

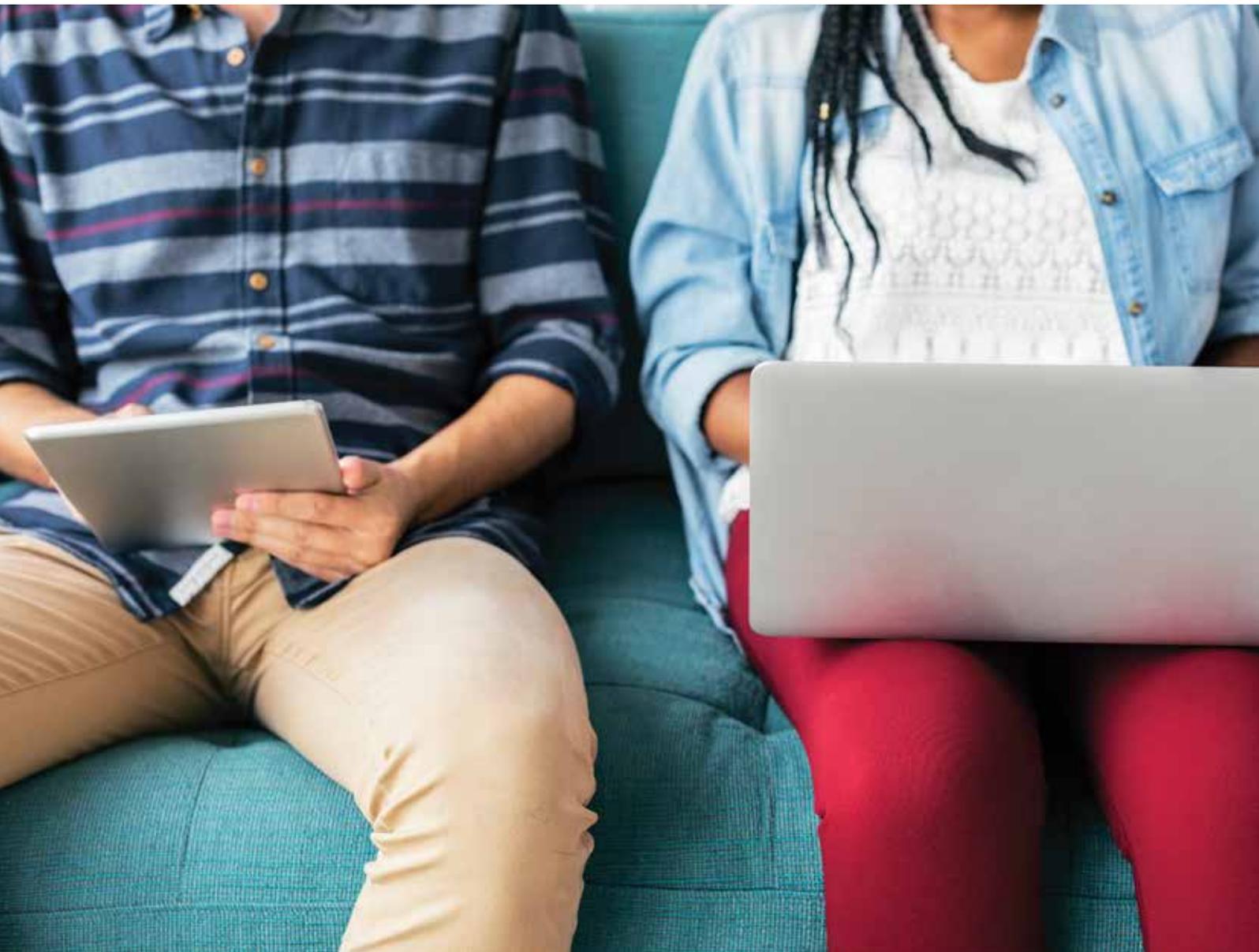


OFFICE OF FILM  
& LITERATURE CLASSIFICATION  
*Tē Tari Whakarōpū Tukuata, Tutituhinga*

# YOUNG NEW ZEALANDERS VIEWING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

STAGE 3 RESEARCH REPORT

Interviews with young New Zealanders



*YOUNG NEW ZEALANDERS VIEWING SEXUAL VIOLENCE*

**Office of Film and Literature Classification**

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# Foreword by the Chief Censor

Welcome to the Classification Office's Stage 3 Report researching young New Zealanders' views and habits around viewing sexual violence in entertainment media.



This is our third in a series of reports into this important topic, and it is potentially the most insightful as it has a real focus on the perspectives of young people themselves.

I would like to thank the researchers, staff and those young people involved for their time, commitment and honest engagement with a difficult subject. For this report we were privileged to obtain very direct input from a diverse group of 48 young New Zealanders aged 13-18. It is largely their voices you hear in the following.

The reality described by these young people is a 'new normal' where virtually any content is available to them on their devices, with little distinction as to whether this is obtained legally or not. Age restrictions are seen as more of a guide than actually being restrictive. There is not a great deal of parental engagement with, and supervision of their consumption of this material.

Not surprisingly, for the most part young people relish this freedom.

And why not? There is an incredible array of entertainment and educational possibilities available to today's teens, and as digital natives they can and should make use of them.

There are inevitably a few downsides to this, and this report provides the opportunity for some of our young people to reflect on these. It is commonplace for them to view sexual violence in films and series, access porn, or see troubling content on social media.

Fully understanding the implications and impacts of this is a complex undertaking, and more work is needed. But for now, this report, read together with its predecessors, provides strong evidence that our youth are learning about sexual violence through media representations, and to some extent are having their attitudes shaped by

them. They have often seen things they would rather not have seen, and feel that they lack information and support in this area.

The things that young people tell us will help them with this are simple and reasonable. They include better information about what they are looking to view, and better support to help them manage and put what they view into context. The task seems complicated by virtue of the breadth of content and different platforms being used. But this research can help inform simple steps we can start to take as parents, educators, counsellors or regulators in this space.

Our young people deserve this.

***“Ma whero, ma pango ka oti ai te mahi”***

***With red and black the work will be complete***

This whakataukī (proverb) refers to co-operation: If everyone does their part, the work will be complete. The colours refer to the traditional kowhaiwhai patterns on the inside of a meeting house.

Ngā mihi nui

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Shanks'.

David Shanks  
Chief Censor



PHOTO: LOUIE BURN

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## **Background and purpose of the research project**

The Office of Film and Literature Classification (the Classification Office) is responsible for classifying films, games and other publications that may need to be restricted or banned. We have noted an increase in sexual violence in material we are classifying, and this has coincided with public awareness of issues pertaining to sexual violence in wider society. Sexual violence is a complex social problem, and its depiction and impact on audiences is not well understood, particularly with respect to young people. While there is research into the effects of depictions of violence or sexual content on young people, we could not find any research specifically relating to sexual violence.

This report is the third and final component of a wider Classification Office research project that seeks to fill the identified gap in current research by giving young New Zealanders, frontline agencies, and sexual violence experts a voice to describe the effects of depictions of sexual violence in mainstream entertainment media.

## **Findings from Stage 1 of the research project**

In the first stage of research, we commissioned research agency Colmar Brunton to explore the views of young New Zealanders aged 14 to 17 in a series of group discussions. This research found that the term ‘sexual violence’ was widely misunderstood, and some participants expressed potentially harmful attitudes and misconceptions about sexual violence. Participants said that inaccurate depictions or misrepresentations of sexual violence in entertainment media are potentially harmful to younger viewers. While some participants said they were not personally affected by viewing sexual violence, they acknowledged that there could be negative or harmful effects on some viewers, particularly younger viewers. Participants generally wanted more specificity in content warnings.

The full results can be found [here](#).<sup>1</sup>

## **Findings from Stage 2 of the research project**

The second stage of research explored the views of those who work with young people in the fields of sexual violence prevention, education, treatment and research in a series of workshops. Most of these participants believed that on-screen depictions of sexual violence had the potential to negatively affect young people’s attitudes and behaviours. They noted that sexual violence is often depicted in problematic ways that in some cases may reaffirm false and harmful beliefs about sexual violence, and that media messages about sexual relations, romance and gender more generally can be harmful to young people. Participants called for better and more comprehensive education – about sex and relationships, and about interacting with media in a positive and informed way. Most participants thought classification labels/warnings are a useful tool to help mitigate potential harms.

The full results can be found [here](#).<sup>2</sup>

## **Research objectives and methodology**

After the first two stages of research, it became clear that we needed to explore young people’s views about this topic in more depth and outside of a group discussion setting. We also saw it as imperative to consult a more diverse group of young people, including those who identified as survivors of sexual violence, lesbian/gay/bisexual/trans/queer/intersex (LGBTQI) youth, and young people from rural areas.

With these objectives in mind, we conducted 24 paired interviews with 48 young people aged 13 to 18 from around New Zealand. Groups were divided by gender and age. Each interview was one-to-two hours in duration and was moderated using a semi-structured topic guide that expanded on the issues outlined in the Research Purpose.

This research sought specific, targeted evidence from young persons as to the impact of media representations of sexual violence, specifically on young people.

<sup>1</sup> OFLC 2016. *Young New Zealanders Viewing Sexual Violence: Stage 1 – Discussion group findings*. <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/research-young-new-zealanders-viewing-sexual-violence-2/>

<sup>2</sup> OFLC 2017: *Young New Zealanders Viewing Sexual Violence: Stage 2 – Discussions with service providers working with young people*. <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/young-new-zealanders-viewing-sexual-violence-stage-2/>

### Insights from young people

*We get entertainment content wherever we can find it online*

“**RESPONDENT:** My older brother did download illegally - it's extremely common - but they take shit down. Megashare got shut down. Putlocker... You just keep searching. Netflix first, it's the best quality. There was a proxy to stream US Netflix but it got shut down - **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”



PHOTO: © Shutterstock | Dreamstime.com

**RESPONDENT:** *I feel like in my family I'm like the separate one who goes off* - **YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT**”

Young people told us that parents were often strict with children and sometimes younger teens about the content they viewed, but, as young people mature, this often diminishes to the point of little or no supervision. Young people say that even those

parents who do engage with what their children are viewing are generally not restricting or actively supervising access.

One reason for a lack of parental engagement could be the technological gulf separating many parents and young people. As pointed out by a number of participants in our NGO and health agency workshops, many parents lack the confidence and knowledge to provide meaningful supervision of their children's online media use.<sup>3</sup>

Young people say they prefer viewing content alone or with friends, rather than with parents or other family members. One reason is that family viewing places limits on what they can view, and another is that they are uncomfortable viewing certain content (such as sex scenes) with family members. Some young people told us it can be useful to talk about high-impact content with friends after viewing, but they did not wish to do this with parents or other adults.

