructivist grounded theory adapts the method in a way that acknowledges the positivist influences of grounded theory, whilst simultaneously rejecting epistemological and ontological objectivism. Equally so, this constructivist grounded theory emphasises "social contexts, interaction, sharing viewpoints, and interpretive understandings" without falling into radical subjectivism. In this way, it presents an approach that reconciles grounded theory with the necessarily non-dualist orientations of this research, subscribing to the idea of positivism and interpretativism as part of a single continuum.

The importance of using grounded theory for this project related in part to its emphasis on inductive 'emergence'. As has been mentioned, consumers of pornography

have often been spoken *for* in academic work around media effects (eg. Malamuth and Donnerstein 1984, Felson 1996) and in policy research alike (eg. Papadopoulos 2010; Bailey 2011). Conversely, grounded theory presents a way to allow for "the words of the respondents themselves to be heard" whilst simultaneously enabling the researcher to develop a more systematic model for understanding these voices in context (O'Brien and Smith 2002). Furthermore, grounded theory's rigorous, line-by-line coding processes ensure, as far as possible, that results 'emerge' from participant responses rather than from researcher preconceptions. It is true that absolute emergence remains a questionable concept, since themes that appear to have independently revealed themselves in the data inevitably can only do so by means of a third-party mediator – the researcher – who identifies, describes and theorises them, thus threatening the validity of their autonomous status. However, the 'bottom-up' approach that grounded theory advocates in its quest for inductivity remained vital to this research, particularly given its quest to move beyond stereotypes of the 'porn consumer' and capture the "ambivalence, uncertainty, and inconsistency" in people's experiences of pornography use (Bragg and Buckingham 2002: 7).

Grounded theory was also deemed an appropriate methodology for this research by virtue of its focus on theory building. Grounded theory is extremely effective in areas where little or no theory already exists (Urquhart 2013: 55-6) and, thus, served as a useful means by which to generate a theoretical framework for understanding porn consumption – in this case, amongst feminists – where one did not exist already. As Charmaz (2006: 10) notes, many grounded theorists "produce substantive theories addressing delimited problems in specific substantive areas…[and] each exploration within a new substantive area can help us to redefine the formal theory". Accordingly, the intention for this research was to move beyond the simple description of phenomena towards a substantive theory of online porn consumption amongst London feminists, with the ultimate aim of developing existing formal theory and pushing our thinking around porn consumption forward in new and fruitful directions.

Nonetheless, whilst grounded theory brought a number of strengths, it was also prudent to assess its limitations in order to minimise any challenges these may pose. One such issue pertained to the challenge of abstraction (Urquhart 2013: 89). 'Bottom-up' line-by-line coding provides us with a mechanism for inductive emergence, but at the

same time, it generates a set of very detailed and wide-ranging themes and categories. As Urquhart notes, “to be workable, and elegant, a theory needs to have only a few constructs or core categories”, and as such, the challenge for grounded theorists lies in the need to break away from micro-phenomena in favour of core conceptual categories around which a theory can develop. In light of this, the research presented made use of three different types of coding technique: open (descriptive and analytical) coding; selective coding; and theoretical coding (Glaser 1978). Open coding produced very detailed and rich descriptions and insights. Meanwhile, it was the task of selective coding to narrow these down into key themes and a core conceptual category, around which theoretical codes and relationships between them could emerge. The principle of constant comparison helped to gauge the significance of individual codes, and I also make use of integrative diagrams to assist in this task. Strauss (1987) describes integrative diagramming as a visual device that facilitates cumulative integration by pulling together otherwise scattered materials into a provisional coherent form. By making use of these techniques for scaling up open codes, I aimed to avoid the critiques of disorganised and unfocused theory development that could be levelled at grounded theory research.

Leading on from this, another potential issue was encountered; namely that of how much data to collect. One of grounded theory’s strengths lies in the richness of the data received, and the way in which the methodology encourages theoretical ‘saturation’. Whilst definitions remain contested, achieving ‘saturation’ broadly refers to a process by which the significance of each category or theme suggested by the data is backed up by many tangible examples. In many ways, this practice thus serves to counteract the critique of much qualitative research, which accuses researchers of being selective about the data they choose to highlight. The emphasis on theoretical saturation enables researchers to present “findings [that] are representative – that is, not just detected once or twice in the data” (Urquhart 2013: 159). Nonetheless, as Sandelowski (1995) notes, theoretical saturation is a judgement call on the part of the researcher; the imprecision of which leads Dey (1999: 257) to abandon this term completely, in favour of the term theoretical ‘sufficiency’, which he deems a more appropriate description of the process. Given the extensive time required to engage in such a detailed process of analysis, which involves coding data, line-by-line, via three different techniques, grounded theory’s detailed-oriented, bottom-up approach also poses significant practical implications in

terms of the three year PhD project cycle. This is further exacerbated given the impossibility of grounded theory researchers to ever know in advance the sample size required for theoretical saturation. As such, this project aimed for theoretical 'sufficiency,' balancing practical considerations with fitness-for-purpose, as a means by which to ensure that rich, detailed data was gathered within the allocated time-frame.

Rather than constructing this research around a 'theory-testing' model with a hypothesis firmly embedded in existing literature, the premise of this research was based on a set of much looser and broader 'seed concepts' (Urquhart 2013: 131), as elaborated upon in the previous chapter. Thus, whilst I sought to minimise the influence of my own assumptions and values on the research, some initial "hunches" underpinned this project, laying the necessary foundations for bringing it into being in the first instance. These emanated primarily from my experiences of the London feminist community/ies in question, as well as previous engagement with literature in gender and sexuality studies and feminist theory during my postgraduate studies hitherto. These seed concepts thus proved useful in creating a provisional research frame. However, whilst some level of familiarity with the studied phenomenon is necessary when designing and delivering a research project, Glaser (1992) states that extensive review of existing literature "might contaminate, stifle or otherwise impede the researcher's effort to generate categories". Thus, a further tension emerged between the grounded theory approach and the framework of review for PhD candidates. Whilst grounded theory advocates against conducting a comprehensive literature review at the early stages of research in order to minimise the influence exerted by existing theory on the analysis, academic institutions often require a literature review as an indicator of progress. To combat this, I presented a broad, 'non-commital' literature review in the first instance, consistent with Dey's (1993: 63) principle of keeping "an open mind, not an empty head", proceeded by a more thorough engagement with existing theory at a later stage in the research.

In these ways, this project attempted to avoid some of the most common pitfalls attributed to grounded theory research, whilst simultaneously remaining loyal to the key characteristics of the methodology. Charmaz (2006: 15) identifies nine elements she considers to be key to grounded theory, for both constructivist and positivist interpretations alike, some of which have already been touched upon in this chapter:

1. *Conduct data collection and analysis simultaneously in an iterative process*
2. *Analyze actions and processes rather than themes and structure*

3. *Use comparative methods*
4. *Draw on data (eg. Narratives and descriptions) in service of developing new conceptual categories*
5. *Develop inductive abstract analytic categories through systematic data analysis*
6. *Emphasize theory construction rather than description or application of current theories*
7. *Engage in theoretical sampling*
8. *Search for variation in the studied categories or process*
9. *Pursue developing a category rather than covering a specific empirical topic*

Employed within a feminist-oriented constructivist paradigm, these grounded theory 'tenets' formed the backbone of this project's research methods.

Methods

The methods employed for data collection in this project were almost entirely internet-based, making this a study that both explored *and* exploited internet technologies. As Lee and colleagues (2008: 4) note, online methods hold a number of benefits "over 'traditional methods' in terms of time, cost and reach". In the case of this study, online methods enabled participants, where desired, to remain anonymous when making their contributions, and have been useful for widening participation amongst those for whom focus groups would otherwise be inaccessible. Moreover, conducting interviews via teleconferencing software enabled participants to take part remotely from a location of their choosing, in which they felt comfortable – a key priority when conducting research that invites interviewees to discuss potentially sensitive issues around sex and sexuality.

Whilst O'Neill (2004: 1) critiques the biases she sees as inherent to online data collection methods due to internet (in)accessibility amongst certain demographics, this is not considered a significant limitation in the context of this particular research project, given that the use of internet technologies for the purpose of accessing pornographic material is a prerequisite for participation in the first instance. It must also be noted that online methods have sometimes faced criticism on the grounds of data protection and spamming issues (Umbach 2004). Thus, the online services used for data collection (SurveyMonkey, Padlet and Skype) were selected on the basis of their privacy policies, which articulated clear safeguards against third party data sharing. Furthermore, the challenges that online research methods can present regarding potential technical malfunctions were mitigated by means of data back-ups and software testing, further enabling this study to effectively take advantage of the benefits online methods can provide whilst minimising the risks it may otherwise pose. This project made use of three

different online data collection methods: a group brainstorming exercise; demographic survey; and in-depth interviews.

Participants and Recruitment

Participant recruitment also took place online, most significantly via online London feminist networks, social media platforms, and a dedicated project website. These included the following online community groups, contacted by virtue of their London feminist member demographics:

Facebook networks	Wotever World
Twitter networks	Fetlife - London Feminists group
La Freak Smut Cinema	Talking Bodies mailing list
Feminist Fightback	Cameryn Moore/Sidewalk Smut
Bethnal Green Working Men's Club	Feminism for Tories online community
The Secret Society of Humourless Feminist Killjoys group	Shada
	Mumsnet
London School of Economics Feminist Society	All The People
Kings College London Feminist Society	Good Men Project
Imperial College London Feminist Society	Barberette client community
School of Oriental and African Studies Feminist Society	Non-Monogamies and Contemporary Intimacies group
Tory Feminists online community	ICA LGBT
Sisters of Frida	Smut.UK

The online group ideation exercise featured 38 contributions. Subsequent to this, the demographic survey gained 22 responses, of which 17 participants were selected and 18 in-depth interviews held. 45 to 50 respondents were estimated to have taken part in the project in total, taking into account the likelihood of some having participated in both the first (online group activity) and second (interview) stages of the research.

The selection criteria for respondents were that individuals considered themselves to be (a) London residents, (b) porn consumers, and (c) feminists. As discussed in the previous chapter, given the slipperiness of the terms 'feminism' and 'pornography', I resisted the temptation to rigidly define these concepts and, instead, encouraged participants to discuss their own understandings thereof during the interview. I endeavoured to analyse the ways in which these divergent understandings may impact or relate to other categories within the developing theory, over and above making any attempts to police them. In this way, I tentatively aligned myself with Ryberg's (2012) approach to defining pornography, as one which uses as its starting point a 'standard' definition, but which also welcomes the inclusion of many different objective and visual strategies that challenge and expand the standard definition. I furthermore applied this

approach to my treatment of the term ‘feminist’, understanding ‘feminism’ and ‘pornography’ alike as constructs with fluid parameters; a position that is in keeping with my own post-structuralist roots.

The fluidity of these key terms, for the purposes of this research, is something that had implications for the wording of recruitment messages. In particular, due to preexisting assumptions about the meaning of the term ‘feminist’, the need to emphasise that the project is open to feminists of any gender became apparent. Furthermore, I stressed the validity of different pornographies and the various types of sexually explicit media available. These included, for example, the kinds of material that do not conform to the standard adult video format that have come to be synonymous with commonly held understandings of the term ‘online porn’. As a consequence, we heard from men, women and non-binary identified people, cisgender and transgender, who used written, moving-image, still-image and interactive pornographies alike. It was also deemed important to ensure that recruitment notices adopted a non-judgemental tone in order to attract a range of people with diverse opinions, attitudes and experiences, rather than only those who position themselves on any one given side of the ‘pro’ or ‘anti’ pornography debate – or as Paasonen (2011) has come to describe it, the anti-porn/anti-anti-porn debate. Accordingly, the non-dualistic foundations of this research were made explicit to all participants and potential participants throughout the recruitment and participation stages.

Whilst great effort was taken to avoid volunteer bias as far as possible, by emphasising the non-partisan intentions for the research and by employing the theoretical sampling techniques advocated in grounded theory, inevitably biases can never be eliminated completely. For this reason, it was necessary to speculate on the anticipated differences that could be expected to exist between volunteers and non-volunteers and to account for such differences throughout the project. With particular reference to sexualities research, it has been posited that volunteers for this type of research are more likely to report “a more positive attitude towards sexuality, less sexual guilt, and more sexual experience” (Strassberg and Lowe 1995) compared to non-volunteers – a supposition that was acknowledged in the analysis and theory development process. Attempts were also made to ensure that a range of demographics was represented in the respondent group. This was approached by means of a

demographic survey used in tandem with grounded theory's theoretical sampling approach, which together helped facilitate participant diversity and highlight the need for different demographic samples where relevant. A breakdown of interviewee demographics and information on the demographic survey used for this study is detailed later in the chapter.

Another potential bias to be considered pertained to volunteer reporting. Of specific relevance here is social desirability bias, which can be described as the potential inclination on the part of the participant to answer a question in a way that presents a favourable view of behaviour, rather than necessarily a strictly truthful, reflection thereof. Social desirability bias has been identified in studies of sexual behaviour reporting (Kelly et al. 2013) and so, due to the nature of this project's subject matter and self-reporting methods, the presence of some degree of social desirability bias can be assumed. Attempts to reduce this bias include efforts to ensure my own attitudes and intentions for the research, as far as possible, retain an appearance of impartiality by means of carefully reviewed questions, recruitment messages and resources. However, it is also pertinent to note that behaviour itself was in fact not the focus of the study at hand. Indeed, an accurate view of consumer behaviour was not strictly required for the purposes of this research; rather, it is consumer experience that served as the key object of exploration. The subjective nature of this area of inquiry thus renders self-reporting one of the few means – if not the only means – by which to achieve the intended goal of better understanding feminists' *experiences* of pornography.

Fieldwork Stage 1 – Online Group Ideation Activity

The first part of the fieldwork took the form of a group ideation activity. This was a largely unmoderated brainstorming exercise using an online canvas upon which participants were invited to draft and post comments pertaining to the subject in question. A group participation activity was deemed fitting for this stage of the study, by virtue of the capacity for interactive methods to encourage participants to "consider and reflect upon aspects of their daily life that are usually taken for granted" (Morrison 1998: xiv). This is a strategy that we see being successfully implemented in other instances of porn studies research (Morrison 2004; Mowlabocus 2013). The online brainstorming activity in particular was chosen in order to take advantage of the benefits offered by the focus group method, which "concentrates more on the frames of reference of groups analysed,

than on those of the researcher" (Morgan and Spanish, 1984), whilst allowing more flexibility in terms of time, location and level of participation.

Participation at this early stage was made anonymous, in order to maximise involvement amongst those who may be reluctant to discuss sensitive information in a context where they could be identified. The platform being used to host this group activity was the 'virtual canvas' software, Padlet. This service provided a dedicated online space in which participants could draft, post and position their contributions alongside other submissions. Specifically, participants were asked to respond to the question: "*What is important to you with regards to online pornography*?" Responses remained public once posted and participants could thus view and respond to contributions submitted by those before them. Data was analysed by means of line-by-line open and selective coding, the results of which were subsequently used to formulate themes and questions for the interviews conducted in stage two of the research. These emergent codes, particularly those that referred to identity and porn consumption practices, also fed into survey questions for the purpose of theoretical sampling during the interview stage.

The core conceptual categories identified from the online activity data revolved around the following selective codes:

1. *Characteristics of pornography, as experienced by the consumer*

   Including those expressed as likes/dislikes; characteristics of the types of porn they actually consume in reality; and the qualities they identify as constituting 'good/bad' porn:

   > "I watch heterosexual, lesbian and threesome videos. I like videos where there is a focus on giving pleasure to women, more specifically through masturbation of the clitoris. I also enjoy depersonalized close ups of the genitals while performing sexual acts."
   >
   > "It's great when the scene includes some acknowledgment of it being a scene, like talking about it beforehand , acknowledging the cameraperson in some way - i think a lot of people might imagine that as a turn off but for me it makes it more sweet"
   >
   > "I tended to gravitate to porn that featured females as the focal point […] lots of POV penetration or oral sex, where the driving line of the action ultimately centered on the women's pleasure, her moans and wriggling hips and affirmations of arousal, and culminated in her climax, not in the guy's money shot."
   >
   > "I do find certain genres or styles of porn completely unappealing and, in part, I think this is to do with the unrealistic and fake presentation of women, and the predominantly male perspective that accompanies them."
   >
   > "I watch a lot of different types of porn, from kink, to school teacher cliches, to BDSM, to lesbian porn"

> "What I look for in filmed porn is women who I find attractive, who are having a good time and there's a sense of humour about the whole set up. What I don't like is the 'lesbian' porn for heterosexual men. Those. Women. Aren't. Lesbians. Look at their fingernails! […] So yeah, good porn is good. And bad porn is horrific."

2. *Concerns around porn, as experienced by the consumer*

   Including those pertaining to pornography as a media form generally, as an industry, or as a socio-cultural phenomenon. This manifested several times as articulations of misalignment between feminism and porn consumed/enjoyed by the participant, feelings of guilt, and/or calls for change:

> "I [n]ever feel ashamed of watching porn but my feminist ethos does make me feel guilty for not choosing more independent/women-led porn"
>
> "How subjected to conservative gender norms am I when watching this sort of video? Why don't I enjoy alternative queer porn since they seem to be more in line with my professed beliefs? Can one be blamed for one's taste in porn? Should I try to further politicize my porn watching activity?"
>
> "I actually would prefer to see more women behind the camera than in front of it, and more standardized regulations on worker's rights, safety measures, and public education on these issues by porn companies themselves"
>
> "I don't think the issue is niche fetish sites making SSC porn with extreme acts within it- its that the majority of porn is objectifying and does not represent normal sex."
>
> "I feel anxious to see how sex is presented in porn. I know how scary it may turn out for our psy-world."
>
> "I do know that porn companies need to be more transparent and open with their consumers, customers, and detractors. Engage in a dialogue starting with simple questions like: What do you like/not like and why? How can we be better at responsibly and ethically serving your needs?"
>
> "some porn are really abusive without any cultural message it is sending […] and making a lot of money…Porn is not only about pleasure but also about profits."

3. *Access to porn, as experienced by the consumer*

   Including details of online spaces for finding and using porn, availability of porn, the cost of accessing porn, or the format/s of different pornographies accessed (eg. audio-visual, text, moving/still image):

> "Obviously it has to be free, and everyone has to enjoy themselves (including me). I'm more likely to read erotica than watch, because it doesn't seem quite as fake, even though the sex is in your mind."
>
> "I mostly search for videos on mainstream websites (free)"
>
> "I'm perfectly willing to pay for something if I know it will be what I want, and indeed how are we going to support ethical porn if we refuse to pay for it?"
>
> "I don't enjoy watching porn – it's rare for me to find a video that I can engage with on any level. I tend to read rather than watch."
>
> "I get turned on more from sex scenes in TV shows […] I also enjoy porn productions from the director Erika Lust, where she […] creates a movie like atmosphere to the porno, which excites me more. Other forms of porn I really enjoy, are images, and gifs, [which] get me turned on more than conventional porn, as cute as james deen is. i also like reading erotic literature, where I can use my own imagination to create a scene."

> "is porn just moving images? I find myself being more and more involved with personal ads on Craigslist where people share their personal desires and fantasies which allow me to not only connect with them but enjoy their enjoyment and freedom"

These three themes often coalesced around discussions about how participants experienced the selection process for choosing and using pornographic material and how they described their selection criteria. In this way some relational threads between these three core conceptual categories began to emerge:

- *Characteristics <> Access*

  For example, some participants commented on the way in which their desired genre or preferred *characteristics* of porn intersected with the relative ease and/or cost of *accessing* porn to influence the choices they might make when selecting:

  > "On a practical level it initially comes down to accessibility, while I like both the idea and actuality of queer porn I don't come across good queer porn for free so don't access it generally."

  > "I often prefer to watch gay and queer porn, particularly when it's kinkier - I'm not sure why, but I find a lot of the imagery used to present cis women as dominant is unappealing to me - and it's easier for me to find gay porn that I like."

- *Access <> Concerns*

  Others talked about how, for them, the format or cost of *accessing* porn was impacted by their *concerns* around pornography and their desire to support ethically 'good' or 'better' porn. This combination of influences, in turn, impacted their experience of the selection process in quite different ways.

  > "I read more than I watch - partly because I can't afford to pay for porn (and I'd prefer to pay, from an ethical standpoint - especially as the porn I prefer tends to come from 'indie' producers, but also because I want to support 'ethical' porn-makers)."

  > "Porn used to be really conflicting to me. As a feminist, how could I consume something that felt so un-feminist? But then I realised I was just consuming the wrong sort. Now I read a lot of stories online and on my kindle (hello Sinclair Sexsmith) and when I watch porn it is from producers I know share my values. Sounds wanky, but I buy free trade coffee, why would I care less about porn? And no, it's not free, but I think if you can afford it, you should contribute."

  > "For me, porn in the sense of images and videos taken of actors/amateurs - real living people basically - is too real for me. I have a wandering mind and it often spins to the performer and […] I feel a little conflicted when the porn is degrading or 'edgy' even if I know there is consent. In that way I almost exclusively read my porn or sometimes look at drawn/virtual images. By reading or looking at a drawing, I am free to get off on it without being distracted by the real life I am looking at."

- *Characteristics <> Concerns*

  Meanwhile, some participants spoke about how their desire for certain *characteristics* (such as preferred genres, characters and themes) collided with their *concerns* (about

consent and sex worker safety, for example) to influence their experiences of porn decision-making:

> "Personally I enjoy heavy BDSM porn, with submissive women, porn with humiliation in it. But I want to know the set up of the studio works with women who are into this- safe sex etc."
>
> "One of my biggest frustrations as someone who really likes being subjugated and commanded is the complete lack of JOI (jerk off instruction porn) aimed at cis-hetero female audiences […] The closest approximation is the morally repugnant selection of amatuer vidoes capturing some pervy old man on the street wanking it to unsuspecting victims of his uncontrolled sexual impulses, with no whiff of mutual attraction or consent."
>
> "As a transwoman, I'm continually frustrated with the representation of girls like me in porn […] However despite the abundance of negative stereotypes (the deceptive tranny, the predatory tranny etc.) and upsetting language (tranny, shemale etc.) I still watch a great deal of porn with tranwomen performers. See the thing is porn is practically the only place where transwomen are presented as sexy or desirable […] So despite all the bullshit (and there is A LOT of bullshit) in and around transwomen-centric porn, I still find myself somewhat validated by it."
>
> "I'm a feminist with rape fantasies and as such I like to watch porn where the woman is forced/degraded, but I feel guilty because rape in the real world is never okay and that these videos promote rape culture."

Experience of the selection process, therefore, was tentatively positioned as the key theme to be explored in the forthcoming interview stage, structured according to the three core categories that so far appeared to underlie it: characteristics, concerns and access. The intention was for the interview stage to provide sufficient follow-up data to elucidate, develop and evolve these initial themes into a final set of rigorously supported core concepts, forming the backbone of subsequent theory development.

Demographic Survey

The demographic survey took the form of a questionnaire hosted by the online survey-management software Survey Monkey, and was designed to ascertain relevant details about potential participants prior to inviting them for interview. As there were a huge number of potentially pertinent identity-based variables by which to differentiate participants, only those axes of identity significant enough to be mentioned by respondents themselves in the preceding online activity featured in the survey; a strategy that follows the idea of this project as a co-constructed research piece. Furthermore, responses were sought in the free-text form, rather than multiple choice, in order to allow respondents to self-identify using their own words rather than those of the researcher or academic community. This was, again, intended to be a reflection of the co-constructed nature of the research as well as a disinclination to privilege my own range of

identity terms over and above those of the respondents, whilst also remaining consistent with the (anti-/)identity politics of Foucault's (1978) post-structuralism that associates identity determination with social control.

In view of this, based upon those areas of identity deemed most noteworthy by participants, the survey initially consisted of questions inquiring into participant descriptions of their:

- Gender
- Sexuality
- Dis/ability status
- Ethnicity
- Relationship/s status
- Porn consumption practices

This list of questions evolved over the course of the research, as new areas of interest and preoccupation emerged during the interviews. The final iteration of the survey thus also included questions pertaining to potential participants' descriptions of their:

- Political beliefs
- Religious beliefs
- Educational background
- Age

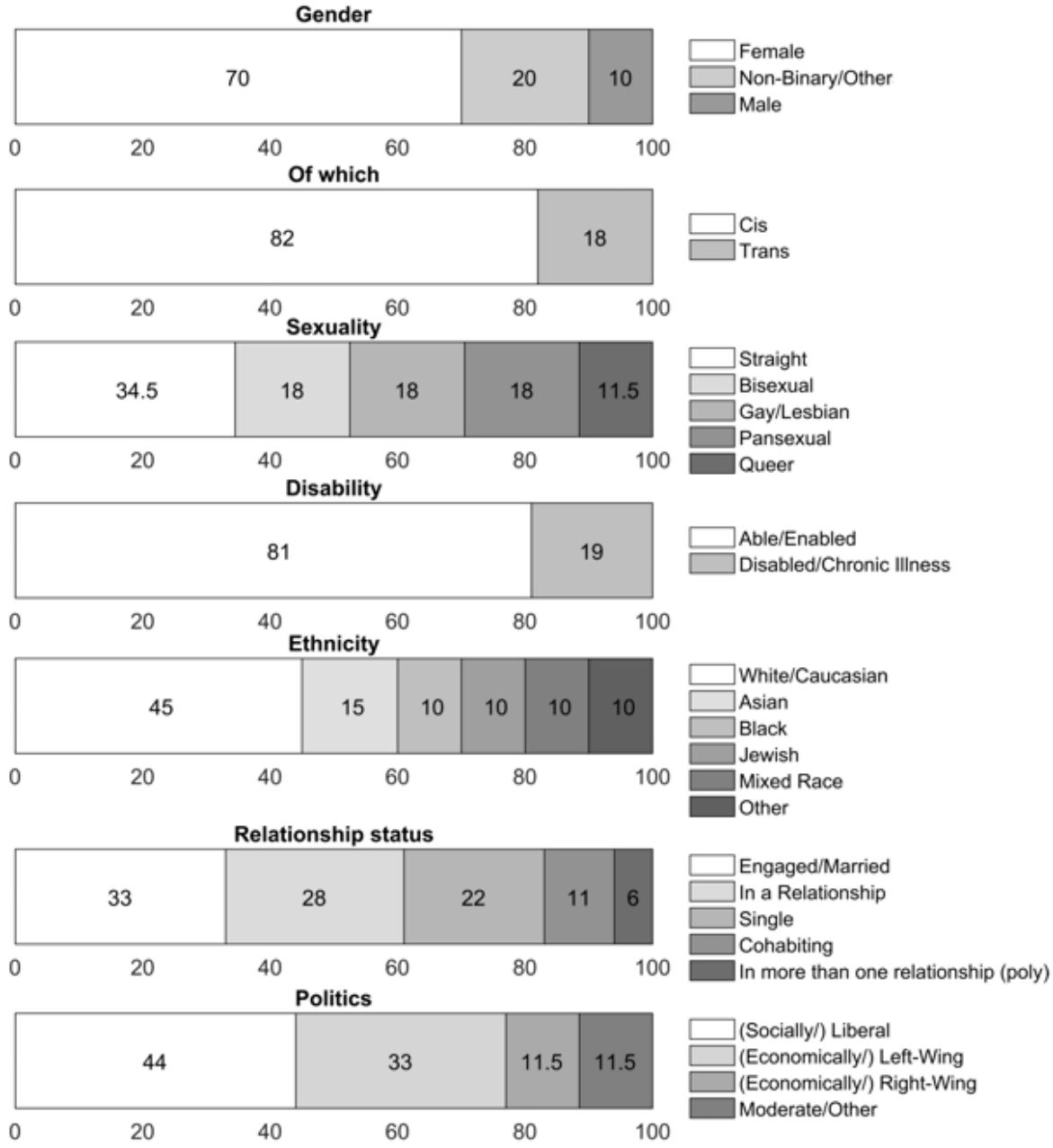
Survey responses were used primarily for the purposes of theoretical sampling; a core component of grounded theory, whereby emergent theoretical categories are refined and saturated by selectively choosing where to collect data from next. Following this, the utility of the demographic survey lay in the potential for its results to be formative in determining which participants to select for interview.

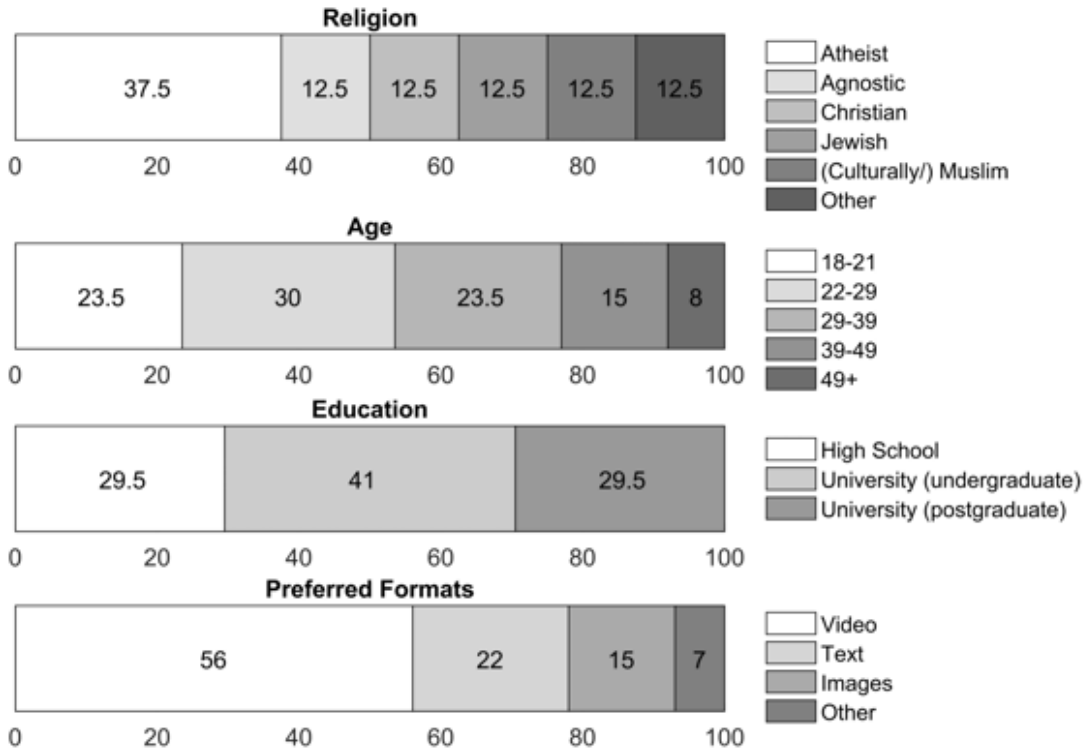
Fieldwork Stage 2 – In-Depth Interviews

The final phase of research consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with feminist-identified porn consumers in London. The interview method was selected for this stage of data collection by virtue of its capacity to gain rich and detailed information, particularly when exploring new issues in depth (Boyce and Neale 2006: 3). Whilst there is also an argument against the interview method – namely that this approach produces 'unnatural' data, with responses potentially influenced by the interviewer's questions, interruptions and silences (De Fina and Perrino 2011) – questions posed were based on issues and topics suggested by participants themselves in stage one of the study, in an attempt to mitigate this. Furthermore, the basis of this critique stands in contradiction with the epistemological underpinnings of the research, as the argument

relies on an understanding of the research as an objective representation of an external social reality, rather than a co-construction of the shared meanings that constitute it.

Interviewees were selected based on their responses to the demographic survey, which were considered alongside the evolving theoretical sampling directives. This resulted in the following sample of interview participants (not all questions were compulsory, thus percentages were calculated with reference to total number of responses gained for each question rather than total number of participants):





For the most part, interviews were conducted using online video conferencing software, Skype (with a minority of participants preferring to hold the interview face-to-face). By making use of online technologies in this way, interview localities became mobile, varying according to participant preferences. This was designed to maximise the comfort of interviewees and facilitate participation. As the subject of pornography consumption may be considered a sensitive topic, ensuring participants were at ease during the research process was paramount. Furthermore, conducting the interviews via Skype enabled participants to select a private location, such as their homes, which in some instances appeared to facilitate certain insights that may not have been readily available in another context. For example, when asked about the selection processes used to choose online pornographic material, one (home-based) interviewee comments:

> "Sorry…for some reason I needed to look at my computer to think about what I did with it… I was like, what do I do with you?" – *Shreya*

In this way, we see how the 'contextual' interview locale made possible via online technologies helped some participants "remember the kind of specific details that so often get lost in traditional [focus group and interview] settings" (Van Dijk et al. 2011).

With regards to the interview questions themselves, these were flexibly defined within an interview 'guide', which evolved throughout the data collection period according to emergent themes, core abstracted categories and areas requiring further

exploration or 'saturation'. Initially, the interview guide featured fairly broad questions addressing various topics emerging from the group activity data. In this way, the jumping-off point for questioning had its roots primarily in the expressed interests of participants themselves, albeit by means of a mediated interpretive framework. The first interview guide was thus structured as follows:

Selection process		
Characteristics - personal tastes - porn consumed - ideas about quality	Concerns - as an industry - as a medium/phenomenon - feelings - call for change	Access - format/medium - spaces of access - cost of access - ease of finding

The second iteration incorporates findings from the new interview data resulting in a more expanded form, to include the additional categories of 'benefits', 'understandings' and 'responses':

Selection process					
Characteristics	Access	Concerns	Benefits	Understandings	Responses
- personal tastes - ideas about quality - porn consumed - need to compromise	- format/ medium - spaces of access - cost of access - ease of finding - conditions of access	- viewer interpretations - (range of) content - industry - porn's impact - calls for change	- for the consumer	- of porn - of media effects - of feminism - of how tastes are formed	- desired - undesired - purpose

Subsequent versions of the interview guide were then further developed as the process of constant comparison across datasets helped to refine the core theoretical categories and concepts within them. Below we see how the categories of 'benefits' and 'concerns' were subsumed within the overarching selective code 'reflections'. This amendment took place by virtue of interview data indicating that reflections about porn amongst participants were experienced in tandem with other considerations and did not fall neatly into the two dichotomous categories of 'benefits' and 'concerns'. Instead, we began to hear articulations of the different types of concerns experienced by respondents and their strategies for reconciling those concerns. Meanwhile, the field of 'attitudes' was added to the interview guide as participants' views on feminism, pornography, media effects and responsibility became more prominent in the interviews, and more pertinent in the analysis. 'Engagement' was also added as an area of exploration in the interview guide to reflect the increasing number of nodes being coded from the data that pertained

to participants' experiences of the actual activities associated with choosing and using porn – from clicking, flicking and rating, to escaping, suspending disbelief and imagining oneself in the scene:

Experiences of online porn selection and consumption				
Attitudes - Feminism - Pornography - Media effects - Responsibility - Consumer choice	Characteristics - Content preferences - Medium/format preferences - Production techniques - Studio/ producer/ company perceptions	Access - Conditions of access - Sites of access - Ease of finding/ accessing - Cost of access	Engagement - Searching - Selecting - Receiving - Responding - Engaging with a community	Reflections - Concerns about porn ▪ Content, industry, impact - Reconciling concerns - Calls for change - Benefits of porn - Potential of porn

The interview guide developed as so, in accordance with grounded theory's theoretical sampling and constant comparison imperatives, until its final iteration. The structure of the last interview guide reflected the concluding stages of the developed theory, with a chief theoretical concept (the main PhD question or substantive area) and three core categories (the key pillars of the proposed theoretical model):

Experiences of porn consumption process		
Influences - Context & information - Attitudes & beliefs	Acting - Search practices - Decision-making process - Consumption activity - Cognitive processes - Responses	Reacting - Reflecting - Reconciling - Intending

Interviews became more focused as the core categories became increasingly well-defined and refined. Interviews tended to last between two and three hours, though some exceeded this. With permission from participants, interviews were recorded using screen-recording functionality available through the software package, Quicktime. Audio-visual files and were stored on a dedicated, local machine in a password-protected folder until word-processed transcriptions were completed. Interviews were semi-structured, presenting participants with a number of open-ended questions to address, based on the analytical categories emerging from phase one of the research. These categories were further developed, assessed and refined throughout the research process as prominent themes continued to arise, in accordance with grounded theory's iterative approach and principle of constant comparison.

Ongoing open coding and constant comparison of the data, along with complementary memo-writing and integrative diagramming, enabled patterns across datasets to be identified as selective codes, and relationships between categories to then be developed into theoretical codes. Theoretical sampling facilitated the refinement of these codes and allowed for the corroboration or refutation of the emergent theoretical categories until the point at which sufficiency was reached. This chapter proceeds by expounding upon the coding and analysis process in greater detail.

Analysis

The rigorous coding system at the heart of grounded theory represents one of the fundamental ways in which it sets itself apart from many other qualitative methodologies. Indeed the merit of its analytical approach is exemplified by the frequency with which the open and selective coding techniques of grounded theory are employed as methods in their own right, in research that does not explicitly or strictly follow the broader grounded theory approach. These studies tend not to adhere to the methodological imperative of following data analysis through to theory development; a practice referred to as the 'general design' application of grounded theory (Urquhart 2013: 50). Urquhart bemoans the 'general design' as inadequate: "It is as if all the new concepts generated by the open coding and selective coding stages are thought to be enough" (*ibid.*: 50). Yet, whilst the research as a whole was committed to engaging with open, selective and theoretical coding techniques alike, data collected from stage one of the research – the online ideation exercise – was analysed using only open and selective coding, much in the manner that Urquhart criticises as unsatisfactory. The reasons for this related to the distinct purposes intended for the different stages of research that this project comprised.

As Glaser (1978: 72) points out, there are two kinds of codes that may be developed in grounded theory research; substantive codes, which he describes as those that "conceptualise the empirical substance of the area of research" and theoretical codes that "conceptualise how the substantive codes may relate to each other". Thus, the online ideation exercise sought only to engage with substantive coding; the reason for which pertained to the very aims of undertaking a preliminary research exercise in the first place. Rather than theory development, the intention for this initial online ideation activity was simply to conceptualise the parameters of the research frame, and thereby

formulate a provisional, thematic framework around which to develop interview (and survey) questions. Based on these inductively developed questions, the aim was always for much richer data to emerge in the interview stage, giving rise to more fertile ground for the production of the theoretical codes ultimately anticipated. In this way, the project can be said to have made use of both the 'general design' and 'theory building design' approaches to grounded theory (Urquhart 2013: 63), employing open and selective substantive coding in the preliminary group activity, and also incorporating theoretical coding techniques at the interview stage when richer data was able to be acquired.

Open coding is the first step in grounded theory analysis and is the point at which some of the most unique insights can begin to reveal themselves. Through open analysis at the word and sentence level, which is not guided by existing literature or a governing theoretical direction, unexpected themes can be more readily identified in the data. For the purposes of this research, open codes suggested by the data tended to be either descriptive or analytical in nature. Whilst the latter was generally favoured, It became apparent that "it often pays simply to summarise the data in a descriptive fashion" (*ibid.*: 81) to help 'break open' the data in the first instance. In addition, this study made use of *in vivo* codes at the open coding stage, to provide descriptive or analytical insight whilst simultaneously serving to elevate participant voices.

Selective coding can be described as the process by which sets of open codes are narrowed down into themes and categories that relate most meaningfully to the research question. As Dey notes (1993) it is at the selective coding stage that the dimensions of the research reveal themselves, which help the researcher to adapt and deepen the parameters of the research question. Indeed, it was at this point that we observed the research question for this project shifting from a broad inquiry into the experiences of feminist-identified porn consumers in London, to a much more precisely articulated research frame, focusing on the particular selection processes articulated by participants, and their experiences of reconciling these practices with their ethical and feminist positions.

Theoretical coding is the process of identifying connections between codes and theorising substantive patterns in the data. This often involves revisiting the selective coding phase a number of times before coherent relationships can be neatly marked out. It is at this stage that Glaser and Strauss (1967: 34) emphasise theoretical sensitivity,

warning against the "forcing of 'round data' into 'square categories'". Whilst Corbin and Strauss (1990) delineate a single coding paradigm for the purpose of theory development, Glaser differs in his approach, instead asserting that, in order to most effectively avoid forcing the data, a grounded theory researcher must "develop a repertoire of as many theoretical codes as possible". In keeping with Charmaz's (2006: 155) acknowledgement of the contributions that recent theoretical currents, such as feminist theory and cultural studies, may offer to grounded theory coding, this project adopted the more permeable approach to coding families suggested by Glaser, enabling theoretical codes to "breathe through the analysis, not be applied to it" (*ibid*.).

