

Article

Framing the Sexual Forbidden: A Comparative Sociocultural Analysis of Anti-Pornography Discourse in Israeli Public Campaigns

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Abstract

Curbing pornography consumption is the subject of keen debate and the object of numerous social efforts. The methods of structuring the discourse on combatting pornography use reveal a wide range of sociocultural views. This study utilizes semiotic and textual analyses of videos and advertisements (ads) dedicated to preventing pornography use in the secular and religious sectors of the Israeli Jewish public, which illuminates the differing perceptions and social norms among these groups. To this end, we conducted a comparative study of ads aimed at both audiences. By analyzing their symbolic representations and the rhetoric emerging from their content, we discovered that, while the prohibition narrative for the observant religious public centers on pornography use negatively impact the individual's environment (their relationship family and community), the ads designed for viewing by the secular public focus on the individuals themselves. Thus, divergent socio ethical perspectives on the use of pornography emerge, illuminating how individuals relate to both their environment and their sense of self. The present study teaches us how different communities adapt words and symbols to convey social messages, particularly those associated with charged issues such as sexuality.

Keywords: pornography; sexuality; videos; advertisements; secular; religious

1. Introduction

Pornography as a sexual practice means “deliberately looking at, reading, or listening to (1) any picture, video clip or video depicting nude individuals or people having sex” or (2) “written or audio material depicting nude individuals or people having sex” [1]. Viewing pornography is a common practice in the developed world [2]. Since the advent of the internet in private homes, pornography has become more widely accessible than ever before, potentially affecting society in unprecedented ways [3].

Research on pornography use in Israel remains limited. However, the few existing studies indicate that pornography-related technological communication has had a profound impact in Israel, mirroring global trends [4]. In 2002, the Israeli parliament passed a law prohibiting the broadcasting of pornography on television [5]; however, online viewing is free to be consumed should individuals choose to do so.

In Jewish society, each sector has different social norms regarding sexuality [6]. According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (See: <https://did.li/N0IUY>; <https://did.li/a5C6q>) (Appendix A, Table A1) (accessed 8 January 2026), secular Jews, which constitute approximately 42.7% of the Jewish Israeli population, espouse typical Western



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social values that emphasize personal choice. They are free of religion's theological content and, for various reasons, generally do not include Jewish law, the *mitzvot* (Jewish commandments), as a component of their Jewish identity or as a binding element of their lifestyles [7]. Secular Jews conduct themselves based on a relatively stable set of modernist moral notions that supplant Jewish ethical imperatives, although they may nevertheless voluntarily incorporate Jewish elements into their lives [8–11]. Thus, in the secular Jewish sector, satisfying an individual's sexual urges using various practices, alone or in a relationship, is legitimized, similar to other secular Western cultures [12,13].

Unlike the secular Israeli public, the national–religious sector is founded on communal principles and follows a halakhic lifestyle (i.e., informed by Jewish religious, civil, and ethical law). Jews who define themselves as part of the national–religious sector constitute approximately 12% of the Jewish Israeli population based on statistics from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (See: https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2024/308/11_24_308b.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com) (Appendix A, Table A1) (accessed on 8 January 2026). The national–religious public observes mitzvot, while exhibiting social liberalism, provided that it aligns with halakhic requirements. Always one of the most prominent groups in Israel, they continue to impact society at large. The national–religious group is integrated into the general population in the workplace, military, and leisure culture [14,15]. With respect to attitudes toward sexuality, in recent years, this sector had to contend with various challenges and respond to a range of sociosexual phenomena [16], including the practice of viewing pornography. We emphasize that this study particularly focuses exclusively on the national–religious community, and not on non-Orthodox religious communities, in which engagement with sexuality and gender is more fluid and not subject to halakhic norms [17–21].

The religious Orthodox conform to halakhic principles and consider pornography viewing a prohibited sexual practice. Even if and when religious individuals watch pornography alone or in a relationship and report the experience as positive, the social directive that determines this practice to be prohibited remains intact [22,23]. Efrati and Amichai-Hamburger's [24] comparison of pornography viewing among Jewish Israeli youth revealed that 78% of secular males as opposed to 52% of religious males, along with 21% of secular females compared with 15% of religious females, have watched pornography [25]. This data turns our attention to the comparative variance between secular and religious sexuality in general and, in particular, the practice of pornography viewing in an attempt to understand the differences in use and attitudes toward sexuality across groups.

Another way of understanding pornography-use characteristics—exposure to it, discourse on it, and the fight to stop it—is manifested in the different forms of videos and ads aimed at each group and designed to discourage this practice. The content for each group indicates differences in knowledge acquisition, thought direction, and talk about sexuality, all of which contribute greatly to how individuals experience their sexuality [26].

The present comparative study presents a textual analysis of 30 videos and ads encouraging viewers to cease using pornography, half of which are aimed at secular Jews in Israel and half targeting their national–religious peer group. We examined and compared the various elements that pornography-quitting ads emphasize when targeting each group as the lens through which the social issues that anchor these groups in the population can be seen. We found that the visual messages, phrasing, and text in ads, as well as the recurring values informing them, are fundamentally different. Ads for the secular public utilize moral discourse directed at individuals, whereas ads for the religious sector emphasize the group and a sense of belonging to a community, based on religious compliance, to promote pornography viewing abstinence.

Furthermore, we suggest that pornography-quitting ads, which visually and textually present the acceptable sociosexual constructs in each group, offer more information that reveals the similarities and differences between the secular and religious sectors in Jewish Israeli society.