*We learn mixed messages about relationships, sex and sexual violence from media*

“**RESPONDENT:** *You needed the sex scene to show the emotional connection. It's important in any relationship* - **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

Young people told us that entertainment media was one of their primary sources for learning about

Young people told us they prefer to access entertainment content online due to the freedom and choice it offers. They say there are few impediments to accessing content. It is common for young people to find pirated versions of movies and TV shows, however they also use legal streaming services if what they want to see is available.

Young people say it is common for people their age to view content that is (or would likely be) classified as restricted, or even objectionable in some cases - for example restricted movies and games, pornography, and other extreme or disturbing content. Young people report that they do not always seek out this content, and even when they do seek it out they sometimes regret this exposure. Young people are being left to their own devices (quite literally) and appear to be testing their boundaries with few resources to assist them. Nevertheless, freedom of choice is all important for young people, and they tend to view any barriers to access negatively.

*Adults don't really know what we're viewing online*

“**RESPONDENT:** *My dad is completely oblivious to most of the things I now watch. Because he's focused on his work or what he wants to do* - **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT**”

<sup>3</sup> OFLC 2017: *Young New Zealanders Viewing Sexual Violence: Stage 2 - Discussions with service providers working with young people.* <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/young-new-zealanders-viewing-sexual-violence-stage-2/>

sexual violence. Most had developed expectations about relationships, sex and sexual violence as it was represented in media, and many appeared to adopt the perspectives and biases of the depictions they viewed. For example, it appeared that media may be contributing to how different genders view each other in relation to sexual violence – views that were often described in an antagonistic or derisive way.

While young people may learn about sexual violence from media content, their ability to critically engage with this content is often limited, having little experience of doing so. Older participants were more likely to engage critically and distinguish between media depictions and real life, and to identify and question problematic or unrealistic depictions.

Young people say that acts of sexual violence are always portrayed as negative or unacceptable in entertainment media. However, it is also true that media depictions often perpetuate harmful or unrealistic beliefs and attitudes about sexual violence.<sup>4</sup> This research explores a variety of problematic beliefs about sexual violence held by young people that seem to reflect such media depictions.

### *We don't think media shapes our attitudes or behaviour, but it might affect people younger than us*

“**RESPONDENT:** *For me personally ratings aren't a problem, they're irrelevant, but I would care if I was with kids* – **OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

As expected, most young people were initially reluctant to support the idea that viewing content may have direct or indirect effects on people's attitudes or behaviours (this is known as the 'media effects' debate). However, on further discussion, young people tended to acknowledge that media could have an effect on the attitudes and behaviours of children or people younger than themselves – for example some suggested that children or younger teens could mimic behaviour they have seen on screen,

or see this behaviour as normal in relationships. They were also concerned that younger viewers may become desensitised to high-impact content and that this may have a normalising affect with repeated exposure.

These apparently contradictory beliefs – that children or people younger than themselves are likely to be affected by media messages while the participants themselves are/were not – is in line with a phenomenon known as the 'third-person effect'.<sup>5</sup>

### *Viewing sexual violence is especially upsetting for victims/survivors and people younger than us*

“**RESPONDENT 1:** *It triggers me so much*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *It depends how I'm feeling at the time. If I feel fine I'll keep watching but maybe not on one of my not-so-great days*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *Yeah, I can't watch it. If that comes up on TV I start crying or I just leave. I just can't handle it at all*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Yeah, they shouldn't joke about that at all. It pisses me off that they think it's funny*

– **OLDER FEMALE SURVIVORS**”

Despite expressing somewhat contradictory perspectives on media effects, young people generally agreed – and demonstrated during the viewing exercises – that viewing sexually violent content has some kind of impact on themselves and others. The clips shown clearly had an emotional impact on participants, who often expressed shock, anger, sadness or discomfort. This may suggest that young people are not exposed to these sorts of depictions of sexual violence on screen often.

Young people told us they were particularly concerned about the impact on children or people younger than themselves, and the likely impact on victims/survivors of sexual violence. The survivors we interviewed described depictions of sexual violence as being traumatic and triggering for them personally.

<sup>4</sup> OFLC 2017: *Young New Zealanders Viewing Sexual Violence: Stage 2 – Discussions with service providers working with young people.* <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/young-new-zealanders-viewing-sexual-violence-stage-2/>

<sup>5</sup> *Where an individual underestimates the effects of a media message on themselves and overestimates the effect on others.*

*We don't often use official classification labels, but we do want to be warned about things like sexual violence*

“**RESPONDENT:** *I'd look on the marker, what the age rating, what the things are. Sexual violence, sexual content, nudity. I'd avoid the film to make sure my younger siblings don't watch it* – **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT**”

Most young people said that official classification labels were not important when deciding what to view for themselves. However, many sought out information online about content they might wish to avoid. Young people were positive about content warnings generally, especially for sexual violence, and a strong message came through that more detailed warning notes on entertainment content would be appreciated. They tended to associate classifications with parental supervision when they were younger, while classification labels often become less important to parents as their children age.

Young people told us they did check classification labels when making viewing choices for those younger than them, such as siblings. This supports the general view held by most participants that people younger than them were in need of guidance and protection – and classifications were clearly one of the tools they used to provide this. The way young people report using classification labels is broadly similar to how the general population uses them. A 2016 representative survey found that only 30% of adults thought classification labels were important for their personal viewing choices, however 92% believed classifications were important when choosing entertainment media for children and young people.<sup>6</sup>

As noted previously, young people are accessing content primarily online, and using a plethora of services (both legal and illegal) to do so. Very few of these services provide official New Zealand classification labels, and many provide various alternative classifications, which may be confusing for people seeking out trusted guidance.

### **Where to next? Using this research to help our communities**

Providing the information, support and tools to help young people with the challenges of media content is both realistic and achievable.

This research shows that young people are willing and able to talk about their media use and the concerns they have about content, but they are often unwilling to approach adults about this, or do not think adults are willing or able to provide guidance. Some adults may lack the knowledge and experience to discuss these topics with confidence, and so the Classification Office will explore ways in which these conversations can be encouraged at home and in schools.

Better education of young people about media effects and media literacy is necessary. Young people told us they first learnt about sexual violence either in entertainment media or in programmes provided in schools. It therefore makes sense for existing sexual violence programmes to include information about relationships, sex and sexual violence in media.

To ensure young people are provided with the best resources, we must engage with other organisations with an interest in the protection of children. This means developing and strengthening relationships with schools, libraries, government agencies and NGOs involved with sexual violence prevention, youth health and wellbeing, media regulation, and online safety.

The findings of this report will also contribute to the Government's announced regulatory reform process, which aims to bring online streaming services under the Broadcasting Standards system. We will ensure the voices of young New Zealanders are heard as we work with participants and stakeholders to help ensure that these reforms work for industry, regulators, and New Zealand families.

Finally, the Classification Office will continue to inform the conversation around young people's media use by driving robust, informative research that addresses the real questions.

<sup>6</sup> OFLC 2016: *Changing media use and public perceptions of the classification system.*  
<https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/research-public-understanding-2016/>

# BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The Office of Film and Literature Classification (the Classification Office) is an independent crown entity responsible for classifying films, games, and other publications that may need to be restricted or banned.

Sexual violence forms part of the legal classification criteria, and we have noticed an increasing prevalence of sexual violence in material submitted for classification. This observation has led to the development of a research and consultation project to explore the effects of sexual violence in entertainment media, particularly as it relates to young people.

For more than a decade, research into media effects has found that exposure to violent and/or sexualised media can negatively influence people's attitudes and behaviours. One study conducted in 2006 combined the results of 431 previous studies involving 68,463 individual participants (both children and adults) and concluded that exposure to media violence is associated with more aggressive behaviours, thoughts and feelings, as well as reducing behaviours that could help others.<sup>7</sup> The study also noted that the effects of exposure are particularly enduring for young people and children.

In 2016, the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication* published a review of 153 separate empirical studies and content analyses published between 2000-2015. It concluded that heavy exposure to sexualised media and pornography influences sexual behaviour, strengthens beliefs in gender related sexual roles, and strengthens adversarial beliefs such as the sexual

double standard.<sup>8</sup> Closer to home, clinical psychologist and University of Auckland Professor, Nicola Gavey, has researched and published extensively on the links between sexualised media, sexual coercion and misogyny.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the extant body of research, the Classification Office is aware of little if any research that seeks to understand the specific impacts of media depictions of sexual violence on young people. This report is the third and final component of a wider Classification Office research project that seeks to fill the identified gap in current research by giving young New Zealanders, front line agencies, and sexual violence experts a voice to describe the effects of depictions of sexual violence in mainstream media.

In the first stage of its research, we commissioned research agency Colmar Brunton to explore the views of young New Zealanders aged 14 to 17 in a series of group discussions. The results can be found [here](#).<sup>10</sup>

The second stage of research explored the views of those who work with young people in the fields of sexual violence prevention, education, treatment, and research in a series of workshops. The results can be found [here](#).<sup>11</sup>

After the first two stages of research it became clear that we needed to explore young people's views about sexual violence in the media in more depth, and this time outside of a group discussion setting. We also saw it as imperative to include young people who identified as survivors of sexual violence, LGBTIQ youth, and those from rural areas.

<sup>7</sup> Archives of Paediatric and Adolescent Medicine 2006; 160:348-352. Bushman, Huesmann, *Short-term and Long-term Effects of Violent Media on Aggression in Children and Adults*

<sup>8</sup> Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication (August 2016), Ward, Erickson, Lippman, Giaccardi, *Sexual Media Content and Effects*

<sup>9</sup> See for example *Out of Sight and Out of Mind: Detachment and Men's Consumption of Male Sexual Dominance and Female Submission in Pornography*, Antevska and Gavey. *Men and Masculinities* 2015. Vol 18(5).

<sup>10</sup> OFLC 2016: *Young New Zealanders Viewing Sexual Violence: Stage 1 – Discussion Group Findings*. <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/research-young-new-zealanders-viewing-sexual-violence-2/>

<sup>11</sup> OFLC 2017: *Young New Zealanders Viewing Sexual Violence: Stage 2 – Discussions with service providers working with young people*. <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/young-new-zealanders-viewing-sexual-violence-stage-2/>

## BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

With these objectives in mind, we conducted 24 paired interviews with 48 young people aged 13 to 18 from around New Zealand.