An example of how the relationships between open, selective and theoretical coding may be conceived is represented in the following table. Here we can see how *in vivo* codes, as well as descriptive and analytical codes, were used together to conduct an open analysis of the data initially. We can also identify the selective 'scaling up' of these codes into broader categories; a process that did not take place in isolation, but rather, by situating these codes alongside those suggested by previous data samples. Finally, relationships between selective codes began to develop, which came to constitute the correspondent theoretical codes. The table that follows is not able to fully represent the selective and theoretical coding processes, as each of these coding stages requires constant comparison with the dataset in its entirety, rather than limiting analysis to a small data segment, such as the quote presented here. It does, however, serve to demonstrate the process of abstraction, drawing a trajectory from open analysis to theoretical coding.

Data	**Open coding**	**Selective coding**	**Theoretical coding**
"I'm a feminist with rape fantasies and as such I like to watch porn where the woman is forced/degraded, but I feel guilty because rape in the real world is never okay and that these videos promote rape culture." – *Anon (participant in online group activity)*	a. 'I'm a feminist' b. 'Rape fantasies' c. Female non-consent / degradation d. Feeling guilty about porn enjoyed e. Using porn to fulfil fantasies f. Differentiating between 'real world' & 'porn' world. g. Concerned about promoting 'rape culture'	1. Asserting feminist identity (a) 2. Expressing inclination towards SM & kink themes (b, c) 3. Feeling guilty (d) 4. Understanding porn as fantasy/reality (e, f) 5. Expressing concerns about impact (g)	i. Perceived conflict (btw. feminism & tastes) • *Represents relationship btw. SC1 + SC2.* • *Represents condition for SC3.* ii. Understandings of porn (as fantasy but its impact as real) • *Represents relationship btw. SC4 + SC5.*

Grounded theory suggests a number of tools for facilitating theory development, the first of which is the aforementioned principle of constant comparison. This can be described as the "process of comparing instances of data labelled in one category with other instances" (Urquhart 2013: 63). Accordingly, the constant comparison process was employed in conjunction with theoretical sampling at the interview stage, each of which worked together to facilitate the sufficiency of emergent theoretical and analytical categories. Theoretical sampling is another key tenet of grounded theory, which Glaser and Strauss (1967: 47) define as being driven by two major questions: "What groups or subgroups does one turn to next in data collection? And for what theoretical purpose?" Whilst this project often sampled dissimilar populations, in order to understand the scope of variation within a particular category and to help delineate relationships between codes according to those variables, this was not consistently the case. Indeed, once a theoretical code had begun to emerge I commonly sampled from comparably similar demographic groups, in order to enrich the particular category in question and gather more examples of it from the data. I also made use of theoretical memos, a tool described by Glaser (1978: 83) as the "bedrock of theory generation". Memos are a means by which to think about the relationships between categories, and to organise otherwise scattered insights into the data. For this project, memos tended to consist of definitions, raw data, categories and relationships, suggestions for sampling, analytical questions, and integrative diagrams.

The final part of the theory-building process involved situating analytical and theoretical findings in the existing literature. Whilst embedding oneself in the literature is not recommended for the early stages of grounded theory research, grappling with existing theory is strongly advocated for the later stages of analysis. Thus this research took heed of Strauss's (1987: 282) assertion that, once theory development begins to "integrate and densify to a considerable degree…then supplementary or complementary or conflicting analyses should be grappled with". This grappling is demonstrated throughout the main chapters of the thesis, where empirical observations and theoretical assertions are complemented by in-depth discussions of relevant issues that emerge when positioning findings within extant scholarship.

Ethics

This study requested that participants discuss their consumption and experiences of pornographic material, entailing discussions around sex and sexuality. Given that information of this nature constitutes 'sensitive personal data' according to the Data Protection Act (1998), an ethical framework approved by the university's ethics committee was put in place from the outset. Furthermore, a comprehensive assessment of risk was conducted and approved by the department. In order to help ensure the safety of both participants and researcher, the project also complied with recommendations set out in the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (Economic and Social Research Council, 2010); the SRA Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers (Social Research Association, 2001); the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (Universities UK, 2012); the Middlesex University Ethics Framework Statement (2008); the Middlesex University Code of Practice for Research (2011); and the Middlesex University Data Protection Policy (2012).

Key to the integrity of the research process was ensuring openness with participants in terms of the project's aims; what the research process would entail; and how the data would be used. Whilst the particular areas of discussion for the interviews were made clear to potential participants before agreeing to take part, it was not possible to disclose specific questions to be posed. As is common with qualitative research, the evolutionary style of the in-depth interviews meant that exact details of these questions could not be foreseen. However, potential participants were informed of what could be expected in the interview *process*. Data was used strictly for the purposes delineated in the consent form, and sensitive personal information was not collected except where explicit consent had been given, as stipulated in the Data Protection Act (1998).

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic at hand, it was particularly important for participants' concerns around confidentiality and anonymity to be handled confidently and with care. Care was taken to make sure that participants were fully aware of how their personal information would be used, and that their expectations with regards to privacy and confidentiality were recognised. Participants were also informed of the instances wherein confidentiality may be broken, for example, in contravention of the Children Act 1989. As well as strict adherence to Middlesex University's ethics and data protection, confidentiality, and records management procedures, the right to withdraw

from the project was made explicit throughout. These represented very important measures, particularly given the likelihood of greater disclosure during the interview stage of the project.

Concluding Remarks

This study adopted a grounded theory approach, making use of its data collection, analysis and theory development tools in the construction of a new theoretical framework for understanding feminists' experiences of online porn consumption. Due to the inductive nature of grounded theory, the direction of the research was guided by participant responses, which shifted the scope of the study from a broad inquiry into consumer experiences at large, to a narrowed focus on consumer ethics more specifically. Thus the emergent theoretical framework is one that conceptualises feminists' experiences of porn consumption at the intersection of ethics and practice. This theoretical framework – the theory of 'conscionable consumption' – is summarised and contextualised in the chapter that follows.

4. The Conscionable Consumption Model

The study of pornography represents an expanding, interdisciplinary area of research, attracting attention from a vast array of fields, including sociology, psychology, gender and sexuality studies, law, philosophy, media and cultural studies. This has resulted in a diverse body of literature debating issues from pornography's legal (Edwards 2000; Beresford 2014; Petley 2014) and moral (Luff 2001; Carline 2011) status, to the impact of porn (Boyle 2000; McNair 2014) and how audiences interact with it as a media form (Albury 2009; Attwood 2002 and 2005; Smith 2007; Vörös 2015). One academic lens yet to receive significant attention within porn studies, however, pertains to the field of consumer research and consumption ethics – another interdisciplinary area, in which psychology, sociology, philosophy, economics, and business studies converge. Given that participating feminists drew heavily upon themes of ethicality at interview, a consideration of extant theory within the field of consumer ethics seemed prudent. Indeed, it could be argued that theories of ethical consumption and consumer decision-making also represent useful resources for research into pornography and its audiences more widely, in light of the ethical concerns and the "moral panic" (Lawson and Comber 2000) with which it is commonly associated. As such, the emergent theory and accompanying analysis presented in this chapter knit together theories of consumption ethics and porn studies, in a quest to better understand and conceptualise feminists' experiences of porn use. In doing so, they shed light on new applications of, and extensions to, existing models of ethical consumption insofar as they relate to the specific context of online pornography use.

The distinction between 'consumption' and other modes of usability is considered to lie in the "relative durability of use objects" versus the "swift coming and going" of consumer products (Arendt 1958: 125). Given the fleeting nature of much of the material constituting pornography's ever-regenerating landscape, porn's qualification as a consumption product may appear fairly straightforward. Nonetheless, it must be noted that not all participants for this study identified with the term 'consumer,' particularly those accessing porn very infrequently and those with anti-consumerist political affiliations. Accordingly, when describing participants, this thesis tends to refer to *individuals/respondents* and their consumption practices, rather than to *consumers*. It also refrains from prescribing a fixed referent to the term 'ethical consumer/consumption'

given the impossibility of establishing a universal definition of what this might constitute in the context of pornography – and beyond. Whilst the parameters of 'ethicality', 'ethical consumption' and 'ethical porn' thus remain in flux, that which emerges as consistent across the data, however, is the *relevance* of ethical considerations to feminist experiences of porn consumption. Indeed, the imbrication of feminism and ethics is perhaps nowhere more evident than in issues pertaining to pornography, where questions of gender, sex, power, and the body coalesce. It is the nature of this relationship, as it relates to experiences of the porn consumption process, on which this chapter seeks to elaborate.

In keeping with many conceptualisations of the feminist project (Card 1991; Jaggar 1994; Brennan 1999) participants closely associated their feminism with their ethics, with many understanding the latter to be an integral part of the former and some considering the two terms synonymous. Accordingly, all interviewees, as self-identifying feminists, discussed having given thought to the potential ethical implications of porn as an industry, product, and socio-cultural phenomenon. This is perhaps an unsurprising observation, given the ongoing significance of porn as a topic of debate within and across feminist circles. Many made positive associations between (feminist) ethics and porn, for example, by linking both with the quest for sexual freedom – and women's sexual liberation in particular. These, more often than not, existed alongside major ethical concerns about porn, however. For some such concerns revolved around fears about exploitation and performer consent; for others they extended to the perceived ethicality of pornographic content being produced and consumed. Grappling with such questions, in the context of their own porn use, emerged as a key feature of participating feminists' consumption experiences, with interviewees positioning themselves at various points along a dissonance-consonance spectrum according to how well they considered their porn practices to align with their values. The research question was thereby narrowed and refined, moving from a very broad exploration of feminists' experiences using porn, towards a more focused inquiry specifically asking: '(how) do feminists experience and negotiate matters of ethics when choosing, using and musing over online porn?'

Media commentators have sometimes been surprised to learn that there exist feminists who use porn at all, given the prevalence of calls from anti-porn feminists for its abolition. In fact, the feminist 'porn wars' represent a prominent point of divergence

within the movement, often creating an impasse between those who seem to view porn as inherently exploitative and harmful to women, and others appearing to argue for porn's potential as an empowering means of sexual expression. One might imagine, then, that feminists who do use porn would tend to align themselves with the latter cohort. In reality, however, a wide range of positions on porn was identified amongst participating feminists; some holding firm opinions on porn or strong feelings about particular types of porn, but others expressing deep-seated ambivalence. This is perhaps reflective of the "sex critical" (Downing 2013) position that has begun to develop within feminism, but which continues to be overshadowed in the media and public domain by the controversy inherent to the polarised pro- and anti-sex/porn debates.

Participants also expressed a wide spectrum of approaches to porn consumption. A minority of interviewees took great care to go about accessing porn in a manner that they considered more ethically responsible – for example, by reading pornographic stories instead of videos. Meanwhile, others talked about using porn that they felt to be at odds with their feminist ethics, describing their porn practices as 'unethical', 'neutral' or 'just acceptable' in terms of their perceived moral merit. As such, feminists' experiences of porn consumption were often, though by no means always, characterised by a degree of separation or tension between their ethical predispositions in a philosophical sense, and their porn selection practices in a practical one. This a phenomenon that has been long observed and scrutinised within the ethical consumerism literature, and which has come to be known as the intention-, attitude-, or values-behaviour gap. This chapter will proceed by elaborating upon the main academic approaches to exploring and understanding the ethical consumption 'gap', and the relevance of these concepts for the context in which this research situates itself; namely that of feminisms and porn consumption.

Consumer Ethics and the Ethical Consumption Gap

Whilst the role of ethics in consumption may seem a new phenomenon, discussions around consumer morality have existed in some form since the "18th century luxury debates" and the critiques of Victorian liberalism that followed (Hilton 2004). In its more recent iteration, however, ethical consumption has come to be understood as "the choice of a product or service [that] supports a particular ethical issue – be it human rights, the

environment or animal welfare" (Cooperative Bank 2003: 7). Accordingly, those who concern themselves with the environmental, social and/or animal welfare implications of their products, and whose (purchasing/) decisions are informed by such concerns, may be considered 'ethical consumers.' This new wave of ethical consumption has gained significant attention over the last two decades within academic, activist, corporate and political spheres, in part due to the recent surge in popularity of ethical products in the UK and the general shift in ethical consumption trends from fringe to mainstream (Low and Davenport 2007).

Such a shift is exemplified by the fair trade movement, which has sought to develop a marketing strategy around a recognised label, to facilitate the entry of more ethically and sustainably traded farming produce into mainstream distribution channels. Despite the relative growth in demand for fair trade products, however, the market share they command as a whole remains much smaller than consumer self-reporting surveys would suggest (Burke et al. 2014; Cornish 2013; d'Astous and Legendre 2009; Devinney et al. 2010; Low and Davenport 2007; Shaw et al. 2016). Specifically, whilst 30 per cent of the population is reportedly willing to buy ethical products, such goods and services appear to constitute only three per cent of actual purchases, in what Cowe and Williams (2000: 1) refer to as the "30:3 syndrome". Whilst more recent research estimates these numbers to have risen in the past few years, the apparent gap between the two remains significant and can be observed across the ethical product and sustainable practice spectrum; from coffee (De Pelsmacker et al. 2005) through clothes (Shaw et al. 2006) to computers (Echegaray and Hansstein 2017).

Some scholars have sought to explain this discrepancy by highlighting the supposed oxymoronic nature of the 'ethical consumption' project, arguing that the global capitalist economy upon which consumer culture is based – whilst appearing to facilitate the growth of the ethical product market – actually serves to limit the scope of movements such as fair trade, by elevating the neoliberal principles of profit and consumer choice over true fair trade values (Bradshaw and Zwick 2016). Others account for this gap by pointing to consumer self-interest (Page and Fearne 1995) or the complexity of ethical decision-making processes and their contexts (Szmigin et al. 2009). Meanwhile, a number of academics find it prudent to scrutinise the research methods that produced these figures (Devinney et al. 2010). Thus three categories of critique in

this area emerge: philosophical; social-/psychological; and methodological. These varied approaches provide a number of different tools for theorising the gap described in interviews between the porn consumption practices of many feminist participants on one hand, and their professed values on the other. In turn, findings from this project provide illuminating insights into the ways in which such approaches to consumption ethics research may be expanded and enhanced. In particular, it is the contention of this thesis that an invocation of 'care ethics' is necessary for understanding porn consumption ethics amongst feminists; and, indeed, that the utility of a care ethics framework may extend beyond this particular substantive area.

Philosophical Approaches

Philosophical theories of consumption ethics and the ethical consumption 'gap' can generally be divided into two categories: teleological and deontological approaches. Ethical consumption campaigns and policies often take both schools of thought into account, though some appeal more to notions of 'good' consequences – such as the plastic bag reduction campaigns that emphasise the harmful environmental consequences of plastic waste; meanwhile, others give precedence to universal ideals of what can be considered 'right' – such as modern slavery campaigns that draw upon a human rights framework to condemn businesses that profit from exploitative practices. When looking at the ethical consumption 'gap,' the teleological approach tends to assume that ethical decision-making revolves largely around the logical evaluation of one's actions and its consequences (Barnett et al. 2005). As such, many researchers assert that knowledge is the key to ethical consumerism and attribute the '30:3' phenomenon or ethical consumption 'gap' to the vagueness, uncertainty or lack of accessible information about the ethicality of goods and services, and their conditions of production (Ellen 1994; Strong 1996; Creyer 1997; Hassan et al. 2016). Indeed, the importance of knowledge is highlighted in the interview data for this study, wherein participants often claimed that the lack information available to consumers about the conditions of porn production served as an obstacle to being able to distinguish between more and less ethical products:

> "I think that part of the problem is that consumers are kind of isolated largely, and in sort of silos and they don't necessarily know all of the options available, don't necessarily know where something came from or who's profiting or anything else."
> *– Linda*

The teleological approach to theorising the ethical consumption 'gap', however, relies upon the assumption that there exists a single measure of 'good' consequences, and thus, a common understanding of what ethical consumption looks like and what type of information can help consumers achieve it. Similarly deontological approaches to consumption ethics assume that there exist universally accepted moral duties to act in particular ways. Following this, with much of the interest in ethical consumption hailing from the field of business studies (Carrington et al. 2016), and issues of consumer ethics therefore tending to be viewed from "the sellers' perspective" (Fukukawa 2003), enhanced ethical practice has usually been equated with increased purchasing of ethical(/ly labelled) products. The idea that ethical consumption might be conceptualised and practiced by other means, however, does not appear to be widely addressed in the literature to date.

Findings from this project, however, indicate that feminist-identifying porn users understand consumption ethics in a much wider variety of ways than the ethical consumption literature generally allows for. Whilst some participants did feel that paying for 'feminist' or 'fairtrade' porn products would represent ethical practice, others disputed the idea that feminist-branded porn was necessarily 'good' or had ethically better consequences. In this way, they also questioned the dominant notion within business ethics that spending money on ethical or ethically-branded products would necessarily be considered the preferred means of engaging with consumer ethics. Serena, for example, challenged this perspective by articulating her anti-consumerist politics and noting the ways in which paying for a subscription to a porn site – even one marketed as feminist in nature – would, as a consequence, involve her supporting an industry that relies and thrives on capitalist modes of consumerism. As such, this is something she felt disinclined to do, instead adopting alternative approaches to accessing more ethical porn and financially supporting its creators:

> "I think it's difficult to get to feminist, queer porn online - unless you're paying monthly. There's been many years in my life, in which that will be something I wouldn't be able to afford. And now that I would be able to afford, I still prefer to support independent feminist porn through other platforms, like events or festivals or crowd-funding campaigns or putting my time to do camerawork in films, rather than paying a monthly quota…I really have a thing, I think it's part of my anti-consumerism, of like, this thing of paying something every month. Like, in general. It's not because it's porn, it's the concept."

Meanwhile, Lacey talked about trying to reduce or eliminate her porn use, going on to question the ethical credentials of queer and feminist porn, and asking whether engagement with porn of any kind can ever be considered truly ethical:

> "Personally it's a dilemma that I've come to, which is like, so is feminist and queer porn better than mainstream porn, or ultimately in the end, like, should we be striving towards…just no porn at all? I don't know whether we can say that queer and feminist porn is necessarily more… whether it's the, like, right way to go, like, now you're 100 per cent ethical?"

Thus, the data suggests that teleological approaches focusing wholeheartedly on the role of information in narrowing the ethical consumption 'gap', appear to overlook potentially pertinent factors in individuals' decisions not to purchase or increase spending on ethically branded products. As the aforementioned examples demonstrate, these might include, competing ethical priorities or differing evaluations of what might constitute positive or negative outcomes. Equally so, variable deontological understandings of one's moral obligations, and how best to realise them, may impact the degree to which individuals adhere to dominant conceptualisations of ethical consumerism that equate ethics with particular purchasing behaviours.

For this reason, it is suggested that an ethics of care approach be drawn upon when exploring the philosophical dimensions of ethical consumption and the 'gap' phenomenon, rather than making use only of the "abstract principles of moral and social justice that (implicitly) underlie virtually all ethical consumption research" (Caruana et al. 2016). Care ethics can be understood as an approach to moral philosophy that addresses the way that 'caring' has been eliminated from Western philosophy's historical conceptualisations of "the good life", despite its centrality to human experience (Fisher and Tronto 1990). It thus seeks to elevate the – often feminised – elements of care that frequently inform our behaviour, by delineating the roles that 'care for', 'care of', 'care about' and 'care that' may play in ethical practice (Blustein 1991). Instead of asserting one way in which consumers who claim to be ethical must be seen to behave, a care ethics approach to ethical consumption can help us transcend this singular understanding and notice the variety of ways that care may be practiced and ethics understood. By emphasising the importance of responsiveness, attentiveness and respect, the emphasis is effectively shifted from a more abstract inquiry into what can be considered universally 'good' or 'right', to more specific questions about what course of action to take in the here and now (Shaw et al. 2016). In this way, an ethic of care resists positing any single

definition of ethical (consumption) behaviour, preferring a framework that can account for the "gendered, relational and socio-cultural embeddedness of moral decisions" (Caruana et al. 2016: 216) and the range of context-specific actions to which this may give way.

Just as Shaw and colleagues (2016) note the relevance of care ethics to consumer behaviour and understandings of ethical practice, it similarly appears that an ethics of care framework resonates closely with feminist articulations of consumer ethics in this study. Whilst it is inevitably the case that, given the widespread availability of free porn, one way in which feminists might choose to practice 'ethical porn consumption' is by paying for products that they feel represent their moral values – as the #payforyourporn Twitter campaign suggests – other ways of incorporating ethical considerations into one's porn use also emerge. For participants in this study, these included efforts to reduce one's porn consumption in general; being selective about the types of free content used; and supporting the creators of 'feminist', 'queer', or alternatively framed 'ethical' porn by other means, such as attendance at festivals, screenings and community events. Using an ethics of care framework in this way, to expand our vision of how ethical consumption behaviour could be conceptualised, may in turn hold explanatory power for theorising the apparent ethical consumption 'gap' – in this study, and beyond.

Methodological Critiques

There are a number of academics who have scrutinised the validity and reliability of empirical consumer research to explain what they see as a potential misrepresentation of the supposed ethical consumption gap (Hassan et al. 2016). In particular, the "principle of compatibility" (Ajzen 1988), has often been invoked to account for – or rather, undermine – the alleged extent of the ethical consumption gap (Sutton 1998; Devinney et al. 2010). This principle underscores the importance of specificity when delineating conceptual terms, and when exploring, identifying and measuring key phenomena. Devinney and colleagues (2010: 57-58) for example, point to the issues surrounding variable understandings of the term 'boycott':

> *Does a boycott mean never, ever buying the product again, or is it sufficient not to buy it the next time to have engaged in a boycott? Does a boycott have to be organized around a social or political cause, or can it simply be an action based on an individual's personal negative reaction to a product/service experience?*

Undefined terms such as these, they argue, can produce inconsistent results, with participants seeming to answer the same question, but in fact responding according to

very different criteria. Similarly, ambiguity pertaining to the notion of 'intention' can be observed within the ethical consumption literature, sometimes resulting in a confusing conflation of *willingness* to act, or what Sutton (1998) describes as 'provisional intent' on one hand, with what can be understood as a more resolute *intention* to act on the other.

This distinction can be observed in the data from interviews with feminist porn users, wherein participants often distinguished between what they would be willing to do – given particular circumstances – and what they actually intended to do in reality. Many interviewees commented that they did not tend to access 'ethical' or 'feminist' porn due to the fee that these products would usually incur, for example. Of these, however, most went on to explain that they would be willing to make use of ethical or feminist porn if this type of porn were to be available for free, and/or that they intended to access such sites when they had more disposable income. The *provisional* intention to act – thus emerges as subtly different from a *resolute* intention to act, with participants understanding the former to imply the possibility of hypothetical scenarios that could facilitate action, and the latter to apply more specifically to the real-life conditions and contexts in which consumption takes place. This is reflected in the analysis, with interviewees' expressions of hypothetical willingness or provisional intentions to engage in more 'ethical' porn practices for example, being distinguished from historical descriptions of past intent and accompanying behaviour change and/or specific articulations of well-defined and resolute intentions to act on a specified upcoming occasion. That which appears to be lacking in such a distinction, however, is the care and concern that nonetheless appears to be embedded in both types of statement. This is a notion explored further by Blustein (1991), who provides a framework for understanding and distinguishing between the dispositional and practical elements of caring.

Blustein (*ibid*.) approaches care ethics from a health perspective, describing the different forms of care in terms of their adherence to the specific properties. "To care for" is associated with the practice of attending the care needs of others, such as family members and friends. "To have care of" Blustein describes as having a duty to engage in acts of caring, perhaps by virtue of one's position as, for example, a teacher or doctor. "To care about" is correlated with a disposition to act in ways that have a positive rather than negative impact on the thing or person of interest. Meanwhile, to "to care that" can be equated with a more abstract concern about a particular issue. The first two modes of

caring explicitly imply action, whereas the latter pertain more to disposition. If we are to apply these four care notions to the context of (porn) consumption ethics, they may be reframed in terms of:

Care as ethical practice:

> "I think most of the time, I succeed in ethical consumption…For me the consent [in porn] is key [so] I try to look for things that are going to be, yeah, like more feminist… Um, it wouldn't make any sense that I defend something and then I go and watch every night super young-looking girls being fucked by ten men at the same time, you know." – *Serena*

Care as ethical duty:

> "I feel more and more, how can I say, like…a duty to be a feminist, for everyone, not just a choice. So this has affected me in so many ways…There is a viewer responsibility…not just not to watch [filmed abuse], but also report it." – *Helen*

Care as ethical disposition:

> "I can't afford to pay for anything at the moment, [but] I would love to be able to…feel that I'm doing something that's morally correct in my mind and subscribe to some lovely feminist porn site, which I know is being, you know, ethically-made. I'd love to have that luxury at the moment, but I don't." – *Carla*

Care as ethical concern:

> "I watched some Netflix documentary…about young girls…getting into the sex video industry sort of thing, and erm, being used up and spat out after about six months basically – that's how long their average career lasts. I can't remember what it was called, but…now I do worry about that as I'm watching porn every now and then. Especially if they're young." – *Charlie*

Thus, Blustein's model, reconceptualised in this way, can serve as a useful framework for differentiating feminists' articulations of abstract concern about certain issues surrounding porn and, in some cases, an – as yet unrealised – desire to make more ethical porn consumption choices themselves; from participants' descriptions of 'feminist duty' and the ways in some choose resolutely to incorporate ethical practice into their porn consumption. To reduce these various forms of experience to a singular notion of 'care' would be to overlook the nuance of experience described by interviewees.

Indeed, it is this tendency to discuss 'care' in an abstract and undifferentiated manner that Shaw and colleagues (2016) have highlighted as a failing within the field. Whilst they acknowledge that notions of care are sometimes referred to in the ethical consumerism literature, they lament the fact that these "are seldom described, defined or analysed beyond noting the existence of care and, in some instances, equating care with the willingness-to-pay for a product" (*ibid.*: 252). In the same ways that semantic inconsistencies associated with the term 'intent,' as we have seen, can sometimes serve to undermine research into the ethical consumption 'gap', so the conflation of

dispositional and practical notions of care risks overlooking a key element of experience that may prove pertinent for our understandings of the apparent attitude-behaviour gap. Indeed, as we have seen, with regards to data analysis for this project, an ethics of care approach helps us to identify the nuance inherent to feminist experiences of porn consumption ethics, in which various modes of dispositional and practical care appear to play a central role. Accordingly, findings support the authors' assertions that notions of care can, in fact, extend our understandings of how consumer ethics are experienced and navigated, thus also supporting a further methodological critique of the research in this area to date; that the role of care in consumption ethics has so far received insufficient attention at both the data collection and analysis stages. This is a pitfall that, upon recognising the importance of articulations of care in the interview data, this study has sought to eschew.

Social-/Psychological Approaches: Cognitive Modelling

Social psychology research into ethical consumption has almost exclusively employed cognitive approaches that focus on explorations of information processing and behaviour (Carrington et al. 2010: 141; Andorfer and Liebe 2012: 417). The most popular cognitive modelling approach used in this area has been Ajzen's (1985) theory of planned behaviour, or TPB (Sutton 1998: 1317; Carrington et al. 2010: 139; Carrington et al. 2014: 2760; Caruana et al. 2016: 216). TPB began as the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980), which sought to explain perceived discrepancies between attitude and behaviour. Key to this model is the idea that intention is the best predicator of action; that attitudes and norms are the best predicators of intent; and that attitudes and norms are, themselves, underpinned by an individual's associated beliefs (*ibid*.). As such, the theory of reasoned action (TRA) referred largely to behaviour that was volitional. However, as the notion that non-volitional factors may play a part in decision-making gained credence, TPB was introduced along with the added variable of "perceived behavioural control" (Ajzen 1985 and 1991). Accordingly, the more contemporary TPB model suggests that behaviour is dependent upon both the motivation to act – intention – and perceptions of one's capacity to act – behavioural control. This model further claims that intention is formed by attitudes and subjective norms, with the latter referring to an individual's beliefs about how others whom they respect will judge their behaviour. Attitudes, meanwhile, are understood to represent the positive or negative

evaluation of the outcomes associated with a particular action. Accordingly, Ajzen (*ibid*.: 13) describes attitudes towards a particular course of action as determined by multiplying the "evaluation of each salient outcome [with] the person's subjective probability that the behaviour will produce the outcome in question".

Whilst this project did not seek to test the predictive validity of the model in any way, it should be noted that findings from the data do align with some the ways in which TPB conceptualises attitude. As such, aspects of this model in turn serve us well as an explanatory tool. In particular, the role of outcome evaluation in the formation of attitudes successfully captures some of the ways in which participants described their experiences of the porn selection process. As a case in point, most interviewees discussed how they, perhaps unsurprisingly, evaluated porn based on its anticipated capacity to help achieve the goal of arousal or orgasm. As such, attitudes towards using a particular porn product can be conceptualised as more favourable the stronger the belief that the desired outcome of arousal will be achieved as a result:

> "Is it going to get me off? That's it at the end of the day. Is it what I'm into, erm, that is number one, and probably numbers two through a hundred as well." – *Charlie*

These more hedonistic evaluations were complemented by other considerations, such as reflection upon ethical outcomes. Josie, for example, talked about being aware of the potential consequences of her actions with regards to porn, noting how she appraises the anticipated ethical outcomes of her porn consumption decisions as well as those pertaining to sexual gratification:

> "I think it's just awareness of what goes on behind the camera. Recognition that there is coercion in porn, that there is trafficking of people to participate in pornography…So, understanding that it exists and being aware that when you're watching, you may be participating in the production of porn that's not made ethically…I'm aware that that's a possibility and I do my best to avoid it…So I'll start playing something and I'll go, ok, does it look like she's enjoying herself, does it look like there's any coercion…and…it's not just about ethics, it's also about the aesthetic. It's that, is this going to work for me, as a...media that's going to get me off, and I have to make that decision quite early on."

Participants went on to discuss how this evaluation of possible outcomes was, in turn, moderated by the strength of belief associated with impact of each outcome. With regards to ethical considerations, this often manifested in a belief – or lack of belief – in the power of consumer choice, with those who doubted the impact of their porn choices exhibiting less motivation to act upon their ethical consumption inclinations.

> "If I'm sitting there combing through porn looking for the one video that's ethical, then it's going to be difficult for me to get off… and…there's like a limited impact that what I would be doing would even have." – *Akim*

By contrast, those who believed their actions to have more significant consequences described greater efforts towards ethical porn decision-making. As Lacey noted, making analogies with her vegetarianism:

> "It's probably that thing, when people are, like, to me, oh but just because you're one vegetarian, is that going to change the whole meat industry. No… But I do think…what makes a difference is whether you're paying into it. I think if more people pay for sites that have queer porn and feminist porn, then it is going to mean there will be more of that, so then that does affect it...It is reduced, the agency we have, because it's such a big industry…[but] you just have to think about it on the individual level and what it can do."

In this way, TPB's notion of outcome evaluation and the role of underlying beliefs in this process of attitude formation emerge as relevant concepts for understanding feminists' experiences of porn consumption ethics.

However, whilst TPB remains the most widely used cognitive modelling approach for consumer ethics research, its limited predictive validity and explanatory capacity with regards to the still notably wide ethical consumption 'gap' (Sutton 1998; Hassan et al. 2016) suggest potential shortcomings. As a result of these weaknesses, a number of extensions to the theory of planned behaviour have been proposed. One such extension to TPB that has been put forward by Carrington and colleagues (2010) is consideration of the ways in which prior planning can increase the likelihood of ethical convictions translating into ethical purchases. Indeed, this phenomenon is hinted at in the interview data, with a number of participants having expressed the belief that they would feel more able to act upon their ethical porn consumption intentions if only they were to prepare for such a task:

> "So, you know, you choose dolphin-friendly tuna. You take a bag to the supermarket instead of buying plastic. You make sure your porn is produced by, you know, ethical producers. Except…when you've got a hard on…or whatever the female equivalent is, you stop thinking, don't you? You stop thinking with your sensible, rational, socialist, ethical, feminist brain…I think if I sat down in a not aroused state and went, mmm and now I shall source some ethically responsible porn. Now I would be able to do that and that would be super and that would be great the next time I got a metaphorical hard-on, and I had it in a nice little folder saying, here's your ethically responsible porn Charlie, click here, on my computer. But of course, I don't do that when I'm not aroused. And yeah, when I'm aroused, it's just like, give me the porn, give me the porn, give me the porn, give me the chocolates, give me the terrible plastic bags, just everything." – *Charlie*

The above excerpt also points to another critique of TPB, which challenges the notion that behaviour can generally be understood as reasoned or planned. For example, Ariely's (2006) study highlights the irrationality of much human decision-making, and points to the capacity of sexual arousal to impact logical and ethical decision-making. A related

critique pertains to notions of habit and processes of habituation that may result in individuals performing behaviours more automatically, wherein stimulus cues may have just as important a function as attitudes or intentions in predicting behaviour (Aarts et al. 1998). Furthermore, Fazio's (1990) MODE model posits that a lack of motivation or reduced cognitive capacity can cause people to act in a manner that is more spontaneous than reasoned, wherein attitudes are only likely to guide behaviour if they are ingrained enough to be activated impulsively.

Others have questioned the sufficiency of the model, asserting that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceptions of behavioural control alone fail to adequately explain consumption behaviour. Indeed TPB, and the cognitive approach it represents, deviates somewhat from its behaviourist counterparts in that it largely attributes action to the ways that an individual processes information and, thus, deemphasises the role of context and surroundings in decision-making (Hogg and Vaughan 2002: 157). Whilst the role of environmental variables is acknowledged in cognitive psychology, some contend that a greater focus on the contexts and conditions of consumption could improve our understanding of the ethical consumption 'gap' (Foxall 1993; Caruana et al. 2007). For example, a number of scholars highlight the relevance of financial conditions for studies of counterfeit product purchasing (Eisend and Schuchert-Güler 2006), music piracy (Bishop 2004) and other examples of consumer ethics research (Barnett et al. 2005). Similarly, financial resource availability was discussed by many feminists in the context of their porn use and their willingness to pay for porn:

> "It's easy for us to sit here and say, yes, I'm going to be an ethical consumer, but then faced with...my financial situation at the moment…I'll go for the cheaper one."
> – *Carla*

Whilst income wasn't quantified and thus couldn't be compared across interviewees, the *perception* of financial wealth and/or hardship nonetheless emerged as a factor of consistent relevance to consumer decision-making.

Community was also raised as an important factor in consumer decision-making. Indeed, the role of friends, social groups and communities in the formation of attitudes and behaviour intention – over and above notions of the "subjective norm" – has been well documented in sociology and psychology alike (Darley et al. 2001). The interview data similarly suggested a variety of roles that community may play in porn decision-making and consumption; from providing a network within which to share content and recommendations, to shaping attitudes towards feminism, porn and ethical practice more

generally. Equally so, the reverse held true, with a number of interviewees lamenting the stigma and secrecy around porn and the way they appear to limit the positive impacts of community participation enjoyed by other ethical consumer networks:

> "If I'm not ok with the fact that people who work in the porn industry don't have the same rights as I do as an employee, I should individually have the responsibility to do something about it in the privacy of my own home…I can start watching porn on a website that I know doesn't…abuse its workers or something. But I think practically speaking and not hypothetically speaking I think it would be a lot more difficult to rally a large group of people to do that, because… because it is such a private thing. I think it would be hard enough to get people to admit to what kinds of porn you're watching, let alone, great now stop watching it…I mean if there was some sort of boycott of McDonalds going around then I could talk about it with my friends and say, you know, let's not go to McDonalds today, let's go to Burger King because there's this boycott going on. But if someone wants to go home late at night after a long day at work, then who's going to be there to say, don't watch this website?" - *Natasha*

In this way, a number of factors relating to the contexts and conditions of consumption seem pertinent for understanding feminists' experiences of porn consumption and apparent articulations of an ethical consumption 'gap'. These serve to highlight the potential limitations of cognitive models such as TPB in explaining apparent discrepancies between values and behaviour.

Instead, Carrington and colleagues (2014) assert that, given our limited understanding of the ethical consumption 'gap', qualitative approaches may prove more useful for theory development in this area, over and above the quantitative cognitive studies based on self-reporting surveys. For this, they suggest a broad-brush inquiry that facilitates exploration of the plethora of ethical concerns, decisions and behaviours in which individuals must engage day-to-day, rather than limiting the investigative frame to one particular desired outcome. By widening the line of enquiry, their study reveals a "motivational hierarchy" of concerns amongst self-identified ethical consumers, suggesting that individuals prioritise issues relative to each other, rather than evaluating each in isolation (*ibid*: 2761). This is very much in keeping with the interview data from this project, wherein feminists described feeling unable to act upon all the issues they care about and, thus, being compelled to prioritise. For example, Jas discussed the ways in which she channelled her efforts towards tackling issues of gender and sexuality over and above other ethical and environmental concerns, due to her limited capacity to act upon the variety of causes she cared about:

> "I would like to put more time into things I care about and things I want to effect change in, but it's hard when you're sort of moving back and forth all the time, and also like balancing a course-load… I have some sort of, like, hard priorities, that are always like the first and foremost thing. And the rest, it just comes down to whatever's

> easiest to act on. So, the hard things are, like, um, right now I'm working on a project where we're making the entire med-school curriculum more LGBT friendly... And, like, even during high school and stuff, that's exactly the kind of stuff I was doing and that's just always been my, like, number one thing, is like getting a gender-neutral bathroom in the school, having a neutral uniform code - all this kind of stuff is, like, number one and that's where I put most of my time as far as doing anything. But yeah for anything else I just do whatever's easiest…whatever cause I can contribute to in the easiest way."

Following this, it could be argued that a key critique of TPB-based approaches to exploring the ethical consumption 'gap' is the way in which the model appears only to take into consideration an individual's attitudes and intentions towards one single, predetermined behaviour at any given time.

In contrast, a care ethics framework accommodates the 'hierarchy of concern' analysis well. Specifically, its focus on context enables us to view an individual's porn decision-making alongside care-based imperatives, including that of self-care; rather than in a decontextualised manner that may incline towards the assumption of apathy and self-interest amongst those whose porn choices appear not to align with their values. Indeed, the notion that there may be limitations to the amount of energy one can commit to care giving/acting is revealed as central to feminists' experiences of porn consumption ethics. For example, Carla noted that, in the midst of an overwhelming number of ethical issues that she deemed important, she found it necessary to prioritise causes:

> "I mean, many days I just feel like weeping into my laptop, at the kind of impotence that I feel, for all this stuff that is going on in the world that I'd like to help with - you know, FGM, the polar bears, um, you know the, what's going on in the States - and I just feel like hiding under the duvet. So, I try to, you know, I mean that's also part of the problem with the whole social media isn't it, that we just become so overwhelmed. So I try, again, I just try and bring my focus back to, you know, at the moment I can only deal with one thing, and my thing at the moment is, is uh, sexuality and rights and all that."

Meanwhile, Gayle discussed the difficulties she had been experiencing in her efforts to consume ethically, concluding that it was simply not in her capacity to act upon all of the issues she cared about at any one time:

> "I'm vegan. I've always been vegetarian…I've been, sort of, recently taking it to the next level of trying to go vegan with things like cosmetics - um, I've always been wary of cosmetics in terms of cruelty-free stuff. And I, like I said, I try not to buy things like Coca Cola. I went through this whole thing - again, it takes up so much time, like, trying to be bloody ethical all the time, but - I was like, I do, sort of miss the taste of Coca Cola, what can I do? … And I was like, SodaStream, let's have a look at SodaStream. And I was just like, oh god, they're involved with this whole sort of Israel-Palestine thing…I can't do that. And it's like, just going on these missions trying to find out the most ethical way to do things…there comes a point where it's like, I can't actually do anything about that now, it's got to the level where I've done my best."

Shaw, McMaster and Newholm (2016) highlight how such articulations may further benefit from a care ethics analysis, drawing upon Tronto's (2013) concept of a "care deficit" to propose that what has usually been conceived of as an attitude-behaviour gap, may be better understood as a discrepancy between care needs and care capacities.

To conclude, we have seen how the philosophical, empirical and social psychology literature around ethical consumption and the ethical consumption 'gap' can provide important tools for research into porn consumption ethics. Philosophical approaches to consumer ethics help us to question what we mean by ethics and ethical consumption, in order to better understand the various ways in which feminists may understand their moral obligations with regards to porn. Methodological critiques of empirical consumer research highlight the importance of analytical rigour and, in this case, highlight the need for clarity around relevant terminology. Meanwhile, social psychology approaches to understanding the ethical consumption 'gap' present a number of cognitive models that can serve as useful conceptual tools for theorising the relationship between attitudes, intentions and behaviours described by participating feminists. Conversely, we have also been able to identify the limitations associated with such approaches, along with the ways in which introducing a care ethics framework may serve to address some of these shortcomings. In particular, this approach allows us to move away from a simple equation of care with willingness to pay, towards a more complex conceptualisation of both dispositional and practical modes of care, which more closely represents the views of participants. In this regard, Blustein's delineation of the ways in which care can be experienced, expressed and practiced provides a more comprehensive model for understanding feminists' experiences of (porn) consumption. A care ethics framework also places greater emphasis on the contexts and conditions of decision-making and behaviour that Shaw and colleagues (2016: 252) highlight as important factors for understanding the ethical consumption gap, and which emerge as pertinent to feminists' experiences of using porn. Thus, whilst the notion of 'care' tends to be overlooked in the consumer ethics literature, it is the contention of this thesis that an ethics of care framework can enhance our understanding of porn consumption ethics and feminists' experiences thereof. It is in light of this framework that the theoretical model proposed by this chapter is presented.