This paper opens with a theoretical review of the changes in the pornography industry, particularly in the religious sphere, and a discussion of the social power of videos and ads in the establishment and reflection of normative discourse. Next, the study methodology is presented, and an explanation of how the qualitative interpretative-semiotic analysis was conducted is provided. At the heart of this paper is an analysis divided into two themes: (1) secular Jews as individuals versus religious Jews as part of a group and (2) lenient normativity versus conservative anonymity. Each theme presents different perspectives for exploring this phenomenon. Finally, the conclusion section will attempt to elucidate the macro-level characteristics of this micro case and provide broader insights into the meaning of this phenomenon among various populations.

2. Changes in Consumption? New Movements in the Pornography Industry

Pornography is one of the most prominent industries to have grown significantly since the emergence of the Internet [27–30]. With mobile technology, the availability, scope, and content of pornography have evolved: it is now far more readily and easily accessible than in the pre-Internet era [2].

As noted, the sex industry has unprecedentedly impacted families, couples, and individuals in new ways that never existed [5]. Even so, viewing pornographic content remains open to much interpretation as to what is culturally and/or socially deemed acceptable or unacceptable [30]. In fact, the study of pornography has, for many years, been attempting to examine how sexuality is presented and what role pornography plays in shaping sexuality discourse [31].

How pornography is consumed and the various social responses to it are culturally dependent, changing from one society to another. Many religions prohibit pornography viewing and consider it immoral, with religious individuals from various faiths vehemently objecting to it [32–36]. Indeed, religious individuals watch significantly less pornography than their secular peers [37], although some still view it infrequently [38]; i.e., they use search engines to find it anonymously [34,39].

Overall, different religions have been addressing sexuality and sexual practice in various ways for thousands of years [23]. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism address sexuality from a religious moral–social perspective [40], mandating a sexual ideal of heterosexual marriage [41]. As noted, the Internet is a global phenomenon, and its implications for pornography consumption by religious groups across the world are being studied [42]. Pornography use occupies a large online bandwidth even as it contradicts the values of various religions [43].

Moral standards, many of which pertain to sexual practices, determine clear rules about sexuality in religious society, with a clear framework in place for what is permitted and forbidden [44,45]. The present paper focuses specifically on two Jewish populations: secular and national–religious. Notably, as a rule, Judaism refers to sexuality as a positive act within the framework of marriage and approves of sexual pleasure within this framework [46].

Religions often aim to make their members behave less impulsively in their sexual conduct [47]. In Judaism, family purity, which refers to sexuality being reserved only for married heterosexual couples and at certain times, such as outside of menstruation cycles, is an important *mitzvah* (religious commandment), one closely associated with sexuality

and sexual practices [45]. Sexual practices are regulated and mandated for specific times and forms, with intercourse reserved only for heterosexual married couples [24]. One forbidden practice is the consumption of pornographic content [48].

Individuals in religious societies who are unable to avoid sexual acts prohibited by religious law, such as pornography viewing, may experience negative outcomes at the socioemotional level [49–51]. Crossing the sexual practice boundaries set by religious law may generate a sociological, psychological, and physiological struggle [50,51]. Religious individuals may experience social and mental stress due to the conflict between religious prohibition and personal desire to engage in prohibited sexual practices even when performed anonymously [52,53]. A longitudinal study conducted by Mahoney and Hernandez [54] revealed that some couples were impeded and embarrassed while performing sexual acts or regretted engaging in sexual practices outside of religious norms [55].

As mentioned, secular Jews subscribe to the typical sexual norms of a Western society [56] and they may view religious mores of sexual conduct as restricting sexuality and morally outdated. From this perspective, the latter does not align with sociocultural developments and may be an obstacle to individualistic rights and desires [12]. In a secular context, quitting pornography may be seen as beneficial and recommended, but pornography per se is not prohibited. As such, the secular sociosexual code is different than its religious counterpart, as it is based on human-derived ethics that change with time and are situationally dependent [56,57].

3. Videos and Ads in Cyberspace Reflecting and Establishing Sociocultural Discourse

Mass communication constitutes media that reaches a large target audience, the opposite of interpersonal communication. Online information is a form of mass communication that plays an important role in shaping public opinion and how the wider public perceives reality. As technology progresses, social media-based mass personal communication continues to evolve, with private individuals having the potential to communicate with large numbers of followers through information sharing [58].

Furthermore, individuals with vast followings often add a degree of authenticity to their content. They can sometimes assume altruistic motives, considered by viewers as members of their in-group with ostensibly nothing to gain from their content, and can therefore be trusted to be telling the truth. The authenticity they offer, inter alia by first-person testimonies, enhances viewers' trust in them and their desire to listen to them and believe what they say [59]. Video content creators thus make information accessible in social media space by generating an experience. In turn, users feel connected to a certain community by connecting to the media they share [60]. Advertisers try to make people talk about their idea or share its information to spread it on social media so that their product or idea will gain popularity. YouTube videos, pop-up ads, and online searches on websites generate high arousal among individuals and can potentially spur those who watch them to action [59].

A range of visual and verbal images that appear in ads may illuminate deep structures in a society and culture [61]. Visual representations provide information on common values as well as key beliefs and worldviews. Ads contain meanings familiar to their target audiences and, as such, carry cultural and social meanings [62,63]. Images therefore serve as one of the main manifestations of popular culture [64].

Advertising is a key component of a financially motivated industry, with the intention of increasing the consumption of a product, service, or idea. Feeding off the culture in which they are created, ads reflect and establish it. Thus, advertising plays an influential role in socialization, identity building, and culture creation [65]. Advertisers use visual

and verbal images and representations in videos and ads to create a common cultural meaning for their target audience [66], with advertising thereby serving as a window into society [67].