### *Research objectives*

The research centres on five core questions:

1. What do young people think 'sexual violence' is? What does the term mean?
2. How are young people affected by sexual violence in the media? What are the potential harms?
3. What things in entertainment media might mitigate these impacts/harms?
4. Are there positive depictions of sexual violence that may have different effects on young people?
5. What restrictions and warnings are appropriate for particular depictions of sexual violence?

Supplementary questions included:

- What language do young people use to talk about sexual violence?
- What is the 'scale' of sexually violent content (e.g. what is less harmful, what is more harmful)?
- What concerns do young people have about viewing sexually violent content?

# METHODOLOGY

The Classification Office conducted 24 paired interviews with 48 young people from around New Zealand in early 2017. Most participants were recruited through pre-existing professional networks. The Classification Office also enlisted the help of organisations that work with young people to recruit participants (see [Appendix 4](#)). All participants were given a letter outlining the purpose and format of the interview, as well as a privacy and consent form to be signed by participants and their parents prior to the interview. Most interviews took place in the participants' homes or at the youth agencies' offices. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw at any time and were offered pastoral information and support where necessary.

Most participants were secondary school students and came from a cross-section of schools between deciles 1 and 10. Of the participants who were not currently in formal education, one had graduated from secondary school and was working part-time, three were involved in vocational training, and two were not currently engaged in education, training, or work. One was a full-time mother. Participants represented a variety of ethnicities including NZ European/Pākehā, Māori, Samoan, and other ethnic groups such as Greek. Two interviews were conducted with self-identified survivors of sexual assault, and one was conducted with participants who self-identified as LGBTIQI. A full demography of the sample is provided in [Appendix 3](#).

## **Interview structure**

Participants were split into age bands of 13-15 and 16-18. During one interview in which a 15- and 16-year-old were present, clips selected for the younger pool of participants were shown. In another interview, which took place at the Classification Office premises, a 15-year-old viewed R16 clips. The parents of the 15-year-old were aware of this content and gave their consent for the viewing to occur. In total, there were 13 older pairings and 11 younger pairings.

Interviews were conducted in gender-matched pairs, by two Classification Office representatives of the same

gender as the participants. The one exception was in the case of a non-gender-binary participant, where the Classification Office did not have non-binary staff available. An InsideOut representative assisted in the facilitation of this interview. Paired interviews were conducted to mitigate limitations observed in the first stage of research, namely that participants in a group setting were reluctant to converse widely and in depth about the core research questions.

In most cases the participants were friends or at least known to each other. Interviews with young male participants were carried out with the aid of a youth facilitator, a student in his last year of secondary school who had been working with the Classification Office on this project. The Classification Office involved a youth facilitator with the male groups as a result of the first stage of research, which highlighted a particular difficulty in eliciting responses from young male participants. This strategy appeared to be successful and the Classification Office will consider using youth facilitators for subsequent consultations.

The interviews followed a semi-structured question and topic guide designed around the five core research questions, and clips were shown to facilitate discussion. Interviews were between one and two hours long. Most interviews were video-recorded for transcription purposes, except in cases where the participants did not consent to being filmed. Notes were taken during all interviews and later transcribed.

## **Entertainment media examples**

Participants were shown scenes from mainstream films and television shows. These scenes depicted a range of scenarios depicting consensual and non-consensual behaviours within sexual/intimate relationships. Some clips depicting sexual violence were shown. Different material was shown to younger and older pairs based on the clip's official classification (for example M, R13, or R16).

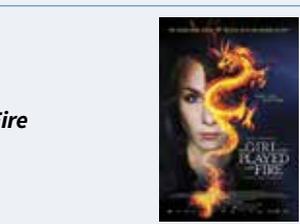


**Clips shown to younger pairs:**

<p><b>Adventureland</b></p>		<p>A teenage boy and girl verbally express their assent to sex/consent while taking their clothes off.</p>
<p><b>Easy A</b></p>		<p>A teenage boy tries to give a monetary gift to a teenage girl to have sex with him. He persists in trying to kiss/touch her after she makes it clear she does not want to.</p>
<p><b>Family Guy</b></p>		<p>A man is raped by a bull at a rodeo event, interjected with a discussion between a female journalist and a talking dog. The discussion contains derogatory comments about women.</p> <p>Also shown to some older pairs.</p>
<p><b>Glee</b></p>		<p>A teenage gay couple argue. One is drunk and tries to pressure the other into sex.</p>
<p><b>The Vampire Diaries*</b></p>		<p>A teenage girl in bed with a male vampire who had bitten her. The girl tries to leave but the vampire intimidates her and demands that she stay in what is presented as a romantic situation.</p>

\*not shown to survivors

**Clips shown to older pairs:**

<b>Game Of Thrones*</b>		An antagonistic character rapes his new wife while forcing another man to watch.
<b>Love And Basketball</b>		Heterosexual high school students have their first sexual experience. Consent is mutual and contraception is used.
<b>Orange Is The New Black*</b>		A young woman is raped twice – once in a flashback by a man known to her, and later by a prison guard. She and another inmate consider revenge-raping the guard with a broomstick.
<b>The Girl Who Played With Fire</b>		Two women have sex after negotiating the terms of their relationship. Both clearly consent. This is somewhat explicit, with breasts and pubic hair shown.

\*not shown to survivors

**Two supplementary clips were shown to some of the older pairs:**

<b>Jack &amp; Diane</b>		A drugged teenage girl is sexually assaulted by several boys/young men, who film the act and post it online.
<b>Watchmen</b>		A man attempts to sexually assault a woman who violently resists. The man then physically assaults her before he is interrupted by another character. All of the characters are clearly superhuman.

Please refer to [Appendix 1](#) for more detailed information about the clips.

## METHODOLOGY

At the end of each interview, participants were asked to classify each clip with an appropriate rating and warning label, based on its content and keeping in mind the discussion about how such content may potentially affect viewers. The results of this exercise are summarised in [Appendix 2](#).

### **Ethical concerns**

The Classification Office identified that there was a risk of triggering participants by exposing them to depictions of sexual violence. We consulted with START Healing, a specialist sexual violence agency, to assess the risk of this occurring. As a result it was decided that the self-identified sexual assault survivors would not be shown the clips from *The Vampire Diaries*, *Game of Thrones* or *Orange Is The New Black*, and that the older pairing would be shown an abbreviated clip from *The Girl Who Played With Fire*.

The Classification Office also consulted with InsideOut as to whether any of the clips could potentially be triggering to LGBTQI youth. No risk was identified.

Facilitators told participants that if they felt uncomfortable they were free to leave the room, look away, or ask for the clip to be stopped. Each interview included questions around whether participants felt that the material shown to them was disturbing, upsetting or distressing. At the end of the interview, participants were provided with a list of area-appropriate helplines and contact details. Counsellors were present with the self-identified survivor pairings, while the National Co-ordinator of InsideOut assisted Classification Office staff with the interview involving self-identified LGBTQI participants.

Participants were not asked about personal experiences of sexual violence (involving either themselves or people they knew), however personal experiences were at times brought up by participants themselves.

### **Notes on terminology**

Throughout this report, the terms ‘young people’ and ‘participants’ refer to the young people we interviewed. Any differences by group (for example by age or gender) are highlighted where appropriate.

The terms ‘classification’ and ‘rating’ are used interchangeably and refer to the official classifications given to publications by the Classification Office – R16 for example. ‘Content warning’ refers to the descriptive notes or ‘warning notes’ given to advise or warn consumers of any potentially harmful content. This information is provided within a ‘classification label’.



### **Methodological constraints**

The Classification Office identified some limitations inherent to the fieldwork and analysis chosen:

- **Group Bias:** Our participants made up a group of young people who were willing to participate (with parental consent) in an interview with a governmental body about the issue of sexual violence in media. This group may not be wholly representative of the general youth population
- **Sample Size:** Face-to-face interviews are time-consuming and resource intensive. The scope of this research project meant that only a small sample size could be accommodated. While the Classification Office accounted for this by recruiting a diverse group of participants, care must be taken when attempting to extrapolate the results of this project more broadly.



PHOTO: Steinar Englund

# DETAILED FINDINGS

# Young people's relationship with increasingly diverse media

## *Main findings from this section*

- The majority of participants accessed entertainment content via download or streaming online (from user-pay, free and illegal streaming sites and apps). The priority for young people was immediacy and breadth of access
- Illegal downloading is considered normal behaviour, however some participants were only likely to use illegal methods if they could not find the content they were looking for on a legal service
- Participants appeared to access content online with little or no supervision or restrictions. Freedom of choice in both nature of content and ways of accessing it was considered both normal and desirable
- This unimpeded access to content sometimes exposed participants to content that made them uncomfortable, with some expressing dissatisfaction at the inability to avoid exposure to such content
- Some reported having seen abusive behaviour (such as bullying or harassment) on social media and gaming platforms, and did not demonstrate awareness of tools or strategies to avoid such behaviour
- Many participants reported that access to content had previously been limited by parental supervision, although most indicated that their parents no longer had a role in their viewing choices
- Participants preferred viewing content alone or with friends, rather than with family members. One reason was lack of choice, another was that they were uncomfortable viewing certain content (such as sex scenes) with family members.



## The increasing diversity of online content and ways to access it

### The importance of choice to young people's viewing

Young people reported having a high degree of control over their viewing choices. This was true of both the content that they viewed and the different media sources they used to do so. Having such a high degree of control over what they accessed and how they accessed it seemed to directly influence their viewing habits. The young people interviewed actively sought out specific content, using a variety of tools, rather than passively accepting programming delivered to them through more traditional formats such as broadcast television. Participants were also likely to use a range of information sources to decide which content was worth viewing, including their peers, promotional materials, and the internet.

**QUESTION:** *How do you go about finding something to watch?*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *Ask other people*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Probably just trailers, trailers for the movies*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *Look it up online*

- **YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANTS**

### Young people seek out content online wherever it is available

**RESPONDENT:** *I look up the title of a movie and then I go "full movie" and I click each site - **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT***

**RESPONDENT:** *You can pick what you want and binge watch - **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT***

The majority of young people we spoke to made deliberate choices about the content they watched, and accessed it by downloading or streaming online. Methods employed included user pay, free, and illegal streaming/download sites and apps. There appeared to be a general shift from downloading to streaming behaviour, although both were

discussed and the terms were used interchangeably. The priority for young people was immediacy and breadth of access, and downloading torrent files took extra time and increased the risk of viruses infecting their devices. Given their priorities, the content limitations of legal user-pay streaming services were discussed negatively.