Theoretical Framework

Whilst the 'responsible' consumer-citizen may be conceptualised in various ways, the terminology we come across most commonly in the academic literature, as well as in the media and public sphere, is that of the 'ethical consumer'. The ethical consumer, as previously noted, can be understood as an actual or mythical (Devinney et al. 2010) figure that purchases fairly traded, green and animal-friendly products. More flexibly-defined articulations of ethically-minded consumer groups, meanwhile, have included terms such as 'conscious consumer' or 'conscientious consumer'. The former is said to represent someone who is aware of possible ethical questionability amongst consumer products and makes attempts at – though doesn't necessarily succeed in – improving their practice accordingly (Szmigin et al. 2009). The latter, meanwhile, may refer to those who take great care to make ethically-sound consumption decisions in many areas of their day-to-day lives, and mostly succeed in doing so (Niinimäki 2010). Conscionable consumption, however, represents something qualitatively different to the abovementioned understandings of consumer-citizen identity and practice. Rather than adopting the *business*-oriented approaches of most consumer ethics studies, whose underlying aim often appears to revolve around devising better strategies for increasing the consumption of particular goods and services, this model is grounded in the *individual's* perspectives on ethics and consumption.

Through the inductive analysis of interview data, the notion of 'conscionable consumption' emerged as a means for conceptualising feminists' experiences of navigating the ethical terrain of porn consumption. Instead of representing a particular classification of consumer, conscionable consumption practices may refer to a spectrum of (porn) consumption choices that individuals consider acceptable to them, and describes the processes by which these notions of conscionable practice may be arrived at. In this way, conscionable consumption approaches may pertain as much to a person's desire to simply *avoid* what they consider to be unethical practice as their ambitions to *pursue* more aspirational ethical practices. With regards to feminists and their porn use, this model should be understood in the context of a perceived "care deficit", or a seemingly limited capacity for individuals to meet all the care needs with which they may be confronted. This, it is contended, may result in a person feeling compelled to prioritise where and how care energies should be spent. As a result, we see some dedicating more

time and resources to pursuing ethical practices in certain areas – where doing so is deemed more urgent or is easier to accomplish, for example – along with lower-level efforts to merely avoid activities seen as especially unethical in others. Indeed, it is this variable evaluation of how to allocate care-giving resources that appears to produce such divergent conceptualisations of 'conscionability' across different areas of ethical concern, as will be explored later in the chapter. As such, rather than an identity term, inspirational ideal, or classification of ethically 'superior' consumer, conscionable porn consumption refers to a context-based process of practice, reflection and (re)definition of what an individual may consider acceptable porn choices at a given point in time. Thus, perhaps by virtue of the origins of this research lying outside the boundaries of business studies and marketing, the notion of conscionable consumption neither presumes, nor seeks to delineate, a set of practices that corporation owners, politicians or ethical consumption activists would necessarily wish to encourage. Instead, the model can simply be understood as a depiction of how feminists – and, conceivably, otherwise-identified 'concerned' consumers – may understand their own journey with (porn) consumption ethics, in a way that aims neither to glorify nor vilify such people or practices.

Indeed, that which could be clearly identified within the interview data was the notion that feminists, themselves, often do not agree on any single way of doing 'ethical consumption' with regards to porn. In fact, some participants expressed uncertainty as to whether such a practice could ever be said to exist. Consistently conceded, however, was the view that certain types of porn could be considered more ethical and others less so:

> "I don't think you can say that there is such a thing as an ethical porn user, um, but people can go about their pornography in more ethical ways, if that makes sense?"
> – *Lacey*

When it came to distinguishing the negatively framed approaches from the positive, participants once again diverged, articulating very different ideas of what might constitute more ethical practice, and sometimes widely contrasting degrees of adherence to them. Serena, for example, focused primarily on the potentially harmful impact of what she saw as degrading depictions of women across mainstream porn. She thus equated more ethical porn with examples of queer- and feminist-oriented productions aiming to move away from normative 'mainstream' imagery and present a diversity of bodies and sexual practices:

> "The idea of mainstream porn feels very threatening to me… Like, most of the times the idea they convey of sex and bodies is very restrictive…if you research on the statistics of consumption, one of the first ones all over the world is teenage porn. Like,

> it doesn't matter that they are underage or not - I mean, obviously that matters, but that's not even the point...it's worrying… Yeah, like the reinforcement sometimes of rape culture, because you realise that there's no consent in the images. All this slut-shaming that they're doing… Ethical porn looks very consensual…And then, you get to see, yeah, like unlimited ways of having sex, and of what is considered sex…I think most of the time, I succeed in ethical consumption."

Whilst Serena noted that she occasionally found herself browsing mainstream tube sites and using porn that she would not consider particularly ethical, she nonetheless specified that it was the queer and feminist porn content that she favoured, and which she most commonly accessed.

Akim also highlights consent in his discussion of ethical porn, paying most attention, however, to the industry side of porn ethics. Namely, he suggests that the most ethical type of porn would be productions devoid of any form of direct or indirect coercion, where performers were fully consenting to the sexual acts in which they engaged:

> "I do think that there are different levels of consent with the actors and actresses. Like who's actually consenting, who's forced into it by their economic situation and such… Uh, yeah I guess the most ethical porn would be ones where the actors want to do it… I am confident these people exist, like I've seen Ask Anythings on Reddit with seemingly happy porn stars, but you can't really actually control for it… I could…only look at porn that is made in the United States for example, or like a, you know, a country with a very high standard of living and tight labour regulation that would hopefully be working to avoid you know egregious abuses, but yeah I don't do that."

Following this, Akim felt that that a more ethical approach to porn could be to confine oneself only to content produced in countries such as the USA, where he believed more effective legislation would be in place to combat exploitative industry practices. This was not something that he, himself, engaged in however, as he was ultimately unconvinced that the impact of him doing so would be significant enough to make the additional effort worth his while. Instead, Akim preferred to concentrate his efforts in other areas, provided that his porn use at least stayed in what he referred to as the ethical "*neutral zon*e".

Meanwhile, Jas associated ethical practice with both avoidance of harm and positive social impact:

> "[Ethical consumers] are aware of what they're accessing and consuming, um, and their decisions to access certain things reflect a set of ethics that are good. Like, good in a way that doesn't harm people and, I don't know, is just good for society in general… I think that comes somewhat inherently in my choice of form of porn consumption. I think there's less of a chance for unethical porn when it's, like, written or drawn or whatever, because, yeah, just like in the first place it's not, like, flesh-and-blood humans. Um, and also just in the fact that I'm very distractable so I will notice if it is unethical porn…so yes, I think I am an ethical consumer."

Unlike Akim, however, who distinguished optimal ethical practice from his own 'just acceptable' behaviour, Jas considered the type of porn she used as entirely in line with her understandings of the ideal ethical consumer. Given the resources she had and the availability of porn that she found to be both ethical and enjoyable, Jas felt able to engage in what she saw as ethical porn consumption; indeed, not doing so would have been unnecessary and may ultimately have proven difficult to justify. Accordingly, Jas's conception of conscionable consumption with regards to her own porn use emerged as one and the same as her understandings of ethical porn consumption per se.

As such, each participant described their own respective conceptualisation of what types of porn content, and modes of porn use, could be considered acceptable to them. For some this took the form of very low-level measures to maintain what they saw as ethical neutrality with regards to porn; for others conscionable behaviour equated to more overt efforts to support studios that they believed would employ more ethically-sound practices, or the use of material depicting more favourable representations of women and minorities. In each case, however, subjective definitions of conscionability with regards to porn use represented the minimum acceptable standard of ethicality required for that individual to feel at sufficient ease with their porn choices:

> "I'm not perhaps doing everything I could to guarantee that it's ethically sourced, but I'm doing enough to make myself feel comfortable about it." – *Josie*

It is upon contravention of such minimum standards that feelings of dissonance may emerge.

Whilst all participants described the trajectory of porn consumption experience according to a number of key stages – from being motivated to use porn in the first place, to selecting, engaging with and responding to it in due course – many also touched upon the role of self-reflection in this process. Some associated this process of reflection with negative feelings directly after having used porn:

> "Immediately following my porn use is the time I think about…kind of, like, the kind of dirty guilt shame feeling. Just being, like, oh, like, what, why do I need porn, why do I want to watch this porn." - *Leticia*

Others were prompted by conversations amongst peers or during their studies, which encouraged discussion of and introspection on their use of porn:

> "I mean, it's hard when you do sociology not to reflect on, like, every single thing you do. But I find it the most interesting to reflect on. So, like I said, I, like, analyse, like, the scenes and how, like, realistic they are and different things. And I reflect all the time on my consumption and whether I should be doing it and what it means. And because of the discussions I have with people I know in, like, my feminist circles, it comes

> around a lot, like, pornography - even in that gender course I did, we talked about pornography." – *Lacey*

It is by means of these contemplative moments that the evaluation and (re-)definition of conscionability appears to take place.

In those cases where individuals, upon reflection, understood the porn they used to be in line with their values, no dissonant feelings seemed to ensue and, thus, they reported resuming their day-to-day life without giving further thought to their porn practices. When, however, an interviewee believed the porn they used to be out of alignment with their values, experiences of dissonance were articulated, most commonly in the form of guilt, discomfort and perceived hypocrisy. This appeared to trigger a process of reconciliation, aiming to bring the practice in question into alignment with the person's sense of feminist self – or vice-versa. Various strategies were invoked here, with a view to justifying, dismissing, accepting or negotiating dissonance. For example, Helen discussed attempts to dismiss the dissonance she experienced by means of "*numbing*" and "*persona switching*". Others appealed to perceptions of powerlessness in order to justify using porn they perceived to be unethical, or placed some or all of the blame elsewhere, highlighting for instance the role of governments and producers in improving porn ethics.

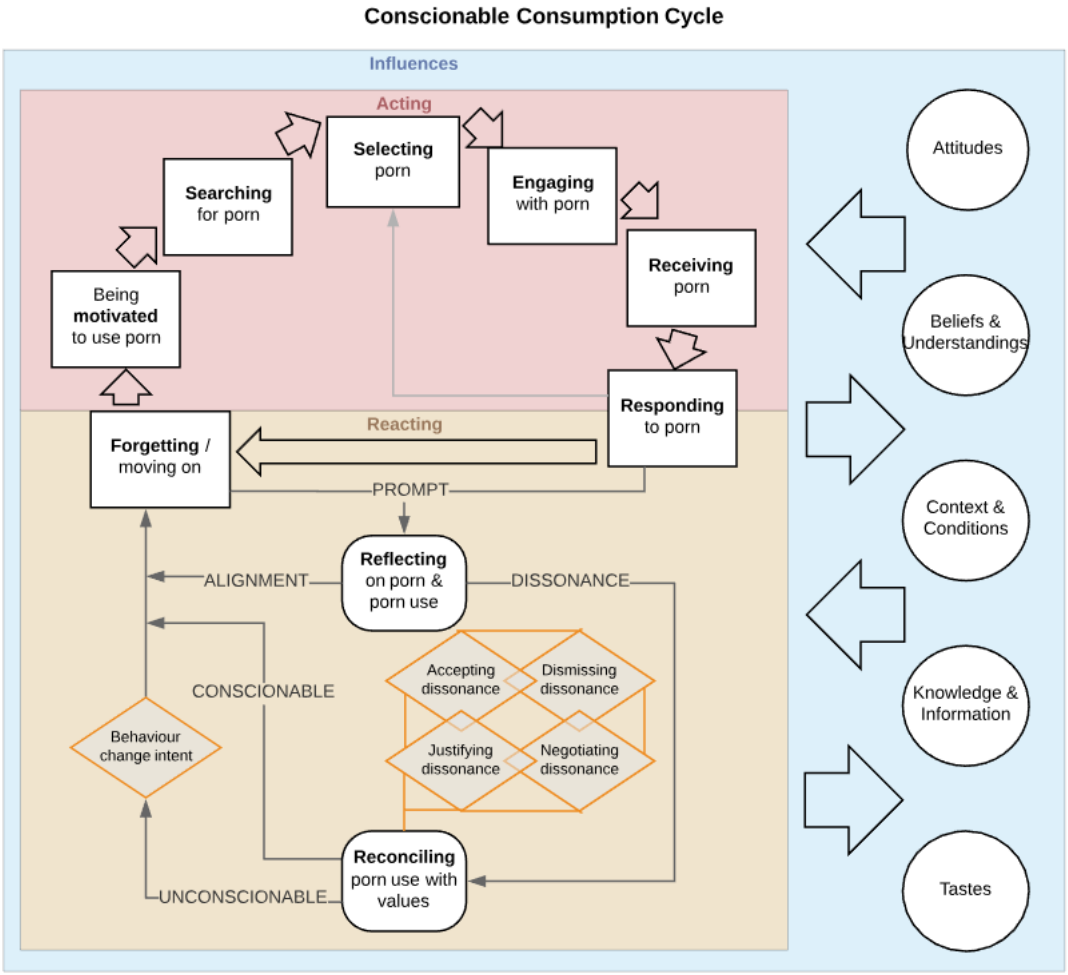
Many described being successful in these reconciliatory efforts, with most participants who expressed feelings of dissonance ultimately understanding their porn practices to be acceptable on the whole, and generally not expressing any intentions to change their behaviour. A minority, however, upon being unable to reconcile what they perceived as a values-actions misalignment, described feeling somewhat compelled to change their behaviour. For example, Charlie drew upon her vegetarianism to demonstrate the ways in which her process of "*compartmentalisation*" had helped her to dismiss feelings of dissonance in the past, but only insofar as she was able to remain ignorant of the negative consequences of her actions in favour of the positive ones. By pointing to a recent change in her meat-eating habits and anticipating a similar shift in behaviour with regards to porn, she asserted that strategies to dismiss dissonance were not generally sustainable in the long-term:

> "Alright, so the compartmentalising is on one level me going, yeah this is bad, politically bad, and you should not be supporting this exploitation of vulnerable women, and the other part of me going, do-do-do-do-do-do-do-do nothing to see here, let's just have our orgasm, this is great [laughs]. But it's the same thing I've been doing with vegetarianism for years, going, I shouldn't eat meat I shouldn't eat meat,

> la-la-la-la-la let's have this delicious steak. And that's kind of, yeah I've been unable to fight against that so I'm becoming more and more vegetarian. So this year has been the year of vegetarianism. So erm, I think repression and denial is great for a while [laughs] but it only lasts so long… But yeah, the mismatch is between my ideas about exploitation and what I know about the sex industry and my consumption of porn – my consumption of video porn. Yeah, I suspect I might have to think about that some more and maybe change what I do." - *Charlie*

Whilst we must be careful not to equate speculation about unspecified future behaviour with explicit intent, we can nevertheless observe how the inability to reconcile feelings of dissonance any longer had reportedly, in the past, resulted in Charlie forming – and acting upon – behaviour change intentions with regards to her eating habits. Acknowledging the potential impact of social desirability bias, and thus the possibility that this statement of provisional intent may never actually be acted upon in the porn context, Charlie's *experience* was nonetheless characterised by an envisioning of future reflection on her porn use and possible behaviour change. Similar speculations were identified in interviews with Yan, Josie and Serena, who each expressed desires to access more ethically-regarded content in future, upon questioning the respective 'conscionability' of their current porn choices. Here, the interview itself serves as an example of how social settings in which porn is talked about more openly may serve as a prompt for introspection, regardless of whether speculations about future porn consumption intentions are realised or not.

The notion of behaviour change reflections and/or intent can thus be identified as part of feminists' experiences of consumption ethics, and earns a place within the conscionable consumption model accordingly. Unlike much of the extant research on ethical consumption, however, the exploration of behaviour change and intention does not constitute an underlying goal or focus of this study, and represents just one part of the conceptual model proposed. It is the wider journey – starting with the motivation to use porn; followed by the selection of, engagement with and response to porn; and ultimately the cycle of 'conscience processing' that may be prompted – with which the model below concerns itself:



As illustrated in the above diagram, conscionable porn consumption can be thought of as a cycle, made up of actions that take place in what participants describe as "*the heat of the moment*", and subsequent reactions, which may or may not involve engaging with a secondary sequence of reflection and reconciliation. Each stage of the process may be influenced by the person's attitudes, beliefs, contexts, knowledge and tastes; and, in turn, these background endogenous and exogenous factors can themselves be impacted along the way. This is deemed particularly the case with regards to attitudes and beliefs, where the reflection and reconciliation process appeared to sometimes encourage a re-evaluation of one's approaches to porn as well as to feminism:

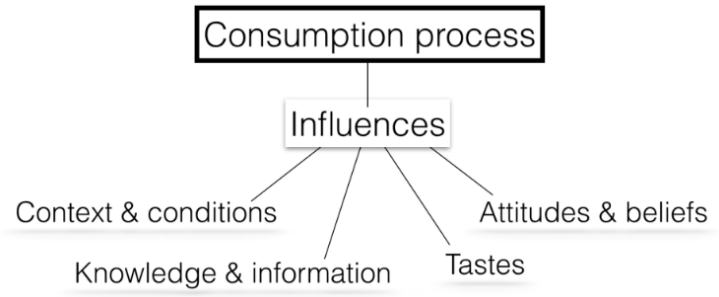
> "I think actually becoming a feminist sort of ruined porn for me a lot. I used to watch it more than I do now, and then I started going on my feminist journey and I...was reading stuff that put me in the frame of mind of porn and feminism don't go together…I wouldn't categorise myself as having been a SWERF, but in terms of my early route into feminism…that was some of the kind of rhetoric I was reading and sort of thinking, oh yeah that sounds like a really good point. And then you start looking at the other point of view and it's like, yeah no there are quite a lot of sex workers who actually really enjoy their work, so um, so, I think I got a bit confused along the way. I went through a phase of watching quite a lot of stuff from Kink.com and feeling like, oh this kind of gets around any political problems because it's, like, women who are involved in that side of porn…because it's so hardcore, it's like, they have to want to

> do it. It's like there's no reason to do it unless they want to do it, to be honest, because it's so extreme. But even that, the kind of, just the act of that level of violence, um, made feel me a little bit uncomfortable about it after a while. I think now I'm just like, yeah, feminism ruined so many things for me [laughs]… It's only relatively recently that I've started to explore *hentai* a bit, just because I kind of felt like, oh maybe this can solve my ethical quandaries about what I watch and what I don't watch." – *Courtney*

As such, the interviews highlighted how participants commonly experienced the role of ethics in porn consumption as an ever-evolving cycle of definition, practice, reflection and redefinition of what could be considered acceptable behaviour and what would need to be 'solved'. In this way, interviewees tended towards descriptions of consumption ethics as a 'journey of conscience' over time, rather than referring to an absolute definition with static criteria to which they had always and would always conform. It is this – sometimes short, sometimes lifelong – trajectory of fluctuating attitudes and behaviours towards ethics and (porn) consumption that characterises the theory of conscionable consumption. The following chapters will elaborate upon each of the key concepts that constitute the conscionable consumption model and will detail the analytical process that facilitated the development of this conceptual framework.

5. Core Category i: Influences

The first cornerstone of the 'conscionable consumption' model proposed in this thesis is the role of *Influences*. This core theoretical concept comprises the key factors that feminist participants understood as having some form of impact upon the porn consumption process. That may have related to the degree to which participants felt certain dynamics affected their decision-making; how some factors impacted their experiences of using porn more than others; or how such elements altered the way they felt about their porn consumption, or about porn more broadly. For example, some interviewees highlighted how the socio-sexual *conditions* surrounding their porn use – such as watching alone versus watching with a partner – impacted the type of porn they chose. Meanwhile, the *information* participants had acquired about the porn industry, via online media, traditional media, social groups and other channels, was often experienced as an influential factor when considering types of porn to access or how they felt after accessing it.



This chapter proceeds by outlining the key facets of this core concept, namely those of: *Context and Conditions; Knowledge and Information; Attitudes and Beliefs; Tastes*. It seeks to elucidate the different dimensions of experience highlighted by participants within these themes, and begins to identify how these might relate to one another, as well as to other elements of the model. This part of the thesis along with the sections that follow also demonstrate the system of analysis used to arrive at this core concept and its sub-categories, by presenting illustrative excerpts of data alongside a breakdown of their assigned codes at each level (open, selective and theoretical).

Context and Conditions *(562 references)*

As noted by Attwood (2005), paying attention to the contexts and conditions of consumption are crucial for understanding "the ways in which [audiences] construct

individual and group negotiations, appropriations, and uses of sexually explicit media". Echoing this, contexts and conditions revealed themselves in this study as key elements of experience amongst participating feminist consumers. Conditions, here, are understood as the situations and circumstances specific to the individual. Meanwhile, context can be construed as the broader setting or backdrop that frames the experiences of the individual and those around them. Conditional elements thus include circumstances that may differ from person-to-person, such as one's upbringing and familial/social environment; financial situation; body and identity; state of health; age; or profession. Meanwhile, contextual factors may refer to the global digital economy; UK political climate; or London as a socio-cultural locale.

Contexts and Conditions 'emerged' as a theoretical category by means of open, selective and theoretical coding of the data, as illustrated in the example below. For the purposes of this study, open codes tended to represent an action (ie. the participant *remembering* an experience or *feeling* a particular emotion). Following this, selective codes served as themes for grouping and classifying those descriptions during the constant comparison process. Theoretical codes were abstracted even further and held importance insofar as they implied a relationship with another of the model's categories. As with each of the coding tables included in this section, only those codes relevant to this particular category are highlighted in the illustration below, though it should be noted that additional codes relating to other areas of the theoretical model also apply to the excerpt presented:

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"When I was in my 20s, um, I was only watching gay porn - men, gay men porn. Um, but I think that was largely down to who I was hanging out with and my brother… I mean, we weren't watching it online, like we were, you know in my 20s… We only had the computer rooms in the university to access our Hotmail accounts. Um, so it was all DVD and stuff." - *Carla*	Specifying moment in time	Age/temporal conditions	Context + Conditions [impact on type of porn used]
	Observing brother's influence on porn tastes	Social/familial conditions	
	Remembering DVDs as more easily accessible than internet	Digital context	

By tracing the trajectory of abstraction from initial excerpt to final theoretical code, we can thus observe how the category of *Context and Conditions* was developed, along with sub-categories reflective of the various types of experiences comprising it.

To understand the nuances inherent to the larger unit, this chapter explores the key conditional and contextual concepts, along with a discussion of how they support, contradict or extend current understandings of consumption within the extant porn studies literature. Included in the discussion that follows are the most frequently cited themes, which were found in the analysis to have a direct impact on the ethical decision-making process specifically, and/or which can be considered to offer an otherwise novel contribution to the field.

Financial conditions

Financial conditions were frequently cited by participants as key influences on their willingness to pay for porn and subsequent porn choices. Whilst income wasn't quantified and thus can't be compared across interviewees, the *perception* of financial wealth and/or hardship nonetheless emerged as a factor of consistent relevance to consumer decision-making. The process by which this category was developed can be demonstrated by means of the following table, which outlines the evolution of analysis from descriptive to more abstracted coding (with *Influences* serving as the core theoretical code and, thus, the final abstraction). As before, it should be noted that each line of data is actually served by a number of different codes, but only those relevant to this particular 'node' are included:

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding

"When I can, I will, you know, go for the ethical option. But the reality is, I think, we've got, you know, a lot of us are skint - what we perceive to be skint." – *Carla*	Discussing limitations on financial means	Financial conditions	Context + Conditions [impact on decision-making process]

In the above example, along with many other instances in the data, we see how financial limitations impacted perceptions of spending capacity and affordability. This in turn was experienced as an influence on the ethical decision-making process, in those cases where participants associated ethical porn consumption with the purchase of feminist porn products. Conversely, financial wellbeing was also raised in relation to its perceived capacity to alter spending habits. Some participants talked about their income having increased in recent years and felt that they could now afford to pay for porn if they were to re-evaluate their spending. Others spoke about how being economically comfortable had provided opportunities to purchase porn that may not have been available to others:

> "I buy a lot of [pornographic] books, um, and if an author wanted to put their story behind a paywall and I knew their work, I would pay for it. Um, yeah, I'm fine with paying for stuff, but I guess that comes with, sort of, privilege too. It's like, I can pay for stuff, so I do pay for stuff." – *Jas*

Perceptions of relative economic hardship and affluence were thus identified as key features of the consumer experience; a notion that has been well-documented in studies of ethical consumerism in other industries (Barnett et al. 2005) as well as research on piracy (Bishop 2004) and counterfeit consumer culture (Eisend and Schuchert-Güler 2006). For respondents, financial capital represented a limited resource at their disposal, which served to restrict or enable their ability to make more ethical product purchases, both within and outside of the porn context. As such, financial conditions can be understood as a constitutive element of the perceived care deficit/limited capacity phenomenon that underpins the conscionable consumption model. That is to say, with limited resources to dedicate to ethical consumption, participants – as consumers who care – felt compelled to evaluate which ethical imperatives to act upon and how.

Physio-affective conditions

Physio-affective characteristics refer to a group of variable mental and/or physical states to which the individual may be subjected at any given time. Physio-affective conditions pertinent to participant experiences of porn consumption include mood and state of

arousal. The theme of mood was identified in almost all interviewees' accounts of consumer experience, for the most part with reference to participants' motivation for using porn, usually expressed as "*being in the mood*".

It quickly became apparent within the interview data that state of arousal served as the primary influence on participants' motivation for using porn, and also impacted the degree to which attempts at ethical decision-making were prioritised. In particular, a common phenomenon reported across the group was how the perceived significance of ethical concerns amongst consumers fluctuated, seemingly with inverse proportion to the level of arousal experienced:

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"In the heat of the moment where I'm like, right I've got ten minutes, I'm going to have fun with myself, I never stop to do that kind of consumer check…though…when I'm not in an aroused state, I'm well aware of, of sort of the ethical problems with the industry." – *Charlie*	Being in the heat of the moment Being aroused Being aware (when not aroused)	Physio-affective conditions	Context + Conditions [impact on decision-making process]

The above sentiment was often expressed with reference to the food/meat industry, and the state of hunger likened to that of arousal:

> "I'm trying to be more vegetarian at the moment, I'm definitely trying to avoid any like factory farming stuff, so…when I'm nice and calm and rational, I'll be making all these lovely ethical choices, and very serious and sensible. But, if I'm drunk and hungry, I imagine I'll have a dirty burger without even thinking about it, which is, I guess, is the equivalent of being horny" – *Charlie*

Demonstrating the same logic in reverse, some participants discussed the need to think about porn at times when they were not turned on and source porn in advance of using it. This, they felt, would help them avoid making impulsive choices 'in the heat of the moment'. In this way, interviewees who failed to engage with the porn products that they considered more ethical, often attributed this to feelings of powerlessness over their own decision-making when aroused.

These experiences resonate with many studies within psychology that recognise physio-affective conditions, or one's state of 'impulsive' being, as powerful influences on decision-making (Read and van Leeuwen 1998, Churchill et al. 2008). Moreover, findings demonstrate the relevance of this relationship to ethical decision-making within the porn

context specifically, as has been suggested by Ariely and Loewenstein (2006) whose study found that moral judgement tended to be compromised in test subjects during periods of intense sexual arousal. Arguably, this link between arousal and ethical decision-making holds particular significance in the porn consumption context given the nature of pornography as a "body genre" (Williams 1991), the very aim of which lies in the invocation of such "sensational effects" on the part of its audiences. Finally, interview data also support Ajzen's notion of perceived behavioural control, emphasising the important role that consumers' belief in their own capacity to undertake a particular action can play in the formation of intentions. When approached from a care ethics perspective, physio-affective conditions, and arousal in particular, can thus be understood as another example of the limitations consumers perceive there to exist on their capacity to translate a disposition of care into behaviour.

Social and familial conditions

The impact of familial conditions and upbringing on sexual attitudes, behaviour and development, has long been theorised across the social sciences (Freud 1900; Klein 1928; Darling and Hicks 1982; Wight et al. 2006). The role of friends, social groups and communities in the formation of attitudes and behaviour intention has been similarly well documented in sociology and psychology alike (Romer et al. 1994; Darley et al. 2001; Maxwell 2002). As such, the identification of social/familial conditions as an important influential factor on feminists' experiences, attitudes and behaviours pertaining to porn consumption is, perhaps, not entirely unexpected.

Through the practice of constant comparison, which facilitated the identification and differentiation of this theme across interviews, the relevance of social and familial conditions to the wider model was supported. Courtney, for example, discussed her journey into feminism, highlighting the difficulties she faced in breaking out of the "*traditional*" gender ideologies that had been instilled in her as a child growing up in a Korean family. Meanwhile, Gayle disclosed that she was brought up in a household of women, and had identified as a feminist from a young age. For each of these respondents, family background was revealed as having affected their views on porn in some way, with the former learning that porn was a taboo topic not to be discussed, and the latter having understood porn as only for men and boys:

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding

"I grew up in a household full of women…so there was no, sort of you know, discovering of my brother's [porn] magazines under the bed… It was something that men do, or adolescent boys particularly… that was something that I was kind of, that I picked up at some point." – *Gayle*	Growing up in a female household Not encountering porn at home	(Social and) familial conditions	Context + Conditions [impact on understandings of/attitudes towards porn]

Meanwhile, other respondents suggested that their experiences growing up in an environment where open conversations about porn and sexuality were encouraged, fostered greater sexual self-confidence; resulted in more positive attitudes towards porn; and helped them feel more comfortable with sexual desires they thought to be unconventional. Similar statements were made in the reverse, with a number of interviewees discussing feelings of shame around their desires and use of porn, which they attributed in part to the taboo around (female/) sexuality within the family setting.

Another frequently occurring theme within the data was the impact that the use of porn by one's spouse of partner could have. For example, Lacey talked about being in a long-distance relationship and, whilst understanding her boyfriend's desire to use porn – and indeed sometimes using porn herself – expressed discomfort with particular types of pornographic representation. Similarly, Gayle juxtaposed her speculative support for sex worker rights and sexual freedoms with the personal feelings of distress that her husband's use of pornography and webcam services nonetheless produced. These emotional responses, she claimed, tended to "*muddy the waters*" of her otherwise more liberal convictions, and Gayle lamented feeling unable to explore these contradictory feelings within the 'sex positive', intersectional feminist circles that she engaged with online and offline:

> "People can very often throw words and phrases round at each other, like SWERF or slut-shaming as a way to kind of shut people down about talking about their feelings about porn. And, I mean one thing that I never ever said [in an intersectional feminist Facebook group] because I don't want to get those accusations…is how it affects people in relationships when they find out that their partner uses porn if they don't, and how they feel and how that affects things like self-esteem. You know, knowing that their partner goes and looks at these kind of images, and maybe the women are very different to them, or look very similar even, you know, if you find out your partner likes watching women who look almost like you, and then you're a bit like, but I'm here, you know, and you're not actually having as much sex with me as you used to. You know, those kind of things, and how it feels on the other side of things, is something that we don't really talk about within feminism at the moment. I think because there's this, sort of, post third wave thing of like, hey my body my choice and it's all about choice…It makes it difficult to be critical, actually, of porn and how it impacts people's human relationships." – *Gayle*

Gayle thus took stock of, both, the liberal ideologies she held - which she felt aligned her more with an anti-censorship 'pro-sex' position – and the feelings of discomfort that her partner's use of porn nonetheless produced. In this way, she perhaps demonstrated that which the ethics of care literature describes as an inextricability of "self with relationship and reason with emotion" (Gilligan 2011). Furthermore, Gayle's comments are in many ways reflective of a "sex critical" (Downing 2013) approach to pornography currently rising in momentum within feminist circles. As Hester (2015) claims, the response to anti-porn arguments within pro-sex feminist academia, which has historically focused a great deal on the transgressive potential of queer and feminist porn, has left little opportunity to "clear the requisite critical space" for a conversation about aspects of pornography that may be considered less favourable. Gayle's statement points to a similar tendency within corresponding feminist and activist communities, whilst simultaneously suggesting a growing need, and – as supported by other interviewees – an increasing will to, engage in more critical discussion about porn within these online and offline spaces.

Online and offline communities themselves constitute another important axis of influence on feminists' experience of porn, particularly insofar as knowledge exchange, reflection and the shaping of attitudes are concerned. For example, Charlie discussed the ways in which feminist friends in the BDSM scene helped her to reconcile her feminist convictions with her sexual kinks around domination and humiliation. Meanwhile, other participants talked about receiving porn recommendations from friends, who shared links to new content or self-made videos. In this way we see how friendship circles in which pornography is considered an acceptable topic of conversation can have sway over an individual's porn use. It would seem that they also have the capacity to significantly alter people's attitudes, as is underscored by Serena, whose friendship circle in Berlin radically changed her views on gender, sexuality and pornography:

> "So, when I was younger, I think I thought of porn as, uh, kind of a means to oppress and to, you know, abuse women and sex workers and this kind of stuff, and then kind of reinforcing patriarchal structures. So, I had quite a negative opinion on porn. Then at some point I started being in touch with… some friends in Berlin I made, and then I eventually moved there one summer and then, like, my whole ideas changed… It changed my sex politics. It changed my gender identity… It changed the way I behave in bed - like, it kind of liberated me as well, sexually, and it, yeah, like... I mean for me, if I think of my life as an adult, there is a before and after, and that community for me is what marked the before and the after." – *Serena*

Serena went on to add that a lot of the information she received about pornography and the porn industry originated from this community. In this way, Serena's interview

supports the notion echoed elsewhere in the data; that social groups can serve as a resource in the quest for knowledge about an industry known for its relative opacity (Tarrant 2016).

As such, it is possible to identify a number of dimensions to the *social and familial conditions* sub-category, including but not limited to circumstances pertaining to upbringing, family, spouse/partner and online/offline social groups. These are each, in turn, experienced as playing an influential role in how feminists feel about porn or their porn use, and how they find and access new material, for example. This supports the assertion made by Smith, Barker and Attwood (2015) that opportunities for individuals to openly discuss topics pertaining to sex and sexuality are "important to their understandings of their interests in pornography." Crucially, we observe that the degree to which an open conversation about sex, sexuality and porn is permitted in each of these contexts may moderate the extent and nature of the influence that such social and familial conditions are felt to exert. Namely, descriptions of a more open conversation around sexuality and porn – taking place within family, spousal or social contexts, for example – tended to be associated with fewer feelings of conflict between participants' feminist ethics and their corresponding porn use.

Cultural and historical context

Whilst participants felt that an open discussion of porn and sexuality tended to help them reconcile feelings of conflict that they may have experienced between their feminism and their porn use, opportunities and spaces for this conversation to take place were identified as scarce. This is, perhaps, reflective of the current stigma that surrounds pornography and the sex industry (Scambler 2007; Voss 2015) and the existence of widespread social taboos around sexuality (Webster 1984; Kirkman et al. 2005). This is a stigma that all participants perceived and commented upon, with many attributing it to social and religious mores as exemplified by the following observation:

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"The biggest religions in the world today are demonising sexuality and sex and, I don't know, pleasure in opposition to…fertility and children-making basically…and it usually targets the female body of course…Even if people are not really religious, the cultural remnants [are] incorporated into everyday practices and cultures." – *Helen*	Identifying religion as a source of sexual shame Associating cultural norms with religion Identifying cultural norms and practices	Cultural and historical context	Context + Conditions [impact on understandings of/attitudes towards porn]

This is reiterated by other interviewees who emphasise the centrality of what Natasha refers to as "*Western, monotheistic, religious…conservatism*" in the stigmatisation – and indeed, legislation – of porn, sex and (female/) sexuality. Such sentiments tended to be accompanied by strong opinions regarding the "*guilt-shame culture*" that Linda, amongst others, attributed to a morally and sexually conservative social tradition, often supported by policy enshrining these relative understandings of 'obscenity' into state law. Gayle, for example, noted the ways in which sexually explicit representations have historically been hidden from society and reserved for the privileged few deemed immune to the corrupt effects of its obscenity.

> "I saw a documentary about the history of pornography and how it very much started with a realm of, um, scientific exploration of, uh, the remains of Pompeii, that there were all these kind of very, rude statues…And what the British Victorians did was, of course, to hide it all into a cupboard and go and kind of examine it from a scientific point of view and only give access to, like, really kind of high-end scholars and so on. And so it was all kind of kept and contained in this room by rich, middle-class, white men…So, it's something that has a long history of being...having the state and the status quo attempt to contain it, um, and I think that's a large part of what is wrong with it now. It's like, if you can liberate it from that sense of it needs to be contained in a room, and shut away and that people shouldn't really look at it, and just peep through peep holes, then maybe people's relationship would be better with it, maybe my relationship would be better with it, if I wasn't surrounded by this thing of like, oh no it's something that you look at secretly and pretend you didn't." – *Gayle*

Gayle, along with many others, considered government attempts to censor pornographic content, as exemplified by the regulations (Audiovisual Media Services Regulation 2014) that had been recently introduced at the time of interviewing, to represent a continuation of this trend. In particular, Gayle bemoaned the stigma and secrecy around porn that this social, historical and legislative context appeared to foster. This, she ultimately felt, prevented her from having the types of frank conversations about porn that she believed would be productive.

Others expressed similar grievances pertaining to stigma and shame around sexuality, porn and the sex industry more widely; culpability for which was often ascribed to culture and tradition. Many felt that the secretive manner in which pornography must be consumed and produced served only to foster a lack of industry transparency.

> "I think uh, it's a conversation that's not being had in society in an upfront way, and that makes it something shameful, and when something's shameful people don't want to come forward and say that they do it, and when they can't legitimately claim it as their work, like, and their rights are infringed, then they have no way of addressing that, or anything that protects them if something like that occurs…Like as soon as society does some sort of shift to take like porn use outside of like the darkness, and all – like masturbation and sexual desires – as they become more liberated, porn becomes something worthy and just to spend your money on and something that is legitimate to to invest in. I know that I, I think consciously or subconsciously, like a part of me not paying for porn in, I don't want it to be on my record or on my bank statement. And…that's, um, kind of a cycle." – *Yosef*

Here Yosef echoes Bryce and colleagues (2015) in their assertion that reduced social stigma around sex work results in an increase in police reporting of abuse in the sex industry. Moreover, however, Yosef's comment highlights how this stigma may also foster an environment in which consumers are less willing to participate in the types of activism or ethical consumption practices that might ultimately help improve labour standards and production ethics. As such, interview data points to a cycle of sexual stigmatisation, central to participant experiences insofar as the perceived enormity of the challenge to improve porn production and consumption ethics is concerned. This should be considered against the backdrop of a society described by interviewees as patriarchal, homophobic, racist, xenophobic and/or classist, wherein those who concern themselves with the ethics of porn production and consumption are perhaps those least likely to wield significant politico-economic power.

Politico-economic context

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"I think that in today's society it's a little bit optimistic to think that [the porn industry] will be driven by anything other than profit. And I'm not a huge fan of capitalism because of the fact that profit drives all decisions and not morals or ethics or anything like that…Just like I would like to see Primark not using kids in Bangladesh to sew their clothes, then I would like to see the porn industry not abuse its workers…I guess similarly to that, I would like for employers to just pay their workers enough, but I understand that the way that society is run today, is way too capitalist to be able to depend on that." – *Yan*	Feeling pessimistic about society Disapproving of capitalist system Wanting labour conditions to improve Doubting industry's commitment to ethical practice	Politico-economic context	Context + Conditions [impact on attitudes towards ethical consumption]

In a capitalist society where consumer choice ideology reigns, the move towards ethical consumerism in porn, is perhaps not entirely unexpected. As porn performer Maggie Mayhem (in Hester 2015) has suggested: "It is our obligation as consumers to inform ourselves and make sure that our dollar really is our vote." In this way, she encapsulates the imbrication of porn – whether 'ethical' or 'mainstream' – with a wider capitalist system of supply and demand. This system and the processes that underpin it effectively shift the responsibility for improving industry standards onto consumers, who must en-masse exhibit sufficient demand for ethically produced products in order to realise market change. As such, the ethical consumption mission relies on individualised ethical purchasing to achieve an outcome that in reality only collective action amongst consumer-citizens can achieve. It is perhaps for this reason that the ethical consumption 'movement' has developed, with a quest to unify ethically-inclined individual consumers under one umbrella campaign. The enhanced efficacy of a combined approach is captured by Papaoikonomou, Valverde and Ryan, who claim "collective ethical action is more formalized and standardized, resulting in homogenous, stronger and more effective strategy" (2012: 28-29). This type of joined-up strategy may represent a larger challenge in the porn context, however, due to the stigma and secrecy that surround it.