Multimedia content often takes the visual form of words alongside images. Words and images are powerful tools for conveying messages [68] by capitalizing on the verbal and visual processing capabilities of viewers [69]. Advertisers often choose representations and images to convey a certain message in group-specific code to direct viewers to the desired product [70]. They create content out of social information, turning it into videos and ads typical of the group they are trying to acquire as viewers while attempting to impact and further enhance social structuring.

Thus, viewing videos and ads containing sexual content may not only reflect what happens in society and a certain group but also strengthen specific behaviors [71,72]. Viewers who consume these ads may view the people portrayed in them as role models and may view on-screen sexual behaviors as normative behavior [73]. Recurring representations of sexual content in ads may thus cultivate sex beliefs among viewers to some extent [74]. This enables individuals to make decisions about their own personal sexual practices and behaviors quickly and efficiently in alignment with society at large [75]. Thus, the potential for exposure to online ads containing sexual content is ever increasing, with corresponding social implications accelerated by the fact that one of today's main socializing agents is advertisers [61], and online advertising lacks the censorship found in the public media sphere [76].

4. Methodology

The present study is based on qualitative interpretative-semiotic analysis of the visual meaning of cultural images [77]. The analysis was conducted with the understanding that a set of social rules and norms is often nurtured by ideology that is conveyed by the use of texts and symbols in advertisements. Interpreting various visual and verbal codes provides scholars with a snapshot of a particular society and its images and rules.

Initial Discovery and the Role of the Researcher: the data collection process originated in a clinical setting, where the researcher, serving as a couple's therapist, identified a recurring theme: a significant number of couples reported that pornography consumption substantially impacted their relationship dynamics. This clinical observation prompted a preliminary review of academic literature and an exploration of various genres of pornographic content.

During this initial phase, the digital footprint of the research activities triggered targeted advertising via cross-device synchronized cookies. Recognizing the sociological potential of these spontaneous advertisements, the researcher initiated an exploratory inquiry into whether similar content was prevalent across broader Israeli society. Using a purposive snowball sampling method, the researcher requested contributors from her professional, familial, and communal networks—representing both secular and national-religious (Dati-Leumi) sectors—share similar digital advertisements they encountered. As the advertisements were aggregated, a distinct paradigm emerged: while all materials shared a common teleological goal, the cessation of pornography consumption, they employed diverse social causalities and discursive strategies to justify this conclusion. This observation solidified the comparative framework of the study.

The data collection evolved through two distinct phases: (1) Passive Phase (Approx. 1 month): Monitoring and collecting unsolicited digital content and peer-contributed advertisements. (2) Active Systematic Search (Approx. 6 months): To ensure data saturation, a systematic search was conducted via Google Chrome and YouTube. Initial keywords in Hebrew included "pornography addiction recovery" and "Shmirat Einayim" (interpretation:

“Guard your eyes”). Following an iterative process, the search terms were expanded based on preliminary findings to include phrases such as “how to stop watching porn” and “avoiding pornographic pitfalls.”

The initial search yielded hundreds of videos, which were then refined based on strict inclusion/exclusion criteria: (1) Format: Content defined as formal religious “lessons” (Shiur Torah) was excluded to focus on accessible, digital-native outreach content. (2) Target Audience: The study focused exclusively on the secular and national-religious Israeli sectors. Consequently, videos originating from sectors outside the research scope (e.g., Haredi) were excluded, even if they conveyed similar messages. (3) Analytical Sample: To ensure comparative validity, a balanced sample was curated, consisting of an equal number of videos from the secular and national-religious sectors. These selected videos constitute the final corpus, providing a representative reflection of the phenomena analyzed in this study.

The analysis was conducted by comparing videos and ads discouraging pornography viewing that targeted the secular sector versus those that targeted the religious sector. The videos and ads used were obtained from the Internet and are available to the public. Comparisons were made between 30 videos (over 2 min long) and ads (up to 2 min long) posted between 2014 and 2017 in Israel and collected from various websites. The choice of the data set from 2014–2017 is particularly relevant to reports regarding pornography viewing, especially before AI broke into the field [78,79]. Of the 30, half targeted the secular Jewish sector and half targeted the religious Jewish sector. Appendix B, located at the end of the paper, provides links to all the videos analyzed in this study. While all links were verified during the study, some online content has since been removed by the original publishers. For these items, the authors have preserved full transcripts and visual snapshots, which are available upon request. For all other advertisements, archived video files or active URLs are provided.

Importantly, thumbnail versions of the videos appear before users click on the videos themselves: A thumbnail is a smaller version of a larger video that helps prospective viewers identify the content of the video before they decide to click on it. Thumbnails use visual images that provide the consumers they are attempting to reach with the content to motivate them to watch the suggested video [80].

Using visual motifs, perceptions, and linguistic messages presented in the video via representations of the body, language, and social context, we classified the videos in accordance with two themes. The first theme examined the different visual and verbal ways in which each group addressed sexuality by focusing on the individual versus the community. We examined the visual representation of the individual, whether it was the center of the story or was shown as part of a social construct. We also checked the extent to which the words selected placed an emphasis on the individual as opposed to the group. The second theme examined the extent to which each group gives individuals the feeling that the practice in which they engage and which the advertisers seek to uproot is socially common or acceptable when visual and verbal representations are used. We checked which ads normalized pornography viewing and which did not, as well as which saw it as something that should be kept anonymous, to discover how the discourse on relationships and sexuality is generated among various sectors in society.