**RESPONDENT:** *My older brother did download illegally - it's extremely common - but they take shit down. Megashare got shut down. Putlocker... You just keep searching. Netflix first, it's the best quality. There was a proxy to stream US Netflix but it got shut down - **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT***

**RESPONDENT 1:** *Putlocker, Gorillavid, WatchSeries Online [laughter]*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Netflix and Lightbox are there too, but I find them quite restrictive with their content. A lot of the time you can't find what you want to watch.*

**INTERVIEWER:** *Are viruses are problem? [laughter]*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *You should probably get an ad blocker*

- **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANTS**

It was apparent that illegal downloading and streaming behaviour is completely normalised and unremarkable among the young people we spoke to. Even the term 'pirating', which is loaded with negative associations, appears to have a merely descriptive meaning to young people. Some appeared to understand that there was something 'wrong' about illegal downloading, but this was more closely associated with age restrictions on content rather than 'piracy' per se. While some lacked the technical ability to engage in this behaviour, they had ready access to someone who did, and shared technical knowledge with each other as necessary.

**RESPONDENT:** *Oh yeah, my dad taught me how to download it, onto Pirate Bay - **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT***

### Use of YouTube

YouTube was a preferred 'go-to' platform for many participants when they lost interest in other platforms such as television or video games.

**RESPONDENT:** *I prefer YouTube over TV because you can control what you're watching on YouTube whereas you rely on something good being on TV. I'll put gaming first because I find that most interesting but if I get bored or frustrated I'll go to YouTube*



PHOTO: © Dimonikids | Dreamstime.com

- YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT

Participants were generally unlikely to define content according to the platform they accessed it through. For example, when asked about their favourite movies, shows, and games, a high number of participants reported on their favourite 'YouTubers' and 'vloggers' (video bloggers). YouTube was not identified as distinct from more traditional media platforms.

**RESPONDENT:** *I don't really stream, I don't use Netflix or anything. I'll get into the habit of watching YouTube videos and going down the recommended list. I don't really watch television shows, just YouTubers*

- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT

### Uninhibited access to restricted content

The young people we spoke to appeared to be largely uninhibited while seeking out and accessing entertainment content. Very few reported experiencing any restrictions to accessing content, either technically or figuratively. Participants described differences in the methods used to access entertainment content, but this access was primarily internet-facilitated. Without restrictions, participants reported exercising a high degree of choice about the content they watched. Furthermore, they were free to experiment with the content without any kind of parental supervision.

Many participants discussed the lack of restriction they experienced in a neutral way, which suggests that they had normalised freedom of access to such an extent that they considered it unremarkable. A smaller proportion of participants reflected on the differences in media consumption that existed between them and older generations, and the level of access that they were currently experiencing.

**RESPONDENT 1:** *The guys I hang out with all watch porn*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *I think teens today with the internet, it's easier to access than for older generations*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *Pornhub is two dollars a month, it's really cheap, or it's free*

- YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANTS

**RESPONDENT:** *Mum comments that I spend so much time on my devices but it's just like I would be watching TV. It's just a different generation*

- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT

Other participants described experiencing regret when this lack of restriction led them to content that made them uncomfortable. Some felt that the highly individualistic nature of the way they sourced content made them feel isolated from others.

**RESPONDENT:** *I feel like in my family I'm like the separate one who goes off*

- YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT

Some young people reported viewing disturbing content on their social media feeds or online forums. While they recognised that this content was inappropriate, the language these young people used suggested feelings of powerlessness and a lack of autonomy and control over what they were exposed to.

**INTERVIEWER:** *Do you use 4chan?*

**RESPONDENT:** *I've been on there before. I've come across some messed up shit... Sometimes if you play around on Tumblr enough you see some really weird shit.*

**INTERVIEWER:** *Like what?*

**RESPONDENT:** *Like really weird shit*  
**- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT**

### Use of social media is ubiquitous

The relationship between young people and social media platforms appeared to be determined by two major factors: functionality and popularity. The majority of participants used both Snapchat and Facebook. Snapchat was often discussed positively, while Facebook was discussed more negatively. Participants described Facebook posts as 'dumb', 'boring' and 'over-rated'. They expressed the general sentiment that Snapchat appeared to allow them a greater degree of user control over their content.



### Bullying and harassment in social media

Some reported having seen abusive behaviour (such as bullying or harassment) on social media and gaming platforms. While this behaviour was perceived negatively, the language they used suggested that young people regard such abuse with apathy, having normalised this reality to such an extent that they do not demonstrate an awareness of tools or strategies to at least prevent being exposed to such behaviour.

Negative experiences with abusive behaviour online were also clearly shaped by gender. Female and non-binary participants were more likely to report instances where they felt like or were targets of abusive behaviour, whereas male participants were more likely to report being viewed as predatory or abusive.

**RESPONDENT 1:** *They hear you've got a girl voice and immediately they stop being toxic, and they get creepy*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Yeah, sometimes my girlfriend played Call of Duty, briefly, before she got sick of it, and the guys on it are just terrible, and it's all just gross comments about your body*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *And God forbid you have any pictures of you up on a gaming forum/ community*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *They critique you really harshly if you do something even just a little bit wrong in the game. They'll be like "What are you doing!" and just insult you cause you're a girl*

**- OLDER PARTICIPANTS, FEMALE AND NON-BINARY**



PHOTO: © Iakov Filimonov / Dreamstime.com

### Viewing and engaging with parents about media use

#### Parental supervision

Young people commonly reported that their access to entertainment media content had previously been limited by parental supervision, although for the vast majority this was a historical practice and their parents no longer played a role in their access to media or their viewing choices. These discussions were strongly underpinned by the participants feeling that there was now a relationship of trust between themselves and their parents, which made supervision and restriction unnecessary. This

language of trust and maturity was present in many of the participants' statements about the relationship they experienced between viewing choices and parental control.

**RESPONDENT:** *My parents were more concerned when I was younger with social media. My dad let me watch anything but he restricted bad things... Mum was strict about social media... At 13, Facebook's a novelty - strangers befriend you and interact, you're younger, naive, you're new and don't know... I borrowed a mate's Netflix and found B-grade, very explicit films. They were pornographic and I regretted watching*

- YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT

**RESPONDENT 1:** *No, they don't mind, they don't care*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *No, they don't mind, I'm older and they know I'm responsible*

- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS

Regardless of such statements, a small number of participants did describe their parents as having a clearly defined, and often strict, enforcement role with respect to their viewing choices well into their mid-teenage years.

**RESPONDENT:** *Mum was extremely big on not letting us watch stuff above our age. Like when we were 14, 15 we couldn't watch an R18 film* - OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT

For the majority of participants, the relationship between their viewing choices and their parents' had evolved in two distinct ways: either their parents actively encouraged or expressed interest in their viewing choices or they took no interest at all in their viewing choices.

**RESPONDENT:** *My dad is completely oblivious to most of the things I now watch. Because he's focused on his work or what he wants to do* - OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT

Conversely, participants who reported that their parents were invested in their viewing habits described co-viewing

material with their parents and/or having discussions with their parents about the content they were watching. Other parents continued to maintain a supervisory role with regard to their teenager's media consumption.

**RESPONDENT:** *Mum and I like some of the same TV shows, so she'll ask me, "Any new TV shows lately?" and I'll be like, "Let's binge-watch Game of Thrones".*

**RESPONDENT:** *Mum let me watch like horror from an early age. We're all interested in horror movies, they're interesting to watch*

- OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANTS



Perhaps unsurprisingly, young people often reported taking steps to avoid parental scrutiny over the content and classifications of their content of choice. This was especially true of young people whose parents took a more supervisory role in their media consumption.

**RESPONDENT:** *I once borrowed a friend's GTA (game). I switched out the R18 cover so my mum would be OK with it* - YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT

The language young people used to describe these experiences revealed a certain element of thrill-seeking, or pride in having bested their parents by having accessed restricted content. None of the young people we spoke to reflected on or expressed interest in the rationale behind their parents' roles in supervising their viewing choices. Some participants were seemingly aware that a lack of parental supervision regarding their media choices was inappropriate either legally or morally, but they were not especially articulate in their discussion of it.

**RESPONDENT:** *I hope parents would monitor but that's hard to do* - OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT

**RESPONDENT:** *If I've watched a cool film or show I'll tell [Mum] about it, but she doesn't make an effort. Dad may ask a few questions about what I'm watching at his place but he won't ask if it's age-appropriate*  
 - YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT

**RESPONDENT 1:** *They don't worry 'cause they know I wouldn't watch anything bad*  
**RESPONDENT 2:** *I think my parents trust me to know what's wrong and right*  
 - OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS

When probed, participants were often unable to explain why their parents didn't express an interest in their viewing choices.

**RESPONDENT:** *With Netflix/online I don't know why they don't pay more attention*  
 - OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT

The young people we spoke to strongly associated classification labels and content warnings with parental supervision. However, they reported that their parents became less concerned about classifications and content warnings as they got older. From the Classification Office's perspective, these findings are concerning. They suggest that parents are either not aware that their teenagers are viewing restricted content, or are aware that they are doing so but are disregarding the importance of classifications and their role in supporting age-appropriate viewing choices.

Some participants felt that watching high-impact content with adults would not counterbalance its effects, or be a useful way to discuss and debrief about what they had seen. However, young people did report doing this with friends. One participant described watching a restricted television show with his mother. Although the show upset him, he did not discuss this with her.

**RESPONDENT:** *When I was younger my mum was watching Game of Thrones. I asked her what it was. She wouldn't tell me so I just sat there. She didn't tell me to get out. She let*

*me sit there and watch. It disturbed me so I walked out and started playing my games*

**INTERVIEWER:** *Did you talk to your mum about it afterwards?*

**RESPONDENT:** *No. I didn't talk to my mum all week*  
 - OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT



PHOTO: © Marcin Winnicki | Dreamstime.com

Parental engagement with and on social media was similar to other media. Young people reported either parental interest, participation and supervision, or complete indifference. Some participants indicated that their preferences regarding social media platforms were shaped by how their parents or family members occupied or populated them. Facebook was the primary example of this.

**RESPONDENT:** *My entire family follows me on Facebook, so I can't really do anything on there*  
 - YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT

### Viewing with family

The young people we talked to recalled viewing content with their families, however this did not appear to be a common feature of their current viewing habits.

**RESPONDENT 1:** *That would be awkward to watch with parents*  
**RESPONDENT 2:** *Yeah, they're always judging your reaction*  
 - YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANTS

Young people associated the family viewing experience with 'family appropriate content'. Many described family viewing as habitual, ritualistic, and centred around broadcast television.