Whilst consumer choice, in theory, was thought to be the key to enacting change within the porn industry given the capitalist economy in which it operates, most interviewees had serious concerns about its plausibility in practice. In particular, most participants ultimately remained unconvinced that a critical mass of individuals with a sufficient level of concern for the welfare of others, especially sex workers, could ever exist in reality. Yan, for example, estimated the number of other people that cared about social issues, such as exploitation in the porn industry, to be low. This severely truncated the degree of impact that Yan felt their money or mouse clicks could practically have, purportedly bringing about less favourable attitudes towards the possibility of taking action in this way themselves:

> "Like, even with my feminist politics, I'm not that inclined to go and look up what their email addresses are, which is going to take forever, and email them and not get a response [because] me and 50 other feminists isn't going to do anything about that. But, hundreds or thousands or whatever of adult men not clicking on their video, that would do something, but that's not going to happen."

As Helen pointed out, for people to make positive associations with ethical porn choices, such individualised decision-making should demonstrate a bigger impact, beyond the scope of that specific purchase or click. To do this, she felt that society must first render porn an acceptable topic of conversation, thereby increasing the reach of consumer-citizenship initiatives such as boycotts and buycotts. Just as Natasha would later express, however, Helen went on to note that the secrecy surrounding porn consumption and its confinement to the private domain may serve to thwart such efforts:

> "I think because…we do it secretly, you're not really going into detail and talk about ethical choices, so I think it's one step to make it less [secretive]"

Thus, a key difference is revealed between ethical consumption in the porn context and similar fairtrade movements in other industries. Whilst many ethical consumption campaigns are thought to gain traction through publicity and word-of-mouth promotion, porn consumption appears to operate under a veil of secrecy that seems to reflect and further reinforce the alleged opacity of the production contexts of the porn industry itself. As such, the politico-economic context of capitalism, which shifts the responsibility for change onto consumers, is one that sees those individuals – who may already feel stretched in a number of different ethical directions and care-based domains – deprioritising ethical porn purchasing, given the limited impact they feel consumer choice could actually have. This is perhaps even more the case in the porn

context than in other industries where more open conversations around production standards and consumption ethics appear to be taking place more readily.

Knowledge and information *(123 references)*

Over the past 50 years, there has been much philosophical debate about the ethics of porn (Monroe 2010; Coleman and Held 2014), discussion about porn's effect as a socio-cultural phenomenon (Paul 2005; Paasonen et al. 2007; Smith 2010; Sabo 2012), and textual analysis of pornographic material (Williams 1999; Kipnis 1996; Church-Gibson 2004). That which appears to have garnered less attention thus far, however, is the intricacies of porn industry operations, the conditions of production and the practices of individual porn companies (Voss 2015: 5-8). Moreover, the resources that are available often present conflicting information, with pro-, anti- and critical-porn analyses offering radically different assessments of the industry and its various sectors (see Tankard Reist and Bray 2011, Taormino et al. 2013, Tarrant 2016 for a range of examples), alongside presentations of pornography and sex work in literary texts that have often provided flawed accounts (Patterson 2015). As we will see, the lack of reliable information and discrepancies in messaging are phenomena that participants had themselves observed and described as problematic.

Through the inductive coding process, the conceptual category of knowledge and information was identified as pertinent to the conscionable consumption model; in particular with regards to its implications for the ethical decision-making process, with many participants associating enhanced ethical practice with being "*in the know*". Sources of information included books and articles, documentaries, social media and traditional media, as well as first-hand experience and second-hand knowledge of the industry. The information participants sought tended to relate largely to the porn industry, porn performers, porn websites and materials, and porn studios and producers, as well as more general understandings of what more ethical porn might look like and where to find it. The degree of commitment to 'doing one's research' varied amongst participants, with many, such as Carla, having become engaged in this area of exploration by way of anti-porn feminist texts:

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"I read Pornland, by Gail Dines and I was so enraged by her material…she's written a compelling book there…but I had the question of, yeah but what about gay porn... It was as I started to do the research, that's when I first came upon the CrashPad Series and…all these wonderful women, making this wonderful wonderful material…So…if I see articles, I'll always click on them and read them. Or books, I'll always buy books that have the word porn in it." – *Carla*	Doing research about porn Seeking out and finding porn Reading articles about porn Buying books about porn	Knowledge & information	Context + Conditions [impact on ethical decision-making; attitudes]

The trajectory described by Carla was echoed by other participants, such as Serena, Gayle and Lacey, who described initially being introduced to feminist literature on pornography via books and articles by anti-porn feminists, before seeking out alternative perspectives, and often arriving at queer and feminist porn projects later on. Whilst participants subsequently dismissed many of the assessments offered by anti-porn feminists, most retained a 'critical eye' with regards to porn. A number of respondents described somewhat conflicted views about anti-porn feminist assessments, expressing frustration at their inability to get to the bottom of views that seemed both "fundamentally irrational, but at the same time, correct" (Kipnis 1996: 199).

These feelings of conflict extended to participant uncertainty about porn industry players and practices. Those with first- and second-hand knowledge of the industry tended to express stronger opinions about pornography and fewer feelings of ambivalence with regards to the sources and types of pornography they accessed. Those without first- or second-hand knowledge of working in the porn industry, however, often described feeling confused by the conflicting information they came across, and bemoaned the lack of resources available for determining the ethicality of particular porn companies and producers:

> "Well, first of all, it's very difficult to know the circumstances of how a porn was shot, so it's really difficult unless you are really into the industry and you know people, and then, ok, which is not my case… To be sure, really, it's almost like trying to make sure you're buying ethical products and then you find out that this ethical company has their, I don't know, factories in Pakistan, or – you know what I mean? You do that with so many other things in your life and, in the end, it's not satisfying enough, because you made all this effort and then, again, look. I don't know if, if… I don't have a solution to this." – *Helen*

The dilemma faced by Helen is one that has been captured by Hester, who notes that "the production of adult texts – including the pornography performance as labour – […] cannot be immediately deduced from the image itself" (2015: 39). This results in a situation in which most viewers of pornographic images and videos, regardless of how much research they may have conducted previously, must ultimately make assumptions about how a particular scene was produced based on existing knowledge of the source, perceptions of the performance itself, and/or the ways in which the product is labelled. This is inevitably a flawed system for gauging production standards and ethical practice and, as Helen was saddened to point out, leaves room for a wide margin of error. For example, as Hester observes, even insofar as ethical, feminist or queer porn is concerned, the consumer relies largely on the self-attributed labels and marketing materials of the company in question when seeking to ascertain ethical production standards. It may be logical to assume that a company professing to care about the wellbeing of its workers is more likely to employ ethical production practices than its counterparts that do not make such claims. Yet, without some knowledge of the industry or a means of communication between workers and consumers, it is for the most part taken on faith that such producers follow through on their concern. Consumers must also, to some degree, make assumptions about how expressions of 'care' translate into practice, unless companies go to great lengths to describe their labour policies.

As Bryce and colleagues (2015) and Holt (2015) note, sex workers need to be able to talk about their experiences in order for consumers and clients to accurately inform themselves about the ethical standards and working conditions associated with particular companies, and to take action accordingly. They go on to point out, however, that the stigma and shame around pornography and sex work currently make it difficult for that to happen. This is an issue that many interviewees had themselves observed:

> "I think uh, it's a conversation that's not being had in society in an upfront way, and that makes it something shameful, and when something's shameful people don't want to come forward and say that they do it, and when they can't legitimately claim it as their work, like, and their rights are infringed, then they have no way of addressing that, or anything that protects them if something like that occurs." – *Yosef*

Like, Yosef, a number of interviewees described a cycle beginning and ending with porn stigma; a social ill thought to facilitate industry secrecy and hide shady practices, in turn producing further stigmatisation. It was felt that additional obstacles to consumers finding reliable information about porn production and ethical standards ensued as a side

effect of this cycle, and simultaneously served to propel it. Consequently, some participants described attempts to intervene in the porn-stigmatisation—industry-obfuscation cycle. Natasha recalled going to some lengths to start an open conversation about sex, sexuality and porn with her friends and family, thereby challenging the secrecy that so often surrounds these topics. Similarly, Helen discussed making an effort to initiate sometimes uncomfortable discussions about porn in order to tackle associated stigma. Such interventions it was felt, would foster greater transparency within the industry and give rise to more reliable information about the ethics and standards of different production companies.

Tastes (105 references)

In their discussion of consumer decision-making, Devinney, Auger and Ekhardt (2010) assert that the supposed ethical consumer draws upon two types of merit in their decision-making: "functional value" and "true social value". The former they describe as the product's perceived fitness-for-purpose; in many cases equating to quality. The latter, meanwhile, is thought to arise when "the individual gets true utility or satisfaction from the specific aspects of production *independent of whether they make the product or service functionally better or reveal something the individual wants revealed to the public*" (*ibid*.: 18-20, emphasis in the original). In this way, functional value can be gained when products improve fitness-for-purpose or enhance one's image, whereas true social value is acquired through choices based upon ethical considerations. This dual-pronged framework is supported by the interview data from this project, wherein participants tended to express two areas of concern in their decision-making: firstly, the perceived fitness-for-purpose; and secondly the perceived ethicality of particular porn products – with the latter usually framed as a secondary consideration. Whilst it was tastes that tended to inform participant perceptions of fitness-for-purpose, with each individual generally selecting porn that they felt most closely matched their respective turn-ons, a merging of social and functional components was identified in some interviews:

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"Is it going to get me off? That's it at the end of the day…That is number one…So, when I'm looking at video porn…what I like is a bit difficult actually. It's basically…simulated rape…I walk a fine line I think of wanting to watch simulated rape that is as realistic as possible…but not actually wanting to see real rape…it's a sort of catch 22 in a way, because if I do see something…that's maybe a bit too realistic…where you think, ooh, they might actually be getting hurt, that's a total shut down of any arousal." – *Charlie*	Considering fitness-for-purpose Describing porn tastes Expressing preference for consensual non-consent themes Perceiving tastes as risky/difficult Simultaneously seeking out and seeking to avoid authentic representation	Tastes	Context + Conditions [impact on decision-making]

The excerpt above demonstrates a concept that was revisited by a number of other interviewees, which I refer to as the 'consensual catch 22.' Despite her tastes for non-consent themes in porn, Charlie's ethical concerns about rape translated into a resolute avoidance of videos that appeared "*too realistic*". This resolution was informed not only by Charlie's moral sensibility – her wish to maximise *social* value – but was also impacted by the revulsion she would experience upon such an encounter – thus compromising the *functional* value that such material could provide. It is for this reason that Charlie, and others, often chose to access written, rather than filmic, pornography, where they felt such concerns could not arise. A number of other participants also discussed similar overlaps between social and functional value in porn, with many, such as Josie, associating their (functional) porn tastes with the presence of performer consent, perceived enjoyment and other (social) components:

> "What's important to me is enjoyment, seeing that all the participants are actually there because they want to be there, and are enjoying it. And that, in turn, gets me off. Because I do tend to put myself in the action, and if I'm putting myself in the position of someone who isn't enjoying being there, that's not going to work - not only from an ethical perspective or coercion, but also that I can't get off if I'm not enjoying myself." – *Josie*

This apparent merging of social and functional value in ethical consumption challenges us to overlook the warnings made by Devinney, Auger and Ekhardt against considering functional and social characteristics as a potentially integrated unit. In the study of ethical consumption such a fusion, they claim, leads only to "frustration on the part of those

attempting to understand the phenomenon" (2010: 18). However, the interview data seems to suggest that consumers themselves sometimes undertake a joined-up evaluation in their decision-making, with social and functional characteristics sometimes experienced as indivisible from one another.

To theorise this link, an ethics of care framework serves as a useful complement to the value-based economic rationalist approach espoused by Devinney and colleagues. Of particular relevance is Fisher and Tronto's (1993: 126-136) definition of care, which involves four stages or components: *attentiveness* (to the context of situation), *willingness* (or duty to act), *ability* (or capacity to deliver), and *responsiveness* (to others involved). Reframed according to this model, interview data suggests that when there is an integration of social with functional considerations in the decision-making process, consumer *willingness* (to make 'ethical' porn choices) and *ability* (to act according to their ethical goals) is enhanced. For example, as we might expect, participants whose porn tastes aligned well with their ethical values found themselves more able and willing to choose what they saw as ethical porn. In turn, those who felt that 'ethical' porn did not match up to their tastes were less willing to use it, as they did not believe that such a product would stimulate them and thus deemed it unfit-for-purpose. However, for all participants, there existed a point of unconscionability that ultimately rendered the functional (tastes) and the social (ethics) as, at some point, indivisible. For acts and images deemed unconscionable, the negative ethical implications effectively "*shut down*" all arousal.

The significant impact that ethical concerns can exert on an individual's ability to enjoy a given porn product can perhaps be attributed to the often visual nature of pornography which, according to some respondents, sometimes served to raise ethical questions during the consumption process itself. For example, whilst respondents claimed that a detailed understanding of behind-the-scenes practices could not be easily determined, some nonetheless felt they could sometimes get a sense of production ethics, on a very basic level, simply by viewing the material in question:

> "I have seen…porn that is more in that realm of, like…not in the sort of Kink.com kind of this is the BDSM world, but it's like domination going on in what I guess I call mainstream porn…there's something about that where it's like, no I know that is anti-feminist, I can just tell by watching it. Because it's like, that woman is not into it, so it's just about being violent against the woman...You can just tell it's not a pleasant experience for them, and I just switch straight off." – *Gayle*

This differs dramatically from other consumables, such as coffee or groceries, where production ethics may seem less immediately discernable in the product itself and, thus, perhaps less likely to detract from the consumption experience per se. By taking seriously the care-based components of consumer experiences, and simultaneously taking note of how pornography may compel individuals to confront ethical concerns that may be less tangible for other products, we are able to appreciate the power of social value – or, more specifically, of the negative social value associated with unconscionability – for feminist consumers of porn. It is this notion of the unconscionable that emerges as a consistent thread throughout feminist narratives of porn consumption experiences in this study.

As well as discussing porn tastes in relation to ethics and value-based characteristics, many respondents described tastes in and of themselves. These were often expressed in terms of dislikes and distastes, particularly for certain mainstream porn conventions that many participants experienced as 'fake' or inauthentic:

> "I don't like watching porn with very fake – I don't often see people in porn that I actually fancy – so the guy is always more muscular and buff and kind of fake looking. And the same goes for the women, I don't – I mean I'm very straight so I don't really find, I don't have massive preferences for women – but I'm not keen on huge amounts of make-up and hair extensions and fingernails and things like that, and it just seems…I don't know, I'm not keen on seeing that anyway. I just think, yeah, it's just not an aesthetic that works for me." – *Charlie*

This statement perhaps echoes the observation made by Hambleton (2016) in her study of Silk Labo viewers in Japan, that mainstream porn represents something that "many women are able to laugh at, but are ultimately turned off by." It simultaneously compels us to consider Attwood's (2007: 441) claim, though, that "taste cultures" revolving around authenticity tend to frame 'genuine' sexual performances as somehow better or more distinguished:

> *These cultures can be understood as taste cultures which draw on a broader aestheticization of sexual representation where some forms of pornography and their consumers are reconstructed as sophisticated. In the process, sexual display is recast as an expression of authenticity and, combined with an ethos of community, becomes a departure point for thinking about the ethics of sexual representation.*

However, despite the fact that the majority of respondents identified as women, most felt that their tastes also deviated from what is often referred to as 'porn-for-women' or 'female-friendly' porn. This genre was often described as too "*soft*", with many participants preferring more "*hardcore*" or "*explicit*" representations:

> "I mean this is what they call the female porn, right, that it has to be a story. But it is true, I can't just watch a close-up…The most common scenario in heterosexual porn is,

> like, blow-job, front, back. Repeat. Like, in all of them. I mean, how stupid…this doesn't work for sure…Anyway, most porn that is out there is tailored for male watchers [but] then most female-tailored is too soft for me, so I'm getting then again this very cuddly-toy feeling that [laughs] it's not what I'm after." – *Helen*

Whilst Helen claimed to enjoy the narrative elements usually associated with "*female porn*", she did not find that this genre reflected her wider porn tastes. This supports the notion, put forward by Kotz (1993), that audience preferences and perspectives cannot be neatly determined according to gender, as doing so would assume an essentialised, dichotomous understanding of male and female identities, which is not reflective of diverse lived realities.

Instead, for many, tastes were described in terms of diverse genres, sex acts or (gendered/) physical attributes of featured performers and characters. Sometimes, these preferences were rooted in a desire to identify with or relate to characters and performers. Leticia for example, like Josie, Charlotte and Gayle, preferred porn that "*focused on the pleasure or experience of the woman*" over and above that of their male counterpart/s, in order that she could vicariously experience the sexual encounter being viewed. Shreya, Courtney and Carla, in contrast, preferred to see bodies that they desired, rather than those that resembled their own, and lamented the lack of porn that focused on the male physique. This was attributed to the 'male gaze' of the presumed pornographic target audience, which they felt usually sought to view the object of desire rather than itself:

> "I guess for me I, it's nice when I see the guy's face…instead of just the women, or just the particular woman's body part, that interaction between the two, so that it's the both parties I can see, not just I guess the male point of view of seeing a woman's body where you don't see any of the guy's face, it's just his penis and the rest of it is her body." – *Courtney*

In contrast, these respondents described what might be referred to as the female gaze, with the act of looking seemingly representing a subversion of viewership; a challenge to the "tradition of an active male and passive female" (Hambleton 2016: 437). Neville (2015) similarly draws upon the pornographic gaze when discussing female viewership of gay porn. Namely, she suggests that some women's interest in this type of material may be attributable to the way in which male-male porn does not compel them to participate in the male gaze, commonly associated with the objectification of women's bodies. Indeed, it is the perceived risk of being or becoming complicit in patriarchal systems of oppression that emerged as a key concern for many feminist participants in this research.

Neville also discusses women's enjoyment of male-male porn as being associated with taboo and the excitement and enjoyment that controversial or forbidden themes can evoke. Taboo is, similarly, a term that many participants drew upon when describing their tastes in material depicting, for example, violence, rape, incest and other kinks and fetishes. For some, particularly those who had been able to discuss their kinks in a safe environment, these tastes were celebrated. For example, Charlie saw her interest in BDSM and female submission as a celebration of sexuality rather than a reflection of patriarchal values. This is a sentiment echoed by Holt (2015) in her discussion of masochism and female sexual submission as agentive practices. She notes, however, that we have little control over the narratives of others and that the perpetuation of imagery depicting women as submissive may have wider social implications. This is a concern reflected in a number of interviews, with many respondents expressing anxiety about increasing demand for a type of porn that they felt could reiterate gendered and sexual stereotypes. For others, their enjoyment of porn depicting this type of power dynamic produced a more intrinsic sense of dissonance, discomfort or sometimes confusion, particularly when such tastes were understood to stand in inherent conflict with their feminist principles:

> "I think that thing of domination just…I feel a bit like, why do I have those fantasies? It's not a case of going, oh well, because I'm a feminist and I'm having this fantasy, therefore it aligns with feminism, you know. It's like, well where has that come from? You know, why do I have this, kind of, latent thing of just like, picturing real kind of violence in terms of sex and sexuality - where's that come from? And that, sort of, troubles me a bit." – *Gayle*

This caused a number of respondents to experience a great deal of guilt and shame, with the secrecy around porn rendering them unable or unwilling to address such issues with others.

Those who did find an outlet for talking about seemingly controversial porn tastes tended to find discussion helpful in addressing feelings of conflict. Helen, for example, described speaking with a therapist about the concerns she had around her interest in violent imagery, an experience that she remembered positively for its role in initiating an ongoing journey of reflection and reconciliation. Yan, on the other hand, felt that their online social groups would be hostile to disclosures around, for example, their incest fantasies, and found it difficult to talk to 'real life' friends about porn at all. Discomfort when discussing porn and porn tastes, more generally, was also described by other participants. For Helen and Courtney, such discussions were either met with disdain from

female friends, or were misconstrued by male friends as flirtation. As such, we observe another way in which stigma punctuates feminists' experiences of porn consumption, fostering a sometimes restrictive environment in which certain issues pertaining to sex and sexuality are off-limits, and facilitating the cycle of secrecy surrounding sex, sex work and sexuality more broadly.

Attitudes and beliefs *(1618 references)*

Ajzen (1985) posits that intentions are determined by two factors: a person's *subjective norm* (or perceived social expectations); and their *attitude* (towards given a behaviour). Whilst social pressures and expectations have been discussed somewhat in the *Context and Conditions* section of this chapter, we have yet to discuss the attitudinal influences on porn decision-making. Following Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour (TPB) attitudes are predicated on a person's evaluation of an action's outcomes, and the strength of belief they have in that outcome being achieved. This is represented using the following equation:

$$A_B \propto \sum_{i=1}^{n} b_i e_i$$

where A_B stands for attitude toward behaviour B, b_i is the belief (subjective probability) that performing behaviour B will lead to outcome i, e_i is the evaluation of outcome I, and the sum is over the n salient behavioural beliefs.

(*ibid*.: 13)

Accordingly, TPB asserts that if a person believes that a particular action will lead to a particular outcome, and also believes that outcome to be favourable, their attitude towards the action would likely be deemed positive. Together, these constitute what Ajzen refer to as "behavioural beliefs" and are thought to be the foundational elements that determine attitude. Due to the presumed interconnected nature of attitudes and beliefs, then, these two conceptual categories will be discussed together. Specifically, this section will focus on attitudes towards the notion and practice of ethical consumption, along with the underlying beliefs and opinions that inform them.

Attitudes towards ethical consumption:

Most participants subscribed to what might be termed 'sexual liberalist' (D'Emilio and Freedman 2012) understandings of porn ethics. As Young (2017) highlights, this is epitomised within sexuality studies by Rubin's ([1984] 1993: 283) assertion that sexual morality be judged by "the way partners treat one another, the level of mutual

consideration, the presence or absence of coercion, and the quantity and quality of pleasure they provide". One group of participants applied this sexual liberalist perspective to porn content, describing 'feminist' or 'ethical' porn as that which depicted respectful, consensual sexual interactions and mutual pleasure on screen or on the page. This is reminiscent of the view held by some feminist porn producers and performers, as well as academic-activists who argue that, since porn is a discourse on gender and sexuality, "if the content…isn't feminist, the porn isn't feminist" (Sabo 2012: 51). Reflecting that which Mondin (2014) describes as "the attendant debate amongst sex-positive feminists" today, however, this view has met criticism. In particular, it has been argued that the designation of some types of content as 'feminist' or 'ethical', in contrast to other examples of pornographic representation, then cast as inferior or somehow un-feminist, is tantamount to a policing or hierarchisation of sexual desire that is antithetical to the sex-positive feminist aims of reducing stigma and shame around (female/) sexuality. In keeping with this argument, another group of participants felt that the type of content presented in porn was ultimately less important than the ways in which such content had been produced. As such, they equated ethical porn with websites and producers that adopted respectful practices, and fostered mutual consent and consideration amongst performers and crew, regardless of the types of sex being depicted.

Whilst the two groups thus differed in their opinions about the ethics of porn content, it should be noted that they nonetheless agreed, across the board, that working conditions and standards of production constituted important criteria against which to judge a porn product (either instead of, or in addition to, content-based considerations). This usually revolved around consent, with the participation of fully consenting adults representing a universal criterion for pornographic ethicality across the sample, and the use of porn where consent was known to be lacking described as the ultimate unconscionable practice. Ethical consumption, then, revolved around the use of content that participants believed to adhere to principles of consent and respect in its production – either instead of, or in addition to, a consideration of the types of sexual interactions and representations depicted.

For respondents, the ethical consumption of porn also often entailed financially supporting what they considered to be more ethical sources by purchasing their products:

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"I mean, starting with the porn thing, I try to visit ethical websites and so on. I don't steal anything, I don't torrent, I always pay for what I use…As far as other ethical things that I do, I use cruelty-free products, um, but then I eat meat, so I feel like I counteract it anyway, so... I buy the Happy Eggs, um, and I eat happy chicken that I eat - happy, as happy as it can get. I've cut out a lot of meat from my diet, so I'm down to basically chicken and some beef. So, I've tried to be nice to animals that way…I don't think there's anything that I do that's very unethical." – *Jas*	Trying to visit ethical porn websites Paying for ethical porn products Avoiding counterfeited porn Buying ethically labelled groceries Not acting unethically in consumption	Attitudes towards ethical consumption Understandings of ethical consumer practices	Attitudes & beliefs [impact on ethical decision-making, reactions, conscience processing]

Here we see how some respondents made an effort to actively engage in ethical product purchasing, particularly those who believed, at least theoretically, in the power of consumer choice. Ultimately, however, when faced with competing demands, context- and condition-based constraints, as well as limited time, energy and resources to engage in ethical consumption, people were satisfied simply to avoid what they understood to be "*very unethical*" (unconscionable) activity. For Jas, like many, practices to be avoided pertained largely to the consumption of material believed to have caused harm, with the use of most other content being described as acceptable (conscionable) practice:

> "I think people should watch ethical porn…so they should make sure that it's ok, or ethical, or not harmful I guess. Like, it can be neutral, I guess, but not bad. And obviously, people's definitions of what's bad, they vary, but... Yeah, if something's not harming anyone, I think that that's ok for the most part."

For Leticia, conscionable practice involved avoiding porn associated with the tag "*barely legal*", where the ages of those filmed, for her, remained questionable. Meanwhile Lacey, who feared that porn was inherently unethical and thus aimed not to use porn at all, chose only to use written porn when she felt her resolve around porn abstention waning, as she believed literature to be more easily reconcilable with her ethical convictions than videos.

All participants thus described their respective notions of unacceptable practice, which they expressed as a "*red line*" or "*line in the sand*" that they could not conscionably cross. For many, as mentioned earlier, unconscionable practices tended to be associated

with the deliberate consumption of material that was unequivocally non-consensual. For these purposes, participants generally felt able to identify a scene that was "*obviously*" non-consensual.

Understanding the more nuanced ethical intricacies of porn production conditions and practices they found much more difficult, however. As was noted by Helen, it is not possible to tell whether or how much someone was paid for their participation in porn simply by viewing the scene, for example. Because of this lack of transparency, but also due to the nature of the capitalist system that is rooted in the pursuit of profit from the means of production, respondents found it hard to be the perfect 'ethical consumer' both with regards to porn and more generally-speaking. Doing so would require "*living off the land*" as Gayle comments, or achieving the impossible task of somehow exiting the global capitalist economy.

> "I guess some of the porn I watch undoubtedly comes from relatively immoral places and there's very limited things I can do to control for that. But I guess I don't really think it's really possible to look at life in the west as a part of society without buying consuming things that come from immoral places, like cheap clothing made in sweat shops or anything of that ilk." – *Akim*

> "There are some things that are just completely out of your control. With something like palm oil, I know in vegan groups online, there are vegans there who don't consider palm oil to be a vegan product, because it has all sorts of issues with orangutans and so on in Borneo. Um, and... But it's like, it's just in everything. It's in pretty much anything - you know, you're really going to struggle to buy basic shit if you completely avoid palm oil. And just so much of it is to do with the system, again, and the actual structure." – *Gayle*

In this way, interviews appear to support views of the ethical consumer as an unattainable myth (Devinney et al. 2010). Rather than attributing the impracticability of this ideal solely to the selfish and value-driven nature of individuals, however, respondents also invoke the position of Bradshaw and Zwick (2016), suggesting that the achievability of ethical consumption will forever be doomed so long as it remains within the confines of the capitalist politico-economic structure that impels it.

As such, interviewees provided useful insights on three of the key components of Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour – evaluation of outcomes and strength of belief, as well as "perceived behavioural control" which Ajzen (1991) later discusses as an important addition to the model. Outcomes associated with what participants saw as more ethical porn consumption practices were generally viewed as favourable, however participants remained sceptical about their own ability to make these more ethical choices, and ultimately doubted the impact that such efforts would even have given the

flawed capitalist logic within which porn inevitably operates. These evaluations, when coupled with the notion of a "care deficit" or a person's limited capacity to act upon all issues of concern and areas of need that present themselves in the world, resulted in an 'attitude of conscionability' towards porn ethics, which were in turn informed by the following beliefs.

Politico-economic beliefs:

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"[Feminism] is definitely more of a liberal thing…I don't think a lot of, uh, the things that the conservative parties, not just Tories, but kind of across the world…stand for are particularly feminist. I mean, if you look at the conservative party in America, and kind of, how anti-abortion they are, and in Ireland as well…a lot of government systems, especially when they're conservative, are just set up and designed to be against women and kind of hold them down as much as they can." – *Leticia*	Associating feminism with liberalism Describing feminism as incompatible with conservative politics Associating conservative parties with anti-woman policies	Politico-economic beliefs	Attitudes & beliefs [impact on ethical decision-making, reactions, conscience processing]

Despite attempts to sample from right-leaning demographics as described in Chapter 3, the participants for this study described wholly or mostly left-leaning political inclinations, across the board. Whilst one participant expressed views that may be considered more economically right of centre, and another expressed sympathy with a small number of issue-based positions usually associated with the (American) right, all respondents identified largely with left-leaning, liberal politics. This is perhaps unsurprising given the nature of the study and call for participants, which sought the attention of London-based feminists who used porn. Whilst conservative feminisms certainly do exist, the feminist movement at large has often been associated with socialist, Marxist and liberal socio-political positions (Bryson 2016) and left-leaning parties, which appear to address 'women's issues' – such as the gender pay gap and the right to choose – more concertedly than their socially and economically conservative counterparts (Edlund and Pande 2002). Furthermore, it has been posited that support for pornography also tends to go hand-in-hand with liberal perspectives, as well as struggles against class inequalities – and the aristocracy in particular, which has historically held the power to control and

restrict access to 'obscene' materials. In this regard, Kendrick (1987: 219) notes that "pornography…is indeed a symbol for anarchy" associated with other forms of anarchical thinking that risks unsettling the economic and political status quo. Similarly, McNair observes that pornography is not only associated with moral decline, but also the erosion of traditional family values and "the decline of the nuclear family as a core structure of capitalism" (2014: 161).

Nonetheless, whilst support for pornography may be associated with left-leaning views, participants also described pornography as a site of political conflict, where sexual liberalism and even 'anarchy' met anti-capitalist ideologies head on. This resulted in an apparent battle between sexual and economic anarchism, with participants wishing to unleash the power of, often non-normative, sexual representations but simultaneously wishing to break free of the capitalist structures within which the pornography industry – 'feminist' and 'queer' pornography movements included – was seen to operate. This resulted in some respondents choosing to support alternative pornographies by means of ad-hoc or non-financial contributions.

The imbrication of porn industries with the politco-economic systems that contain it are well demonstrated by Hambleton (2016: 437-439) who discusses the emergence of Silk Labo, a feminist pornography enterprise whose success was largely attributable to the legislative context and ensuing economic pressures in Japan:

> *It was not a successful second-wave feminist movement in Japan that encouraged the creation of female-friendly* pornography*, but the desperation of an industry facing a saturated market and competing with online content, coupled with shifts in the role of women as* consumers *in contemporary Japan. The environment in which Silk Labo appeared could be considered post-feminist in that it encourages choice and self-determination through consumption…Silk Labo's work may be considered part of the depoliticization and domestication of female pleasure, reinterpreted to benefit the pornography industry by using female pleasure to sustain profits in a saturated market.*

It is, arguably, exactly this perception of pornographic depoliticisation, seemingly achieved by using female pleasure to sustain profits – and, by extension, the capitalist workings of the industry – which was rejected by some interviewees. This is a sentiment echoed by Liberman (2015: 182), who observes a similar critique of capitalism amongst feminist porn users, and their associated scepticism towards feminist pornographers then thought to be "possibly commodifying the consent process, bodies, and other sexual practices." Whilst political scepticism was thus present in interviewees' perspectives on pornography and ethics, many respondents nonetheless felt that pornographies –

especially "*ethical*", "*feminist*", and otherwise "*alternative*" porn – could provide important opportunities for sexual expression, progression and liberation that had not been fully explored and should therefore not yet be dismissed. This was particularly the case insofar as female sexuality was concerned. Such perspectives are perhaps reflective of a similar turn within porn studies scholarship, exemplified by Smith and Attwood's (2014: 16) assertion that a sex critical approach "need not be opposed to the critique of pornography as a capitalist industry but it will challenge stances that assume the answers are already known."

Noting the positive potentials of what they understood to be 'ethical' porn, some respondents felt it was important to support these producers financially by buying their products, thus enabling them to survive in the current economic climate. Creating demand for more ethical products and thus providing an economic incentive for producers to adopt more ethical practices, they felt, was a key means for encouraging better production standards across the industry. Nonetheless, given the private nature of most pornography use and the perceived opacity of its production, distribution and consumption, most of these also believed that a critical mass of people seeking to create this demand would remain ultimately insufficient, as highlighted earlier in our discussion of the contexts of consumption. These suspicions thereby rendered the notion of individual ethical purchases limited in potential impact, at least until a more open conversation in general can emerge to unite individual interests. Some were conflicted about this view, however, also feeling that paying for porn and being more open about its use could itself serve as an intervention in the cycle of stigma and secrecy surrounding it:

> "I think [paying for porn] makes a lot of sense, honestly [but] I don't really practice what I preach…I think it makes sense and I think that's a part of the thing that can make porn more ethical and more…um…less of a dirty secret that has to be hidden, but actually like a platform that will allow the entertainer or the worker a lot more flexibility… it can allow individuals kind of to take more control of their, um, of this aspect of their life as work and not just as free labour or as exploitation. By paying for porn we have that chance to do that." – *Yosef*

This is something that has been observed in the context of the aforementioned Silk Labo initiative, which has created online and offline spaces for audiences to discuss topics pertaining to sex, sexuality and desire. The Silk Labo forum, it is argued, has allowed the business to "increase sales and appeal to a wider audience as it simultaneously aids in normalizing the discussion of previously taboo topics" (Hambleton 2016: 435).

These conflicting views about porn as a political tool as well as a for-profit enterprise has led Liberman (2015), drawing upon Foucauldian (1986) poststructuralist theory, to describe the feminist pornographic terrain as a 'heterotopia'. We might even describe the feminist porn movement at large in such heterotopic terms, as both operating within a commercial environment that relies on mass support for its success, but simultaneously catering to an audience that is niche in its desire for ethical production values, and that often seeks to undermine the very structures upon which the industry itself is founded. It is perhaps in this sense that Liberman describes the pornographic space as a site of collision that, despite its contradictions, "still offers possibilities for meaning, subjectivity, and reflexivity" (2015: 188). It is, thus, in this context that attitudes towards ethical consumption – and the beliefs held by feminist respondents which underpin the theory of conscionable consumption put forward in this thesis – can be understood.

Feminist beliefs

In addition to the strong correlation respondents described between feminism and politics, all participants closely associated feminism with ethics, with some understanding the latter terms to be synonymous:

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"I think [feminism and ethics] are very closely bound together… Certainly the kind of brand of feminism that I subscribe to, is very much about ensuring equality for all, and...I'd certainly describe myself as an intersectional feminist… So, from an ethical perspective, it's like ensuring that, you know, people of colour are included, and disabled people and so on. But it's making sure that every aspect of society is covered, but having the focus on women. And I think that is, to me that is an ethical position." – *Josie*	Associating feminism with ethics Subscribing to a particular branch of feminism Describing feminism as intersectional Associating feminism with equality for all Positioning women as focus of feminist aims	Feminist beliefs	Attitudes & beliefs [impact on ethical decision-making, reactions, conscience processing]

Many, like Josie, also specified the centrality of intersectionality to their feminism, echoing the observation made of participants in Liberman's study, that feminist porn viewers tend to subscribe to third-wave feminist discourses privileging "inclusiveness

over exclusiveness" (2015: 180). If, as Panichelli and colleagues (2015) claim, sex worker experiences and activist efforts are necessarily intersectional by virtue of the multiple stigmas and discriminations implicated within the sex industries, perhaps it is to be expected that consumers' feminisms and sexual politics also reflected intersectional concerns. These were especially well demonstrated by transgender and gender non-conforming participants such as Jas, Josie and Yan, as well as respondents of colour such as Akim, Courtney, Jas, Leticia and Shreya; many of whom described the ways in which multiple axes of oppression they experienced were imbricated in sexual and pornographic representations. Participants also discussed how these intersecting axes of identity and background interacted with their feminist development and sexual politics:

> "Most women, Korean women, I know…taught me…to basically be a good wife, and that, kind of went with me having to like please men, and please the guy sexually as well. So it was kind of hard to kind of break out of that, even though I said, yes, gender equality, racial equality, but I myself had a really hard time breaking out of that, um, and, but gradually I think…taking courses, understanding, um, and exploring my identity, um, that helped me quite a bit to transition and come quite passionately excited about gender equality and feminism…It was more about just respecting myself more and understanding that it's ok to ask for my pleasure…Now, I want to be more empowered to make choice around what I want to watch and how I really feel and what I really find pleasurable for myself, it's not just always pleasing the other person. Um. So I think that was aligned with my changing tastes in porn as well." – *Courtney*

This more sexually liberal "orientation" (Smith 2007: 227) with which Courtney later came to align herself, in fact, emerged as a common foundation of participants' attitudes towards porn consumption ethics more widely. Indeed, a key feminist goal articulated by respondents pertained to reducing the shame around women's bodies and sexualities, and encouraging sexual self-acceptance and pleasure. These sexually liberal, intersectional feminist beliefs, and perceptions of pornography's potential to assist in their execution, went hand-in-hand with somewhat favourable attitudes towards porn, or certain examples thereof. Interviewees expressed especially positive opinions about self-produced imagery by women celebrating their "*authentic*" sexual identities – such as porn performer Stoya, who Helen saw as "*taking the leading role*" in her own sexual representation on screen.

These beliefs in sexual authorship and female sexual agency have long been central to feminist projects. As Liberman (2015) points out, however, feminists fighting to reclaim their sexual subjectivity have often been in disagreement about which approach to take and of which arenas to make use. Pornography has tended to represent a

controversial "*battleground*", but interviewees were steadfast in pointing out the potential that such sexual spaces could hold:

> "I think [porn] is very important when it comes to understanding there's other ways of looking at sex. So, sex-positivity can be one of the advantages…But, I think it's also liberating in a way…because it can channel, as well, activism I think. And not only from the side of the people who are doing porn, uh, also for the other side. Like, it depends on the kind of use you do of porn, it can become a political act. Like in the moment that you start doing practices that are non-normative because of whatever, like, influences around you, including porn, that to me - even though it is personal - it becomes political." – *Serena*

In this way, participants described views akin to that of Holt (2015), positing that the buying – and, indeed, selling – of sexual services need not necessarily signify abuse – or victimhood – but can instead signify a celebration of sexuality, identity and pleasure. An acknowledgement of this fact, they identified as essential to the task of destigmatising pornography and, in turn, improving the ethical standing and conditions of porn production.

Beliefs about porn

Whilst anti-porn feminists have often contested that pornography "induces misogynistic behaviour and attitudes, and to this extent reinforces patriarchy," the literature on porn effects tells a different and less conclusive story (McNair 2014: 161). Given the contradictory findings emanating from media effects research (Segal 1993), it is unsurprising that interviewees questioned the notion of porn harms, yet still took seriously the potentially negative impact that porn may produce. Some challenged the porn addiction models that have gained traction in media and clinical practice in recent years (Ley et al. 2014), whilst others questioned the nature of porn effects more generally. Simultaneously, however, concerns around porn's influence on young people's expectations of sexual relationships and understandings of their own bodies, for example, remained pertinent.

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"With…PornHub and…other sites on the internet that kids can access really easily, um, I think the influence on children is shocking…With my own children, I think I have to say, yes, it's there, but you have to understand it's not real life…it's fantasy…You can…watch it as long as you understand that it's not real. So yeah, I do worry about the influence of media, and porn specifically" – *Josie*	Influence of porn on children Mitigating expectations of 'real sex' (vs. 'porn sex') Being concerned about media/porn effects	Beliefs about porn effects Beliefs about media effects	Attitudes & beliefs [impact on ethical decision-making, reactions, conscience processing]

Josie's statement reflects wider concerns in the UK about the accessibility of pornography amongst young people, children's unwanted exposure to porn, and the impact of porn consumption on young people's health, body image and approaches to sex and relationships. Whilst many interviewees noted the value offered by feminist, queer pornographies, much of which they felt had been badly served by recent government regulations (Audiovisual Media Services Regulation 2014), they were careful not to conflate these 'alternative' pornographies with what they saw as 'mainstream' content. In this way, participants heeded Hester's (2015) warning not to allow the radical potentials associated with queer and feminist porn to overshadow the need for a critical interrogation of more mainstream pornography. Many respondents thus took seriously the views of anti-porn feminists, whose work around pornography, objectification and violence towards women, was often central to their early feminist development.