The videos and ads in the present study were classified as targeting religious or secular individuals using the following criteria. First, video creators self-reported. For example, a video was classified as “secular” when creators reported in its title: “The whole truth in your face about pornography 18+ not for religious people”. Similarly, videos and ads classified as “religious” report on their official websites that their content is suitable for the religious, e.g., *Avodah BaEinayim* (loosely translated as “pulling the wool over your eyes”)

associated with GYE (Guard Your Eyes), attesting to being an information, content, and religious counseling website: “This website helps to cope. . . with an emphasis on coping with sexuality in the media . . . the content on this website has gained the support of the state religious education directorate.”

Second, videos and ads that explicitly contradict Jewish law with regard to sexuality were classified as secular because the advice they presented contradicts religious rules. These videos and ads suggest sexual practices that run counter to the general and most minimal common denominator for observing sexuality mandates according to the Jewish faith. For example, the solution offered for quitting pornography viewing is engaging in sexual intercourse before marriage or with several partners, which is prohibited for members of the religious group. Therefore, if the videos and ads offered solutions unsuitable for the religious public, they were classified as “secular”.

5. Between Self and Community: Divergent Ethical Discourses on Pornography

As noted, attitudes toward quitting pornography viewing shed light on otherwise private and anonymous sexual practices as well as societal norms and values in the realm of sexuality and community [81–84]. To ensure that ads are customized and geared toward specific audiences, advertisers emphasize certain social values, revealing views and beliefs that are socially acceptable within these groups.

Many of the videos aimed at the religious audience emphasize not only the individual, but also their belonging to a broader collective, whether a community, society, or relationship. For example, one video thumbnail presents an entire animated community being constructed, visually highlighting a shared societal project. Another features a group of five animated characters: four in red symbolizing society, and one in black representing the individual as part of that collective. In a third case, the words “Tali and Ronen’s Home” appear behind a male character, underscoring the importance of the couple’s home and their relationship, rather than focusing on the individual alone. These visual choices in thumbnails of anti-pornography videos directed at the religious public reveal a recurring theme: the individual is portrayed within a network of social and relational contexts, not in isolation. The presence of communal and interpersonal imagery suggests a broader moral and social framework within which the viewer is positioned, even before the video begins.

In addition to its social dimension, the video also contains a religious connotation: one thumbnail shows two characters facing one another shaking hands, one of whom appears ordinary, while the other is a rabbi. Another thumbnail shows three characters via a whiteboard, two of whom are dressed in ordinary clothes, with the third dressed in “rabbinical” attire. The representation of the rabbi character indicates that the religious community establishes its social norms around Jewish law (halakha). The rabbi is the knowledge-provider, promulgating halakhic decrees and their practical moral manifestations to the community. National-religious faith is often identified with the rabbinate and halakha is based on rabbinical interpretation, with behavioral norms continuing into the private sphere [85].

The videos also depict a man watching content on his laptop while his wife turns her back to him, highlighting the importance of quitting pornography viewing for relationships, the spouse’s well-being, and the couple’s intimacy, that is, not only for the individual. The video goes on to show an animated allegory of quitting pornography viewing in the form of a man bridging the distance between himself and his family by returning to them on a ship and reuniting with them on a pier. Another ad talks about children gaining a better father once the latter quit pornography viewing: “*My children have gained a calm and happy father*” (Religious video, RV-1). The conclusion drawn from these contexts is that giving up

pornography viewing leads to better relationships and family life. The individual is thus addressed as part of a relationship and family rather than focusing on the advantages for the individuals themselves.

Another video in the same vein shows a family having a festive meal, during which participants talk about their new year resolutions. One family member says that they are trying to stop eating sweets while another wants to quit smoking, and their remarks are accepted. However, when one mentions their intention to quit viewing pornography, the family's reactions are shaming. In this case, the ad implies that pornography viewing distances the individual from family, indicating that it cannot be openly discussed as pornography is prohibited by religion and considered a serious deviation from group norms.

In this context, abstinence from pornography is associated with family purity—a fundamental religious value. Family values determine engagement in sexual practices among religious individuals within the framework of heterosexual marriage, and there is no room for performing sexual acts on one's self or as part of a practice that includes seeing someone who is not married to the individual [45]. Thus, pornography viewing is unacceptable in religious society as a practice or even a subject of discussion.

The message to the religious public thus continues to be that relationships, family, and community are of the highest importance. Engaging in pornography viewing negatively impacts all these structures that surround the individual, with ads emphasizing that attitudes in religious groups revolve around family and community:

"I feel like I got my life back; my children have gained a calm and happy father."
(RV-1)

"And this addiction. . . It distances you from your friends, your family. . ." (RV-8)

Moreover, only religious ads make reference to marriage, tying sexual practices solely to a marital partnership. Sexual pleasure is deliberately found only in relationships, and the attitude toward pornography viewing or masturbation is negative, whereas the attitude toward sexuality in the context of marriage is positive:

"[Since I quit viewing pornography], my marriage has never been better." (RV-1)

"Thousands contact us every year to quit pornography and save their marriage."
(RV-2)

"Worse comes to worse, it [pornography viewing] will lead to divorce." (RV-13)

Ads thus draw a causal link between pornography viewing and the breakdown of spousal relationships leading to divorce. As such, the person engaging in pornography viewing is not at the center of this predicament; rather, it is the detrimental effect this behavior has on the individual's environment. Moreover, there is a cynical implication that pornography viewing results in prioritizing relationships less. The ad cynically mocks them, saying that all pornography viewers need their right hand to experience sexuality on their own, contrasting it with value-based sexual pleasure derived from a legitimate relationship.