“**RESPONDENT:** *I got invested in The Block - my parents watched it so I started watching it with them* - **OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

“**RESPONDENT:** *Most Fridays, the four of us sit down and watch a TV show, movies* - **YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT**”

“**RESPONDENT:** *[Mum] doesn't check up on what I watch. We don't watch much together. We watch Masterchef together. It's like a family ritual, we love cooking shows. Sometimes she'll ask what I watch but I just usually say House* - **YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT**”

There were exceptional cases where parents watched content chosen by a young person, or where young people watched high-impact content with their parents that they all enjoyed. However, it was also apparent that young people found watching sexual content with their parents uncomfortable and/or embarrassing. Participants also reported during the viewing exercises that they felt awkward during the scenes of consensual sex. Sexual content may therefore play a role in young people's general resistance to family viewing.

“**RESPONDENT 1:** *I only feel uncomfortable because every time I watch a movie like that my parents are always with me. Kind of have to, eh? Because they look at you going "What's this? What's he thinking?"* - **YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT**”

“**RESPONDENT:** *I think it made me uncomfortable because it's that sort of thing that it would be weird watching with a parent. It's almost a bit too revealing, I guess* - **YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT**”

# Understanding relationships, sex, and sexual violence in media

## *Main findings from this section:*

- Young people report learning about relationships, sex and sexual violence from entertainment media
- Many appeared to adopt the perspectives, biases and scripts of the depictions they viewed
- Gender is an important factor in how young people view sexual violence, and the perceived views of other genders are often viewed dismissively
- Most participants appeared to believe that different genders view sexual violence differently. At times this was reported in an antagonistic or derisive manner
- Many young people hold problematic beliefs and misunderstandings about sexual violence
- Young people often lack the ability to effectively critically analyse material they are viewing; however
- Many are able to identify problematic and unrealistic depictions of sexual violence and relationships
- Young people report that sexual violence is generally framed as being wrong or unacceptable in entertainment media
- Many young people do not appear to have been exposed to stronger depictions of sexual violence
- Understanding of the term ‘sexual violence’ varies widely, however many young people have a relatively sophisticated understanding of it.



PHOTO: Marc-Olivier Jodoin

### Learning about relationships, sex, and sexual violence

Young people discussed learning about sexual violence from either a school programme or the media. These two experiences appear to be the entry point for sexual violence knowledge for many or most young people. For many, the concept of sexual violence was something that had been discussed superficially, in a single health or physical education class. The gravity or importance given to sexual violence by adults in these situations appears to have had some direct impact on the importance of this subject to young people.

### Learning about sexual violence from media

Young people reported learning about sexual violence from the media, particularly entertainment media. They were sceptical of the idea that the way sexual violence was portrayed in the media could influence their own attitudes and behaviours. Despite this scepticism, however, many participants appeared to adopt perspectives, biases, and social scripts that reflected the representations of sexual violence that they viewed, suggesting that young people understand these portrayals as authentic and/or literal. This is concerning, as media depictions often perpetuate harmful or unrealistic beliefs and attitudes about sexual violence (see findings from our NGO and health agency workshops).<sup>12</sup>

“RESPONDENT: *It’s good to see scenes like that. [You can learn] not to get yourself into situations as a girl. If you’re not shown then I’d have no idea if I was about to be abused. I wouldn’t know if I hadn’t seen it on TV/film*  
– OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT”

“RESPONDENT 1: *People are a lot more aware of what can go on*  
INTERVIEWER: *So that’s positive?*  
RESPONDENT 1: *Yeah. It’s made me realise that it does happen and you don’t just see it in movies*

RESPONDENT 2: *I think if it’s in a movie I reckon someone would be like, ‘Oh it’s made up’ and not think about it, as it happens every day. Yeah*  
– OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS”

“INTERVIEWER: *Does it happen in real life?*  
RESPONDENT 1: *Not the rumour stuff but I do think that men do that*  
INTERVIEWER: *Push themselves (on women)?*  
RESPONDENT 2: *I’ve seen enough in movies to think that that does happen*  
– OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS”

“RESPONDENT: *For kids, and myself sometimes, you can take it as being in reality like on TV*  
– OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT”

### Developing expectations about relationships, sex and sexual violence in media

The young people we interviewed generally seemed to hold preconceptions about narrative arcs, story and character development across a wide range of media content. Therefore, it is of little surprise that as these same young people learn about sexual violence via its media representations, they begin to develop expectations about the ways in which sexual violence will be shown and how the scenarios on screen will progress and resolve. Young people generally accept that entertainment media follows patterns, and that the ensuing content will be reliably formulaic and predictable. As a result, young people’s commitment to what is ‘normal’ or ‘expected’ informs their perception of certain media content, and they trust that entertainment media will faithfully reproduce the script that they have come to expect.

“RESPONDENT: *You knew what was going to happen* – OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT”

Young people appeared adept at picking up cues in entertainment content in order to understand what

<sup>12</sup> OFLC 2017: *Young New Zealanders Viewing Sexual Violence: Stage 2 – Discussions with service providers working with young people.* <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/young-new-zealanders-viewing-sexual-violence-stage-2/>

was happening, then used these cues to figure out how the scenario would progress and resolve. For example, young people were more likely to conclude that hetero-normative representations of relationships were romantic, intimate, committed, exclusive, and ‘positive’ overall. They did not draw the same conclusions about queer relationships, which they reported as being much more



unexpected, perhaps shocking, and confusing overall (in response to *The Girl Who Played With Fire*). Such a disparity in their understandings of hetero-normative versus queer couplings supports the conclusion

that young people are learning and forming social expectations directly from media representations or lack thereof.

Other examples of participants reading cues in order to extract meaning included:

- Young people felt that all entertainment content frames sexual violence as ‘bad’, ‘not okay’, negative, or unacceptable. However, some participants felt it was unnecessary to include depictions of sexually violent acts to convey this message to an audience.

“**RESPONDENT:** *You could definitely see [rape is] a bad thing but I don’t think you have to show it to get the message across* - **OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

- When characters have sex, it signals the beginning of an exclusive and committed relationship.

“**RESPONDENT:** *You needed the sex scene to show the emotional connection. It’s important in any relationship* - **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

- Scenes participants described as ‘intense’ were often those in which explicit sexual and/or non-consensual behaviour occurred. Young people often had the expectation that sex/rape will be cut away from or blurred, or that there will be some form of intervention in the narrative.

- Young people have a clear expectation that genres such as romance, drama, or ‘family friendly content’ always end happily. These genres are also perceived as depicting ‘happy/good/healthy’ relationships.

Assumptions arising from depictions of sexual violence in entertainment media specifically included:

- Young people expected, and felt it was normal, for women to be portrayed as powerless in stories that fit within the historic and fantasy genres.

“**RESPONDENT:** *I don’t think it’s that rape happens more now, it’s just that it’s recognised generally. In the past women would have accepted that he’s my husband, I should have sex with him even though I don’t want to. That’s just... a thing that happened* - **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT**”

- Young people expected that perpetrators of sexual violence victimise multiple women, have a history of committing sexual violence, have a sense of entitlement, and will be framed negatively as characters. These include characterisations of perpetrators as ‘weak’ or ‘depraved’.
- Young people assumed that victims/survivors of sexual violence will either become homicidal or suicidal as a result of their experiences.
- Young people felt that victims/survivors were often shown to ‘get themselves into situations’ where sexual violence is perpetrated.

### Understanding sexual violence terminology

When most young people attempted to define ‘sexual violence’, their primary inference was that the behaviour needed to be physically violent in a sexual context. Young people generally understood rape was sexual violence, but showed varying understandings of other forms of sexual violence. This was particularly true of sexual violence that was non-physical, or instances in which coercion played a strong role in the resulting ‘choices’ characters made. A number of participants also recognised that sexual violence covers a spectrum of behaviour and that ‘sexual violence’ and ‘rape’ are not synonymous terms. These particular participants were able to report

on this spectrum and give precise definitions of certain behaviours. The language of consent, and the presence or absence of it, was used in these interviews to describe the spectrum of sexually violent behaviours.

“**RESPONDENT:** *Sexual acts where you don't have fully-informed consent.*

**RESPONDENT:** *Rape and abuse are different. Abuse is violent in some way. Violence is something that hurts you mentally or physically... Rape means forcefully penetrated, and abuse means you're touched or have things done to you.*

**RESPONDENT:** *More physical definitely. Sexual violence is definitely physical. Abuse is more like...a wider range of things*  
- **OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANTS**”

“**RESPONDENT:** *Rape, anything touchy-feely you don't consent to* - **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

“**RESPONDENT 1:** *Using someone sexually*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Anything, like, if a chick doesn't want to do it*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *No, because hitting a girl over the head isn't sexual*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Yeah, but sexual-wise*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *Oh yeah, so it's like a guy taking advantage of a girl in a sexual way*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Like from the little things, like the chick being drunk and then having sex with her. That's not right. And then it goes to not having consent and then all the other bad ass stuff*

- **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS**”

Coercion and harassment were concepts that the majority of young people we spoke to lacked a clear understanding of. Some, however, demonstrated precise understandings of these terms.

“**RESPONDENT:** *Like blackmailing someone into having sex* - **OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

“**RESPONDENT:** *It's not quite as intense as hitting them but it's still harassing them sexually and trying to come on to them, in ways that they clearly don't want* - **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

### Understanding consent

Many of the young people we spoke to could confidently identify sexually violent behaviour. Where it was depicted, many participants described the behaviour as rape without being prompted or questioned by their interviewers. Many participants from both age brackets were also able to recognise the absence of consent. They identified a range of non-consensual behaviour, and used a character's reactions and body language to determine its absence in scenes where non-consent was not expressed verbally. This undermines presumptions that young people are not capable of recognising consent, or that young people need consent to be expressed explicitly and affirmatively. This is not meant to imply that expressing enthusiastic consent is not useful. Rather, it is simply an acknowledgement that young people can and do understand the subtleties of consent communication.

“**RESPONDENT 1:** *Before as well. In bed she had her hand over her boobs, she was defensive. It was her that led him into the bedroom though*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *She pushed him off her, and she didn't want to piss him off or something*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *I think that she was scared for him to react poorly, I don't know*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Yeah*

**INTERVIEWER:** *So was there a silent pressure?*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *Yeah*

- **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS**”

“**RESPONDENT:** *They were going to have sex. He kept asking her if it was alright. It wasn't like the other ones where the guys were forcing her to do something. It makes you feel better when the guy's being nice to the girl. It's cuter* - **OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

### Safer sex practices

In addition to understandings of consent, the Classification Office was interested in the ability of young people to pick up on and identify safer sex practices. The clip for *Love And Basketball* was included as it contained implied condom use. Many young people commented on this element of safer sex organically and without intervention from the interviewers. They were surprised to see condom use, but reflected positively on the fact that express consent and safer sex practices were represented. They also reflected on the social benefits that media depictions of express consent and safer sex practices could potentially have.