Indeed, the discourse associating pornography with objectification and violence has become so prominent in society that it has come to be understood as *the* feminist perspective on porn (Attwood 2004), despite the "shaky evidence base" (Smith and Attwood 2014: 10) to support it and the plethora of alternative approaches and viewpoints that exist across the feminist landscape. As Attwood (2004: 9-10) observes, "it is partly for these reasons that the anti-pornography feminist position still retains its power for many feminists." Many participants claimed that the research they had come across did not necessarily support a correlation between pornography, objectification and gender-based violence – indeed McNair's (2014) study, without suggesting that pornography in fact *causes* a reduction in violent crimes against women, indicates an inverse correlation. Nonetheless, a significant number of interviewees felt that some part of the rhetoric around porn harms rang true and thus they remained attentive and open

to the possibility of porn's negative impact. For most, this resulted in what we might call a porn- or sex-critical approach, whereby the positive aspects to pornography were celebrated alongside a simultaneous disapproval of what they saw as negative representations, suspected sub-par production ethics, and the ways in which easily accessible porn could potentially impact (young) people's body image and expectations of sex:

> "It's not the same thing when you're watching porn when you're 30, than when you're watching porn and you're 15. You don't have any reference if you're still a virgin, so you don't know what real sex is like or can be like. You don't know all the different possibilities that you're going to have. And then, having access to very limited way of understanding sex and bodies I think can have a very detrimental...it can be detrimental to the way you perceive sexuality and to the way you have sex. Which means that, for women, they won't know many times how to claim...to be satisfied, and what they want in bed, and just being more like a hole, you know, that a guy needs to fill. And then on the way of the guys, I think it's negative in the sense that it's reinforcing many times rape culture, and just the phallocentric culture, in which everything is focused on the penis…And it's going to put a lot of pressure as well, on them, on having to have a big, enormous, unreal penis, that being essential." – *Serena*

Whilst a number of policy reports have been commissioned by parliament to support calls for various censorship measures and changes to online pornography legislation (Bailey 2011; Papadopoulos 2010), feminists interviewed for this research nonetheless remained sceptical of such government interventions. Instead of censorship, educational approaches to challenging the potentially negative effects of pornographic media consumption amongst young people – and indeed adults – were generally described as preferable and thought to be more effective:

> "I lived for many years in the United States, where obviously many politicians believe you shouldn't teach adolescents about birth control or safe sex or anything either, because they think you won't have sex if you don't know about it, which is not true [laughs]. And I think it's much better to make sure people have accurate information about what things are so that they're not confused, they're not looking for information in unhelpful places. Um. And I think in a way, it'd be much better to sort of make available appropriate types of material, and appropriate types of information, which again then sort of in the porn context would give people the opportunity to see anything they were going to see or read or hear I guess, whatever they were going to do, in a broader context where they had a better understanding of how this fits in the world at large and reality and how human beings interact with each other." – *Linda*

Participants were well aware of the contradictions inherent to the fact that porn is often used *as* sex-education – and potential advantages offered by porn in terms of sexual exploration and inspiration – but also the negative effects that a lack of education *about* porn, or indeed bad sex education in general, could yield. This is a contradiction that has been highlighted by Albury (2014) in her discussion of 'porn as pedagogy' versus 'pedagogy about porn'. Reflecting the conclusions drawn by Allen (2006) and Carmody

(2009), respondents felt that the solution to such a contradiction lay in the improvement of sex education and porn literacy in schools, and the reduction of stigma around sex and sexuality at large. This, they felt, would enable young people to more readily seek answers to their questions from sources better equipped to provide them than pornography alone. This perspective, described by Linda as the "*educationalist*" approach, was echoed across the sample of respondents and emerged as a key belief underlying participants' attitudes towards pornography ethics.

The ways in which participants thus evaluated their beliefs about the potential positive and negative effects of pornography, and how best to address the latter, then challenges the idea that feminist porn users necessarily overlook the impact of their porn use and disregard the realities of exploitation and abuse (Caputi 1994). The nuanced, often unsympathetic, and sometimes conflicted evaluations provided of different pornographies also challenges the view of feminist porn and its users as uncritically perpetuating the oppression of women. In this way, Smith and Attwood's (2014) assertion that sex positive approaches – in this case, to research – "should not be understood as simply celebratory or uncritical" emerges as equally applicable when considering the attitudes and beliefs held by feminist consumers.

Beliefs about responsibility

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"Because of the difficulty in finding reliably ethical porn and gauging which porn is ethical and which porn is unethical, there's limited responsibility [for consumers, but] I would say in cases where it seems obviously unethical, I suppose to an extent there is" – *Akim*	Associating lack of information re. production ethics with limited consumer responsibility Identifying consumer responsibility re. unethical content	Beliefs about responsibility Beliefs about consumer responsibility	Attitudes & beliefs [impacts ethical decision-making, reactions, conscience processing]

Participants generally felt that the responsibility for porn ethics fell on a wide variety of actors, including producers, consumers and the state. They tended to agree that consumers had a responsibility for the porn that they used, but challenged neoliberal views that shift accountability for production ethics onto consumers and consumer demand. Consumer responsibility tended, instead, to be understood as one part of a wider joined-up effort to improve porn industry standards, content, and stigma. The duties of porn users, then, were described in terms of efforts to report and reduce

demand for abusive content, to increase support for and interest in more ethical porn, and to combat the stigma around pornography and sex work that serves to conceal shady industry practices:

> "So the responsibilities that I think the consumers should have include when you watch the videos, um, if you think that there is really a question that arises about, like, ethics, where there's someone being coerced into the situation, I think that needs to be flagged, and we can be helping, like, the police and um like children's protection services or something like that, in that way. Another way is…ensuring that the actors and actresses are being treated fairly by their employers, and do your research, and then buy, because we hold the money to some degree as viewers, right, so what we like is something that they're going to produce more of, and if we show them that what we like isn't any of this abusive stuff, then that's going to help motivate people to produce more of the stuff that we think are ethical." – *Courtney*

These duties, as described by Courtney, went hand-in-hand with notions of industry responsibility. In light of the ways in which consumer choices are constrained by market availability, Gayle felt that industry responsibility was the most important with regards to production ethics in the porn context and beyond:

> "I think ultimately the responsibility should come down to the people who are making it...You then have to consume it and watch it to the end and that's your responsibility but if it's being made in the first place sort of in a way goes back to the hand cream, and you know, what's in the...how the plastic bottle has been made. It's like, I'm making a consumer choice in terms of, I'm picking [a handcream] that's vegan and cruelty-free, but it's like, I don't have any choice over the horrible way this plastic has been produced, and what's my alternative - you know, a glass bottle, and that's not environmentally sound either. So...that responsibility ultimately comes down to the producer of it. Um, and I think the same thing occurs in porn, really."

Serena felt that this notion of industry accountability extended to the feminist porn movement, which she believed had a responsibility to keep producing content that presented alternative representations of sexuality and non-normative sexual practices.

Most respondents also highlighted the role of the government in improving ethical practice in the porn industry, but felt strongly that state remit should exclude censorship measures. Instead, Josie asserted, policy and legislation interventions should focus more on efforts to tackle crimes pertaining to trafficking, coercion and other industry-related malpractice:

> "The recent laws that have just been enacted... seem very focused on denying female pleasure in porn…and things like face-sitting have been banned in British porn. It's like, well, why, what's...why? Why has the government arbitrarily decided that this thing is not allowed? It's...I really don't like that...There's a role for government in that, that you know, there have to be laws about um you know trafficking and uh coercion…but in terms of policing what we see and what genres of porn are acceptable and what are not, I don't think government really should have a role in that."

Indeed, participants emphasised the need to disentangle sex work from trafficking as an important part of the journey towards reducing stigma; a logic reflected in Schreiber's

(2015) study of the St James Infirmary campaign to improve public perception of sex workers. Rather than policing content, respondents felt that the role of the state lay in the arena of awareness-raising and rights provision, believing that legislative changes to support sex worker freedoms would go a long way in tackling stigma:

> "I feel like changing and acknowledging rights that people have is necessary in this industry…I think currently, like, the way that sex work is criminalised is really wrong and legislation has to change, um, to make it more accessible and to make it more legit- legitimated so it can be addressed, it can be talked about, so people have some sort of space to speak about injustices and not just there being, being an injustice… I mean exploitation, or rape, um, not getting paid, uh, stuff like that." – *Yosef*

These types of policy measures, Yosef believed, would intervene in the cycle of stigma seemingly working to perpetuate shame and secrecy around the porn industry and potentially facilitating the concealment of malpractice. Participants thus delineated specific areas of responsibility that should be taken up by the government, whilst also acknowledging and lamenting their ultimate lack of faith in the state's capacity to actually eliminate exploitation in the porn industry at large:

> "Now there's so much stuff online that it's almost ineffective for governments to have a role, but on the surface yeah, I guess there should be some guidelines on responsible porn stuff from the government, and producers should be aware of that." – *Jas*

Similar doubts about the impact of consumer choice were also expressed, as discussed earlier in this chapter, alongside a lack of faith in porn industry players to take responsibility themselves, in what Lacey describes as "*a battle that can't be won*." Nonetheless, in a deontological capacity, the notion of the unconscionable persisted as a salient "*red line*" in terms of consumer obligation:

> "Like in the moment that you are watching something that seems wrong, and you are not doing anything about it, then you're contributing to it, I feel." – *Serena*

Equally so, in a teleological sense, consumer responsibility extended beyond a duty to buy ethical porn, to include wider efforts at stigma reduction and speaking up about injustice:

> "It's something that…I feel like I have to hide about. So…if I talk about it with guys, they take it the wrong way, and think that I want to have sex with them. If I talk about it with other women, they feel very uncomfortable, or think that I'm just kind of crazy, so it's really rare to find people who feel comfortable talking about it…who feel an interest in like helping each other find the right content, or trying to actually do something good in the process of, you know, help kind of policing the porn community. And it is a job market, it is a market with people, so as viewers as consumers I think we have responsibility to speak up about certain issues, and like fairness and ethics and stuff." – *Courtney*

In this way, respondents emphasised the importance of efforts to break the taboo around porn and, indeed about sexuality and pleasure itself. As Paasonen, Nikunen and Sarenmaa assert, it is this end that porn itself serves to achieve, via the way that it

"confronts tendencies to silence or demonize sexualities" (2007: 14) As such, just as a perceived cycle of stigmatisation can be identified in the data, this is complemented by participants' concurrent beliefs in a more hopeful cycle of destigmatisation based on visibility and open conversation; beliefs that Paasonen and colleagues might claim to be in keeping with the very nature of porn in the first place.

In conclusion, given apparent restrictions on time, energy and resources, participants described processes of evaluating the impact of particular ethical consumption decisions (behavioural beliefs), and assessing beliefs in their capacity to achieve those outcomes (perceived behavioural control). This resulted in a range of favourable and unfavourable attitudes towards ethical consumption practice that informed decision-making. Provided individual porn choices were not deemed "*very unethical*", feelings of dissonance or conflict that could not be reconciled by the individual in some way were avoided. As such, most respondents, even if they were unable or unwilling to engage in what they might consider to be optimally ethical porn decision-making, were at least assured in the belief that they ultimately didn't consume 'unconscionably':

> "I consider myself not a criminal porn consumer and that's about it. Neither ethical nor unethical I would say. Neutral zone." – *Akim*

These were often complemented by positive inclinations towards tackling stigma around porn, sexuality and pleasure, and favourable beliefs regarding the potential outcomes associated with such destigmatisation efforts.

Discussion: On Stigma

Drawing upon porn studies research as well as feminist (care-based), philosophical and cognitive hermeneutic devices, we see how stigma underlines feminists' experiences of porn consumption in diverse arenas. Stigma has implications for how easily individuals are able to find spaces to discuss pornography and sexuality, and get information; how they perceive the porn industry, regulation, and production ethics; how they feel about their own desire for porn, porn tastes and porn use – each of which, in turn, informs their understandings and practice of porn consumption ethics.

The stigma that participants described appeared to pertain largely to notions of shame surrounding the production and consumption of pornography itself. Indeed, as Rubin (1993: 37) notes, the very word 'pornography' tends to be associated with disgust

and aversion in a range of contexts, including militarisation and politics: “For example, war may be ‘obscene’ and Reagan’s policies ‘pornographic’. However, neither is customarily found in adult bookstores.” It is argued that the secrecy and suppression produced by stigmatisation is, in fact, reflective of a desire to halt social and moral degeneration. If anti-porn discourse dictates that pornographication and raunch culture have permeated British society then, as Smith puts forward, legislative penalties and social stigma are seen to represent “the very last bastions which prevent culture sliding into the very worst excesses” (2007: 29). Whilst it may be argued that porn has undergone a cultural shift, from a fringe position to a more visible location – aided by the rapid evolution of digital and online technologies – Voss (2015: 392) argues that the stigma surrounding the production, consumption and very existence of sexually explicit materials nonetheless persists. This may be seen as an extension of the stigma and taboo surrounding sex and sexuality more generally, and women’s sexuality specifically. As Diamond (1985: 50) has posited: “where boys learn that sex makes them powerful, we learn that it makes us powerless and bad.” This is particularly the case for working class women, who Ciclitira (1998: 277) argues “generally have fewer choices about sexuality and employment, and are stigmatized on these counts more than middle class women.”

The stigma referred to by sexuality researchers and participants in this study, alike, has been traced back to the Victorian moral crusades in England and the United States, characterised by chastity campaigns seeking to eliminate extra-marital sex, masturbation and prostitution (Rubin 1993: 100). Attitudes towards sex and sexuality today, it is argued, are part of that heritage, particularly where young people and adolescent development are concerned. Where interest in masturbation amongst children was historically chastised out of fear for their physical and psychological wellbeing, so too it appears that concerns about pornography effects often focus on young people’s sexual and emotional development. Whilst the more extreme measures taken to thwart sexual ‘corruption’ in the young, such as clitoral excision, may no longer take place in UK medical settings, “the notion that sex *per se* is harmful to the young has been chiselled into extensive social and legal structures designed to insulate minors from sexual knowledge and experience” (*ibid*.: 101). It is perhaps this legacy to which respondents objected. Certainly participants’ concerns about pornography, where they pertained to porn effects, revolved around the potential impact of porn on young people’s expectations of bodies and sexual

relationships. However, instead of suggesting means by which to insulate young people from such experiences, interviewees favoured measures to open up, not silence, a discussion about pornography with children and adolescents. Rather than a useful force for moral preservation, respondents understood stigma to be a source of harm; and the silence it produced as potentially more dangerous than imagery itself. In this way, interviewees reflected the position of McNair (2014: 166), who observes how: "societies in which sexually explicit materials circulate with relative ease are also likely to be societies in which there have been progressive changes in sexual politics and public attitudes, which in turn contribute to reductions in sex offences over time."

Just as Herek (2007) describes stigma as felt, enacted and internalised, so too do participants describe feeling, enacting and internalising stigma. Many experienced stigma when discussing pornography with friends or family members; stigma that was often internalised as guilt or shame, impacting on individual actions and decisions – such as self-censorship or refraining from making porn purchases that could compromise anonymity. Even for respondents who described their porn consumption in celebratory terms, stigma was nonetheless often experienced at the point of disclosure, or indeed non-disclosure; supporting findings from Bezreh, Weinberg and Edgar's (2012) study, who make similar observations. Whilst the stigma respondents experienced was described as significantly less severe than that which they supposed porn performers themselves must face, they nonetheless recounted experiences of associated stigmatisation, or "courtesy stigma" (Voss 2015: 9). In addition, feminist porn users – like their non-feminist counterparts – must grapple with the stigmatised stereotype of the sleazy porn user, as depicted in popular culture. This is a figure commonly framed in terms of the horny teenager (see, for example, American Pie's Jim Levenstein [1999]); the sleazy middle-aged man (represented by characters such as Orange is the New Black's Caputo [Kohan 2013–]); or the helpless porn addict (associated with the likes of Don Jon's title role [2013]).

The potential impact of this stigma on consumer experiences extends to each of the areas of influence described in this chapter. Where participants understood the contexts and conditions of consumption to be a key influence on their porn use and ethical decision making, then their encounters with stigma in social and familial settings take on added significance. For example, the effects of social stigma appeared to impact consumer attitudes towards 'ethical porn' use considerably. Given the secrecy and silence

that this stigma was felt to produce, and thus the difficulty in uniting a critical mass of ethical consumers, participants often expressed a general sense of disinclination towards purchasing 'ethical' and 'feminist' porn products, believing that single examples of this type of individualised consumer activism would ultimately have little effect within a larger system of global capital. Similarly, controversial or taboo tastes in porn often produced feelings of guilt or shame amongst participants, with stigma tending to prevent them from addressing their concerns with others in ways that may be beneficial (Bezreh et al. 2012). Equally so, knowledge and information was described as an influence on ethical decision-making in the porn context and beyond, yet virtually all respondents bemoaned the lack of reliable information available about the ethics of porn production and the practices of particular porn players. Indeed, drawing upon a report from Cai and colleagues (2012), Voss attributes the lack of accessible data about pornography businesses to the fact that so few adult entertainment enterprises actually operate as public companies. She goes on to assert that this opacity is facilitated by stigmatisation, and the resultant challenges that "whore stigma" poses for porn performers wishing to speak out about employer malpractice; a sentiment echoed by participants themselves. This often resulted in participants describing a 'cycle of stigma' that they believed must be broken in order for ethical consumption, production and circulation to flourish. Such beliefs, in turn, fed into wider attitudes towards porn consumption ethics that generally revolved around a key goal of reducing, and ideally eliminating, stigma. Natasha referred to this as "*a permanent revolution*", which she, and other respondents, felt could be best achieved through a combination of steps, including: open conversation; enhanced sex education; anti-censorship legislation; and/or sex work decriminalisation.

In this way, just as porn stigma does more than "colour our understanding of what type of entity the pornography industry is", the stigmatisation of (female/) sexual expression, pathologisation of female sexual desire and interest in porn, and stereotypes associated with the emblematic porn user are also seen "as a bright flash of light" eclipsing consumer identities, and impacting individual consumption practices (Voss 2015: 2). In fact, this study finds that a deep-rooted belief in the effects of stigma broadly underpins the ethical positions and practices of feminist consumers. In particular, experiences of stigma, and beliefs in a broader stigma-reduction mission, serve to inform feminist consumers' attitudes towards ethical porn practice – which revolve as much

around efforts to break the silence as they do around using one's pound as one's vote. That is not to say that consumers somehow blame stigma for their lack of participation in ethical product purchasing, but simply that, given the perceived 'limited capacity to act' on all of the ethical issues that present themselves, the impact of ethical or feminist porn purchasing becomes devalued in a context where its consumption and production is shrouded in stigma. Meanwhile, the mission of reducing stigma – around porn, but also around sexuality and female sexuality in particular – is rendered an equally important goal in the pursuit of improving porn ethics as a whole. As such, just as Voss emphasises the impact of stigma on porn production, the findings from this study similarly serve to highlight the importance of stigma in shaping porn consumption experiences and consumer ethics amongst feminists.

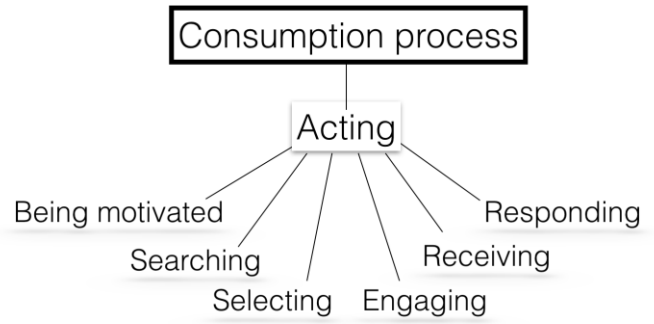
6. Core Category ii: Acting

Gaining a deeper understanding of how feminist consumers select and engage with porn represented an important aim for this research. Insights into impulsive desires and habits, porn decision-making strategies, forms of engagement with sexually explicit materials, and processes of reception, can give depth to our understandings of the role, nature and significance of ethics in consumption. This chapter sets out the ways in which participants described their experiences of choosing and using porn. Whilst it is by no means claimed that these descriptions provided an unmediated account of the cognitive workings behind consumer decision-making or porn reception, articulations of consumer introspection can nonetheless give rise to useful insights. As Johnson-Laird notes: "introspection makes available to [interviewees] what they are thinking, and in this way…can provide clues to the underlying process" (1993: 2-3). This is characterised by Jensen (1987: 31) as a "flash of insight" for both researcher and respondent when the latter comes to establish new categories or conceptual frameworks.

Furthermore, a better grasp of the way in which feminist consumers *understand* their own behaviour and decision-making processes may serve as a useful tool in itself, with reflexive audience studies of this kind often proving valuable resources for informing marketing strategy (Kawashima 1998) and policy development (Lades 2014). In particular, as Livingstone (1998) notes, empirical research into media reception can challenge mobilisations of the "implied audience" or audiences whose activities and perspectives have been presumed rather than investigated. These implied audiences, she argues, "form part of the often invisible assumptions on which much theorizing about the media, society and social change is built" (*ibid*.: 198); assumptions that are palpably prevalent in the context of online pornography use.

With this in mind, the chapter commences with an overview of respondents' stated motivations for using porn, followed by a discussion of search practices and selection processes. We later move on to participant descriptions of engagement with and reception of porn, and the range of anticipated or recollected responses generated by porn use. Finally, we conclude with an observation of how perceptions of authenticity play a seemingly important role in consumer decision-making, exploring the possible implications of this quest for 'the authentic' for ethical practice. Six distinct dimensions of experience can be identified in the analysis, each relating to the core theoretical category

of *Acting.* In this context, acting refers to the consumption activities described by participants as being undertaken 'in the heat of the moment'. This begins with the act of *feeling motivated* to access porn in the first place, and follows a trajectory through *searching*, *selecting*, *accessing*, *receiving* and finally *responding* to porn:



The chapter will discuss each of these dimensions in turn, elaborating on the ways in which ethical considerations feature as central or peripheral to each, and how these different facets of experience relate to other areas of the conscionable consumption model and to each other. This will be accompanied by a breakdown of the coding process used to arrive at these conceptual categories.

Motivations (64 references)

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"If my goal is…masturbation, then I would probably go straight to hardcore. If I'm not too desperate about masturbating, then I would look into like a couple other things…And sometimes out of curiosity I…look for things that I want to learn about" – *Courtney*	Porn goals relating to masturbation & arousal Different goals impacting selection Motives having different levels of urgency Curiosity serving as a motivation	Having different goals and motives for using porn	Feeling motivated [impact on selection process & responses]

The main incentives for porn use amongst participating feminists pertained to its capacity to aid arousal and facilitate orgasm at times of heightened sexual interest. This was complemented by a range of other secondary motivations, such as boredom; a desire to relax or fall asleep; and efforts to get in the mood for sex with a partner. Respondents' purported motivations for using porn thus aligned, on the whole, with those with those put forward in the audience study conducted by Smith, Barker and Attwood (2015), in which "when I feel horny" emerged as the most common motivation for using porn,

followed by “when I’m bored, can’t relax, or can’t sleep” and “because I want to feel horny”:

> “If I can't sleep, I just quickly look something up on my phone and just try and be done with myself as soon as I can. Um, other times it'll be, like, it's the middle of the day and I'm feeling really horny that day for no good reason. Or if I've been avoiding working the entire day and it's, like, 3pm and I like see something on Tumblr and I'm like, yeah I'm just going to go to my bedroom and just spend an hour doing whatever.” *– Yan*

Respondents also discussed using porn as inspiration for their own sex lives and as a way to educate themselves about sex, particularly when they were younger. This also supports findings from the abovementioned study, which indicate that, in addition to masturbation, motives for using porn also include education and curiosity, especially amongst young people (Barker 2014; Attwood, Smith and Barker 2018). It has been argued that some, often women, may cite sex education as their main motivation for using porn in order to present a more socially acceptable reason for engaging with it (Juffer 1998). However, respondents in this study appeared not to hide their more hedonistic interests in porn in any concerted fashion, instead citing sex education and sexual inspiration as historical or secondary reasons for using porn, behind the primary purpose of porn as an aid to arousal and orgasm. In this way, it may be prudent to also acknowledge the ways in which porn may indeed help achieve educational ends for some consumers, as well as self-gratifying ones.

Some participants talked about using porn as a way to set the tone or mood for sex with a partner, whereas others spoke about attending porn screenings or coming across porn indirectly in other group settings, such as sex parties or fetish clubs. On the whole, however, participants reported using porn alone. In turn, their motivations for doing so were frequently triggered by hedonistic desires or urges, with ensuing behaviours commonly representing spontaneous actions based on how the individual anticipated being able to satisfy those desires most effectively. This often affected the degree to which ethical considerations were incorporated into decision-making processes, and thus, how participants felt about the porn they used. For example, some respondents associated the spontaneous quest to satisfy their sexual urges with feelings of conflict, guilt or shame after having used porn. This was attributed to the affective mode of consumption activated by such urges, which they felt overrode more rational and feminism-informed decision-making. Others described experiencing both spontaneous

and non-spontaneous porn practices at different times and pointed to the different motivational inclinations associated with each:

> "[I don't use] ethical porn…as much as I want, because sometimes, like, you know, I just need to get it done [laughs]...But, if I have a bit more time, if I feel like it's not as urgent…if it's not that kind of urgent scenario, then I go through those [ethical porn] sites." – *Courtney*

In this way, we see how the motivations for using porn and decision-making priorities may be different for impulsive and non-impulsive consumption contexts, with the former being more strongly associated with the satisfaction of immediate sexual desires and less regard for ethics, and the latter more easily incorporating a desire to explore products they considered to represent superior ethical standards. This echoes the point made in the previous chapter, regarding the influences of physio-affective state on perceived behavioural control and, moreover, it highlights the central role played by motivation in this relationship.

The importance of exploring the motivational foundations underlying impulsive and non-impulsive consumption is a point stressed by Lades (2014: 125). In his consumer ethics study, Lades claims that a deeper understanding of motivational forces on decision-making can help develop better approaches to supporting those who wish to improve their ethical practice; ethical practice here referring to consumers' own conceptualisations thereof rather than assuming any universal moral imperatives. Lades acknowledges the problematic nature of censorship measures that seek to restrict access to certain content deemed by one person or group of people to be inferior. Instead he suggests more libertarian behavioural interventions that seek to foster the realisation of self-defined ethical consumption practices by accounting for and attempting to counteract the effect of impulsive desire on consumer motivations and willpower. When applied to the porn context, this type of approach might consist of efforts to support feminist (and, indeed, non-feminist) consumers who wish to make more ethically-informed porn choices, without resorting to the type of state censorship measures that participants regarded with suspicion. These strategies, if we are to take the libertarian paternalist approach advocated by Lades, may revolve around: "strengthening willpower, reducing impulsive desires to consume, and guiding impulsive behavior in ethical directions by making salient certain self-images that favor ethical consumption" (*ibid*.: 115)

It may be argued that behavioural interventions of any sort need not be a necessary, desirable or effective measure in the context of online porn use; we may disagree with the principles of libertarian paternalism that assume individuals' incapacity to act in their own best interests; and we might question an approach to ethical consumption that does little to address the role of industry players, structural inequalities and the global capitalist economy in porn production ethics. Nonetheless, we are reminded by Lades that a deeper understanding of the motivations behind consumption, and how these differ in impulsive and non-impulsive decision-making contexts, can provide useful insights into the processes underlying ethical decision-making. In turn, such insights could have the potential to inspire new approaches to ethical consumption amongst those who wish to incorporate ethical considerations into their porn use more effectively, as well as new ways for activists and/or 'ethical porn' producers to reach them.

Search practices *(241 references)*

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"If I don't have anything saved up…I'll go online and go to…one of those, like, fan fiction websites, and just put in my, the people who I'm shipping, and then romance and then search…Less often, I'll go on Tumblr, um, and just scroll through" – *Jas*	Saving porn texts to read later Having go-to websites Using search terms and keywords Seeking out particular performers or characters	Having different goals and motives for using porn	Feeling motivated [impact on selection process & responses]

Whilst some participants recalled occasions on which they used porn chosen by someone else – most commonly, when watching with a partner – most discussed searching for porn themselves and talked at length about the search practices they adopted. These included strategies such as following signposts and recommendations, remembering and revisiting, having go-to sites, hunting, stumbling upon, avoiding, keyword searching, browsing, filtering and going incognito. A number of search practices emerged as prominent in this regard, particularly insofar as they intersected with participant notions of consumer ethics.

Firstly, rather than actively seeking out what they thought of as ethical porn, many people adopted strategies for avoiding what they deemed unethical porn.

> "I would never look at child porn or something like that, or an actual video of someone being raped [so] I guess I would stay away from websites that look as if they're moving in that direction…I mean like, if I was looking for *hentai* and I'm seeing there are some with cartoons that seem a bit younger, I would probably stay away from that website." – *Akim*

This is in keeping with the theory of conscionable consumption that this thesis puts forward, whereby consumers – in lieu of a clear way in which to achieve 'ethical' porn practices, and a limited amount of time and energies to dedicate to such efforts – seek at least to avoid practices and material that they consider *"very unethical".*

Meanwhile, for those interested in finding and using more ethical porn, recommendations from friends or online community acquaintances served as useful means to that end. Some respondents spoke about the value of friends linking to their own porn content in a way that helped them avoid what they considered to be the unethical terrain of porn tube sites:

> "Other circumstances in which I consume porn online is when I am watching stuff that my friends have produced, and in that case I do it through Vimeo, because they send me passwords for their work…But when you are going to…the tubes, it's difficult. Because in the tubes you can search something, but no matter what word you put in the search, like, really misogynist stuff will come up as part of the results - maybe not all of them, but some of them. It is like that. There's no escape." – *Serena*

Others spoke about how online communities wherein porn and feminism were discussed openly helped signpost them to 'ethical' and 'feminist' content:

> "In our society group for the intersectional feminists, like a year ago someone had asked…like, so I'm having like a dilemma, I'm wondering about pornography. Like how do you manage being a feminist and watching it? And then some people had sent different links about alternative pornography, and I checked it out to see like...because I was really interested." – *Lacey*

Whilst participants described giving and receiving recommendations for more ethical porn, recommendations on the basis of other characteristics – such as genre, sex acts, or quality – appeared less common. This may relate to the stigma associated with porn and (female) sexual desire, which often serves as an obstacle to more open conversation on this topic, particularly when niche or taboo tastes may be concerned. Whilst still stigmatised, a discussion about the ethics of porn content and production standards, and the sharing of potentially more ethical examples of pornography, may carry less stigma than conversations about other porn qualities that individuals may find appealing. Nonetheless, this sharing and signposting on ethical grounds perhaps indicates that a space for giving and receiving reliable information about the ethical standing of different porn companies and producers would represent a useful resource for feminists, and other consumers, who are already initiating conversations about porn ethics and seeking out

more ‘ethical’ content. This is especially the case given that many respondents maintained that they simply did not know where to look for feminist or ethical porn.

Instead, most participants claimed to have certain go-to sites that they used to access porn, and discussed the merits of these different online spaces and platforms. Commonly, sites were deemed preferable when they featured a wide-ranging and regularly refreshed selection of content, though some were preferred because of the niche nature of the scenes they offered. Others talked about being “*lazy*” and choosing one site over another out of habit or convenience. As such, on the whole, respondents appeared to know where they could find the type of porn that would be, at the very least, fit for its intended hedonistic purposes. It was relatively rare, however, that interviewees reported being aware of more ‘ethical’ or feminist porn that was also of erotic interest to them. Lacey, for example, recalled her attempts to find feminist erotica:

> “I actually put into Google, feminist erotic fiction [laughs] because I was like, I want to find more, like, feminist uh, like, style...even in the Tumblr thing I think I put in feminist porn, but nothing came up, sadly. Um, but yeah, and so then I found like...And actually in the book, the recent book I was reading, they had a website for feminist erotic literature, but then I went on there and I think it had shut down.”

Meanwhile, Helen discussed ‘stumbling upon’ feminist porn performer, Stoya, rather than necessarily having known where to look for feminist porn or even being aware that feminist porn that was likely to align with her tastes existed in the first place:

> “Like to find something more ethical, or you know, where do you start from? Like, ok, you know, it was very good that I came across Stoya, but actually I came across her through Twitter and through the whole issue about rape with James Deen – not by searching for ethical porn, you know what I mean? … I came across her and then I was happy I found her…and also it coincided that she was an activist, but she was also a very good actress, and really a turn on for me, she’s really hot anyway [laughs] and she plays well, and I like also her style that she's not fake, to me at least, but all these things coincided, and it was a really, and then I could feel more comfortable with what I’m doing.”

Accordingly, we see how participants knew where to look when seeking out porn that aligned with their sexual tastes – usually going for the large tube sites with a wide enough variety of content for them to be relatively confident of finding something that would work. We also observe, however, the difficulties experienced when attempting to combine these search criteria with a secondary desire to access ostensibly more ethical porn, particularly given the limited range of content that the ‘feminist’ and ‘ethical’ porn sectors can currently offer.

Selection process *(593 references)*

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"[When choosing porn] it's just…sort of intuitive, I'm drawn to this for some reason... I'm not sure I can particularly analyse why, other than, like, the characters, or the kind of scenario that it is…whether that is in tune with my kind of fantasies." – *Gayle*	Selecting porn based on intuition Selecting porn based on the presence/absence of certain features and characters Judging porn's alignment with sexual fantasies	Intuitive or affective modes of selection Calculative modes of selection	Selecting porn [impact on access & response, reception & reflections]

Parts of the porn selection process, for many respondents, remained indescribable or inaccessible during the interview, particularly insofar as affect-based decisions were concerned. Some also spoke about the role of habit and the idea of being 'automatically drawn' to certain types of material that served their functional needs well in the past. Simultaneously, however, an element of conscious calculation also appeared pertinent to participants' understandings of the selection process. In this way, descriptions of the porn selection process corresponded well to the three components of Weber and Lindemann's (2007: 192) "functional taxonomy of decision modes". These decision-making 'modes' comprise calculation-, affect- and recognition-based imperatives:

> *Calculation-based decisions involve analytical thought. Affect-based decisions are governed by conscious or unconscious drives or feelings. Recognition-based decisions involve recognition of the situation as one of a type for which the decision maker knows the appropriate action.*

Weber and Lindemann conceptualise this framework in terms of making decisions with your "heart, head or by the book". With regards to porn, instead of head and heart, participants preferred terminology around "*rational"* thought and "*base*" desires. Interviewees also drew upon notions of ethical imperatives and a sense of "*feminist duty*" in lieu of 'by-the-book' decision-making, though they claimed to employ this mode of decision-making less frequently than its 'affective' and 'calculative' counterparts. This was sometimes explained with reference to the lack of consensus around pornography and consumer ethics within the feminist community – and thus the apparent absence of any collective, 'by-the-book' guidance to which they might easily refer – as well as the seeming impracticability of the limited guidance that does exist.

Whilst some respondents made attempts to shed light on the more intangible elements, it was the conscious, rational processes that they drew upon most during

interviews. Calculative criteria for porn selection fell into two categories: functional merit and ethical/social merit. Under the functional merit umbrella lay a number of considerations relating to fitness-for-purpose, including content, format, quality, accessibility and price. Central to each of these components was the characteristic of 'authenticity,' with almost all respondents emphasising the importance of authentic sex, scenarios and aesthetics to their selection criteria. Meanwhile, ethical/social merit revolved around the moral and social considerations that individuals might make when choosing porn. These were usually framed as secondary to the functional considerations, with the exception of 'unconscionable' content, the presence of which superseded any functional merit that the material in question may otherwise offer.

Functional criteria

Accessibility was revealed as a relevant consideration in the porn selection process; from preferences for mobile-friendly platforms to those known to have fewer ads and pop-ups. Price was also a consideration for those who were willing to pay for porn at all. The ability to access porn for free, however, was a taken-for-granted criterion for most. Some interviewees expressed a hypothetical willingness to pay for porn, but felt that self-proclaimed feminist porn was currently pitched at too high a price, and/or that these sites did not currently offer the variety of content required to satisfy their needs and niches. This should be understood in the context of an online world in which "there is just too much free content available for many viewers to ever feel the need to pay for porn" (Arroyo 2016: 309). Similarly, Ruberg (2006: 149) highlights that, since porn aggregator sites are able to offer a wide range of content free of charge by virtue of significant advertising revenues, the expectations of consumers have started to shift accordingly:

> *With so many free amateur videos by unpaid DIY-ers to browse, paying for porn is sometimes seen as archaic, one of many consumer nuisances rendered obsolete by contemporary digital business models.*

Nevertheless, the problem that has been highlighted by porn activists is that, in addition to DIY content, tube sites also host pirated material, which undermines the efforts of feminist porn producers and industry players seeking to improve the labour rights of performers, who charge for the porn they create (Lee 2015).

Over and above accessibility and price-based considerations, however, it was taste-based criteria that featured most centrally in participants' descriptions of porn decision-making. Whilst tastes in porn emerged as highly variant, most respondents were

able to identify some consistent themes. In particular, the 'fake aesthetic' associated with some pornographic videos and films represented an off-putting characteristic across the board, in contrast to 'real' bodily representations that were generally cited as preferable:

> "Typically I try to look for things that are not…like I prefer the people to look more real than fake – so not a ton of makeup, like generally, relatively more realistic body images. Um. So I guess if it's a guy, not someone who's way too muscular, or if it's a woman not somebody who is incredibly thin." – *Akim*

This was positioned as a functional criterion, with many claiming simply not to be attracted to models embodying such "*exaggerated*" aesthetics. As will be discussed later in the chapter, however, authenticity was also discussed in terms of its ethical value, with unachievable 'porn star' body ideals often considered antithetical to the feminist project.

Also prominent in participants' accounts of functional selection criteria was the notion of "*real sex*" and "*authentic pleasure*". Yosef, for example, used live interactive platforms such as ChatRoulette, and browsed descriptions of real life sexual fantasies shared by gay men on Craigslist, in order to satisfy his desire for authentic pornographic material. Others searched for video and text-based sexual representations that portrayed what they considered to be more realistic sex scenes and conveyed ostensibly genuine pleasure. For many participants, these perceptions of realism enabled them to more easily imagine themselves as a participant or voyeur in the scene:

> "What's important to me is enjoyment, seeing that all the participants are actually there because they want to be there, and are enjoying it. And that, in turn, gets me off. Because I do tend to put myself in the action, and if I'm putting myself in the position of someone who isn't enjoying being there, that's not going to work - not only from an ethical perspective or coercion, but also that I can't get off if I'm not enjoying myself." – *Josie*

Meanwhile, Helen talked about being distracted by 'fakeness' and the seeming detachment of performers:

> "I can't have this complete, you know, confrontation of how fake this is. I like to be a little bit, you know, that someone has some sort of fun in there…I think you can see this immediately if something is completely fake, then you can already imagine them, how completely detached they are from this."

As before, the objection to 'fake' sexual representations revolved firstly around the impaired functional value they were thought to offer, but also related to ethical concerns, with many associating scripted 'porno sex' scenes with the dismissal of female sexual pleasure and a lack of female sexual agency. This is an assumption challenged by Berg (2015: 28), who notes how scripted scenes are preferable for some performers, who may prefer to draw a line between the sex they perform as work, and the sex they may have off camera in their personal lives:

> *A focus on 'authenticity' in work environments can render workers more, rather than less, exploited…Performers may experience being encouraged to 'share a part of their sexuality with the camera' as more laboured and extractive than performing a scripted (even tritely so) role.*

Also apparent across interviews, however, was a strong acknowledgement of the simultaneous centrality of fantasy to these portrayals of authenticity:

> "It's definitely fantasy…but some of the stuff that I like to look at is grounded in reality. So, it would be, you know, submissions from other porn users of their own sexual activity. Or, this one site that I used to really enjoy, which was um, Czechoslovakian parties, where they'd have porn performers, and then they'd invite the participant - uh, the people going to the clubs - to join in as well. And there's that sense of, you know, you could be a participant, you could join in, it's that kind of mix of realism and fantasy. So that's important for me, to have some grounding in reality." – *Josie*

Josie, and indeed all those interviewed for this study, strongly emphasised porn's role as sexual fantasy. In this way, the interview data supports Barker's (2014) notion of a pornographic "paradox", wherein porn still functions as fantasy even in those cases where more realistic sexual depictions are pursued. Interviews with feminists for this study thus challenge the belief that "the fantasy status of this world [is] invisible to the people who visit it" (*ibid*.: 144). Instead, participants described complex understandings of pornography's role as fantasy and how this fantasy status might interact with notions of 'authenticity' and 'realism' as desired characteristics of pornographic representation.