By contrast, the videos encouraging secular viewers to quit viewing pornography attempt to convince individuals that they should quit for their own benefit. The individual and their sexuality matters; therefore, when individuals view pornography addictively, they are harming themselves. Reference is made to sexuality with a partner, but not in terms of long-term partnership, with social welfare not mentioned as well. Instead, the focus is on the pornography viewer's own sexual pleasure, suggesting that quitting will result in intercourse with an actual partner, which is ultimately more satisfying. This is the suggested solution in the vast majority of anti-pornography-viewing videos (approximately 87% of secular videos):

“[If you quit watching pornography] your desire to meet women will be much stronger, you will bring a different energy and power into your interactions like never before. You will be much more eager to meet women both physically and mentally.” (Secular Video, SV-5)

“If you’re feeling sexual energy and you’re feeling horny, why porn? Get out there, hit on women, score and sleep with a girl.” (SV-6)

“Meet real girls. Get into the game of meeting women, going out with them, and sleeping with them, and telling yourself the following: the only way for me to reach orgasm is by being with a real girl.” (SV-11).

“I’m looking for a girl now who’ll meet my sexual needs. . . Porn stops individuals from going out and having sex.” (SV-13).

In the secular group, the clear preference is to engage in intercourse over pornography viewing, with the orientation being the individual’s sexual pleasure. The secular group’s argument is that viewing pornography is detrimental to individuals’ sexual experiences. They claim that individuals who continue to watch pornography will miss out on having actual sex. This means that, were it not for the energy spent viewing pornography, individuals would be physically and mentally eager for genuine sexual situations. They further maintain that, in the absence of pornography, individuals can satisfy their sexual desires with multiple girls, which these videos and ads insist is preferable to viewing pornography.

The notion that pornography viewing is a form of individual failure reinforces the secular social orientation that engaging in intercourse with real partners is positive. As a cyclical behavior, successfully sleeping with women and engaging in intercourse will help individuals overcome their pornography-viewing addiction. Authentic sexual satisfaction further strengthens desirable behavior: According to the ads, individuals who engage in intercourse with a real partner become higher achievers in the secular sexual satisfaction hierarchy. Moreover, the individual can once again feel sexually excited by simple sexual things. Thus, they argue that pornography viewing prevents individuals from feeling genuine sexuality and becoming excited by their sexuality, thereby hindering their own personal development.

For secular audiences, advertisers emphasize the negative disadvantages of viewing pornography, showing how it distorts individual moods, siphons time away from engaging in intercourse with real girls, and wastes personal time and potential, while also introducing the theme of pornography viewing as a means of provocation to anger. They also use texts to convey these messages:

“We identify the implications for sexual performance here at very early ages, and they suffer from them their whole lives.” (SV-2)

“Porn didn’t give me release, and nothing came [of it]. All it did is turn sexuality and intimacy into a space in which power, violence, and anger were introduced.” (SV-3).

The rational-scientific discourse emerging from these secular videos and ads shows individuals as losing out on genuinely satisfying themselves because their brains are falsely rewarding pornography viewing. The porn addict brain is compared to that of drug addict, someone controlled instead of being in control. Pornography controls individuals, shaping their will, power and productivity. Reference is also made to wasted time and potential, whether in terms of general activities or specific real sexual conquests. Thus, individuals are advised to stop watching others having sex and start experiencing it themselves:

“Studies conducted have taken porn addicts’ MRI scans and compared them to those of drug addicts, and gentlemen, the results were identical. This means that

porn addiction goes as far as to shrink areas in the brain. . . You have no opinion on the matter and no power over this disease. The impact that porn has on your life kills not only your willpower but also your productivity.” (SV-12)

Other means employed to try and convince pornography viewers to desist are anti-human trafficking and anti-sexual abuse appeals: How can they live with themselves knowing that whenever they click on pornographic videos, human trafficking and sexual exploitation become more lucrative? The videos and ads present women as victims of pornography and tap into the public-moral compass to help them quit viewing pornography:

“Let’s be honest about what this does to our lives and what it does to the lives of real women featured in porn because, when we consume porn, we encourage demand. In addition, where there is demand, there will be supply. If we watched a movie about Asian women, someone would be pimping out Asian women. If we watched a movie about Black women, someone will be pimping out Black women.” (SV-3).

6. Lenient Normativity Versus Conservative Anonymity

The religious group makes two more appeals in their videos that are seemingly unique to quitting pornography viewing: (1) they ensure that quitting can be done anonymously and (2) they attempt to raise funds as a means of providing group support to individuals while quitting. The videos incorporate halakhic values to this end—tithe (*maa’ser ksa’fim*, i.e., the mitzva to donate one tenth of one’s earnings to charity) [86] and lovingkindness (*gemilut hassadim*, i.e., good deeds done for the benefit of others)—to harness society to contribute funds to the general social system [87]. Advertisers thus claim that pornography prevention can use the religious value of tithe donation for this specific cause. It thereby activates another religious value, lovingkindness toward other members of society, enabling them to receive the help they need without having to disclose their identities or even invest financial resources to do so. Thus, religious society takes care of its members by providing anonymous help services and creating mutual responsibility to uproot this phenomenon:

“The biggest challenge we face is that our organization’s services must remain free. . . That is why we have been contacting you once a year, asking you to generously donate to GYE.” (RV-2)

The possibility of “anonymous treatment” in religious society reflects and establishes the discourse as intimate and private, preserving religious social norms that seek to address issues regarding sexuality and gender “behind closed doors”. This group collaboration allows the religious public to uproot pornography viewing while in alignment with halakha, keeping the boundaries of religious discourse intact, namely preventing public discussion of issues pertaining to sexuality. As can be seen, anonymity is an important space, not only for uprooting pornography viewing but also for simultaneously maintaining the boundaries of religious discourse:

“However, there is no need to disclose your name or any other personal information to sign up. We recommend signing up with an anonymous email address and using an alias.” (RV-1)