**RESPONDENT:** *They were constantly checking on each other. Let's just say if my first sexual relationship was like that I would not be upset or mad at all [laughter]*

- YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT

**RESPONDENT 1:** *And you never see things like the condom*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Yeah, I was like, "That's surprising!" You never see that, I was like, "Wow"*

**RESPONDENT:** *They used protection, a condom. It's rare to see condoms. It's a good message. You rarely see tender love [in programmes I watch]*

- OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANTS

These responses suggest that young people are conscious of express consent and safer sexual practices, but that these elements are generally absent in the media content they are viewing.

### Lack of awareness or exposure to sexual violence on screen

This research has already established that young people have a lot of viewing experience, and that many have been exposed to high-impact or restricted material. However, the sexually violent content that we showed them was met with surprise, and often made participants feel uncomfortable and uneasy. It is worth considering whether young people maintain a potentially false preconception of themselves as possessing a certain worldliness. That is, in some sense, participants felt they had a wide scope of media content in their repertoire, that they had seen all that there was to see. This led to a follow-on assumption: that if they had not seen a particular representation in the media they had viewed thus far, they did not expect to see it in any subsequent viewing, and were not mentally prepared for a 'new' impact. Therefore, when they were shown material that did not fit their expectations, as was the case with the content in the clips, they were clearly surprised and acted accordingly. Many participants were unaware that there were gaps in their knowledge and were unprepared for novel content, to the extent that they struggled to talk through and explain what they had seen, even immediately after viewing it.

Many participants struggled to identify having recently seen representations of sexual violence and/or abusive behaviour in the context of intimate relationships. Some reported never having seen content similar to the clips shown in the viewing exercise. Others reported having seen sexual violence in other content, and were firm in their belief that sexual violence had been cursory to the plotline of whatever it was that they had watched. They were also likely to draw parallels between sexual violence and explicit sexual material.

Without a clear understanding of what sexual violence is, or how it is represented, young people were effectively required to draw on the limited resources they did have. For example, they demonstrated familiarity with depictions of high-impact consensual sexual content. It was from this knowledge that they attempted to make sense of representations of sexual violence. Similarly, they drew on what they understood of romantic consensual relationships to contextualise the representations of sexual violence that they were presented with, and

presumed that there were pre-existing relationships between characters in a non-consensual interaction.

“**RESPONDENT 1:** *Did she have a thing with the guy in the past maybe? Yeah, I think she had a thing in the past. Maybe she broke it off and he still likes her* – **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT**”

### **Relationship between media representation and life experience**

While our research questions specifically address sexual violence in entertainment media, consensual sexual interactions were also included in the research design in order to better understand how young people recognised and understood the presence or absence of consent. What we found was that young people used their own personal experiences of relationships, or relationships that they had observed, as reference points. Their own early romantic relationships, or relationships they were familiar with such as those of their parents, featured in their discussions.

Young people used colloquialisms such as ‘hooking up’ or ‘going out’ to describe the relationships viewed in the clips. Several participants also related what they viewed to personal experiences, in particular experiences at parties where they had seen similar behaviour, or behaviour that they thought was relevant to the discussion. The universality of such anecdotes suggests that witnessing some level of sexual violence in situations such as parties is a common, shared experience for many young people.

“**RESPONDENT:** *Boys come on to a girl while she’s unconscious. We’ve all probably experienced this in our friends’ group and our age group* – **OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

**RESPONDENT 1:** *Yeah, nah, girls are frustrating eh*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *So confusing*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *Sometimes they’ll go off with a guy. They’ve had one drink. One drink. Girls aren’t that lightweight that they can’t handle one drink, and then they go back to their friends crying. It’s like “No, you knew*

*what you were doing, don’t play that game”*  
– **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS**”

“**RESPONDENT:** *I dunno. She seemed reluctant at the start. I’ve seen this at parties, when the girl isn’t into it but the guy goes in and the girl goes along with it. It escalates until she didn’t, it didn’t seem like she had a way out so she went along with it* – **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT**”

Such anecdotes often lacked specific and descriptive information, suggesting that the young people recounting them have both internalised and normalised the experiences they recounted. However, the anecdotes often described behaviour that is generally accepted as ‘sexually violent’. Participants often did not provide details relating to what happened to the people involved, such as whether other people intervened, whether the behaviour was addressed, or if there were any other outcomes. Female participants were much more likely to recount experiences where they or their peers had experienced gendered and sexual violence. That they were able to associate representations of sexual violence with life experiences suggests that young people are able to recognise sexual violence when they see it. However, as with the ‘party anecdotes’, other accounts of gendered and sexual violence from girls did not include descriptions of intervention, resolution, or consequences for the abusive behaviour.

“**RESPONDENT 1:** *Even if I’m walking*  
**RESPONDENT 2:** *Yeah like walking the dog, you can always guarantee at least one... I don’t even know if it’s sexual harassment if they’re just... I’d probably call it just harassing you, like not...*  
– **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANTS REFERRING TO CAT-CALLING IN THEIR COMMUNITY**”

“**RESPONDENT:** *I know two people who’ve been in a near-rape situation... One, she was intoxicated and she is like the flirty type of drunk, she got fingered by a complete stranger and she was a virgin so it’s not like*

*she was used to that feeling or anything, and it was very traumatising for her. The other was intercourse, she didn't like it anymore and she kept saying "stop, no", and the male wouldn't, he just kept going. She didn't know if that was rape 'cause she'd already consented* – **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**

**PARTICIPANT**

The young people told these stories using language and tone that revealed feelings running the gamut from anger and shame to apathy. It is important to note that participants were not asked questions about these personal experiences. Their reporting suggests that these experiences did not result in intervention, resolution, or consequences for those perpetrating abuse.

Some participants reported on media depictions of sexual violence in relation to their own experiences in a way that suggests that, while they are coming into contact with these behaviours, they lack the mental and emotional resources to understand them. Their reports revealed significant gaps in knowledge and understanding of what is being represented to them in entertainment media, and that this may impact on their ability to manage their own life experiences.

**RESPONDENT 1:** *Most of the time it just happens and they both go with it. If there's no reaction, if you don't stop them then that's consent*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Yeah that's true*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *If you weren't OK with it you say no, but if nothing's said then... if you push them away... She was uncomfortable and she kind of just sat there and moved over but she was on the corner and feeling trapped*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *I don't think that's sexual abuse but something more tame... I can't think of a word, it'd probably just be like 'perky', 'weird'*

– **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANTS**



### **How gender informs young people's understanding of sexual violence on screen**

Gender was a major factor that influenced young people's understandings of sexual violence. Young people almost universally concluded that different genders viewed sexual violence and its representations in entertainment media differently. This was, at times, reported in an antagonistic manner, with some young people expressing disdain or disregard of other genders within the context of intimacy and relationships. Participants tended to report that the opposite gender understood or approached the topic of sexual violence in a simplistic or problematic way.

**QUESTION:** *Do boys and girls regard sexual violence differently?*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *I would think so. We look at it from a male perspective... we can sort of empathise better with the male in the situation. It's easier for us to see ourselves in them. I don't know how females would think about it but... I feel like females are more likely to blame it on the guy from their perspective. Males would be more understanding to the guy in that situation*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *I totally agree with that. I feel like girls are harder to read. Isn't that true? [laughter] I feel like girls sometimes might – I don't want to sound sexist here – they might not see the whole picture all the time, they might not see both sides and I think – I think males often act on their own emotions*

*and girls don't see those emotions that cause things all the time*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *I think males resort to physical violence, it can often seem like the man's fault. But behind the scenes it can be like a two-way thing*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *I don't think they'd sympathise with the man as much*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *They'd side with the woman*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *They'd be more definitive in saying that he raped her so he was wrong*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *If it was a girl who was abused she might be a bit more siding with the girl. But if it was a guy who was abused they might see it as more of the other person's fault*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *I agree. If it was a girl who was raped watching that - I reckon she'd think the man is completely in the wrong*

- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS ”

“ **RESPONDENT:** *Guys interpret it differently than girls, they think it's normal and think it's okay to do those things* - YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT ”

Young people across the gender spectrum appear to have developed fixed, gendered understandings of sexual violence. These understandings seem to be influenced by media narratives. For example, most young people were aware of the near-universal trope of the male predator.

“ **RESPONDENT:** *When I think about it it's always the guy doing the violating* - YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT ”

A very small number of participants, typically older ones, demonstrated a critical awareness that this bias was operating as a part of wider social discourses, rather than simply being a reflection of their own lived or peer experience.

“ **RESPONDENT 1:** *So it just fuels the hatred toward men*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Yeah*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *It's not a harsh hatred but it's underlying*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *It makes me pissed off that like society sort of teaches men that it's OK. So anger at men but also anger at society for letting it continue*

- OLDER PARTICIPANTS, FEMALE AND NON-BINARY ”

We also observed young people attempting to rationalise or justify their gendered biases. In this sense, young people often held onto 'received wisdom' from media and other popular discourses, internalising it as fact. For example, many participants showed a lot of deference for and commitment to the idea that men are primarily sexually motivated, and that this biological imperative explains men's 'need' to constantly pursue sexual interactions, consensual or otherwise.

“ **RESPONDENT:** *Guys see it as just sex. There's two different views* - OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT ”

Young people reported that women who deliberately sought out sexual interactions, engaged in any sexual behaviour, or who welcomed sexual interactions with men all faced risks to their reputations (as did women who did not welcome sexual interactions with men). Some participants commented on this as representative of a gendered double standard. However, several participants also appeared to believe that reputation and reputational risk were the primary motivation for women's sexual choices. By contrast, men were perceived to be primarily motivated by their inherent sex drives.

“ **RESPONDENT:** *Guys get champed-up for having sex but girls get degraded* - YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT ”

**RESPONDENT 1:** *I don't know. Maybe she doesn't want her reputation*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *It's pretty hard to shake. Reputations are pretty hard to shake*

- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS ”

Some participants were pleased to see depictions of a woman initiating sexual activity, which was generally seen as uncommon in entertainment media.

“**RESPONDENT:** *It’s a stereotype that the man pushes the woman into a situation, some women initiate too* – **OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

**RESPONDENT:** *The girl initiated, which is a nice message, that it’s not always the guy leading* – **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

Young people appeared to have developed expectations about gender from media narratives about gender, and specifically gendered violence. In their interviews, this manifested in their attitudes towards their self-identified genders and the genders of others.