Shreya, for example, described this convergence of fantasy and authenticity as "*hyper-reality*", comparing sexual scenarios in porn to the way in which films and adverts capture, yet often exaggerate, certain aspects of day-to-day lived experience. This notion of fantasy that is nonetheless "*grounded*" in reality is one that recurred throughout the interviews, with participants referring to "*hyper-reality*", "*plausible fantasy*", "*convincing stories*" or scenes that are "*realistic but not real*". The lattermost of these descriptors tended to be associated with porn depicting non-consent themes, wherein it was the authenticity of pain or domination that viewers sought in addition to performer pleasure. In these cases, participants wished to view (consensually-produced) non-consent scenes that were realistic, but that simultaneously managed to assure the viewer that they were not actually watching "*real-life*" abuse. As a result, many found themselves confronted with contradictory needs; a wish to be convinced of a scene's realism on the one hand, alongside a categorical requirement *not* be convinced of it at all. In order to feel reassured about the absence of abuse in pornographic material used, these participants often felt more comfortable reading porn and thus expressed a preference for erotic literature. This I have referred to elsewhere in the thesis as the 'consensual catch 22'.

Text-based and video-based porn were the two most common formats for pornographic material amongst those interviewed. Animated graphics interchange format (GIF) images were also used to access many different types of imagery in a short space of time, particularly in the cases of those for whom sound was not an important feature. On the other hand, as is to be expected, this format was uncommon amongst those who enjoyed the audio associated with porn videos. For Courtney, sound played an important role in conveying a sense of realism and authentic pleasure amongst performers:

> "I need to hear people interacting and the noises and the how they're expressing how happy they are or pleased they are is important to me."

This supports Mitarcă's (2015: 94) assertion that diegetic sounds such as these help to state the authenticity of the scene, especially in gonzo porn wherein "raw and unprocessed sound" helps create the illusion of realism that is characteristic of this genre.

As Mitarcă goes on to point out, production values in porn often relate more to the cinematographic means by which seemingly rudimentary, amateur-style scenes can be most effectively constructed, rather than more conventional film-industry understandings of 'good stagecraft'. As such, quality in porn becomes a difficult concept to define, as demonstrated by participants' inconsistent descriptions thereof. For some, good quality porn consisted of scenes that had high production values in the traditional, artistic and filmographic sense; interesting plotlines and character development; texts that were well written and grammatically correct; and/or material portraying diverse sexual representations. For others, however, quality was equated with fitness-for-purpose and thus good quality porn was more likely to be described in terms of the type of material that "*did the job*" effectively. In these cases, the reverse characteristics to those listed above were often cited as representing good quality. That which emerged as consistent, however, was the association of authenticity with good quality porn. This sometimes pertained to the plausibility of the scenario portrayed; the novelty of the storyline and divergence from tropes and stereotypes; the degree of immediacy and presence conveyed; or the authenticity of the characters' and performers' reactions. Mitarcă's claim that "pornography in the digital age is all about 'authenticity'" (*ibid*.) thus appears well-supported by the data.

Ethical/social criteria

The most frequently occurring themes with regards to ethical considerations in the porn selection process revolved around issues of vulnerability, perceptions of abuse,

objectification, the level of communication between partners or characters, and the recognition (or not) of women as a target audience. These represented issues and topics that participants tended to factor into their more calculative porn selection processes. These considerations were usually deemed secondary to the functional criteria, by reason of the motivations behind the consumer's decision to access pornography in the first place. As Weber and Lindemann (2007: 196) remind us, goals are central to decision-making and to the choice of which decision-making mode to draw upon in a given situation: "Although calculation-based modes are best suited to addressing the traditional motive of maximizing material consequences, other modes are better suited to other goals."

As detailed earlier in the chapter, respondents' ultimate goals for using porn revolved around its ability to aid in arousal – its failure to do so would undermine the very reason for using it:

> "The point of porn is that…it works. Is that it makes you feel good. Is that you respond to it in some way. Like. It's not meant to be an essay in acceptable social interaction. And, an essay in acceptable social interaction might be a good thing and you might read that as well, but I don't, to me it doesn't do the same job." – *Catherine*

The social characteristics of porn were thus revealed as a second priority, yet not necessarily one that was antithetical to respondents' tastes or pleasures. Indeed most participants discussed the ways in which assurances about the standards of production ethics, and sometimes also perceptions of more "*female-friendly*" types of content, helped in their quest for sexual satisfaction. Equally so in reverse, revisiting the concept of unconscionability here, the interviews once again pointed to how perceptions of extreme unethicality served as a turn-off. Many, however, found themselves making compromises when selecting porn, given the difficulties they experienced in sourcing more 'ethical' porn that also met their more hedonistic sexual needs, and the limited time and energy they were able or willing to dedicate to this quest. This notion of limited time and energy, can be likened to the "emotional resource limitations" discussed by Weber and Lindemann (2007: 196), which they claim have the power to "constrain optimization, preventing the operation of otherwise rational hedonic editing". In this thesis, such limitations are framed in terms of a perceived limited capacity to act. My use of this term intends to account for the emotional but also financial and temporal resources required for certain decision-making outcomes, whilst also incorporating Ajzen's (1991) notion of perceived behavioural control – which interview data suggests is also pertinent to

consumption ethics amongst feminist porn users. Indeed, in some cases, these constraining factors were linked, with interviewees discussing how their limited emotional (and financial) resources rendered them ill-equipped for the vast and complex task of sourcing porn that they could be sure lived up to their optimal ethical standards. In turn, participants felt that the seeming impracticability of this task served to loosen their resolve to make more 'ethical' porn choices in the heat of the moment.

Akim, for example, highlighted the difficulty of ever feeling truly assured of the processes and production ethics underlying the various pornographic images he might access, given the way in which pornography is currently distributed and its production regulated:

> "You don't really know the environment in which the porn is made so it's difficult to tell how everyone involved is treated, how much they got paid, etc. I would say that one way that I could potentially avoid this, that I do not do, is to only look at porn that is made in the United States for example, or like a, you know, a country with a very high standard of living and tight labour regulation that would hopefully be working to avoid you know egregious abuses…if you're, for example going on Reddit or going on pretty much any porn website where you're browsing, all the things come from different countries, there's almost no way of knowing where it comes from…I can imagine it's similar in Canada or in Britain. But then again I can also imagine that…if porn was made by EU migrants here, maybe not…[Migrants are vulnerable] to pimps. People who will control them, restrict their freedom, force them into situations where they are dependent on them… they lack the networks that locals have if they get in trouble and they don't necessarily know the workings of like the justice system in the country… Like I'm not saying it's impossible for migrants to be involve in ethical porn, but…it makes it more difficult to judge."

Similarly, Charlie noted how the vulnerability of certain demographics represented in the porn industry made ethical concerns about labour and exploitation even more pertinent for this area of work, and many lamented the lack of transparency that served to hide this information from consumers at the point of access.

Vulnerability is, in fact, a theme that recurred throughout the interviews. Carla, for example, noted that whilst she sometimes enjoyed depictions of "*violent play",* she did not wish to see genuine vulnerability, instead needing to "*see confidence there*". Similarly, Gayle described feeling more comfortable with BDSM porn on Kink.com where she felt female performers had a more active involvement in setting up the scenes and seemed to enjoy themselves on set. Meanwhile, Courtney favoured "*hardcore*" porn but only when she felt the female performer also occupied a position of power and was "*really revealing her sexual pleasure and sexuality*". Vulnerability was also contrasted with agency, with Josie noting the centrality of female agency to both feminism and her views on porn ethics:

> "Because feminism is about female agency, and that's, so that's really what I'm looking for when I'm consuming porn. So, from that aspect, it's about female enjoyment, it's about female agency, and control as well. It's if someone is depicted as being out of, or not in control, then it is by choice and that there is always an out. That's... I need that in the scene. If I'm not getting that, if I'm not getting that assurance, then I don't feel that it aligns with my feminist principles."

Female agency was also contrasted with the objectification of the female body, about which some interviewees expressed a concern. Women's objectification was largely associated with "*straight porn*" and tended to be understood as the perceived absence of female subjectivity. This, participants felt, was combated by portrayals of women's agentive participation, reciprocal – verbal or non-verbal – communication between male and female performers or characters, and perceptions of "*authentic*" female pleasure. In this way, authenticity is once again framed as a sought-after characteristic, for the purposes of satisfying taste-based, but also values-based selection criteria. For this reason, authenticity was a characteristic that featured highly in participants' selection criteria and on which they rarely compromised, due to the ways in which a lack of authentic representation was likely to affect both the functional and social needs of feminist consumers.

Access and response *(203 references)*

Actions taken to access porn were described in interviews with reference to the above-mentioned decision-making processes underlying them. Participants thus identified the ways in which affective, calculative and recognition-based decisions gave way to the consumption activities they recounted. These included the acts of clicking, flicking through, skipping over, trialing, rating, sharing, paying for, masturbating to, having sex to, or discarding porn.

Theories of affect put forward by porn scholars such as Paasonen (2011) and Keen (2016) resonated closely with participant descriptions of browsing and using image and video-based porn. With reference to pornographic GIFs, Keen (*ibid*.: 315) notes:

> *I find myself using less and less cognition to browse. I watch images for split seconds before clicking 'next', relying on my body's reaction to decide what I want to look at. These images are pure Barthesian punctum. Single gestures rendered in their most simple form, they have been stripped of any capacity for 'contemplation and contextualisation' (Paasonen 2011, 84) that might give them studia. My eyes are drawn to one captivating point, and – at an affective level – the image either clicks or it does not.*

Similarly, respondents discussed both the ways in which they acted based on calculative decision-making, as well as more unconscious actions based on physical reactions and

corresponding urges. For example, Akim drew upon the affective rhythms with which he scrolled and clicked, with the browse pace reflecting his level of excitement and the associated sense of urgency. In contrast, Josie discussed how she gauged the social and functional merit of a scene, in a seemingly more calculative way, before choosing or discarding a video:

> "There's a lot of flicking between different movies to see, how do I feel about this one, do I feel it's been...is this scenario going to work for me, is it, does it look like there's any coercion in there, does anyone look like they're underage"

Other interviewees touched upon the ways in which both calculative and affective decision-modes directed their browsing behavior and actions. Leticia, for example, described how certain types of content could provoke a negative reaction, resulting in her skipping parts of the video or discarding it altogether. This resulted in her ultimately developing a more calculative approach to porn selection, involving attempts to anticipate affective response and strategies to avoid such material.

In a similar fashion, most respondents talked about skipping and discarding videos based on affective responses to the material. Lacey, for example, pointed out how the affective response provoked by perceived inauthenticity would prompt her to discard the pornographic material in question, in favour of text and videos that she deemed more realistic:

> "I'd like watch the first, like, little bit and if I'm like, well this looks interesting…then I'll continue watching it. But if it just like starts off really, like, fake and strange, then I'm like, mmm not going to do that... With literature…sometimes I'll like be reading it, and then I'm like, oh this is really fake, and then I'm like what, this would never happen in real life…and it really gets to me…I'm like, ah fuck this I'm going to read something else."

Through these descriptions, participants illustrated an ongoing process of porn trialing, whereby a cycle of flicking, clicking, skipping and discarding – directed largely by a combination of calculative and affective decision-modes – was repeated until orgasm (or desired outcome) was achieved:

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"When I put my mouse on the video, I'm able to…see bits, like different screen captures of the video…From that I…make the decision around whether or not this is something that I will enjoy …and click on it. If I don't like it then I go to another video to…try watching something else" *– Courtney*	Previewing screengrabs and sampling videos Gauging anticipated affective response Clicking Responding Discarding Trying something else	Trialing porn Experiencing positive or negative affective responses Persevering or moving on	Accessing and responding to porn [impact on reception & reflections]

In order to decide which videos, images and/or texts to trial next, participants recalled reviewing ratings, reading descriptions, and watching previews. Beyond that, they resorted to what Linda described as the "*try it and see*" method; a concept echoed in numerous other interviews:

> "I haven't found anywhere on the internet that breaks, what, that breaks genres down specifically enough to get to like tick every single box I'm looking for… You just have to open the stories and see." – *Catherine*

There were a small number of people who appeared to engage very little with the 'try it and see' method delineated above. These exceptions tended to be correlated with alternative motivations for using porn. Serena, for example, preferred to watch select, independent, often feature-length porn productions, rather than browsing large quantities of material on tube sites. This could be traced back to the main purpose underlying her porn use, which she identified as a desire to have some kind of novel and potentially erotic "*experience*". Unlike most other participants, orgasm was not described as a primary goal for Serena, particularly given the group settings in which she usually accessed porn; namely at screenings and other queer and feminist porn community events. This exception serves a useful function in the context of the analysis, as it helps highlight the important relationship between consumer motivations, contexts of consumption, and consumption activities. Specifically, it suggests a link between 'porn trialing' as a means of consumption, and the pursuit of orgasm as a motivation for use; the latter commonly aided by accompanying masturbatory efforts. Digital spaces, in turn, lend themselves to this quest – and, by extension, to the associated 'try it and see' mode of consumption believed to facilitate it – by virtue of their capacity to provide *private* access to a wealth of pornographic material.

Indeed, with few exceptions, participants described using porn most frequently when they were alone. If we are to assume that, as reflected in this sample, a significant proportion of consumers use porn as a private masturbation aid, then the importance of privacy to porn consumption is also foregrounded. In this way porn use differs from the types of product usually explored in ethical consumption research, such as groceries, clothes and electronics, which tend not to call for the same levels of privacy at point of sale or access. As a result of this, porn consumers are rendered more autonomous in their actions. This autonomy, Weber and Lindemann (2007: 196) claim, encourages the 'affective' decision mode in which "one's personal desire for an action suffices without any need to justify the decision", as highlighted by Natasha:

> "I'm not hiding from anyone but myself [so] I'm not doing anything I don't want to do."

Whilst most respondents emphasised the autonomous nature of much of their porn consumption activities, a minority of respondents did report a degree of community participation in the porn context. For example, Serena described a long-standing affiliation with the offline queer porn communities in Berlin and London. Meanwhile, Yan recalled contacting authors of pornographic fiction to compliment them on their work and Jas discussed sharing erotic fan-fiction stories that she enjoyed with an online network of like-minded fans. These activities tended not to take place during the 'heat of the moment' as part of a quest for sexual stimulation, however, but instead appeared to serve distinct personal and political purposes in their own right.

Reception (157 references)

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"I think that sometimes I'm just a voyeur… but…I definitely see…there are other times that I would like to be the person. Like…sometimes if I see an action of fisting, I'm definitely the person fisting. So, yeah, I think that I do that as well, I 'jump' on someone" *– Serena*	Seeing oneself as a voyeur in the scene Seeing oneself in the place of a character or performer	Using your imagination	Receiving porn [impact on selection, responses, reflections]

The ways in which respondents described their reception of porn gave some insight into their understandings of underlying cognitive processing. Descriptions of porn reception

included terminology such as "*escaping*", "*losing inhibitions*", "*relating*", "*imagining*" and "*suspending disbelief*". Some pointed to the types of inaccessible, unconscious processing that was difficult to articulate in the interview context, often described in terms akin to 'fleshy' affectivity:

> "Sometimes…I go for things that don't relate to, many times, my taste of anatomy. Like, for instance, male gay porn, which is still flesh, I react to it, and it does the trick." – *Serena*

Most common, however, was the idea of being able to relate to individuals in a scene and imagine experiencing the types of sexual stimulation being enacted. Many imagined themselves occupying a voyeur position, while others envisioned themselves metaphorically "*jumping on*" or taking the place of a character or performer:

> "The only way to experience it is to place myself into them… More in the context of, like, imagining my genitals doing that, or if it's something I don't have the genitals for, just like, imagining if I could." – *Yan*

Such descriptions are similar to those put forward by participants in Chowkhani's (2016) study of female porn consumers, wherein participants often described "*wish[ing that] they could be the woman on screen*".

For many respondents, key to being able to relate in this way was a degree of realism and sense of authenticity. For Josie, this revolved around perceptions of authentic female pleasure, which she felt enabled her to "*put [her]self in the action*". Similarly, Serena discusses a need for "*veracity*" in order to connect, expressing a desire to be convinced that performers are acting "*not only as a profession…but also that they're actually enjoying it".* Participants usually described suspending disbelief to some extent when they encountered something they believed to be unrealistic. However there were limits to what could feasibly be overlooked, often coalescing around the perceived authenticity of performer experience:

> "If you're reading like a fantasy novel…there's the concept of suspension of disbelief. However, there's a level to which [you] will not be able to suspend [your] disbelief anymore…I think it's the same thing in porn. Like, it's a fantasy, really, because they're not using condoms and they're not asking for consent and whatever and I'd hope that that wasn't necessarily always going to be reality. And it's like, it's not necessarily congruous - like someone walks into your house and you immediately start having sex with them, right? So, that's part of the suspension of disbelief. But the porn that people look like they're not having a good time or whatever, it's like, I can no longer remain in this fantasy world with you - I step out and I, I stop believing in the fantasy... And also, there's aspects of, like, people's bodies being so exaggerated that it's like I can no longer believe that this person is real." - *Yan*

In addition to authentic pleasure, those who were interested in porn with BDSM themes often expressed a similar desire to see genuine experiences of (consensual)

bondage, pain, humiliation and/or submission. Many found that the acting in professional porn was not convincing enough in this sense, though, and thus sought out more 'amateur' style porn videos (or, alternatively, other types of non-video porn). The use of amateur porn was thought to have the additional advantage of being more ethical, as respondents often believed these videos to have been produced by individuals in a DIY fashion, for free and for fun, rather than by large porn corporations with a reputation for exploitation. It has been argued, however, that such perspectives tend towards an idealised view of crowdsourcing platforms as "empowering and democratising" and thus risk obscuring the "network of capitalist forces that drive free amateur online content" that serves to undermine the value of digital and sexual labour (Ruberg 2016: 147). It is this, and other issues implicated in the pursuit of authenticity amongst feminist porn users – and indeed, demographics beyond the scope of this research – that I will elaborate upon in the discussion that follows.

Discussion: On Authenticity

Online porn, perhaps more so than any other pornographic medium, has emerged as a fertile site for ontological debate, compelling us to "question the boundaries of the real" (Levin-Russo 2007: 250). Discourses around the concept of 'realness' are often evoked in discussions of pornography – from those criticising porn for depictions seen as inauthentic (Gordon and Kraus 2010), or indeed too authentic (MacKinnon 2000); to those expressing support for pornographies that claim to feature more 'genuine' representations of bodies, identities and sexual practices (Young 2014: 187).

A pertinent question emerges around what we actually understand authenticity to mean – and whether any consensus can be reached with regards to its definition(s). Williams offers one explanation, pertaining to the 'positivist' roots of realism in film. She suggests that the pornographic real can be equated to maximum visibility, "wherein the elusive and prurient 'truth' is located in increasingly more detailed investigations of the bodies of women" (Williams 1999: 36). This type of authenticity, described by Josie as "*nitty gritty*" realism, tended not to be judged favourably amongst interviewees, and was associated by some with the objectification of women's bodies:

> "I remember feeling really put off by the level of focus on body parts, specifically, you know, vulvas and anuses…it almost looked like a kind of medical examination. And I at the time wasn't really involved in feminism, so I couldn't put my finger on what my problem was, but it was that objectification…that removing the person from their

> body part…If I come across porn where it's very much focused on that…then I'll just kind of click and move on. Because it's, like, I want to see people's faces…it's not like I need their life story or anything, but I need a bit more than just their vagina." – *Gayle*

Similarly positivist conception of realness have also been described in terms of indexicality, 'liveness' and perceived transparency between object and representation. Some have sought to achieve this reality effect by means of 'voyeuristic' images, televisual strategies of documentary, and by "eschew[ing] formulas and staging in favor of low production values" (Levin-Russo 2007: 244-5).

However, increasingly we are seeing an acknowledgement of the ways in which authenticity may not reside purely in perceptions of unmediated visibility, as highlighted by participants in this study. Indeed, it has been suggested that the problem with much (straight) porn "is not what it shows, but what it doesn't show" (Moorman 2007: 16-17). Such hidden elements may include the portrayal of 'genuine' female pleasure, common safer sex practices, explicit consent, the use of sex toys, condoms and lubricant, and ways of having sex that do not fit into heteronormative models, amongst others. In this way, some conceptions of realness appear to pertain as much to the representation of diverse identities, bodies, sexual narratives and practices, as to modes of production. This is certainly a perspective that appears well-supported by the interview data and findings described in this chapter.

Accordingly, perceptions of authenticity in porn appear to resist unification into one comprehensive or universally agreed-upon definition. In fact, DeGenevieve (2014: 194) challenges the notion of pornographic 'authenticity' even further, asserting that porn is fundamentally about fantasy and does not, in fact, concern itself with reality at all. This begs the question of what, then, is referred to when claiming to portray 'real sex' (Levin-Russo 2007: 239), 'real lesbians' (*ibid*.: 244), 'real teens' (Bonik and Schaale 2007: 84), and so on. Is it possible to represent fantasy in a more or less authentic way? And if so, what makes some representations more authentic than others? Authenticity in feminist porn, for example, may favour concerns with the ethics of industry practices (Taormino 2013: 259), the presence or absence of certain cultural markers in porn (Levin-Russo 2007: 249), or the challenging of particular sexual stereotypes (Mondin 2014: 191), over and above preoccupations with visibility. Conversely however, feminist porn that adopts high-level production values – regardless of any other 'legitimating' characteristics it may wield – could in fact be seen to forfeit its claims to authenticity from the perspective of those who equate 'real' with a 'refusal of artifice' and who may even

celebrate the unapologetically crude as a challenge to bourgeois conceptions of acceptability (Attwood 2012: 45).

Seeking to address some of these questions, Levin-Russo (2007: 239-40) has suggested a four-pronged model for understanding porn's 'privileged relationship to the real':

1. *it records an unsimulated, authentic sexual act (realness of production)*
2. *its images appear real due to their character and conventions (realness of representation)*
3. *it acts directly on the viewer to produce real effects (realness of reception)*
4. *it is directly tied to real economic, political, and/or cultural processes (realness of social context)*

Participants' descriptions of authenticity appear to incorporate elements of each of Levin-Russo's characterisations. Selection criteria reportedly revolved largely around notions of natural bodies, authentic sex, real pleasure, and convincing storylines; requiring both realness of production and realness of representation. Responses to porn were often described in terms of the relatability of characters, acts, experiences and scenarios, which similarly required a degree of authenticity around the production and representation of sexual scenes in order to be achieved. These responses appeared to impact the ways in which porn was accessed, with many basing their decisions about which videos or texts to sample next on the real-life effects of the material viewed thus far. As such, we are able to identify the 'realness of reception' sought by consumers at the point of access, experienced as arousal and/or climax. Furthermore, some respondents discussed their participation in wider (queer, feminist and/or fandom-based) porn communities, and emphasised the importance of porn productions deemed to be authentically queer, feminist, or otherwise. In this way, they pointed to the 'realness of social context' to which some producers and productions within such communities are able to lay claim.

Given these numerous modes of constructing 'realness' and divergent interpretations of how authenticity is to be understood, it is perhaps unsurprising that notions of pornographic realities have been invoked to serve very different ends. Indeed, anti-porn proponents use discourses of realness to denounce the production, distribution and effects of pornography altogether (Levin-Russo 2007: 243; Attwood and Smith 2013: 51). In contrast, many people have instead come to consider much of the professionally produced video porn as 'fake', as was demonstrated in by participants in this study. The supposed superficiality of 'professional' porn, however, has been questioned by the likes of Maina (2014), Paasonen (2011) and Levin-Russo (2007), who point out that performers

and their sexual encounters on-screen are no less real in mainstream porn than in any alternative genre. In this regard, Gorfinkel (2012: 87) makes a pertinent assertion, claiming that pornographic performance has come to represent:

> *a vocation that most directly challenges a set of ontological questions regarding the labors of performance, and the labors of privatized intimacy – the relationship between authenticity and artifice, between real pleasure and its mimesis, and between acting (playing a role) and being (oneself).*

It is precisely these complex ontological challenges that reveal themselves in the findings of this study. Whilst participating feminists described authenticity as a priority in their porn choices, for both personal and ethical reasons, their emphasis on "*real pleasure"* and "*authentic sex"* simultaneously presents a number of challenges and contradictions for a feminist analysis. In particular, this emphasis on authenticity has the potential to blur the line between performance and reality further, which in turn risks undermining other feminist priorities that participants claimed to value. Of particular thorniness are issues surrounding: (a) the association of authentic-seeming "*amateur porn*" with enhanced ethicality; and (b) the association of authentic-seeming pleasure with more enthusiastic consent. Each of these assumptions, it is argued, contributes to the devaluation of sexual labour, which Ruberg (2016) claims to be at the heart of porn stigma and exploitative industry practices. In this way, such views and the consumption decisions they inspire are ostensibly rendered inimical to participants' stated feminist aims.

Amateur porn and authenticity

Attwood notes that shifts in online sexual cultures are making it "increasingly difficult to distinguish between labour and play" (2009 in Ruberg 2016: 152). It has been argued that this, in turn, has resulted in the devaluation of sexual labour – and online sexual labour in particular – with pleasure itself deemed to be reward enough for those involved (Ruberg 2016; Scholz 2012).

Far from suggesting that porn performers should work for free, participants in this study nonetheless tended not to view pornography as a product for which they felt obliged to pay. Instead, most – though not all – took advantage of the amateur and DIY gift economies, in which text, image and video porn products are apparently produced as a 'labour of love' rather than as paid work. Free porn was naturally described as more economically accessible, and some respondents also associated amateur porn with greater ethical standing. The latter was based on an assumption that this type of DIY style

production eschewed the murky waters of the for-profit industry, effectively disentangled the association of money and sex that could sometimes cause discomfort, and enabled them to avoid participating in what they saw as an exploitative capitalist enterprise. As Ruberg (2016: 155) notes, however, "the fantasy of digital DIY porn as non-capitalist…overlooks the fact that amateur tube sites are big business." In particular, these assumptions fail to acknowledge the advertising revenues, affiliate schemes and other corporate enterprises with which Mindgeek and other tube site owners are involved. They also overlook the ways in which a denunciation of monetised sexual services and products arguably facilitates the very exploitation that respondents seek to eliminate, by silencing discussions around fair compensation, contracts, and working conditions. Furthermore, such perspectives risk contributing to the stigmatisation of those who cannot afford to make porn for free, by framing DIY porn as superior to productions for which performers received payment.

Authentic pleasure and consent

It is also the case that some participants associated their perceptions of authentic performer pleasure in video productions with more enthusiastic consent. Whilst respondents described being aware that they could not know with any degree of certainty or detail the conditions of production, some sense of authentic pleasure on the part of performers, especially women, helped them feel more reassured that the scene was not forced. This approach has been problematised, however, by Berg (2015) who claims that such perspectives are informed by feminist analyses that have not paid sufficient attention to labour politics. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, whilst authenticity in porn is often framed as an ethical endeavour, and artifice an unethical one, Berg notes that, some performers may in fact prefer adhering to scripted sexual scenarios in their work, whilst reserving their more authentic displays of sexuality for the private sphere. In this way, it has been argued that the insistence on increasingly more 'authentic' sexual performances may foster further exploitation, with performers being asked to share parts of their sexuality that they might otherwise wish to keep separate from the work context and, in the process, to take on additional unpaid duties usually reserved for directors and scriptwriters. As Scott (2016: 126) notes, the association of authentic pleasure and authentic sex with better ethics "also perpetuates a belief that sex work is

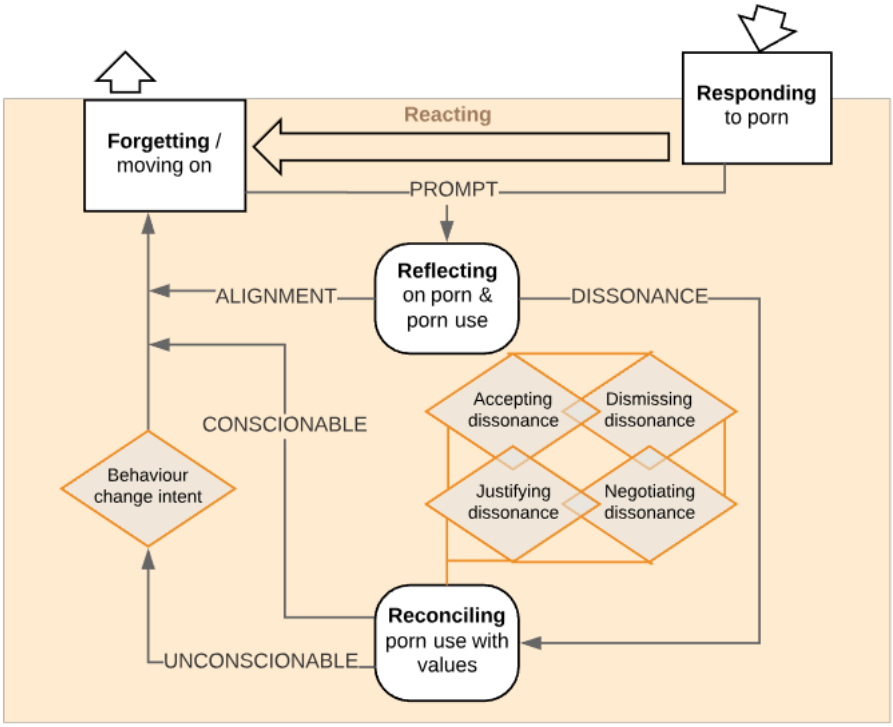
only acceptable when it does not feel like work" thus further undermining and stigmatising those who claim it as labour.

In light of these arguments, the desire to access authentic porn emerges as a site of contestation and, in many ways, contradiction, for feminist consumers relying on perceptions of real pleasure and authentic sex for reassurance about the porn content they access. We might speculate that such practices are especially prevalent in the absence of other more reliable insights into production ethics and labour conditions. However, given how associations between authenticity, ethics and consent risk encouraging a view of porn performance as somehow better when unpaid, the valorisation of authenticity is perhaps especially litigious for 'sex positive' feminists who do not wish to devalue the labour of sex workers. Feminist consumers of video porn with an interest in consumption ethics might thus wish to interrogate their demand for authenticity, and the ways it serves to help or hinder parallel efforts to reduce stigma and exploitation associated with the porn industry.

7. Core Category iii: Reacting

Whilst the previous chapter focused on consumption activity in the 'heat of the moment', the goal for this chapter is to explore the subsequent *re*actions or post-consumption processing described by participants. These include the act of 'forgetting' about porn outside of the consumption context; being prompted to discuss or reflect on porn and consumer ethics; evaluating one's own porn use; rationalising decision-making; and negotiating potential dissonance between one's values and practice. The latter constitute important reflective stages, which together represent defining elements of the conscionable consumption cycle proposed by this thesis.

Many interviewees claimed to think about porn predominantly on an as-needed basis. Nonetheless, all respondents also described occasions in which they were prompted to reflect on porn decision-making and consumption outside of this context. Prompts included online and offline discussions around pornography, coming into contact with new information and resources on the topic, and emotional or affective responses stemming from one's own porn use. Such prompts encouraged reflection upon issues of ethicality in porn and consumer decision-making. For some, this resulted in positive or neutral outcomes, with these individuals gauging their own porn consumption practices as favourable or, at the very least, unproblematic. For others, such evaluations produced experiences of dissonance between their feminist ethical principles in theory and their porn choices in practice. This in turn appeared to trigger a process of reconciliation, as they fought to resolve the incongruity identified – either through modified behaviour or modified attitudes. The diagram below illustrates the geography of such processes in the context of the consumption cycle.



This chapter dedicates itself to further explicating the various stages of this reflective cycle, along with the relationships between these concepts and other core categories that make up the conscionable consumption model. Consistent with the previous chapters, a breakdown of the open, selective and theoretical coding process is presented in each section, with an indication of the number of references identified for individual conceptual categories. The chapter goes on to discuss how participant responses point to alternative ways of conceptualising consumer ethics, responsibility and activist endeavours, which go beyond the neoliberal rhetoric of consumer choice. It furthermore explores the extent to which such articulations may suggest certain oversights in the ethical consumption research to date.

Forgetting (24 references)

The act of discarding explicit videos or texts immediately after use and promptly forgetting about the pornographic encounter was identified by a number of interviewees as common. Josie made a distinction between her pre-and post-transition experiences in this regard:

> "Afterwards…pre-transition, there was always the, had the orgasm, not interested, didn't even register that it even existed... Whereas now, it's kind of…like you're putting a book back on a shelf that you might go back to and read again. It's not the same forgetting, that it doesn't exist." – *Josie*

Similarly Yan explained how they tended only to give thought to the topic of porn and their porn use on an "*as needed basis*".

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"It's just something that doesn't occur to me at other times of the day…Like, really this conversation's one of the first times I've actually been thinking about it much…I have, like, one friend I to talk to about porn...[but generally] it doesn't fit into the rest of my life, so I'm never going to think about it outside of the context where I'm using it…it occupies a separate space" – *Yan*	Thinking about porn on an as-needed basis Talking about porn use with friends Talking about porn use in the interview Porn occupying a separate headspace or discursive arena	Forgetting about porn after use Being prompted to reflect on porn	Forgetting (and remembering) [impact on reflection & selection process]

Yan attributed this mental disarticulation, in part, to the lack of conversational space granted to the discursive arenas of sex and sexuality. This is an observation that has been similarly identified by Marques (2017: 8), who notes how individuals tend to discourage peers from reflecting too deeply on pornographic consumption even in a focus group setting:

> *Tania's critical reflections on pornography's messaging was met with comments such as ''you're thinking way too much,'' and ''it's just a show,'' speaks to the paucity of opportunity to speak or even think about pornography… The implied messaging appears to be: This is the pornography that exists; you are not meant to think about it.*

All participants in this study, however, did point to occasions and contexts in which they felt comfortable exploring issues of porn consumer ethics – amongst friends and classmates, for example – with many even including the interview itself as an example of this type of conversational prompt.

Reflecting (231 references)

Prompts for reflecting about porn were reported to include discussions with partners, friends, feminist groups and study groups. In addition, participants identified situations wherein they would reflect on porn and their attitudes towards it in a tangential fashion – when thinking about related topics or about sex, sexuality and/or feminism more generally. For example, Gayle recalled revisiting her attitudes towards porn upon discovering her partner's use of porn. Others described being prompted to reflect on porn after having come into contact with news articles, blog posts and other media or

resources on the topic. It was individuals' own porn use, however, that reportedly served as the most frequent precursor to reflection, particularly insofar as strong emotional reactions were involved.

Participants described a range of positive, neutral and negative affective responses to porn, which appeared to induce moments of reflection. Positive responses included a heightened sexual self-acceptance, as well as feelings of happiness, connectedness and identification. Neutral responses were framed in terms of participants seeing their porn choices simply as unproblematic and "*feeing fine*" about their tastes and practices rather than necessarily happy – or conversely, disappointed – with them. Perhaps unsurprisingly, positive and neutral emotional responses to porn tended to be correlated with perceptions of relative alignment between an individual's porn choices and their sense of ethical, political and/or feminist selfhood.

Other respondents talked about guilt and shame around their porn use, a sense of discomfort or unease about porn, and feeling hypocritical about or bothered by their porn choices. These sentiments were most likely to be expressed by those with kinky or taboo porn tastes that they felt were not in keeping with their feminism or ethics – particularly when such tastes coalesced with themes of male dominance or aggression and female passivity or submission. However, some experienced guilt and shame for other reasons, such as female objectification in general, or ideas around compulsion and (lack of) control over one's porn habits.

Excerpt	**Open coding**	**Selective coding**	**Theoretical coding**
"When it was more of a compulsion, I did reflect on [porn] in a very negative way…I felt like it wasn't a very healthy consumption of porn… [but now] I don't feel a need to reflect on it because I am so comfortable with the way I use porn" – *Josie*	Reflecting on porn when perceiving lack of self-control Reflecting on porn when perceiving unhealthy usage Not feeling need to reflect on porn when at ease	Negative emotional response as prompt for reflection	Reflecting [impact on attitudes & selection process]

As highlighted in the excerpt above, strong negative emotions such as guilt and shame often elicited more extensive reflection on porn and ethics than positive and neutral responses. In many ways, this aligns with the strand of cognitive emotion theory positing that individuals, upon experiencing emotion, subsequently explain such emotional responses through a cognitive appraisal of the events thought to have caused

them (Frijda et al. 1989). The link between guilt and ethical consumer behaviour (/change) has furthermore been observed elsewhere in cognitive and social psychology research (Hoffman 1982; Newman and Trump 2017; Peloza et al. 2013; Tangney and Dearing 2002). Theories about the appraisal processes linking these emotions and "action readiness" (Frijda et al. 1989), however, are reportedly less common (Antonetti and Maklan 2014a: 717). The sections that follow attempt to address this academic oversight by detailing the self-reflective appraisal process described by participants and the way such deliberations seemingly shape – and are shaped by – participant attitudes and behaviour.

Dissonance and alignment

For those participants who perceived their porn choices to be in alignment with their feminism, ethics and politics, the reflective stage of the conscionable consumption cycle represented a fleeting digression from the main circuit of the model. When prompted to reflect on the ethics of their porn consumption practices, these respondents reported feeling content with what they found and recalled finding little need to dwell further on the matter. Conversely, for participants who experienced discomfort due to apparent conflict between their sense of moral identity and their porn use, such dissonance served as a gateway to further deliberations on porn, ethics and consumption.

Cognitive dissonance, a term coined by Festinger (1957), can be described as the state of discomfort invoked when an individual perceived themselves to hold two opposing or contradictory attitudes or beliefs. Gregory-Smith and colleagues (2013: 1203) suggest that, at the root of dissonance, lies a "process of self-evaluation which assumes a comparison between the actual self (and behaviour) and the 'ideal' self". However, far from comparing their actual behaviour to notions of 'ideal practice' – the latter often dismissed as ultimately unrealisable – participants claimed to experience dissonance most prominently when they believed their choices to have contradicted notions of *conscionable* practice; conscionable practice here understood as the personal norms and minimum ethical standards they had set for themselves. These were often intimately tied to their sense of self and feminist identity.

In this regard, responses appear to align more closely with the self-consistency interpretation of dissonance:

> *Here dissonance is said to occur when a situation creates inconsistency between the self-concept and behaviour with dissonance being greatest 'when it involves not just*

> *any two cognitions but rather a cognition about the self and a piece of our behavior that violates that self-concept.*
>
> (Aronson 1992: 305)

In continued support of Aronson's theory of dissonance, participants furthermore claimed that such discomfort revolved around a sense of conflict between the porn they accessed and type of person they saw themselves to be:

> "Hardcore…is something that does stimulate me quite a bit, but at the same time those videos often have bits that I think is…borderline abusive from my view, so that does make me feel quite guilty…because of…who I want to be, how I want to kind of perceive myself as being somewhat responsible and ethical." – *Courtney*

Responses also resonated with Newman and Trump's (2017) assertion that the self-ascribed personal norms and minimum standards of ethicality invoked by individuals may differ considerably from person to person. Indeed, the widely divergent understandings of what constituted acceptable behaviour amongst interviewees, and the varying levels of guilt associated with seemingly similar porn consumption behaviour, suggested dramatically different understandings of conscionable practice. Nonetheless, wherever the line of unconscionability lay for the individual in question, it was the transgression of this standard that appeared to produce feelings of dissonance. This, in turn, seemed to prompt the individual to journey deeper into the reflective cycle, in an attempt to reconcile the transgression with their sense of moral selves.

Findings were thus in keeping with the framework of ethical decision-making posited by Gregory-Smith, Smith and Winklhofer (2013: 121), which frames choices as inspired by both affect and cognition and then appraised by the consumer as either ethical or unethical – conscionable or unconscionable; an appraisal that in turn serves to affect future decisions:

> *If the consumer makes an ethical choice, positive post-decision emotions (e.g. pride, happiness) will be experienced. These emotions will reinforce the idea of making the 'right choice' and encourage similar ethical decisions in the future (i.e. in an anticipatory form). Alternatively, if a consumer's evaluation results in a conflict, then cognitive dissonance emerges due to dissonant behaviour. Dissonance is usually accompanied by negative emotions in a post-decision form (e.g. guilt and regret), and consumers can employ management strategies to either reduce or eliminate these negative feelings. If these strategies are unsuccessful, then negative emotions are likely to influence future judgements in an anticipatory form, that is, the decision-making process has a cyclical nature.*

It should be noted that participants tended not to express pride in their porn consumption, perhaps due to the stigmatised nature of porn itself and the secrecy around sexual practice more generally in society. However, the authors' assertion of a reciprocal relationship between reflection and practice as central to the consumption process is a

concept supported by the interview data from this study. This is explored further in the remainder of the chapter through a discussion of the reconciliatory efforts reported by dissonance-burdened participants.

Reconciling (331 references)

Just as Gregory-Smith (2013: 1214) and colleagues observe, interview data from this study points to introspection as the primary means by which to "achieve emotional balance". This appeared to be accomplished through reconciliatory attempts to bring actions and ethics into alignment.