“These days, we are willing to combat this issue at scale to make sure that any Jew struggling in this area will have somewhere to go and get the help they need completely anonymously. However, we need your help; together, we can strengthen the foundation of our people. We can guarantee that the future Jewish community will continue to flourish. In addition, that Torah learning, lovingkindness and community structures be built on holy foundations.” (RV-7)

“Completely anonymous and free of charge, click and sign up.” (RV-12)

“This digital platform is completely anonymous. . . totally free and 100% anonymous.” (RV-13)

“Signing up is totally free and anonymous.” (RV-14)

A comparison with their secular counterparts reveals that not a single video mentions the anonymity or group sponsoring of individuals seeking help. In contrast, videos actively seek to make individuals feel that this practice is very common, legitimate, and normal, providing statistics to render their arguments reliable. Data are presented to individuals who feel that this is normal and that they are no exception. Thus, one of the questions asked in a certain video (SV-1) is “*When were you first exposed to pornography?*” and not “*Were you ever exposed to pornography?*”. There is no reason to offer anonymity; because there is no reason to be ashamed, this practice has room to be addressed and discussed.

Support for normalizing group norms is provided by various media that have become key channels featuring role models. Videos and ads represent what normative sexual tension is, what is considered a sex symbol, and which behaviors are common and acceptable in various groups [88]. What may seem meaningless to one could serve as the ultimate proof for another, depending on differences in perspective and education [53]. One of the most interesting elements in these ads is the way pornography is addressed socially. Secular ads openly speak of pornography viewing, presenting this issue as common and normal:

“If I watch [pornography]. . . the sexual energy in my body increases a little. It makes sense. It’s legitimate, it’s something we can all understand from personal experience. . . It’s not a problem in itself [pornography viewing] . . . It’s great, it can be nice, it can be fun.” (SV-8)

Normativity (as opposed to anonymity) is highly indicative of acceptance and containment of pornography viewing in secular contexts, openly discussing the issue and not referring to individual anonymity. In contrast, ads targeting the religious group keep messages subtle and implied, making them accessible through allegories and social codes that are highly specific to it, with the word “anonymous” in all its forms directly and explicitly mentioned nine times (in 60% of ads aimed at religious audiences, RV).

In ads targeting secular individuals, pornography viewing is presented as commonplace, with its negative aspects being that it is addictive and prevents individuals from living their best life. By focusing on the individual, sexual secularity circumvents the laws of religion. One ad classified as secular is an entire video on quitting centered on claiming that pornography’s overall effect on life is negative. Another ad, by the same advertiser, explains “how to hit on women and get them into bed”. The vast majority of secular ads (78% of ads aimed at secular audiences, SV) do the same. Thus, most advertisers targeting the secular public do not regard premarital or multipartner sexual practices as problematic, only pornography viewing specifically. Therefore, there is no need to hide sexual practices and worry about anonymity, since every sexual practice is permitted as long as it does not have a negative impact on the individual:

“I don’t want you to think that sleeping with women or ejaculating is negative. There’s a right way to do it. . . I want you to have a thriving sex life—with real women, and I want you to understand the following: Every time you do the deed [view pornography], you lose, because you’re reinforcing the behavior you want to stop.” (SV-11)

Thus, the strongest argument in these advertisements for the secular public is emphasizing the detriment caused to the individual by pornography viewing, with no effort dedicated to subtle or anonymous discourse. Secular Western cultures legitimize satisfying

one's sexual needs [13] through premarital sex with multiple partners: As it is socially acceptable, no attempt is made to convince individuals otherwise.

At the same time, the secular group normalizes this practice with a discourse on prevalence and by presenting global data attesting to the large numbers of pornography viewers, stating that it is a significant industry. This is unlike the religious group, which instead focuses on classifying pornography viewing as irredeemably bad. These social perceptions inform the ads, revealing the prevalent beliefs and values in each group while reinforcing views that either legitimize this practice or not [89].

7. Discussion: Toward a Sociology of Pornography in Israeli Public Discourse

This study examined how Jewish secular and national-religious groups in Israel contend with pornography use by analyzing online videos and advertisements aimed at curbing its consumption. These visual and rhetorical texts function as cultural artifacts that reveal underlying sexual norms and broader social ideologies. They do not merely reflect public concerns but also actively shape the discursive boundaries of sexuality, morality, and community in contemporary Israeli society.

The case study began by highlighting common ground: both secular and national-religious groups live within the same national and religious framework, use similar media platforms, and confront pornography as a perceived social problem. The shared premise across all analyzed ads and videos is that pornography is harmful and should be avoided. However, the *way* this message is constructed diverges dramatically across sectors, indicating fundamental differences in the social construction of sexuality.

In the religious sector, pornography is framed within a halakhic and communal discourse. The ads employ a rhetoric of absolute prohibition, are rooted in religious decrees, and highlight the individual's responsibility to the community, family, marriage and religious institutions. Even when the videos address viewers anonymously, they still position the act of pornography consumption as a violation of communal norms, with potential repercussions for one's standing in society, the yeshiva, or even in front of the rabbi. Shame and embarrassment are not only personal emotions but also communal tools of moral discipline. The emphasis on frameworks such as the nuclear family, extended family, yeshiva, and rabbinic authority reflects how deeply sexuality is embedded in the collective moral order. Thus, religious ads mobilize communal belonging to induce behavioral change.

There is an underlying tension between the secular Jew who does not adhere to the commandments of the Torah—viewed as irrelevant in modern times—contrasted with the religious sector, whose values and commandments guide them even today. For its part, in the secular community, it could be argued that science, functioning as a secular institution, has come to assume certain roles traditionally fulfilled by religion in modern societies [90]. Accordingly, the advertisements strategically employed scientific data and research to affirm and support the secular individual's moral sensitivity. Thus, while secular anti-pornography activism is an individualized endeavor of self-care and personal improvement, it nevertheless operates within, and derives meaning from, a wider secular socio-moral institutional context.