“**RESPONDENT:** *There’s a lot of distrust. Especially if you have a bad background with men in general, and then you see it in media, and then you hear it. Media has quite a bit of sexual violence. So it just fuels the hatred toward men* – **OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

Young people were also capable of identifying and reflecting on the impact of sexism and sexist practices within media depictions of sex and sexual violence.

“**RESPONDENT:** *Yes. Girls more often than not are considered the victim, and um... guys more often than not are worried that they may become that kind of monster* – **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT**”

“**RESPONDENT:** *It’s that common misconception that men will rape, men will be the murderers, I don’t know why we think that, it’s like ‘blue is boy, pink is girl’, it’s just gender misconceptions* – **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

### Victims/survivors’ understanding of sexual violence

Survivors of sexual violence reported confidently on the impact their experiences had on their attitudes and worldviews. They were forced to navigate these areas in isolation while also managing the misunderstandings of others. They reported very negative responses from both peers and adults when they disclosed their experiences of sexual violence, including having their specific needs dismissed, being belittled, made fun of, and not being taken seriously.



PHOTO: sergio souza

“**RESPONDENT 1:** *Lots of people lie about it and make fun of it*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Yeah a lot of people make fun of it*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *You’re meant to like having sex with a guy. You’re meant to like having sex and if you don’t like it then you’re weird. Lots of guys think that I’m weird because of it*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *A few guys do care about that sort of stuff...like I told one guy a long time ago about what happened, and he just burst into tears and said “that’s not OK!” I was like, “Woah, no one’s been like that before”*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *Most guys aren’t like that. They just think it’s funny and normal* – **OLDER FEMALE SURVIVORS**”

The young survivors held some preconceptions and/or expectations about sexual violence that were influenced by media discourses, however these were very clearly filtered through their own experiences.

Some reported that their peers often tried to relate to their experiences by drawing on depictions of sexual violence they had seen in entertainment content. Young survivors did not like these comparisons, which they felt minimised their experiences. Young survivors also described avoiding sex scenes, explicit material, and relationship-driven

narratives in the media they consumed. Instead, they preferred violent action content, or content where the relationship dynamics were neutral or light-hearted.



### **The aftermath of sexual violence: media messages about the criminal justice system**

We observed a strong correlation between how narratives about sexual violence ended and how young people reflected on the representation overall. Participants often rooted for positive outcomes and resolutions in the media they consumed, such as the victim/survivor experiencing empowerment and the perpetrator being duly punished.

“**RESPONDENT:** *Everything has to end well. Like in movies. Rare to find movies with a bad ending unless it's part of a series* – **YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT**”

Participants felt let down and cheated when narratives about sexual violence did not have idealistic outcomes. This was particularly true if the criminal justice system did not become involved, as young people felt this was an unequivocally poor outcome for victims/survivors. The young people did not demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of how the criminal justice system often fails or re-traumatizes victims/survivors of sexual violence. Instead, participants held concrete views about ‘justice’. These views often appeared to be based on the narratives presented to them in entertainment media.

“**RESPONDENT 1:** *Take it to the police*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Yeah take it to the police maybe*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *Stuff like that. Talk to people, “What should I do?” At least take it to the family first. Then take it to the police. Just to see what the family has to say about it so that she has a little bit of support*

– **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS**”

### **Attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence**

Most young people exhibited a mixture of healthy and problematic understandings of sexual violence. Often they showed little awareness of the contradictions in their belief systems. It was clear that young people are still developing their attitudes towards sexual violence well into their late teenage years.

#### **Problematic attitudes and beliefs about relationships, sex and sexual violence**

Many participants exhibited a range of attitudes about sexual violence that demonstrated fundamental misunderstandings about sexual violence, coupled with views that are problematic from a sexual violence education and prevention perspective.

Some were unable to identify sexual violence in the clips. Some struggled to draw comparisons between what they viewed and ‘real world’ behaviour, or to similar behaviour they had seen in other media content. This demonstrates that many young people either fundamentally lack exposure to sexual violence or have significant gaps in their understandings of what sexual violence looks like and how it is represented.

“**RESPONDENT:** *No, I wouldn't say... I think this will sound weird... a part of it seems slightly natural on a very basic level. But I mean, everyone kind of, he can realise that what he's doing is not consensual and not right but being provoked like that, and having had sexual relations with the girl, something does spark that, a little bit. It's not a completely unnatural, wrong, foreign*

*and weird thing. A little bit of... yeah. That and that. I don't think he should've done it*

**- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT**

In some cases young people had already begun to develop fundamental misunderstandings about sexual violence and its societal impact.

**RESPONDENT:** *Well I think specifically men are raped more than girls but girls are more associated with it because of the media*

**- YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT**

A high number of young people believed that being drunk minimised the role of the perpetrator of sexual violence, and assigned more responsibility to the victim/survivor.

**RESPONDENT:** *The guy wasn't sober so he didn't know what he was doing... If you're willingly becoming that drunk, around these kinds of people, it's bound to happen, you should be careful not to drink too much*

**- YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**

Others reported that sexual violence was caused solely by male sexual desire.

**RESPONDENT:** *The man had no ability to restrain his impulses and desires and forced himself upon the girl*

**- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT**

Some young people also believed that sexual violence was often caused by misunderstanding or incorrect interpretations of consent.

**RESPONDENT:** *They might've been getting mixed messages, like males as well, not just females*

**- OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**

**RESPONDENT:** *I feel like the guy thought she was joking when she said no and so he kept pushing and pushing*

**- YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT**

Similarly, some of the young people we spoke to interpreted controlling or abusive behaviour as normal features of romantic/intimate relationships. Several felt that controlling or abusive behaviour could be motivated by a perpetrator's love of or care for the person that they treated poorly.

**RESPONDENT:** *He later apologised and said "I did it 'cause I love you". She went back to him. Cause it's happened to her before she didn't see it as such a problem*

**- OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**

Furthermore, a number of participants believed that passivity and appeasement were normal, and strongly associated these behaviours with female partners in intimate relationships.

**RESPONDENT 1:** *It was cute. She's hesitant. She felt she must have to give in. Loving.*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *It was mild. She seemed reluctant at first, like she didn't wanna do it, but he was keen so she changed her attitude. She was shy throughout, like she wasn't keen but didn't want to disappoint*

**- OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**

Many young people reported that the clothing, appearance, and behaviour of victims contributed to or was the cause of the sexual violence perpetrated against them.

**RESPONDENT 1:** *The guy shouldn't have done it but it was the girl who sort of provoked him*

**- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT**

*As long as she can prevent situations like that from even beginning to start then it would be a lot better, in terms of healthy relationships and getting away from people that do this*

**- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT**

There were also participants who responded negatively to victims and were critical of their behaviour.

“**RESPONDENT 1:** Obviously what the guy did was really wrong

**RESPONDENT 2:** But it almost seemed like it was more her fault

**RESPONDENT 1:** Yeah it was more her fault because she was the one pressuring him emotionally

- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS ”

“**RESPONDENT:** I would tell her to stop being so deceitful about sex - YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT ”

“**RESPONDENT:** Cause she’s too cheeky, and she like, gets too flirty - OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT ”

Some young people reacted hatefully to perpetrators of sexual violence, suggesting they wished to hurt or kill them. Alternatively, they suggested that rape was an acceptable punishment for those same perpetrators. This concept of retribution as justice suggests that the young people who made these statements lacked a sophisticated appreciation of the impact sexual violence has on a person.

Again, many young people indicated that physical acts were necessary in order for something to be considered sexual violence.

### Healthy attitudes and beliefs about relationships, sex, and sexual violence

Many participants expressed empathy for the characters in the clips shown. This is illustrated by the ways in which they reflected on the experience of sexual violence and the impact it could have on victims/survivors.

“**QUESTION:** How did that make you feel?

**RESPONDENT 1:** Sorry for the girls.

**RESPONDENT 2:** Yeah that guys have no respect for the girls

**RESPONDENT 1:** Girls are just there – not treated as people

- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS ”

“**RESPONDENT:** It shows the fear in rape, the abuse, and what power and control does to people - YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT ”

“**RESPONDENT:** She just gave up. She didn’t tell anyone or seek help. The prison guard was in a position of power so she just let him. Like you’re powerless if it’s happened to you before - OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT ”

Most participants felt that they would intervene in situations of sexual violence. It was clear that these feelings were motivated by an empathy for others.

Young people reported wanting to intervene on both parties’ behalf, to provide counsel and support where necessary. They were confident that in such a situation they would feel empowered enough to

insert themselves into situations of sexual violence if they saw them taking place or about to take place. It was clear that these young people felt intervention by others was a necessary factor in the prevention of sexual violence.



PHOTO: Cristian Newman

“**RESPONDENT:** I don’t know if I’d have the courage to stand up to that. But I’d definitely talk to him about it and make sure the right people knew about it - OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT ”

**RESPONDENT:** I’d step in and say something, I couldn’t bear to watch that in real life - YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT ”

“**RESPONDENT:** If I knew that there was an issue I would speak to the one who is being manipulated or being hurt the most. I would talk to them. Be brutally honest. And I

*would tell them the truth about their partner that they can't see themselves - OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT*

**PARTICIPANT**

A number of young people also demonstrated a relatively nuanced understanding of victim/survivor responses to sexual violence. For instance, several understood that as well as trying to escape or fight back, freezing and non-resistance were also natural and instinctive responses to sexual violence.

*RESPONDENT: I've heard from a couple of acquaintances where they've just let someone do something they don't want. They feel obligated to - OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT*

**PARTICIPANT**

*RESPONDENT: It was intense, it showed him getting mad and raging and her just sitting there blank with no emotion - she felt something but she wasn't expressing it, she was just numb - YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT*

**PARTICIPANT**

*RESPONDENT: They zone out. They avoid what they're feeling. They come out of their bodies - OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT*

**PARTICIPANT**

Some participants were aware that power over other people, coupled with a perpetrator's sense of entitlement, were often important factors in sexual violence.

*RESPONDENT: The relationship between her and the guys could be realistic in terms of like that guy expecting her to put out. Like she's just some thing, she's not a person, she's just there to be used - OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT*

**PARTICIPANT**

*RESPONDENT: He wanted the other to watch, that's sick. He wanted mental impact. It's a one-sided, controlling relationship - OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT*

**PARTICIPANT**

*RESPONDENT: The problem is I don't think he sees a problem with how he's behaving. I don't know if anything would get through to him just because that's the way he was raised; he could get whatever he wanted, people had to listen - OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT*

**PARTICIPANT**

### Young people's ability to critically analyse media content

#### Media representations as artificial and inauthentic

A significant number of young people recognise that media depictions are artificial and constructed, rather than direct or faithful representations of real life. In the interviews, these young people were able to critique and test their presumptions about what and how sexual interactions were represented in media.