Excerpt	Open coding	Selective coding	Theoretical coding
"I'm well aware that a lot of my porn choices are not ethical. But I'm well aware that a lot of my fetishes are not – wouldn't be considered - ethical, and I've had to reconcile them with being quite a militant feminist. So that's ok, I'm happy with that" – *Charlie*	Having seemingly unethical tastes in porn Reconciling feminism with fetishes Feeling comfortable with reconciled porn tastes	Harmonising feminist ethics, politics with porn consumption and tastes.	Reconciling [impact on attitudes & selection process]

There were four modes of reconciliation described by participants: acceptance; dismissal; rationalisation; and negotiation.

Acceptance (17 references)

Acceptance tended to go hand in hand with a disinclination for all-or-nothing conceptions of right and wrong. Leticia, for example, noted that she had become "*a bit less black and white about things like that now*", which helped her to accept what she saw as contradictions between her feminism and her desires. These inconsistencies might be interpreted as flaws in an individual's self-integrity; a manifestation of the ethical consumption 'gap.' However Szmigin, Carrigan and McEachern (2009) resist this interpretation, preferring notions of flexibility over ideas of hypocrisy or inconsistency. In the context of a global capitalist society that provides individuals with a limited range of choices through which to exert their agency as consumer-citizens, it has been argued that the 'ideal ethical consumer' represents a myth or illusion rather than an achievable personal goal (Bradshaw and Zwick 2016; Devinney et al 2010). As such, for many

participants, a more flexible understanding of consumer ethics facilitated the degree of acceptance necessary for existing in an environment that is seemingly incompatible with moral idealism.

Dismissal (39 references)

Conversely, dismissal of dissonance was described in terms of "*avoidance*", "*compartmentalisation*", "*hope*", and "*repression*". For example, Helen described a process by which she could temporarily avoid thinking about potential conflicts between her feminist "*persona*" and her enjoyment of "*abusive*" porn:

> "In the past I have come across more women directors, which is nice to see that they are directing themselves. So in a way, you know, ok, she's not suffering…So that's better. But then if you start thinking how certain things perpetuate the way we understand the female body bla bla bla…it stresses me out. Like, ok, why do I like this? So yeah, the switching personas is…to switch off the thinking part from the enjoying part. And – maybe, I don't know – maybe this will develop into a hybrid that can actually think and have pleasure together. But until this happens, it's not easy for us to hear the two… Um, schizophrenic me [laughs]."

Similarly, as has been highlighted elsewhere in the thesis, Charlie claimed to avoid thinking too much about possible tensions between her feminism and her ethics, and to repress her feelings of dissonance temporarily until she felt ready and equipped to address them. Meanwhile, Josie spoke about relying on hope and faith that scenes were consensual, in lieu of other ways of determining ethicality:

> "I feel a little bit uncomfortable with those [pre- and post-performance] interview scenes, because you don't know how much they're set up… I'm not convinced that that is genuine evidence of consensual activity… You can't really tell. It's, it's... You kind of have to hope, fingers crossed."

Rationalisation (109 references)

As has been observed across the ethical consumption literature, post facto attempts to rationalise behaviour considered to be at odds with one's values are common amongst consumers, particularly upon experiencing guilt and other negative emotional responses to consumption. On the one hand, we might see such rationalisations as little more than attempts to diminish personal blame and deflect responsibility for behaviour. Indeed, Sykes and Matza (1957: 667) compare such articulations with the defensive arguments of criminals, which make use of legislative flexibility to redirect moral culpability from the individual.

> *It is our argument that much delinquency is based on what is essentially an unrecognized extension of defenses to crimes, in the form of justifications for deviance that are seen as valid by the delinquent but not by the legal system or society at large*.

The authors propose five methods for justifying conduct deemed inconsistent with ethical values: (1) denial of responsibility, (2) denial of injury, (3) denial of the victim, (4) condemnation of the condemners, and (5) appeal to higher loyalties.

On the other hand, however, the rationalisations provided by participants in this study do not fall easily into the abovementioned categories. Instead, the rationalisations drawn upon most commonly by participants included:

(1) conceptions of a finite reserve of resources to expend on care-based endeavours, reflective of an ethic of care perspective:

> "I tried to give up Amazon - it didn't really work, particularly when you're skint. You know, this is another thing about kind of capitalist systems, is that it relies on the fact that there are people that don't have very much money... It's like, oh I'm going to try and buy all my uni books from Better World Books, because they're a good ethical company, but it's like, this really obscure textbook is not available, except for £30…if money were no object, I would buy that, but it's £7.99 over on Amazon, I'm going to have to get that." – *Gayle*

(2) perceptions of a limited capacity to control one's own behaviour, echoing Ajzen's (1991) notions of "perceived behavioural control" or PBC:

> "I do feel like consumers should have a responsibility, um, but also I think consumers are weak." – *Leticia*

(3) a lack of belief in consumer efficacy or the efficacy of consumer choice, a concept that has come to be known as "perceived consumer effectiveness" or PCE (Kinnear et al. 1974):

> "If I'm not ok with the fact that people who work in the porn industry don't have the same rights as I do as an employee, I should individually have the responsibility to do something about it…I can start watching porn of a website that I know doesn't…abuse its workers or something. But I think practically speaking and not hypothetically speaking I think it would be a lot more difficult to rally a large group of people to do that, because…it is such a private thing. I think it would be hard enough to get people to admit to what kinds of porn you're watching, let alone, great now stop watching it." – *Natasha*

(4) perceived external constraints rendering certain ethical actions impossible, including restrictions on choice and industry opacity:

> "I guess the most ethical porn would be ones where the actors want to do it, but again there's not way you would really know that. It would be almost impossible to really figure that out. Like I am confident these people exist, like I've seen Ask Anythings on Reddit with seemingly happy porn stars, but you can't really actually control for it." – *Akim*

It could be argued that some overlap exists, for example, between 'perceptions of finite resource' and Sykes and Matza's (1959: 669) "appeal to higher loyalties", given that resource limitations ultimately saw participants prioritising some causes over others. However, this was not always framed in terms of a clear hierarchy of loyalties but rather

was evaluated, or rationalised post hoc, through a combination of factors including cost, ease, impact, and availability of alternatives.

Equally so, it could be claimed that participants who described a lack of faith in the efficacy of consumer choice, or who highlighted external constraints on behaviour, effectively denied their own responsibility in favour of placing blame on other actors. However, all participants emphasised their own role as consumers in the quest to improve porn production ethics and labour conditions alongside an acknowledgement of the role they felt the state, industry and other agents should play in this mission:

> "We do [have responsibility as consumers], because if no one is going to watch child pornography no one will abuse children and make child pornography...I think that in today's society it's a little bit optimistic to think that [industry] will be driven by anything other than profit…It's kind of like the whole minimum wage discussion, you know - who's job is it to ensure that workers are paid enough? Because obviously an employer would like to pay the least amount possible, so the government should [also] protect people by giving, making sure that there's a legal minimum wage."
> – *Natasha*

Such sentiments were often complemented by lamentations of the apparent lack of effective action on the part of such actors, as will be discussed later in the chapter.

Participant rationalisations for sub-optimal ethical consumption choices thus appear, in many ways, to resist assimilation into the framework of defensive argumentation put forward by Sykes and Matza. On the whole, participants did not deny their responsibility for ethical porn decision-making; rather, some simply noted other areas of responsibility that also demanded their time, money and attention. They also didn't deny that their choices could cause harm; though equally, they did not feel that discontinuing their behaviour would necessarily reverse or prevent that harm from being enacted. Interviewees did not refute the victimhood of those exploited in the industry, nor the role of consumers at large in helping to perpetuate or dismantle that system; even as they did point to other actors that should also be held accountable. And finally, they tended not to appeal to higher loyalties per se, nonetheless noting how the wide range of ethical concerns and limitations on their capacity to act on all simultaneously made ethical decision-making more difficult, sometimes requiring them to prioritise.

This relative divergence begs the question of whether participant rationalisations ought only to be considered insincere excuses for behaviour similar to those of Sykes and Matza's "delinquents", or whether they may, in part or in whole, represent genuine explanations for decision-making that substantiate seemingly incongruous choices. Indeed, the notion of limited time and energy expressed by participants can be likened to

the “emotional resource limitations” discussed by Weber and Lindemann (2007: 196). Rather than simply serving as a retroactive behavioural excuse, the authors find that such restrictions do in fact serve to “constrain optimization, preventing the operation of otherwise rational hedonic editing.” Similarly, Antonetti and Maklan (2014b) and Newman and Trump (2017) discuss the effects of behavioural control and perceived consumer efficacy on consumer decision-making. The authors conclude that both confidence in one’s ability to complete an action and belief in the impact or efficacy of such actions do reveal themselves as key (de/)motivators for ethical decision-making. As such, participant explanations and rationalisations of their porn consumption choices could perhaps be framed, to some extent, as an awareness of such factors. In support of this, it is worth drawing upon Newman and Trump’s (*ibid*.) theorisations that feelings of guilt – as well as pride – are most commonly correlated with a sense of personal responsibility rather than deflection of blame. Thus, participants’ discussions of guilt and appraisals of decision-making deemed ethically sub-optimal may be seen as a constructive part of the reparative process, rather than solely as post hoc attempts to explain away questionable behaviour.

That is not to say participants denied that such rationalisations helped mitigate negative emotions and dissonance arising from their porn consumption; indeed this link represents a well-established notion within consumer research (Mazar et al. 2008; Gregory-Smith et al. 2013). Rather, it is to suggest that dismissing such rationalisations as unfounded, defensive excuses for undesirable behaviour would be unwise. Whilst much of the literature frames consumer rationalisation as a way to deflect blame and responsibility, interviewees in this study rather acknowledged their responsibility and sought to fulfil their sense of duty, whilst also highlighting the role of others in achieving ethical ends. As such, instead of treating explanations of behaviour as necessarily suspicious due to the associated self-serving outcome of reducing guilty feelings, it may also be prudent to recognise the extent to which respondents may be pointing to genuine obstacles and contextual factors that require attention. Taking such insights seriously may, in fact, help to illuminate additional routes to advancing industry ethics that do not rely solely on the promise of consumer choice – which has thus far seemingly failed to yield the desired results.

Meanwhile, returning to our account of behaviour rationalisation, it should be noted that upon engaging with this reparative process successfully, participants generally described giving little thought to pornography until next prompted to use or reflect on it. If they were unsuccessful in rationalising, accepting or dismissing dissonance, however, respondents sought to negotiate feelings of guilt through behaviour change. This supports Antonetti and Maklan's (2014b: 117) assertion that a reduced ability to neutralise guilt renders them "more likely to behave sustainably" and supports the link between guilt and action readiness recorded in studies across the field (Frijda et al. 1989; Hoffman 1982; Newman and Trump 2017; Peloza et al. 2013; Tangney and Dearing 2002).

Negotiation (134 references)

Given the clear associations participants made between feminism and ethics, and the steadfast feminist identifications they themselves maintained, moral identity was framed as central to participating feminists' sense of self. Aquino and Reed (2002) posit that the inclination to repair feelings of post-consumption dissonance or guilt, through modified future behavioural intentions, manifests itself most prominently amongst those with this type of strong ethical self-identity. Such reparative actions were indeed identified in the interview responses from participating feminists. These included attempts to avoid 'suspicious-looking' material; choosing porn featuring models perceived to be less vulnerable; doing background research and seeking out more female-produced and/or 'ethical' porn; paying for porn; rating porn and reporting abusive content; using written or animated porn; reading author preambles and disclaimers or watching pre- and post-scene interviews with performers; using porn less frequently; and taking other types of action outside of the consumption context. The most recurrent themes that have not received attention elsewhere in the thesis will be discussed in this section.

Choosing porn featuring models deemed less vulnerable:

A number of respondents discussed attempts to avoid sites and content featuring seemingly vulnerable performers. These efforts were said to involve conducting background research on models and performers, and searching for companies and websites claiming to uphold certain standards with regards to labour conditions, consent and broader ethical approaches:

> "If I have a bit more time…then I go through those [ethical porn] sites, or Google like the porn star behind it to see what kind of profile she has or he has, and whether it

> seems like she's happy with what she's doing and she's in charge of herself."
> – *Courtney*

Many highlighted the how perceptions of race, ethnicity and nationality impacted their views on performer vulnerability, intersecting with gender and class-based factors. Courtney, Charlie, Akim and Gayle, for example, noted the ways in which language barriers, discrimination and poverty affect people of colour, migrants and those living in less affluent countries more than their white, wealthy and/or English-speaking counterparts, in turn rendering them more vulnerable to exploitation.

Akim pointed out how he believed porn produced in countries with high standards of living and tight labour regulations to be more likely to feature consenting performers with legal protections, viable alternative career options, and support networks. He also made associations between the porn industry and modern day slavery however, emphasising the vulnerability of migrants who, whilst living in "developed Western countries", may nonetheless lack the necessary networks to seek help in problematic situations. Meanwhile, Gayle described having researched webcam performers upon discovering her partner's use of cam services, noting concern at the apparent overrepresentation of young women from poorer countries. This led her to question the level of agency that could really be demonstrated in contexts where few other income opportunities appeared to be available. This sentiment was echoed elsewhere in the interviews:

> "I'm almost always watching American based porn with American actresses, maybe because I have some random idea that Eastern European women are more likely to be trafficked or something like that." - *Charlie*

Charlie went on to discuss looking for porn featuring older women, who she felt would be more likely to "*know their own minds*", and therefore engage in porn modelling as an agentive career choice rather than a necessary means for survival in lieu of alternative options. Nonetheless, participants also acknowledged that – outside the context of sex trafficking, modern day slavery, and other crimes understood to be coercive by definition – "*free choice*" could not easily be determined or even defined. Some made reference here to socialist perspectives on wage labour more widely:

> "[When] it's like porn or starving to death you know – nobody should be faced with that choice. Or even, like living in poverty to any extent. I guess that goes to much deeper societal issues than just the porn industry… If people need to work jobs really to what extent are they free? Can we consider pornography a form of wage slavery? In certain cases I would say so. So, I guess in order to solve problems like wage slavery you'd need a pretty drastic shift in how society functions… People need like a stronger

> social safety net so they're not forced into things they don't want to do, like porn in some instances." – *Akim*

These discussions around agency and vulnerability are reflective of wider arguments taking place within the feminist community. Indeed, Bell (1994: 11) notes that much feminist critique of sex worker rights discourse revolves around the notion that "prostitution can not be voluntary in a racist, sexist, capitalist, patriarchal social field." She also points out that sex worker rights groups do not always disavow this sentiment per se; that many simply regard sex work to be "as free a choice as other choices made in a capitalist, patriarchal, and racist system." Similarly Pitcher (2015) highlights how the availability of alternative employment options for sex workers is, in many ways, reflective of the wider obstacles and opportunities impacting people's entry into jobs across the labour economy. It is argued that, whilst a lack of alternative income opportunities serves as motivation for some to enter the industry, there are instances in which this line of work may be more actively chosen. Schreiber (2015: 260) refers to this as a spectrum of volition, rather than a dichotomy of free choice versus coercion: "after all most of us who work for wages see what we do as some mix of free will and obligation." These debates can similarly be identified in the complex and sometimes conflicted accounts of feminist-identified porn consumers.

Using written or animated porn:

As touched upon in the previous chapter, the simultaneous centrality of both fantasy and authenticity to the porn consumption project was emphasised by most respondents, and articulated in terms of 'plausible fantasy' or similar. This was often discussed with reference to non-consent themes in porn, wherein it was the authenticity of pain or domination that viewers sought in addition to the authenticity of performer pleasure. In such cases, participants looked for consensual non-consent scenes that were realistic, but which at the same time were also able to assure the viewer that they were not actually watching "*real-life*" abuse. In order to feel reassured about the absence of abuse in pornographic material used, participants such as Helen, Leticia, Lacey and Charlie described seeking out written porn in an effort to overcome this consensual catch 22.

> "In the heat of the moment where I'm like, right I've got ten minutes, I'm going to have fun with myself, I never stop to do that kind of consumer check, even though…when I'm not in an aroused state, I'm well aware of…the ethical problems with the industry… I think it's definitely easier with written porn… when it's written, then the actors are in your head and…you don't have to worry that they're getting hurt because they're imaginary." – *Charlie*

Similarly, Lacey noted the ways in which written porn helped her overcome feelings of guilt around porn more generally, and her wider concerns about sexual objectification:

> "Things like erotic fiction I've come to like...because…this makes me feel less guilty. Not guilt-free, but less guilty. So, I'm like, I feel like this is, this is what works for me in terms of like ethics and like consumption and, like, objectifying people's bodies and things like that."

Meanwhile, Gayle discussed exploring animated *hentai* porn in order to try and resolve her fears around unwittingly watching video porn in which real people might be being exploited or coerced. Whist she felt this helped eschew anxieties around performer consent and labour conditions, Gayle nonetheless noted content-based issues with *hentai*, expressing concern that much of the genre featured animated portrayals of non-consent on the part of seemingly young girls. The tension between ethicality of production and ethicality of content thereby emerges once again as pertinent to the experiences of feminist consumers.

Using porn less frequently:

In a similar manner to the "voluntary simplifiers" (Gregg 1936) of the ethical consumption arena, some participants in this study claimed to have reduced their porn use or to be making an effort to do so. Gayle, for example, found herself unable to completely reconcile her desire to use porn with her feminism, and purported to have decreased her consumption of pornography as a result:

> "I'm very ambivalent at the moment and that I just have a lot of questions and concerns about it and haven't really found something that alleviates that to, you know, 100%. And therefore it's something that I just don't participate in too much, because it's like, too many ethical quandaries about it. But...and also that it's, so I think as with anything, it's part of a journey, you know."

Leticia also claimed to have reduced her porn use, finding herself increasingly dissatisfied with the content she viewed and concerned about its potential impact on others.

Likewise Lacey sought to minimise her porn consumption, recalling instances of periodically deleting the smartphone application relied upon to access pornographic texts, and expressing hope for a time in the future when she would no longer need to use porn at all. Whilst they had yet to reach a firm decision on the moral nature of porn itself, Lacey and Gayle feared that porn consumption potentially represented an inherently un-feminist pursuit; an anxiety that ultimately inspired a quest to eliminate porn altogether from their day-to-day life:

> "Well, there can be feminist [produced] porn, but is it inherently feminist? And I don't know, I don't want to...I wouldn't want to, like label things as, like, all pornography is objectifying, because I don't know...but I want to say yes, maybe it is." – *Lacey*

Such claims are, once again, reflective of ongoing debates and tensions within feminism: sex positive feminism that seeks to promote the free expression of diverse sexualities; and anti-porn feminism that seeks to eliminate objectifying sexual representations. Both perspectives represented powerful arguments for many of the feminists interviewed, often resulting in a degree of ambivalence or uncertainty towards porn. Such fundamental ambiguities in turn contributed to a sense of irreconcilable dissonance that, for them, only abstention could eliminate.

Conscience processing

Whilst not all participants experienced negative emotional responses to porn or feelings of dissonance – with some in fact describing positive responses and complete congruity between ethics and practice – each nonetheless recalled conversations with friends or internal contemplative moments during which they found themselves reflecting upon porn and consumer ethics. Feminist consumers experiencing guilt described a process of reconciling emotional responses to their porn use through acceptance, dismissal and rationalisation of dissonance. If this conciliatory process proved unsuccessful, these individuals sought to revisit their understandings of acceptable practice and/or claimed to modify their behaviour intentions accordingly. This observation remains consistent with Newman and Trump's (2017: 599) conclusions asserting the reparative nature of consumer decision-making:

> *Individuals are typically motivated to behave in a constructive way to repair the negative emotional state that occurs if guilt is present (Baumeister et al., 1994, Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995; Frijda et al., 1989; Hoffman, 1982; Tangney et al., 1996b). This reparative motivation to alleviate feelings of guilt is consistent with emotion regulation in general (e.g., Cohen, Pham, & Andrade, 2008), whereby people are particularly driven to avoid negative emotional states.*

For participants in this study, guilt that could not be otherwise reconciled served as an ineludible prompt for renegotiating how to traverse the complex terrain of porn and consumer ethics. In turn, behaviour change intentions were based upon redefinitions of 'the unconscionable' and, as a consequence, the fresh demarcation of that which could be considered acceptable practice. In this context, the line of unconscionability appeared to be set at different levels for each individual and was drawn in very different ways, often using divergent rationales. Comparable observations around the variability of subjective ethical norms have been made in similar studies:

> *One individual may experience guilt for an action that falls short of his or her standards whereas another individual may not experience guilt for the same action because he or she does not accept or value the standard that the behavior violated (Miceli, 1992). Similarly, since people tend to rationalize their negative behaviors to avoid negative self-evaluations (Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008), successful rationalization of why one violated a standard may allow an individual to avoid experiencing guilt.*
>
> (Newman & Trump 2017: 599)

Whilst attitudes towards consumer ethics and the degree to which behaviour could be rationalised thus differed from person to person, the notion of a bright line of unconscionability nonetheless remained consistent across interviews. This saw guilt-provoking – but reconcilable – activities being deemed acceptable, and flagged irresolvable practices as demanding of further attention. Marques (2017) suggests that these "personal norms" of porn ethics revolve around legal imperatives. The present study, however, finds that many feminists remain suspicious of legal restrictions on certain content and dispense with legal guidelines in favour of their own conceptions of ethical and unethical porn products and practices. Such conceptions aligned with associated legislation to a degree, but also incorporated a range of complex and sometimes conflicting messages from family and community contexts, information resources, the press and social media, and other environmental sources outlined in Chapter 5. Furthermore, rather than representing static views, these understandings of conscionable and unconscionable practice appeared liable to change, not only informing but being informed by practice, affect and, importantly, reflexive contemplation.

Of course behaviour and behavioural intentions cannot be considered interchangeable concepts. The success or failure to act according to new (and existing) definitions of conscionablility thus has the capacity to impact the nature and direction of future trajectories along the conscionable consumption track. If we are to assume that the theoretical model of conscionable consumer experience presented here holds true, unfulfilled behaviour intentions would thus result in ongoing repetitions of this conscience processing stage, until the point at which such behaviour could either be reconciled with notions of conscionable practice or successfully modified accordingly. Feminist participants in this study found themselves at various points along this "*journey*" of conscience, as it was sometimes conceptualised. Some described very positive associations with porn, and thus – having already reconciled any perceived dissonance, or never having experienced such conflict in the first instance – rarely felt the need to venture far into the conscience processing part of the cycle. Others described a seemingly

endless cycle of behaviour change intent or hypothetical action readiness, followed by guilt, reparatory reflection, and a repetition of the offending activity. Regardless of such variation in circumstance, however, this reflexive stage in the consumption process proved central – in some form or another – to feminist experiences of porn use and conceptions of consumer ethics, across the board. Consequently, conscience processing reveals itself as a key tenet of the theoretical model presented in this thesis.

Discussion: Calling for Change (237 references)

One goal for this chapter has been to argue for the possible value of participant explanations for professedly sub-optimal ethical behaviour, regardless of the degree to which such accounts may also achieve defensive ends. This final section will explore how this bracketing of scepticism in an effort to recognise and elevate the worldviews of participating feminists – a key priority for the research – can bring to light alternative understandings of consumer ethics and new horizons for action and activism that may complement consumer choice imperatives.

Just as Sykes and Matza (1957) argue that their "delinquent" research subjects do not represent true "radicals," but rather, buy into accepted norms of moral and legal justice – simply adding caveats to excuse their deviant behaviour – so consumer researchers frame those who fail to live up to certain ethical purchasing ideals as "apologetic failures" (Carrington et al. 2014; Harris and Dumas 2009; McGregor 2008). The primacy of consumer choice and acceptance of the neoliberal status quo are taken for granted in much of this research. Accordingly, such literature revolves around a premise that the burden of responsibility for effecting change in industry ethics ought to lie with consumers, and laments their apparent tendency to deny this responsibility through recourse to behavioural justifications:

> *Consumers are powerful actors in the context of the current societal movement promoting socially responsible behaviours. First, they have the power to modify their consumption behaviour to make it more respectful of the environment, of animals and of other inhabitants of the earth. Second, in a business ethics perspective, they have the power to force companies all over the world to embrace the socially responsible paradigm, by voicing their opposition to unethical business practices and preferring products and services that meet society's ethical standards.*
>
> (d'Astous and Legendre 2009: 265)

The analysis of interview transcripts for this study, however, suggests that London feminist consumers of porn often do not buy into such neoliberal ethical imperatives

entirely, or even at all. Instead, rather than representing accepting yet apologetic failures of a neoliberal capitalist economy, participating feminists tended towards rejecting capitalist values and questioned the efficacy of consumer choice. They did not present themselves as having failed the system, but rather as swimming against it. In this light, that which might be framed as apologetic and defensive justification elsewhere in the literature could perhaps be recast as somewhat genuine opposition and calls for change.

Whilst it is the tendency of ethical consumption researchers within business and marketing to position consumer demand and corresponding opportunities for corporate profit as the best or only means to improve industry standards, participants in this study suggested ways they felt this might be complemented by state, industry and third sector intervention. In this way they rejected the notion that individuals must bear the majority or entirety of the responsibility in this arena, highlighting how other actors ought also to be held to account and how their efforts might, in turn, foster more effective action on the part of consumers. This stands in stark contradiction to business studies scholarship that recommends exploring tactics for increasing the burden of duty shouldered by the consumer, and capitalising on feelings of guilt that such strategies may thereby be able to invoke:

> *The evidence from extant literature suggests that experiences of guilt exert a positive influence on consumers' future intentions to engage in sustainable consumption…There is, therefore, room for further research to understand how emotions can be used to undermine the neutralization process often used by consumers when disengaging with ethical issues.*
>
> (Antonetti and Maklan 2014a: 729)

Whilst this PhD study supports the link between guilt and action readiness, it resists the conclusion that exacerbating consumer guilt necessarily represents a desirable course of action. In fact, this is something that participants reject, instead emphasising the need to highlight all the areas of responsibility and to call on a range of agents for change – including consumers – to act on it. In this vein, Marques (2017: 13) points out:

> *While neo-liberal rhetoric valorizes individual choices, and consumerist society is predicated on the notion of a multiplicity of opportunities and selections, the reality is that individual decision-making is done within a constraint of available options.*

Indeed, the idea that not everything can be solved through neoliberal self-governance, especially in the context of limited choice and limited resource, served as a leitmotif throughout participant interviews. This was accompanied by a general under-confidence in the efficacy of feminist consumer choice within a capitalist economy seemingly at odds with feminist aims and a neoliberal society made up of non-feminist

majority demographics. Instead, it was believed that the task of turning a feminist ripple of dissent into a wave of change across the industry could be best achieved through shared accountability and collaborative action. Such calls to action included more effective work on the part of the state, third sector and community groups, industry players, and the general public.

Government action (56 references)

Aside from party political desires for a change in leadership, participants expressed a number of calls for state action. Most of these revolved around a wish to see tangible initiatives to improve the labour conditions of porn performers, as a priority issue:

> "I think [the government should address] how this is being produced. [That] is the very first stage I think. That's a must…And I think with the content, um, there's a lot of responsibility on the producers as well, but that one is something that I think the consumers can weigh in a lot to support." – *Courtney*

Rights and protections for porn performers that participants wished to be enacted included (1) the decriminalisation of sex work with a view to enabling greater industry transparency, stigma reduction, and access to justice for aggrieved employees; (2) more effective regulation of agents and studios, to grant performers greater security and protection at work; and (3) meaningful consultation with sex workers that could help improve policy and avoid or reverse unhelpful legislation. Relatedly, they also wished for the government to relinquish control over the types of content being produced and for porn censorship laws to be lifted, particularly those seen to restrict the sexual expression of women and sexual minorities. These calls for change largely echo demands made by the sex worker rights community in London.

Improvements to sex and relationships education and expanding the curriculum to include 'porn literacy' was also suggested by many respondents, who felt that a major issue was the way in which young people may use porn for educational purposes in lieu of more appropriate sexual health and education resources:

> "I think that today, it acts, and I'm going to say this – unfortunately – as a kind of sexual education tool, because sexual education doesn't exist in the way that it should. I think that a lot of people, with an emphasis on young people, go looking for answers and that's the only place answers exist. Now, the answers aren't necessarily correct, relevant or realistic in porn, and so a lot of times people get the wrong answers about what real sex looks like and how things work or how they should work, or whatever… So today the impact that it has is not a very positive one in terms of, it's the only teacher out there, and because it's in no way planned or regulated to be such a tool that it's not a very good tool." – *Natasha*

Finally, participants discussed hope for more effective poverty reduction efforts, in a broader sense. Many felt the Conservative government was failing to take adequate steps to ease the gap between rich and poor and to reduce the number of people in the UK living below the poverty line. More efficient action in this domain, they believed, could mitigate the prevalence of survival sex work.

Third sector action (10 references)

Third sector responsibilities tended to be seen in terms of information and support provision. Many discussed the need for a porn industry watchdog, supporting those experiencing discrimination or maltreatment in the sector, and providing reliable and accurate information about company practice to discerning consumers:

> "It's rather a disappointing thought, that, you know, there is no real, clear way to find out that this is made by everyone's consent, people are paid properly, they're using all, you know…they're making their tests, they're using condoms, or whatever, you know all these things… How can I know, and if I have to go through all this… I mean ok, if there was a company that would, you know, really prove ok these are made ethically, you know what I mean? But something like that doesn't exist… it could be that there would be…an organisation that goes and checks in there all this, and addresses them, you know [and] if you have more viewers saying I'm going to stop watching you if you have those things there, then they will respond more." – *Helen*

Protection for people on their way to and from shoots was also mentioned as a potentially useful service for porn performers, as well as stronger unionisation to support sex workers' demands for fair treatment and remuneration.

Industry action (51 references)

In terms of industry responsibility, participants highlighted the role they felt porn companies and studios ought to play in making business practices more transparent.

> "It's difficult because websites don't take responsibility for [their ethical practice]. It's not really even a conversation. I think there are some niche porn sites and porn companies that make sure to kind of publicise their own ethical involvement, but on the whole it's a very, very marginal thing to happen." – *Yan*

Greater transparency, they believed, could help highlight malpractice as well as best practice and enable consumers to make more informed porn choices, thereby increasing demand for ethical porn products. Participants also called on industry players to ensure fair working conditions, contracts and remuneration:

> "[I'd like to see] fairer pay structures, uh, ensuring that um you could have holiday pay and sick pay included in their rates, because often there won't be a rate that's worked out on times someone's there, or, it will be per job. Erm, and you know, the job, the shoot takes what the shoot takes. And, I mean if it's, if it goes into other dates I mean you do get paid extra for that, but, yeah it um better pay structures so people understand, you know, what they're being paid is important." – *Shreya*

In addition, better representation of women and minorities in porn was discussed, with a particular emphasis on the desire to counteract the widespread exoticisation of people of colour and the fetishisation of people with non-normative body types and identities. A greater recognition of diverse audiences, it was felt, could facilitate such a shift.

Consumer and public action (104 references)

Respondents also acknowledged their own responsibilities and the role of fellow consumers with regards to porn ethics. These revolved around paying feminist producers for their work, doing research in a quiet moment to ascertain the ethicality of different companies, reporting abuse or suspected abuse if ever it was encountered, and participating in a wider porn community – especially groups dedicated to porn ethics projects:

> "[I am interested in] looking into a community of porn viewers because…porn is such a widely-consumed entertainment, and because there are some shady things that's happening as entertainment, especially when it comes to like kiddy-porn and like illegal stuff or like really abusive ones that you come across and you're like this is just absolutely disgusting. This cannot happen. If people feel comfortable telling other people, you know, I am a porn viewer, we can all be like the visuals in a way, like report pornography that is really unethical or really abusive and we would feel more comfortable reporting those incidents if we destigmatise porn viewership." – *Courtney*

Stigma-reduction was also framed as central to the porn ethics mission – ostensibly even more so than consumer choice obligations – and thus represented a key call to action for feminist and porn user demographics, as well as the wider public.

As such, feminist consumers interviewed for this research clearly highlighted a number of methods by which to promote and facilitate the porn ethics agenda. These revolved around their own continued efforts and further input from fellow consumers, and included responsibilities that they believed to fall on other actors and agents of change. Far from suggesting that these strategies necessarily constitute cast-iron solutions to the complex issues surrounding porn industry ethics, or that the goals articulated represent universally desired outcomes, it is nonetheless the contention of this thesis that such insights ought not simply to be dismissed. Besides serving as indicators of the apparently thoughtful nature of feminist ethical decision-making in the porn consumption arena, which some have elsewhere sought to refute (Caputi 1994), such assertions may be understood – at least in part – as indicative of potential obstacles to ethical practice; obstacles that it may ultimately prove prudent to address regardless of the 'true' motivations underlying their articulation.

8. Conclusion

By means of a two-stage data collection process involving an online group activity and in-depth interviews, this research achieved its goal of extending our understanding of how feminists experience, understand and articulate their engagements with porn. Deploying grounded theory in this undertaking helped to safeguard the project's independence from pro- and anti-porn agendas – a notable aim for the project. Simultaneously, this methodological approach facilitated certain feminist imperatives by elevating individual women's 'standpoints'; encouraging participants to review and input into findings; enabling respondents to play a more agentive role in determining the direction of the research; and acknowledging the co-constructed nature of its results. In this way it heeded the recommendations put forward by Stanley and Wise (2002: 3) who maintain that truly feminist research ought to resist adopting the traditionally "scientific" stance that sees women only as the *objects* of study, that regards the researcher and their perspectives as paramount, and that does little to address relations of power between researchers and participants.

In addition to the abovementioned objectives originally stipulated for this work, the project has also enabled us to gain insights into the interaction between ethics and practice in porn consumption amongst London feminists, resulting in the development of a model for understanding this process of 'conscionable consumption'. Whilst the study itself can be said to be based on feminist epistemological foundations and, indeed, a key criterion for participation revolved around respondents' feminist identifications, it is in no way supposed that the theoretical model itself represents a universally or ideally 'feminist' way of using porn. Rather, the theoretical framework presented is simply intended as an aid to conceptualising the feminist porn consumption experience and its nuanced, complex and sometimes contradictory nature.

In particular, findings from the study suggest that feminists' experiences of porn are heavily impacted by the contexts and conditions of consumption, their knowledge and information about porn, attitudes and beliefs towards the use of porn, and the specificities of their own subjective tastes and preferences. In particular, an important influence identified was that of consumer beliefs about ethical practice, or more accurately, beliefs about what constitutes 'ethical enough'. This has been referred to throughout the thesis as the line of conscionability, and represents the border between

that which an individual considers justifiable and unjustifiable practice; a line that is liable to vary between individuals, over time and with experience. Other key influential factors observed pertain to beliefs in the efficacy of consumer choice, perceptions of one's capacity for self-control, and availability of material and emotional resources.

These perceived influences on experience are understood to impact the ethical decision-making process by facilitating the selection of certain types of content and impeding the selection of others. For example, perceptions of limited financial means was believed by a number of respondents to be a primary reason for them accessing free porn; individuals' work on other social and environmental justice issues was thought to impact their capacity to exert additional time and resources to ethical consumption efforts in the porn context; lack of information about porn industry practices, labour conditions and ethical standards purportedly left some feeling unable to make informed ethical choices; and the apparent lack of belief in the impact that a small number of feminists could feasibly make in the context of a largely non-feminist, global porn audience was experienced as a de-motivating factor when prioritising – or not – ethical considerations in porn decision-making.

Contemplative moments around such porn practices proved key to the conscionable consumption model. These porn-related self-reflections varied in form, with some expressing largely positive sentiments, and others articulating tensions and conflict. The nature of these feelings and reflections tended to correlate with the degree to which participants felt they had adhered to, or strayed from, their own conceptions of conscionable practice, and the degree to which these decisions could be justified or dismissed afterwards. Participants appeared to describe an interactive relationship between such reflections and future behavioural intentions or attitudes. Thus emerged the central concept of a consumption *cycle*, evolving and adapting with each repetition. In this way, participants appeared to conceptualise the porn ethics project as an ongoing process, rather than a status that has been – or has yet to be – achieved.

Impact

By scaling up these insights from the substantive, descriptive level, this research has been able to develop a new theoretical model for understanding consumer ethics amongst London feminists who use porn; or more precisely, a model by which London feminists

themselves understand consumer ethics and ethical practice in the context of their own porn use. Indeed, before embarking upon the final write-up stage, participants themselves approved a summary of the results presented here. The thesis in no way claims that participant testimony represents unmediated access to some objective or generalizable 'truth' about the nature of consumption. It does, however, expose the subjective truths espoused by participants themselves, and thus potentially holds a great deal of value within academia, industry and policy alike.

Academia

In a scholarly capacity, the research extends our understanding of the ways in which feminist ethics and porn use are woven together and navigated by consumers, whilst simultaneously enhancing our knowledge of porn consumption amongst a previously unexplored demographic within porn studies. It presents a new theoretical model for conceptualising the role of ethics in the consumption process, representing an original contribution to knowledge not only in the field of porn studies, but also to that of consumer research. It furthermore makes an empirical contribution to the field, granting certain theories of consumer ethics empirical support from a hitherto under-researched substantive area of inquiry – online pornography. It also sheds light on other less explored areas within the field, such as the role of affect and emotion in ethical decision-making. For example, Antonetti and Maklan (2014a: 717) point out that consumer ethics research "has been mostly focused on cognitive processes and often disregards the role of emotions in sustainable consumption choices." By highlighting the role of emotion – particularly that of guilt – in the conscionable consumption process, and the ways in which affect appears to influence consumer behaviour, this study adds to the relatively scant literature touching upon emotion in consumption.

The study also supports positions established in some consumer ethics studies that "conscious consumers" in real-life decision-making contexts often face "incommensurable forces" (Slater and Miller 2007: 20). They navigate these in myriad ways depending on the circumstances and consumption context, often resulting in seemingly erratic behaviour. Such behaviour can be said to reflect a complex array of conflicting priorities rather than necessarily mirroring the ethical principles of the individual in any simple or direct sense (Szmigin et al. 2009). This has been said to represent an area wherein "considerable scope" for further research remains (*ibid*.: 229).

This thesis took up such a challenge, exploring selection criteria, behavioural influences and obstacles to ethical decision-making. It ultimately invoked an ethic of care to illustrate the perceived resource limitations with regards to ethical undertakings; limitations that result in an apparent 'care deficit', whereby social and environmental needs ultimately outweigh the capacity of individuals to address them. On the other hand, it acknowledged participants' refusal to transgress certain ethical parameters regardless of other pressures and obstacles, and referred to this as the 'line' of un/conscionability. In this way it posited a new means by which to theorise how these 'incommensurable forces' upon consumers with ethical inclinations may be navigated.

Policy

Meanwhile, from a policy perspective, this research also holds value insofar as it highlights potential barriers to ethical consumption and delineates the contexts in which unethical consumer choices may be made and justified. As Astous and Legendre (2009: 265) note:

> *studies focussed on identifying the antecedents of the use of justifications for unethical consumption behaviour (e.g. consumer perceived effectiveness, knowledge about SRC [socially responsible consumption]) can help policy makers to better understand why consumers behave unethically and to come up with appropriate strategies for behavioural change.*

As such, the insights offered in this thesis could help inform policy seeking to encourage individuals to prioritise ethical considerations in their porn choices, if such a task were to be identified as a desirable goal for policy-makers. In particular, findings pertaining to the stark variation between how people defined ethical, 'ethical enough' and unethical practice, may prove informative for government departments such as the Behavioural Insights Team, whose aim is to develop 'nudging' policies that will encourage positive social action amongst consumer-citizens (Hancock 2015). Rather than limiting freedoms by enforcing an outright ban on certain types of content – the approach the government appears to have taken thus far – nudging strategies might more effectively focus on helping individuals act in accordance with their own ethical priorities over and above externally imposed ones. The significance of this approach is elaborated upon further in the next section of the chapter.

A lot of research so far has assumed a simple connection between the ethical principles that consumers profess and the actions they go on to take, resulting in confusion at the seeming disparity between the two in reality. In fact, findings from this

research suggest that, rather than simply dictating how individuals are likely to act, a person's ethical orientations are more likely to dictate which actions they are likely to avoid. As participants in this study highlighted, eschewing what is *un*conscionable appears to represent a particularly crucial dimension of consumption ethics. As such, useful nudges in this regard may resemble those that help individuals avoid impulsively making decisions they will later condemn as 'unconscionable'. In light of participants' scepticism about the existence of an ultimately 'ethical consumer', this thesis also suggests that nudges may incorporate to their advantage strategies that highlight the small steps being taken by 'ordinary people' across society, rather than a select few believed to represent little more than the unattainable 'ethical consumer' ideal.

Finally, given the significance of self-reflection to the conscionable consumption cycle – and importantly, the potential that reflection seems to hold for improving or consolidating ethical decision-making – efforts to promote discussion about porn in relevant private and public forums may represent another fruitful area of intervention. This would have the additional benefit of helping to reduce stigma around pornography and the sex industry, which, as has been elaborated upon elsewhere in the thesis, could have positive implications for those in front of the camera as well as those in front of the screen.