Despite being immersed in developed Western society, the religious individual is still morally influenced by the contents of Jewish religion, which firmly upholds reserving all forms of sexual gratification exclusively for the marriage union. Given that the religious sector regards pornography as inherently taboo, the discourse within their advertisements shifts away from the explicit elements of the content. Rather, it prioritizes sociocultural determinants within the individual's religious sphere—specifically marital dynamics, family

structures, and social environments. In contrast, secular-targeted ads adopt a markedly different approach. They employ an individualistic appeal, positioning pornography consumption as a personal barrier to self-fulfillment, productivity, and emotional well-being. The secular subject is framed as a rational agent, encouraged to make choices based on harm reduction and personal growth. These videos rarely reference society or communal belonging, reflecting a worldview in which the individual is autonomous and morality is self-defined. Pornography is portrayed as addictive, time-wasting, and inhibiting personal or romantic success—particularly with women—rather than as a transgression of collective values. On one hand, it seems that because the gratification of the secular individual is a top priority, they may be more satisfied. However, the labels that resonate with them are quite isolating, and there is no cohesive group responsibility to support them.

The religious individual, on the other hand, demonstrates through their behavior a sense of belonging to a consolidated social group that extends well beyond their immediate social circles [91]. One might think that the communal life of the religious community stifles individuality due to the boundaries they impose, yet it is evident that the group genuinely cares for its members, and the religious community is even willing to spend money to protect its members from practices they believe may endanger them. This demonstrates a high level of social resilience. The group's power dynamic leads the collective to engage in matters related to intimacy and privacy, which are unique to individuals. Norms ingrained within the group compel its members to financially support initiatives such as funding pornography rehabilitation for several individuals—this reflects a profound influence on the religious public consciousness. This stands in stark contrast to the mentality prevalent in secular society, that secularism is rooted in liberalism and places the individual at the center [92], which often focuses on individual welfare without considering group power dynamics or collective responsibility regarding personal indulgences. This may lead every individual to feel that society is guiding them towards self-fulfillment and caring for its members, but it does not build a surrounding social resilience framework.

The secular focus on the self may also be pragmatic. Advertisers may assume that for secular viewers—particularly men—pornography consumption is a solitary activity and may not relate to messages centered on family or community, although existing research [93] indicates that it is common even among married individuals. Some secular ads briefly mention harm to others, such as women involved in trafficking or exploitation, but even these are framed through the lens of the individual's conscience or well-being. Thus, the absence of communal references likely reflects deeper ideological assumptions rather than empirical audience profiles.

Moreover, the way campaigns targeting the secular sector present assistance for pornography rehabilitation, enabling individuals to break free from pornography viewing or addiction, can also reflect a reproduction of gender hierarchies and sexual norms. That is to say, while their perspective ostensibly aligns with feminist critiques regarding gender inequality [94], their proposed solution stands in opposition to feminist doctrine. By framing sexual relations with a 'real woman' as an instrumental substitute for pornography, they inadvertently objectify the female figure to serve male sexual needs, thereby clashing with the very values they appear to share.

The normalization of sexual conquest as a secular lifestyle presupposes a specific sexual ethics within the secular sector. By treating sexual relationships as non-unique to marital unions but as more casual experiences from adolescence onward, sexual indulgence is permissible as long as it occurs consensually and is grounded by certain state laws and social rules [95]. In light of the aforementioned considerations, sexual relations are perceived as a superior normative alternative to the consumption of pornography. Their approach seems straightforward—it is moral to seek consensual sexual experiences, yet

immoral to enjoy sexual content on a screen when there is uncertainty about whether the actors in pornographic films are doing so willingly and consensually.

Research into pornography has undergone a significant paradigmatic shift, transitioning from early frameworks preoccupied with ‘texts and effects’ toward nuanced approaches that prioritize the cultural and social contexts of consumption [96]. Concurrently, contemporary efforts to regulate pornography have evolved from traditional moralistic or religious rhetoric into a biomedical discourse of ‘clean’ science, which frames use as a physiological addiction [97]. This medicalization functions as a strategic ‘masking’ mechanism; it appeals to secular sensibilities by aligning with broader social concerns regarding gender equality and public health, while circumventing the legal and ethical complexities of free speech. By pathologizing the consumer—equating the viewer with a substance addict—the discourse successfully shifts the focus toward neurobiological responses and individual health. This biological reductionism effectively obscures the underlying ideological motivations and cultural contexts that historically informed the regulation of sexual representations [97].

Pornography addiction and the act of viewing pornography are distinct. The simplest difference between the two is that addiction controls the individual, while viewing allows the individual to manage their time according to their decisions [98]. Addiction signifies a disruption of practice affecting the individual’s behavior; the individual cannot refrain from consuming pornography, losing control, excessive time spent on sexual behavior, and negative consequences to self and others. In contrast, viewing can simply be an act prompted by a temporary lack of sexuality or even boredom, without interfering with the individual’s agenda or hierarchy of needs. It seems that addiction alone is something that requires intervention in the eyes of secular society. Secular society provides argument after argument to appeal to individuals in the sector to advance themselves, thus primarily finding addiction as a particularly problematic issue that controls the individual’s freedom. The religious sector views a major issue not only with addiction to pornography but also with the practice of viewing pornography, primarily because it disrupts the system—the couple, the family, and even the collective.