Industry

Insofar as industry is concerned, the findings presented in this thesis may serve as a useful resource first and foremost for those seeking to reach feminist porn audiences. Whilst the results cannot be generalised across the population, they nonetheless offer insights into the nature of London feminists' engagement with porn as well as an empirical foundation upon which to speculate more broadly, each of which may be utilised for marketing purposes amongst feminist porn production studios especially. As we know, companies such as Pink and White Productions employ a business model that "explicitly speaks of and operates through a feminist ethics" in pursuit of a feminist audience (Mondin 2014). Accordingly, insights from this study potentially have much to offer such ventures. For example, Yeow, Dean and Tucker (2014: 8) draw our attention to how studies repeatedly demonstrate that:

> *an understanding of how consumers use neutralisation techniques to justify not changing behaviour can be used to formulate appropriate communication strategies which directly address those techniques themselves.*

In this way, feminist porn producers may gain valuable information from findings pertaining to the reflective stage of the conscionable consumption cycle, particularly where dissonance was experienced as a result of unrealised intentions to use pay-for feminist porn platforms; a scenario described by a number of respondents. Attention to descriptions of how the context and conditions of consumption interact with such negotiations may also prove useful for informing marketing strategies targeted at the type of feminist audience interviewed for this research.

Caruana, Carrington and Chatzidakis (2016: 216) argue that there exists a great deal of opportunity for "cross-disciplinary and novel approaches that can promote radically different understandings of ethical consumption". They have expressed a wish to see further research that will help us to broaden our understandings of the 'words-deeds' consumption contradictions embodied by consumers, and call for work that moves "beyond a simple and relatively unreflective observation of 'attitude-behaviour gaps'". Arguably, the project at hand does just this, directly addressing such areas that remain relatively opaque within the literature by means of cross-disciplinary approaches. In particular, there emerge three specific domains in which this thesis helps extend knowledge about ethical consumption and the 'words-deeds' disparity. Namely, it does so by (1) offering new perspectives on the debate around the ethical consumption 'gap' itself; (2) emphasising the role of motivational influences on (impulsive and non-impulsive) decision-making; and (3) highlighting perceived barriers to ethical consumption as well as ways they might be addressed. The chapter proceeds by elaborating upon the contributions of this thesis for academia, policy and industry with specific reference to these three discussion points.

Addressing the 'gap'

A key finding of this research pertains to how we understand the ethical-consumption gap – or words and deeds disparity – and, relatedly, how we understand the figure of the 'ethical consumer' itself. Namely it suggests that both concepts may ultimately prove to be fallacies.

If we are to believe that the ethical consumption gap represents a gulf between what people say and what they do, then it becomes crucial to understand what it is that they mean when they profess a willingness to make ethical consumption choices, and to examine what happens in the space between intention and behaviour. This thesis has

suggested that, firstly, definitions of ethical consumption differ widely. Whilst it might be assumed that buying fairtrade, or in the case of porn, buying self-proclaimed 'feminist' porn or accessing 'porn-for-women', would by default represent the ethical option, this was not necessarily a view shared by all. Some remained dubious of the capacity for consumption – whether fairtrade or not – to address the social and environmental ills generated by capitalism. Others felt that porn-for-women addressed only content-based concerns, ignoring the more important ethical issues around production. Meanwhile, there existed a view that porn could never truly be an ethical or feminist pursuit at all. Thus, engaging in 'ethical' consumer choices came to mean very different things depending on the individual. As Szmigin, Carrigan and McEachern (2009: 224) point out:

> *Self-report scales employed [in quantitative consumption research] may result in responses that appear to be similar, but are underpinned by a variety of meanings.*

As such, we must be careful not to confuse seeming anomalies between what consumers say they will do and what they actually do, with a misunderstanding of terms. An awareness of these variable understandings of ethics in porn has potentially significant implications for porn studios, companies and performers wishing to better meet the needs and ethical imperatives of feminist consumers, as well as for researchers exploring the apparent ethical consumption 'gap'.

Secondly, the ethical consumption gap may only be considered a 'gap', per se, for as long as the space between professed intentions and subsequent behaviour remains unexplained. With greater understanding of the journey between intention and action, this unexplained gulf, instead, becomes characterised by a series of identifiable steps. This research has helped to elucidate some of the possible steps undertaken by feminist before, during and after the point of (porn) consumption, and thus the threads that may link sometimes seemingly disjointed intentions and corresponding behaviours. These steps include both cognitive and affective appraisals of content and choices that may modify intentions or impact the selection process. Whilst not claiming to reveal any objective or unmediated truth, this thesis – by shedding light on consumer experiences of the journey between intent and action – provides "flashes of insight" into certain decision-making imperatives that may currently be obscured or dismissed under the auspices of an ethical consumption gap. It may be useful to build upon the qualitative work done for this project by exploring these preliminary insights amongst a larger and more generalisable sample, making use of the quantitative research methods commonly

found in consumer ethics research within business and marketing, and social and cognitive psychology.

Finally, discussions about the ethical consumption gap often revolve around binary notions of the ethical consumer versus the unethical consumer – or, with regards to the latter, the consumer who keeps up ethical appearances, but ultimately fails to live up to their professed ethical consumer status. This thesis demonstrates that such understandings contrast starkly with feminist conceptualisations thereof. Rather, participants tend to describe ethical consumption – in porn and elsewhere – as a lifelong project, echoing Siegle's (2006 in Szmigin et al. 2009) notion of a "work-in-progress". It marks the difference between notions of an ideal 'ethical consumer' and the purportedly more realistic 'consumer with ethical principles'; principles that individuals are more and less able to apply in particular circumstances. In the context of feminism and porn, this becomes a distinction between the 'feminist porn consumer' – which can perhaps never have a singular universally agreed-upon definition – versus the 'porn consumer with feminist principles', with each seeking to uphold these principles in different ways across different circumstances.

As such, the figure of the 'ethical consumer' is replaced by self-characterisations more closely resembling an ongoing 'work-in-progress'. Likewise, notions of an 'ethical consumption gap' become increasingly obscured, in favour of a somewhat more complex 'conscionable consumption process' that better accounts for the incommensurable forces and perceived resource limitations that may result in seeming incongruity between intention and action.

Such conclusions are perhaps in keeping with Szmigin, Carrigan and McEachern's (2009) position that, in practice, the application of ethics is not simple. They suggest that consumers are liable to act 'flexibly' in ways that may seem to us incongruous, but that for them do not pose significant conflict:

> *The concept of flexibility offers an explanation to what may appear as inconsistencies between attitudes and behaviour but which do not create dissonance problems that threaten the person's self-integrity.*
>
> (*ibid*.: 229)

Due to perceived limitations on one's capacity to act habitually and reliably according to the many ethical concerns and care-based imperatives we value, a flexible approach – accompanied by an all-important inviolable bottom line – was instead established. If we were to examine where and how this line is drawn for each individual rather than

measuring the degree of separation between consumers' professed ethical values and hypothetical future intentions, we might expect the ethical consumption 'gap' to eventually diminish. Testing how inquiries into the gap fare when working from a model of 'conscionable consumption' instead of traditional definitions of 'ethical consumption' may shed more light on this speculation, especially when broadening the focus from porn consumption to include other consumer industries.

In many ways, however, this study thus supports Gregory-Smith's (2013: 1219) assertion that the ethical consumption gap is, at best, transitory, fluctuating according to contexts and conditions of consumption for each individual:

> *Overall, the current findings highlight the necessity of focusing on consumer decision making at an individual level given the multidimensional and miscellaneous behaviour of each consumer. The results highlight the complexity of decision making in ethical consumption and consumption more generally. As McDonald et al. (2006) state, 'consumption behaviour is unpredictable and heavily context dependent' (p. 530). When the findings reported here are considered in conjunction with Chatzidakis et al. (2007) and McEachern et al. (2010), then the debate about the attitude–behaviour gap in ethical choice becomes more enlightened. At the individual level, the gap is transitory; it comes and goes. It arises because of contextual factors, and it is facilitated by rationalisation and the dissonant behaviour that gives rise to the gap which is often emotionally driven.*

It must also be noted that a feature of the ethical consumption 'gap' is that the individuals in question do foster a sense of ethical self and espouse ethical intentions in the first place. This was also the case with feminist participants in this study – their feminist self-identity was important to them and thus conflict sometimes ensued when they felt their feminist integrity being compromised. The degree to which such ethical self-identities are important to porn consumers who do not identify as feminist represents an area for further investigation. As Lades (2014) highlights, nudging strategies designed to help individuals act in accordance with their ethical self-identities such as those mentioned earlier presuppose an existing ethical self-image. As such, this thesis does not assume that the strategies mentioned would necessarily be effective beyond the feminist demographic. It does assert, however, that an inquiry into the degree to which ethics feature as a central facet of people's identities more broadly would be a useful exercise, along with a study of how and whether stronger senses of ethical selves can or should be fostered in ways that Lades (*ibid*.: 125) suggests:

> *Governmental programs can foster such self-definitions by, for example, supporting famous role-models that appear in the media behaving in environmentally-friendly ways.*

Thus this research makes a contribution within but also beyond the scope of media and cultural studies or gender and sexuality studies. Its insights serve to support research findings from within business and marketing, as well as cognitive and social psychology, which point to the complexity of consumer ethical decision-making; the importance of the contexts and conditions of consumption; and the transitory or otherwise obscure nature of the ethical consumption gap. Accordingly, the thesis offers its own theoretical model for understanding consumer ethics within the porn context, whilst also extending and supporting formal theories of consumer ethics and the ethical consumption gap more broadly.

Understanding motivations

Whilst this project of course took steps to minimise social desirability bias during interviews, it is nonetheless the case that the research aim was ultimately to take participant voices at face value, understanding porn consumption in terms of how feminists themselves experienced and articulated it. As such, the thesis itself does not make any claims to unmediated access to universal truths of consumption; rather it recognises that the results presented are based on feminists' experience and mediated through their descriptions. This data, it is argued, offers a number of illuminating insights that do not depend upon positivist claims to objectivity for their value. For example, irrespective of the degree to which professed barriers to ethical consumption represent genuine explanations for behaviour or simply post-hoc excuses, as Astous and Legendre (2009: 265) assert:

> *Knowing what type of arguments consumers use to excuse their unethical actions is a first step in developing efficient strategies aimed at changing their behaviour.*

Even within a more positivist logic, it can be argued that the cited motivations for ethical consumption – including any affected by social desirability bias – retain value. If social pressure and norms can themselves be deemed a key factor in individuals' decision-making processes, as Ajzen (1988, 1985 and 1991) and TPB proponents claim, then insights into the types of narrative participants feel they 'should be' articulating remain valuable insofar as they point to those potentially significant social imperatives. In this way, responses affected by social desirability bias may, if nothing else, help expose the norms that a given individual deems most important – regardless of the degree to which the motivations and intentions they inspire are actualised. That is not to say that social desirability ought to be encouraged in this type of research, but rather that social

desirability bias need not impede the discovery of important insights, such as the peer-induced imperatives that may affect an individual's porn decision-making. Meanwhile, for expressions of socially undesirable or less desirable reasons for consumption, the larger challenge arguably revolves around encouraging these to be articulated at all.

Insofar as motivational factors themselves are concerned, the overwhelmingly dominant reason cited for using pornography revolved around arousal. Participants usually described feeling horny or excited prior to using porn, which translated into a desire to experience further arousal and climax. As such, motivations for doing so were frequently triggered by hedonistic desires or urges, with ensuing behaviours commonly representing spontaneous actions based on how the individual anticipated being able to satisfy those desires most effectively. Participant responses indicated that such motivations activated an affective mode of decision-making, which some felt overrode more rational and feminism-informed porn choices. Weber and Lindemann (2007: 194-195) describe this as the attraction-avoidance mode of decision-making, whereby a focus on the anticipated immediate emotional outcomes associated with those choices – rather than longer-term considerations – lead an individual to approach or avoid a particular action:

> *People often experience the attraction–avoidance reaction as "going with their gut" because the processing leading up to this reaction is conducted at an unconscious level.*

Some participants, on the other hand, described less 'urgent' and more rational porn decision-making, almost always resulting in porn choices that aligned easily with their ethical convictions. In this way, we see how the motivations for using porn and decision-making priorities may be different for impulsive and non-impulsive consumption contexts, with the former being more strongly associated with the satisfaction of immediate sexual desires often with less regard for ethics, and the latter more easily incorporating a desire to explore products they considered to represent superior ethical standards.

Such discrepancies suggest that, if we are to facilitate improved ethical porn decisions amongst those who wish to take them, rational arguments that appeal to cognitive sensibilities may not suffice, since those making rational porn decisions were least likely to describe experiencing feelings of conflict and dissonance after the fact. Rather, strategies focusing on gut decision-making faculties – or decision making 'by the heart' – as well as 'by the book' rules or duties may prove more effective. With regards to the latter, Weber and Lindemann (2007: 194-195) distinguish between three types of by-

the-book decision-making modes: case-based, whereby "the decision maker is typically an expert with a memory store of specific situations…and their appropriate associated actions"; rule-based, involving the invocation of a relevant rule, such as a statutory law or personal policy; and role-based, wherein a decision maker's social position or identity goes hand-in-hand with certain anticipated obligations, such as doctor or parent.

A major difficulty in attempts to appeal to affective and rule-based decision-making faculties, however, revolves around the widely differing tastes amongst individuals, and the extremely variable understandings of what might count as conscionable and unconscionable practice in the porn context. It would be difficult, for example, to successfully anticipate the 'gut' instincts of such diverse audiences. Equally so, it is hard to imagine a set of rules constituting ethical or conscionable porn practice that could be universally agreed-upon. Instead, encouraging individuals to formulate their own rules upon which they could rely in moments of impulse would be necessary. This is especially the case given that attempts to change behaviour according to a singular view of the ethical imperative for consumers risks imposing a moral hierarchy in ways that have been condemned – for their class-based exclusivity, for example – and which may foster a type of sexual shame that participating feminists sought to resist.

Tackling obstacles

Calculation-based decision-making, on the other hand, is not to be completely forgotten. Participants who were inclined to make more ethical decisions – through personal ethical motivations, socially-prescribed imperatives, or a desire to maintain the integrity of one's moral self-identity – nonetheless claimed to encounter obstacles to ethical decision-making. A significant barrier in this regard pertained to the lack of transparency within the porn industry, and a resultant lack of clarity or understanding around which companies were operating in ethically sound ways. This went hand-in-hand with a desire to see specific types of porn that could satisfy often very niche sexual tastes. Gaining sufficient information to cross-check which studios were producing content that matched an individual's personal tastes, and which of those were also operating ethically, was described as a significant challenge for respondents. A number of participants suggested that the founding of an organisation to review the ethical standing of porn companies and studios would be very useful in this regard. This, it was speculated, might take the form of an independent body, similar to the Fairtrade Foundation or Soil Association, which

would provide certification services. Community review initiatives such as Tripadvisor, which enable individuals to review products and services according to various criteria, could serve as an alternative model.

Other obstacles included perceptions of a limited capacity to act upon ethical concerns and care-based imperatives. Participants articulated a plethora of social and environmental issues about which they were concerned; so many, in fact, that they found it difficult to act upon all of the issues that were important to them. Difficulties arose from material impracticalities, such as budget, as well as immaterial ones, such as a lack of emotional energy. A key factor in determining which issues to prioritise spending time, money and energy on revolved around impact. This was articulated most commonly in terms of perceived consumer effectiveness or PCE. The results of this research thus support Antonetti and Maklan's (2014b) conclusions that individuals need to feel that the ethical choices they make can actually have a positive impact in reality. They emphasise that many studies from a range of domains, with a range of demographics, across a range of geographical locations, have similarly highlighted "the important role of perception of effectiveness in promoting sustainable consumption" (*ibid*.: 118)

According to participant responses articulated in this study, a key means by which to foster perceptions of effectiveness pertains to the task of enabling the individual to see other agents also taking action. There is a general opinion that significant inroads into the considerable challenges that the pornography industry potentially poses cannot be made through consumer choice at the individual level. Whilst it could, of course, be – and has been – argued that this line of argumentation represents little more than a post-hoc justification for sub-optimal ethical choices on the part of consumers, this thesis contends that it may be prudent to give tentative credence to participant testimony, in a way that does't appear to have been prioritised in consumer ethics research to date. Rather than adopting a position of skepticism and assuming the worst in our respondents with a view to reaching some objective singular truth, it has been the aim of this project to elevate the voices of consumers. This was considered a priority not only by virtue of the useful outcomes that can be gleaned from such insights into subjective consumer experience, but also in light of the feminist obligation not to overlook or overwrite the experiences of individuals. In this way, it is argued that a feminist approach would not dismiss consumer 'justifications' for behaviour as attempts to 'rationalise away' responsibility, but would

consider the merits of these claims. It is for this reason that the thesis gives weight to a care ethics approach that recognises the genuinely limited capacities of individuals to act in ideal ethical ways, and acknowledges the role of others in facilitating ethical practice; a role that is often overlooked in neoliberal perspectives. This is especially the case since participants tended not to dismiss their own ethical responsibilities with regards to porn, but rather highlighted how their responsibilities must go hand-in-hand with obligations upon other agents, such as policy-makers and industry players themselves. It reflects a view that consumer choice, rather than necessarily being ineffective, may be more useful as a complement to wider legislative, social and industrial change, not as a stand-alone task or an alternative to broader social and political change.

Antonetti and Maklan (2014b) draw upon Bandura's (1997) notion of "mastery experiences" to suggest that increasing guilt (and pride), amongst consumers making seemingly unethical (or ethical) choices, could serve as an effective behaviour change strategy. They furthermore argue that a stronger emphasis on consumer responsibility may help elicit feelings of guilt, which could discourage consumers from making unethical decisions. This thesis contends that, whilst guilt and (potentially also) pride play an important role in feminists' experiences of porn decision-making, particularly insofar as the reflective stage is concerned, behaviour change strategies based on promoting guilt or mastery experiences alone are unlikely to be sufficient (or necessarily desirable) in and of themselves. I argue that research, activism and practice might do well to move away from neo-liberal missions to effect change through self-governance alone, as this philosophy actually appears to serve as a disincentive for ethical porn decision-making amongst some consumers, including most of the individuals interviewed for this study. Beyond the belief that consumers alone should shoulder the responsibility for improving industry ethics in any domain, lies the additional fear that one's own power as an individual consumer is ultimately incapable of effecting change anyway without wider social, legislative or industrial support. Thus it is contended that greater and more visible efforts on the part of government, industry, activists and third sector organisations – as well as fellow consumers – may represent the most effective means of encouragement for ethical consumer decision making at the individual level. This approach would of course have the additional advantage of being able to enact change independently of any consumer action that may accompany it. Consumers being able to see their efforts as part

of something bigger, as complementary to a wider movement for change, according to participant testimony could help break down perceptions of consumer ineffectiveness that seem to impede ethical decision-making amongst feminist porn consumers who may otherwise be so inclined. In order to achieve that, however, it appears that a reduction in stigma levels will most likely also be necessary, in order to facilitate a dialogue on the topic. This is a task that many participants took on, themselves, often engaging in conversations about porn, sex and sexuality in spite of associated taboos.

To conclude, I would like to draw attention to claims declaring that it is first and foremost consumers who hold the power to improve production ethics, by means of their capacity for vocal and material dissent against unethical business practices; and that it is consumers above all others who hold the responsibility to thereby effect change (Astous and Legendre 2009: 265). Such statements – along with a body of consumer ethics research based on similar assumptions – rely on a neoliberal philosophy espousing the primacy of consumer choice; a philosophy that London feminists do not necessarily believe in. Whilst it was acknowledged that consumers held a degree of power, it was not conceded that they held 'the' power or even significant power – especially as a minority community. Power, they felt, was distributed amongst a number of parties, each of whom they felt ought to play a part in encouraging and enforcing ethical standards within the porn industry. This research thus suggests that, according to participating feminists, the most effective means for change in this area may not be by increasing ethical consumer decision-making in and of itself, but perhaps by resisting the neoliberal philosophy that seems to diminish the responsibility of the state, industry and others.

Further works

The theory of conscionable consumption presented in this thesis takes from cognitive psychology models that highlight the roles of both affective and cognitive decision-making modes, and which stress the limitations on information processing. It also draws upon sociological perspectives that emphasise the contexts and conditions of consumption. The model furthermore accommodates care ethics approaches, invoking the notion of limitations on one's capacity to expend care-giving energies and resources on bottomless ethical consumption projects. Finally, philosophical perspectives – in particular the philosophical critiques levelled at much of the existing ethical consumption

research – also emerge as relevant in light of the way in which this model resists assuming or dictating a universal system of ethics. In fact, the conscionable consumption model can be applied regardless of an individual's particular ethical convictions or stance. In this way, the thesis represents an interdisciplinary academic endeavour, with anticipated contributions to a number of academic fields including media and cultural studies, gender and sexuality studies, business and marketing, sociology, and social psychology.

Whilst the applicability of this research for policy, industry and scholarship may be apparent, shortcomings associated with qualitative research nonetheless remain, and areas for further research can be identified. As Jensen (1987: 32-33) highlights, with reference to research into audience reception:

> *qualitative data are frequently not respected as forms of evidence in their own right. Instead, qualitative inquiry tends to function as a pilot study that then becomes a stepping stone for "real," quantitative inquiry. Once the qualitative occurrence of particular notions in a given group of recipients has been noted, the aim becomes to assess the recurrence of the notions as standardized and quantified in particular terms or statements. Even though this is a worthwhile procedure for many purposes, it is not universally applicable to all aspects of reception. In particular, while quantitative inquiry may be especially suited for reception phenomena where the conceptual categories are familiar and well established such as the patterns of consumption and the public perceptions of different media, qualitative inquiry is called for in the attempt to discern the categories audiences use to decode specific media products. In fact, the latter kind of inquiry generates data for an understanding that could not have been arrived at in any other way.*

Given that this project was from the outset intended to be an exploratory study in light of the lack of agenda-free theories of porn consumption at the time, this research does function somewhat as a "pilot study" in the way that Jensen describes above. If the questions asked in quantitative studies of porn audiences are, at best, inspired by extant theories of consumption, and at worst inspired by uncritical assumptions about porn and its viewership, I believe it to be a vital task to ensure that there exists a qualitative research base that exists outside of the pro- and anti-porn agendas, upon which to base future quantitative inquiries. Of course, as Jensen (*ibid*.: 33) points out, qualitative research also holds value in and of itself, elucidating nuances in experience that could not be arrived at through quantitative methods. Furthermore, qualitative data can be compared with existing qualitative and quantitative research and used to confirm, modify or explain extant research findings. These are all key academic contributions that this project makes. Nevertheless, as has been alluded to elsewhere in the thesis, I am of the opinion that this work would be further aided by a quantitative follow-up of its findings.

In particular, a quantitative project could help to ascertain the degree to which the conscionable consumption model holds relevance for other feminist communities in the UK and beyond, and indeed non-feminist groups and the general public at large.

Furthermore, whilst care was taken to avoid social desirability bias, in-depth interviews are inevitably susceptible to this. It is therefore recommended that, if there is a wish to validate the result of this study, further research be conducted in a more anonymised way. Whilst such validation was not within the scope of this research and did not represent a stated goal for the project, this type of corroboration may be deemed desirable for future work. This is especially the case given that the study did not seek to acquire a representative sample reflecting the demographics of the UK population as a whole, by virtue of the exploratory – rather than theory-testing – nature of the project.

Whilst, as Papaoikonomou, Valverde and Ryan (2012) stress, qualitative methods are favourable for exploratory consumer research projects, they may still be complemented by quantitative follow-up studies to validate results and enhance understanding. This is particularly so when relatively few interviews are conducted, as was the case for this project. Nonetheless, in light of the exploratory nature of the research, a small number of in-depth interviews was deemed the most appropriate approach. Indeed, McCracken (1988) advocates that eight long interviews represent a sufficient basis for qualitative research projects. This study, as was detailed earlier in the thesis, comprised 18 in-depth interviews with 17 participants lasting around three hours each, as well as an online brainstorming activity with 38 respondents. Data was collected until redundancy was reached, indicating 'sufficiency'. In this way, as Smith (2007: 125) also notes with reference to her own study, the research was "not about 'sampling' or drawing pictures of 'average' readers [but about] the in-depth exploration of the responses and interests of individual". Similarly, this study sought to collect a great deal of rich data from a select group of people, which may be complemented by a quantitative follow-up study to test generalisability moving forward.

Follow-up projects may also wish to investigate the strength of moral identity importance amongst both feminists and non-feminists and the degree to which a strong sense of ethical self impacts the conscionable consumption process. As Newman and Trump (2017: 598) assert: "individuals typically have strong beliefs in their own morality and are motivated to maintain this aspect of their self-concept." If this is the case, it is

anticipated that the applicability of the conscionable consumption model could extend well beyond the scope of London feminists. Indeed, even for those who do not see moral identity as important to their sense of selves, the model may well hold true, with the reflective cycle – and associated sense of ethical dissonance (or consonance) – simply featuring less prominently in the consumption journey of those individuals. Testing this will no doubt prove vital for understanding experiences of consumption and consumer ethics at large.

A final area of research exposed by this project as in need of further exploration pertains to the role of pride in porn ethical decision-making. In other industrial contexts that have been explored in consumer research, pride features as a key motivator for ethical action. As Antonetti and Maklan (2014b: 121) emphasise:

> *Pride is a positive emotion associated with a sense of achievement and self-worth…pride supports behavior in accordance with personal standards or in the pursuit of valued goals.*

Pride, they claim, "incentivises charitable donations, volunteering…and support for cause-related marketing campaigns." In participant responses for this study, however, pride in one's porn choices was rarely cited as a prominent emotional response to ethical or conscionable decision-making. Given the prominence of concerns about social stigma around porn and women's consumption thereof – even where ethical or conscionable porn choices are being made – it is speculated that ongoing sexual taboo represents one reason for the seeming lack of pride experienced by participating feminists. Research to explore this phenomenon may yield useful insights for the field of consumer ethics, given that porn consumption – as a largely private activity – represents such an under-researched substantive area of inquiry compared to the – more public – consumer behaviour associated with other industries such as food and clothing. Exploring the role of pride in porn decision-making will also undoubtedly be significant for the field of porn studies, as well as for industry, third sector and activist endeavours to promote ethical porn consumption. Of particular value may be inquiries comparing behaviour change strategies that revolve around fostering notions of pride amongst ethically conscious porn consumers, versus those that seek to increase guilt and promote neoliberal ideologies of individual consumer blame. This thesis argues that the latter strategies, for London feminist porn users at least, represent ethically questionable tactics that are, at any rate, unlikely to prove the most effective means for change.

Concluding remarks

Relatively little research within porn studies has grappled with questions of labour, with Hester noting that many academic studies in the field "largely ignore the contexts of production in favour of engaging with the text itself" (Hester 2015: 32). This blind spot is speculated to have developed by virtue of porn studies' genealogical roots in the 'feminist sex wars', along with a fear that discussions of labour would risk confirming criticisms that label porn studies scholars as 'pro porn' conspirators. Whilst this project did not seek explicitly to explore issues around sex work and labour, equally so, it did not shy away from these areas of discussion. Indeed, questions of labour proved central to participating feminists' conceptions of ethicality in porn consumption. A consistent theme emerging throughout the interviews and online brainstorming exercise pertained to the importance of worker safety and wellbeing. Whilst respondents' views varied as to whether notions of porn ethics ought to include content-based criteria, they were united in their insistence that truly ethical porn should, as a minimum requirement, correspond with superior standards of production. This is arguably one of the key messages emanating from the research.

Along with the above observation, it must be noted that feminists interviewed for this project recognised their own responsibilities in the task to improve porn (production) ethics, whilst also emphasising that a significant amount of responsibility lay elsewhere. They acknowledged their power as consumers, but also the limitations of this power. They pointed to government responsibilities to take action to improve sex worker safety, and the seeming ineffectiveness of censorship measures that have already been taken. They also suggested ways in which the state, community and third sector could be working with industry players to improve transparency and reduce stigma. In fact, the anticipated benefits of stigma reduction were thought to be vital for addressing a range of issues associated with porn ethics. These ranged from the potential of stigma-reduction efforts to break down conversational barriers that serve to impede word-of-mouth strategies promoting ethical consumer choices, to their capacity to facilitate industry opacity and eliminate barriers that stop sex workers reporting employer malpractice. Thus, whilst practical legislative, social and organisational efforts to improve sex worker safety and production ethics in porn (as well as other sex industries) were highlighted as important, it was also stressed that these must be complemented by

similar efforts to encourage a wider cultural shift in attitudes. This is a sentiment encapsulated by Sanders and Campbell's (2007) work on sex worker safety. Whilst their research focuses on the contexts and conditions surrounding UK sex work, more broadly, the message nonetheless still reflects participants' view on porn labour, specifically:

> *[There is] potential for environmental and organizational conditions to facilitate sex work safety. Yet in the absence of further cultural changes to attitudes towards those involved in the sex industry (sex workers, their clients, owners and managers) such a strategy would only have limited effectiveness. If the ultimate aim is to reduce violence against sex workers policy needs to address perceptions of prostitution and attitudes associated with the women who sell sex.*

(*ibid*.: 15)

Likewise, the data in this study indicates that the quest to change sexual attitudes and reduce porn stigma represents a fundamental goal for London feminist who use porn, for the purposes of improving porn production ethics, but also for the purposes of female sexual liberation at large.

To conclude, then, this thesis has demonstrated that a range of divergent and conflicting opinions about porn can and do coexist in the imaginary of feminist-identified consumers. However, whether for or against porn, critical thereof or undecided, it is perhaps a given that pornography as an industry will continue to exist regardless. Whilst there may not exist a right answer or universally accepted solution to every question, nor a common ground expansive enough to accommodate all extremities of the dispute, this thesis suggests that efforts to move beyond the pro- and anti-porn debates might begin with a focus on the rights and wellbeing of individuals. Even the most ambivalent of those interviewed conceded that people working in any industry, be it for survival or for pleasure, ought to enjoy safety and employment rights. That individual porn performers at least be free from harm, violence and exploitation, may represent a common ground upon which many, even if not all, feminists from different sides of the debate can begin to converse.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: Call for Participants Email

Dear xxxxx,

I'm contacting you with regards to a research project on feminisms and porn that I am currently working on as part of my PhD. I am looking for participants and I thought this might be of interest to people in your network.

As a bit of context, the aim of the project is to try and move past the pro/anti 'porn wars', which are increasingly dividing and fragmenting feminist communities. With that in mind, I'm not taking a pro or anti stance with the research, I'm just interested in hearing people's experiences - however they might frame them.

Participants should be London-based, self-identified feminists who use online porn (this can potentially include adult films/videos, images, literature/anime/fanfic etc., the definition is open to interpretation). They'd be asked to chat with me, on Skype or in person, about their experiences and/or to contribute to an online discussion.

If you know of anyone who meets these criteria and would be interested in getting involved, they can contact me at pm861@mdx.live.ac.uk.

Kind Regards,

Patricia Macleod

APPENDIX B: Information Sheet and Consent Form

Online Porn Consumption amongst Feminists in London

Project Information Sheet

Introduction:

You are invited to take part in a research study into the consumption of online pornography amongst feminists in London. Please read this form carefully and make sure to ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

Name and contact email address of researcher: Patricia Macleod, pm861@live.mdx.ac.uk

What the study is about:

The purpose of this study is to better understand porn consumption amongst London feminists who watch it – why London feminists who watch online porn do so, and how they decide what to watch. The aim is to do this in a way that avoids assumptions about audience identities, viewing practices or experiences. It also intends to move away from the idea that there exists a single feminist position on porn.

You must be over 18, based in the UK, have accessed online pornography at least once in the last calendar year, and identify as a feminist to participate.

What you'll be asked to do:

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview at a time and place of your choosing, either online or offline. The interview will include questions about online porn viewing experiences and practices, as well as more general questions about you. It is likely to take between two and three hours to complete. With your permission, the interview may also be audio or video-recorded. There'll also be a short questionnaire for you to complete.

Risks and benefits:

There is the risk that you may find some of the questions about your online porn viewing practices to be sensitive. It is advised that you arrange to have appropriate support available should you need it. The researcher may stop the study or take you out of the study at any time they deem necessary. They can do this without your consent.

There is no compensation for taking part in this research project, however it is hoped that the results of the study will be of interest to you. Findings will be disseminated to all participants upon completion of the project and others may benefit in the future from the findings of this study.

Confidentiality:

Your answers will be anonymous. In any sort of public report, no information that will make it possible to identify you will be used without your permission. Textual, audio and video material you have provided will be stored securely.

There may be occasions when it is necessary to breach confidentiality, for example upon contravention of the Children Act, or if a statutory power overrides it. The researcher recognises that any breach of confidentiality must be treated very seriously.

Your rights:

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time from now until final submission of the thesis on 25/09/18. You can do this by contacting the researcher, who will then destroy any data you have provided as part of the study. This will not affect your current or future relationship with Middlesex University or the researcher. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Online Porn Consumption amongst Feminists in London

Participant Consent

By ticking the box on the 'Participate' page, I agree that:

I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the Information Sheet on page 1.
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.
I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.
I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be obligated to explain why I have withdrawn.
The procedures regarding confidentiality and use of the data have been clearly explained to me.
I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.
I understand that my name will not be used in any publications or other research outputs associated with this project and that any audio/visual material that I provide to be anonymised, unless I give my consent to do otherwise.

If you have any questions about this information and consent sheet or the project in general, please contact Patricia Macleod: pm861@live.mdx.ac.uk

APPENDIX C: Demographic Survey

On Porn: Project Survey

* 1. What is your name or preferred identifier?

2. What is your Skype username if you have one (interviews to take place over Skype where possible)

3. How do you self-identify in terms of gender?

4. How do you self-identify in terms of sexuality?

5. How do you self-identify in terms of ethnicity?

6. How do you self-identify in terms of being en/disabled?

7. How would you describe your relationship/s status?

8. How would you describe your:

Political beliefs?

Religious beliefs?

Educational background?

9. How old are you?

10. How would you describe your porn use?

Medium/format

Genre/s

History/frequency

Done

APPENDIX D: Interview Guides

Interview guide: version 1

Introduction:

- Introduce myself, welcome the participant, and thank them for taking part.
- Before starting, refresh participants' memory of the information sheet and consent form. Answer any questions they may have around confidentiality or otherwise.
- Explain the presence and purpose of recording equipment and confirm consent.
- Explain to the participant that they are free to leave or pause the interview at any time.

Discussion:

- Question topics relate to understandings of porn and feminism generally, and the three core categories emerging from the online discussion data:

Selection process		
Characteristics - personal tastes - porn consumed - ideas about quality	Concerns - as an industry - as a medium/phenomenon - feelings - call for change	Access - format/medium - spaces of access - cost of access - ease of finding

PERCEPTIONS OF PORN

Eg. What does porn mean to you? What, for you, is the purpose of consuming porn?

PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY

Eg. Is some porn better than others? How would you describe good quality porn? Is the type of porn you consume? Why/why not?

PERSONAL TASTES

Eg. Do you have particular tastes in porn? If so, how would you describe them? (eg. content, form, genre, medium, perceptions?) Is that the type of porn you use? Do you ever use other types of porn?

SELECTION PROCESS

Eg. What's the biggest priority when choosing porn? What are the other things you consider when choosing porn? What makes you click on one thing over another?

ACCESS

Eg. How do you find the porn you use? [potential for real-time walk-through here] What do you think about the idea of paying for porn? What format/s do you prefer for porn (eg. videos, text)

CONCERNS

Eg. Do you have any concerns about pornography? If so, how do you think those things could be resolved?

FEMINISM

Eg. What does feminism mean to you? To what degree do you feel your porn choices align with your feminism? How do you feel about this?

Closing remarks:

- Ask the participant if there were any areas of discussion not broached in the interview, which they would like to address at this point.
- Ask if they would like to receive a transcript to review.
- Provide participant with my contact details, and explain that they can contact me at any time with questions, concerns, or to remove themselves from the study.
- Thank the participant for their involvement.

Interview guide: version 2

Introduction:

- Introduce myself, welcome the participant, and thank them for taking part.
- Before starting, refresh participants' memory of the information sheet and consent form. Answer any questions they may have around confidentiality or otherwise.
- Explain the presence and purpose of recording equipment and confirm consent.
- Explain to the participant that they are free to leave or pause the interview at any time.

Discussion:

- Questions for interview relate to six categories identified within the data thus far:

Selection process					
Characteristics	Access	Concerns	Benefits	Understandings	Responses
- personal tastes - ideas about quality - porn consumed - need to compromise	- format/ medium - spaces of access - cost of access - ease of finding - conditions of access	- viewer interpretations - (range of) content - industry - porn's impact - calls for change	- for the consumer	- of porn - of media effects - of feminism - of how tastes are formed	- desired - undesired - purpose

ON PORN

CHARACTERISTICS

ACCESS

BENEFITS & CONCERNS

UNDERSTANDINGS

RESPONSES

ON FEMINISM

Closing remarks:

- Ask the participant if there were any areas of discussion not broached in the interview, which they would like to address at this point.
- Ask if they would like to receive a transcript to review.
- Provide participant with my contact details, and explain that they can contact me at any time with questions, concerns, or to remove themselves from the study.
- Thank the participant for their involvement.

Interview guide: version 3

Introduction:

- Introduce myself, welcome the participant, and thank them for taking part.
- Before starting, refresh participants' memory of the information sheet and consent form. Answer any questions they may have around confidentiality or otherwise.
- Explain the presence and purpose of recording equipment and confirm consent.
- Explain to the participant that they are free to leave or pause the interview at any time.

Discussion:

- Questions for interview relate to five key categories identified within the data thus far:

Feminists descriptions of online porn selection and consumption				
Attitudes - Feminism - Pornography - Media effects - Responsibility	Characteristics - Content preferences - Medium/format preferences - Production techniques - Studio/ producer/ company perceptions	Access - Conditions of access - Sites of access - Ease of finding/ accessing - Cost of access	Engagement - Searching - Selecting - Receiving - Responding	Reflections - Concerns about porn ▪ content ▪ industry ▪ impact - Reconciling concerns - Calls for change - Benefits of porn - Potential of porn

Closing remarks:

- Ask the participant if there were any areas of discussion not broached in the interview, which they would like to address at this point.
- Ask if they would like to receive a transcript to review.
- Provide participant with my contact details, and explain that they can contact me at any time with questions, concerns, or to remove themselves from the study.
- Thank the participant for their involvement.

Interview guide: version 4

Introduction:

- Introduce myself, welcome the participant, and thank them for taking part.
- Before starting, refresh participants' memory of the information sheet and consent form. Answer any questions they may have around confidentiality or otherwise.
- Explain the presence and purpose of recording equipment and confirm consent.
- Explain to the participant that they are free to leave or pause the interview at any time.

Discussion:

- Questions for interview relate to five key categories identified within the data thus far:

Feminists' descriptions of online porn selection and consumption				
Attitudes - Feminism - Pornography - Media effects - Responsibility - Consumer choice	Characteristics - Content preferences - Medium/format preferences - Production techniques - Studio/ producer/ company perceptions	Access - Conditions of access - Sites of access - Ease of finding/ accessing - Cost of access	Engagement - Searching - Selecting - Receiving - Responding - Engaging with a community	Reflections - Concerns about porn ▪ Content, industry, impact - Reconciling concerns - Calls for change - Benefits of porn - Potential of porn

Closing remarks:

- Ask the participant if there were any areas of discussion not broached in the interview, which they would like to address at this point.
- Ask if they would like to receive a transcript to review.
- Provide participant with my contact details, and explain that they can contact me at any time with questions, concerns, or to remove themselves from the study.
- Thank the participant for their involvement.

Interview guide: version 5

Introduction:

- Introduce myself, welcome the participant, and thank them for taking part.
- Before starting, refresh participants' memory of the information sheet and consent form. Answer any questions they may have around confidentiality or otherwise.
- Explain the presence and purpose of recording equipment and confirm consent.
- Explain to the participant that they are free to leave or pause the interview at any time.

Discussion:

- Questions for interview relate to three key categories identified within the data thus far:

Feminists' descriptions of the porn consumption process		
Influences - Context & information - Attitudes & beliefs	Acting - Search practices - Decision-making process - Consumption activity - Cognitive processes - Responses	Reacting - Reflecting - Reconciling - Intending

INFLUENCES
- ATTITUDES & BELIEFS
- CONTEXT
- INFORMATION

ACTING
- SEARCHING
- DECIDING
- ENGAGING & RECEIVING

REACTING
- RESPONDING
- REFLECTING
- RECONCILING
- INTENDING

Closing remarks:

- Ask the participant if there were any areas of discussion not broached in the interview, which they would like to address at this point.
- Ask if they would like to receive a transcript to review.
- Provide participant with my contact details, and explain that they can contact me at any time with questions, concerns, or to remove themselves from the study.
- Thank the participant for their involvement.