Moreover, the divergent uses of shame and anonymity in the two discourses are telling. While both sectors address pornography as taboo to some extent, religious ads treat it as a moral failure that endangers one’s integration into community life. Secular ads, in contrast, present it as a behavioral habit to be overcome for the sake of personal betterment. The promise of anonymity in religious ads reflects the stigma and desire for discretion, whereas in secular ads, it reflects norms around confidentiality and autonomy.

Finally, this study contributes to macro-level understandings of how communities construct responses to sexuality in general and pornography in particular. It highlights how sexual behavior is not merely personal but also socially encoded, monitored, and regulated. The discourse around quitting pornography viewing is therefore not just about sex—it is about belonging, identity, authority, and morality. The esthetic and narrative design of the videos further reinforces these distinctions. Religious videos draw heavily on symbolic figures—wife, family members, rabbis, yeshivas—while secular videos employ psychological language and metaphors from addiction science. From a sociological perspective, this study sheds light on the production of sexual norms in Israeli society. Pornography becomes a site through which broader values are contested and negotiated.

It would be interesting to examine future data sets against the ones analyzed. At the time of the research, there was access to pornography featuring real people. The advent of AI today may also alter claims across different sectors regarding pornography-viewing practices. Perhaps secular moral sentiments will shift, as claims regarding human trafficking may become less relevant in a few years if the direction of pornography production shifts to AI-generated content without real individuals. Nonetheless, there will still be ar-

guments about objectification of women's bodies and masculine attitudes towards women. Meanwhile, the religious claim may remain intact, asserting that sexuality impacts far beyond the individual, and thus it does not matter whether one experiences sexuality with real people on the screen or with artificial intelligence. As long as sexuality is not experienced within a couple's framework, it will pose a religious issue. Therefore, it will be interesting to see whether inter-sectoral differences will be affected and to what extent.

Although two sectors are presented as individuals ourselves, we often belong to some group, and we know that even within the group, despite appearing heterogeneous externally, there exists a gathering of individuals with internal diversity and certain differences. Therefore, the approaches and descriptions that marketers use to connect with secular and religious sectors are especially highlighted—how they categorize the methods they believe will successfully engage and connect with the individual viewer from the respective sector.

Although the article is based on an Israeli case study, its findings are relevant to broader research on social responses to pornography in diverse cultural contexts. The analysis demonstrates how public discourses on sexuality are not neutral, but rather embedded in deep-seated conceptions of subjectivity, moral responsibility, and the relationship between the individual and the community. In this way, the study contributes to a comparative understanding of how different social groups—religious and secular, collectivist and individualist—shape educational and regulatory messages around charged issues. The socio-social and cultural significance of the article lies in its proposal of an analytical framework for understanding how struggles over pornography both reflect and reinforce social orders, moral values, and identity formations—insights that can enrich scholarly research and public debate beyond the Israeli context.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Weighted Frequencies and Percentages of Religiosity among Jews, 2024 CBS Social Survey (Population Estimates).

Religiosity—Jews	Total
Total	4,814,758
	100.0%
Ultra-Orthodox	546,818
	11.4%
Religious	579,156
	12.0%
Traditional	579,445
	12.0%

Table A1. Cont.

Religiosity—Jews	Total
Traditional—not so religious	1,034,079
	21.5%
Secular	2,053,808
	42.7%
Unknown [!]	21,453
	0.4%

Note: The relative sampling error is less than 15%. Data marked with [!] has a high relative sampling error (between 15% and 30%).

Appendix B

Table A2. Links to the advertisements analyzed in the study.

Accessed on [Day-Month-Year]	Video/Ad Code Secular = S Religious = R	Video/Ad Link
05-02-2026	S-1	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VPEbT0IZKs
05-02-2026	S-2	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZCIUoafIhY
05-02-2026	S-3	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSgOOBG4Jqk
05-02-2026	S-4	Video files or transcripts are available from the authors upon request
05-02-2026	S-5	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKUuarf0Chw&t=3s
05-02-2026	S-6	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oup0lhDM_9M&t=384s
05-02-2026	S-7	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k49zStsJXjA&t=475s
05-02-2026	S-8	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZvIagH9qk4&t=1s
05-02-2026	S-9	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFzX7NyBjk&t=33s
05-02-2026	S-10	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_ziMuV1b-4
05-02-2026	S-11	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRPkNljwvTs&t=395s
05-02-2026	S-12	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIQ6y_MdnSc&t=1s
05-02-2026	S-13	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJenmJS9oV4&t=604s
05-02-2026	S-14	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLvLhhfLAg4&t=403s
05-02-2026	S-15	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urV8evaLjs8
05-02-2026	D-1	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvtikk537xw
05-02-2026	D-2	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYypkJXuTes
05-02-2026	D-3	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEZavqobP8I
05-02-2026	D-4	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vi11KI3syGc
05-02-2026	D-5	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VSdDp1C270
05-02-2026	D-6	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1b2nNb8JQ
05-02-2026	D-7	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRbLU60zDYE
05-02-2026	D-8	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5esJVn8HU8c
05-02-2026	D-9	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5IV3Zu70zs&t=1s?
05-02-2026	D-10	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPIBOgDLr70&t=17s
05-02-2026	D-11	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQkicmx4QiU
05-02-2026	D-12	Video files or transcripts are available from the authors upon request
05-02-2026	D-13	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwXMfREtLSk&t=37s
05-02-2026	D-14	Video files or transcripts are available from the authors upon request
05-02-2026	D-15	Video files or transcripts are available from the authors upon request

Note: While all links were verified during the study, some online content has since been removed by the original publishers. For these items, the authors have preserved full transcripts and visual snapshots, which are available upon request. For all other advertisements, archived video files or active URLs are provided.

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