*RESPONDENT: I think they just want to show you something that ends on a high note. In real life not everyone gets caught which can be really sad for not only the person it happens to, but it could also be someone in your area - YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT*

**PARTICIPANT**

*RESPONDENT: It seemed like it was being forced into the story. Again, another excuse to stimulate the viewers - YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT*

**PARTICIPANT**

This was particularly true for some older participants, or more mature younger participants, who had begun to engage more critically with issues around sexual violence and were ready to start unpacking some of the preconceptions they held. These participants had begun to notice that there were conflicts between their expectations, media representations, and their understandings of sexual violence in real world situations.

*RESPONDENT: I have seen a couple of things where it's been a male victim. What annoys me is how they play the woman as the victim - OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT*

**PARTICIPANT**

“**RESPONDENT 1:** *It’s frustrating the way they dramatise it so much*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Like women are dainty flowers who get abused all the time*

– **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANTS**”

### Identifying problematic depictions of sexual violence in media

Some young people had started to notice problematic patterns and tropes in entertainment media.

“**RESPONDENT:** *One reason I don’t watch Orange Is The New Black is it’s too one-sided, like “of course women get raped, especially in prison”. What about men? Men get raped too* – **OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

“**RESPONDENT 1:** *Like “pretty woman got raped by a big burly man on a cold night in a small town”*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *“She was wearing a mini skirt and he chopped her up”*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *“And he buried her in the woods. Like “Wow, haven’t heard that one before”*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Especially as I watch so many crime dramas, you see the same stories*

– **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANTS**”

Some young people also recognised that difficult or complex subject matter could be treated more or less problematically according to genre conventions. Comedies and cartoons were of particular note here.

“**RESPONDENT:** *More often than not comedy is derived from more negative things in the world. It is kind of annoying when people take these things seriously when it is in fact comedy. But I can understand in situations they can take it too far* – **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT**”

“**RESPONDENT 1:** *I feel like it was meant to be funny but it wasn’t. They take the violence to the extreme in an attempt to be funny, to appeal to some people* – **OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

Participants also noted that allegedly ‘romantic’ relationships could still be problematic, and it became apparent that these young people had already started to reflect on what that might mean in terms of wider social impact.

“**RESPONDENT:** *I feel like we see relationships that are meant to be positive but if you analyse them they’re actually quite unhealthy. I think Twilight and Fifty Shades are the most obvious examples* – **OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”



PHOTO: Anton Darius | Sellers

### Many participants found it difficult to articulate views about sexual violence in media

Although young people were often fairly comfortable reporting their thoughts and opinions on a wide range of topics, they did not seem as comfortable when asked to think critically about sexual violence and its representations in entertainment media. At this point in discussion participants often withdrew somewhat, stating that they felt unsure and did not know what to say. Their language and tone of voice suggested that this was a difficult or laborious task, and that they did not see it as a positive exercise. A few even compared this element of the discussion to schoolwork.

“ **RESPONDENT:** *This is a little bit like an English essay* – **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT** ”

A number of young people openly acknowledged that they did not engage critically with content that they viewed. Some demonstrated a clear lack of critical thinking skills necessary to evaluate the sexual violence depictions shown, and viewed them either superficially or without much thought. We anticipated some young people would have had less exposure to sexual violence and would therefore not necessarily have a sophisticated understanding of sexual violence. This needs to be considered in the context of the fact that these same young people generally had unfettered access to high-impact content.

Even where some participants could recognise behaviour as problematic, they lacked conceptual certainty and the vocabulary necessary to articulate what they saw.

“ **RESPONDENT:** *Rape and... some other stuff. Can't think of what other stuff it is* – **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT** ”

As most young people are not critically reflecting on the content they view, it may therefore be unsurprising that young people struggle to make sophisticated links between their viewing and the media effects debate (i.e. that people's attitudes and behaviours can be affected by media content). While they were capable of reflecting on issues and complexities when pressed, reflection and critique were not processes they engaged with during the act of private viewing. In some ways, participants immediately contradicted their fixed positions by, for instance, talking about how content was addictive – that they felt like they couldn't stop consuming content, or that they engaged in binge-watching. These young people simultaneously believed that media effects were not legitimate, and that they were directly affected by content, at best to a degree where they struggled to disengage from it. Similarly to other findings observed, they did not seem to be aware of this contradiction.

# Media representations of sexual violence and its impact on young people

## *Main findings from this section:*

- Young people tend to be sceptical of the idea that media is likely to affect people's attitudes and/or behaviour – unless asked specifically if the same was true of people younger than them. On further discussion, the majority of young people suggested the qualified view that some media effects were likely, although not applicable to them personally.
- Some participants identified the risk that younger viewers might imitate sexually violent behaviour that they saw on screen. They also expressed concern that exposure to sexual violence in content could desensitise viewers and to some extent normalise this behaviour.
- The clips clearly had an emotional impact on participants, who often expressed shock, anger, sadness, or discomfort.
- Several participants reported experiencing distress after being exposed to extreme content online, however many still felt drawn to this content.
- Survivors of sexual violence reported feeling significant distress when exposed to depictions of sexual violence.
- Participants both reported and demonstrated a number of coping strategies they used to deal with negative viewing experiences. These included skipping or stopping the content; discussing the content with friends; watching something light-hearted; or deliberately avoiding content such as sexual violence as much as possible.
- Young people said that they enjoyed participating in the research, as it provided them with a safe space to discuss ideas around the content they consumed and the effect that it had on them. The positivity of this experience for young people demonstrates that young people are willing and able to discuss complicated subjects if provided with the right environment.



PHOTO: © Jason Stitt | Dreamstime.com

### Young people's views: can media affect people's attitudes or behaviours?

When asked directly how they were affected by media content, and how media content affected others or communities more generally, young people reported a range of answers. Interviewers did not ask participants directly about their views on the phenomenon of media effects (i.e. that people's attitudes and behaviours can be affected by media content), but discussions about media influences and harms often moved gradually towards this topic. Many participants were immediately reluctant to accept that the content they viewed could affect them, either directly or indirectly. There were few exceptions to this rule: older participants were understandably more likely to have begun considering how content and its accompanying representations might impact people. Generally, however, young people responded negatively or dismissively to the idea that content could have an effect on them personally.

Instead, young people often felt that a viewer's response to content was their responsibility alone. They justified this position by asserting that any impact content had on a viewer would be a result of their own hypersensitivity, personal experiences, or poor background. Participants' criteria for a genuine media effect required that the effect be explicit, overt, and ongoing.

“RESPONDENT: *None of that would affect me because I know it's TV and stuff.*

RESPONDENT: *It's not directly the movie's fault, it's the person's fault.*

RESPONDENT: *We are impressionable but we are smart and we can tell the difference. Most of us anyway*

- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS ”

“RESPONDENT: *Me personally I don't mind but some people might be affected. If you know it's a problem for you then don't watch -*

OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT ”

It is interesting then that many young people appeared to withdraw from or circle back on their initially negative or dismissive attitudes about media effects after they

were exposed to high-impact content during the viewing exercise.

“RESPONDENT: *I don't think people my age should see that. It confuses real expectations. You need a strong mentality*  
- OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT ”

This may be in part due to the fact that, regardless of their own perceptions of their media consumption, the young people we spoke to had not actually viewed a lot of high-impact material. Therefore, their attitudes to media effects had developed within quite narrow frames of reference. In any case, participants' views that children or people younger than themselves are likely to be affected by media messages – while the participants themselves are not – is not surprising. This finding is in line with a phenomenon referred to as the ‘third-person effect’, where an individual underestimates the effects of a media message on themselves and overestimates the effect on others.

### Media effects on people younger than them

Young people we spoke to often adopted paternalistic attitudes towards those younger than themselves, especially if questions were framed in such a way as to put them in a position of authority or responsibility. This was particularly true in discussions of media effects. Participants' language became more assertive and emotive, and they did not feel the need to justify why they believed those younger than them were likely to be affected by watching high-impact content.

“RESPONDENT: *I don't think young people should be exposed to that sort of thing*  
- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT ”

“RESPONDENT: *Young people are more gullible to what they see* - YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT ”

Consistent with other observations, participants did not seem to connect their acceptance of media effects on younger viewers with their own experiences of viewing media, with the exception of the occasional anecdote.

Participants expressed concern about the harm of high-impact viewing, especially of sexual violence, on those younger than themselves. They were primarily worried that younger viewers would experience shock and/or distress, or that exposure to high-impact content would directly cause them to act out or replicate inappropriate behaviours.

“**RESPONDENT:** *They think it's the thing to do and they'll do it.*

**RESPONDENT:** *If they hadn't had discussions or lessons of what's healthy and what's not, they wouldn't know*

- YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANTS”

However, participants also felt that at a certain point, viewers could be too young to actually understand what they were viewing, that it would 'go over their heads', and that this lack of understanding cancelled out any potential harms that could result from exposure to the content.

“**RESPONDENT:** *If somebody younger than me was to see it they would probably have either the same effect or even less of an effect because they might not have fully understood what was going on* - YOUNGER

MALE PARTICIPANT”

For some young people, media effects were seen as less pronounced once a person reached adulthood. Their reasoning was that life experience and wisdom were active barriers against media effects. Following this logic, participants often felt that people who were mature and responsible did not need to concern themselves with media effects, and that any suggestion otherwise was either misplaced or exaggerated.

“**RESPONDENT:** *If you start learning about that sort of stuff at a young age you start thinking about doing that sort of stuff at a young age, or even just doing it at all*

- YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT”

Some of the young people we spoke to believed that even if there were negative media effects, these could be counterbalanced by positive media effects. Positive media effects described included being exposed to 'real world' experiences, and widening viewer's worldviews and knowledge. Some even suggested exposure to different types of content was a social good.

“**RESPONDENT:** *People should be made aware as soon as possible at a young age. Even if they're too young to handle it they should be able to see anyway* - OLDER FEMALE

PARTICIPANT”

This contrasted with the views of participants who worried that children or younger viewers could potentially imitate or mimic sexually violent behaviour.

“**RESPONDENT:** *With younger kids in particular, a lot of young kids like to re-enact things they see. Especially in fighting scenes, you can tell like with younger children they've been watching films 'cause they try things out. For example in primary school this film came out and people were trying to choke people from it*

- OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT”

“**RESPONDENT:** *They won't understand getting raped. They'll probably think it's good so they'll try it* - OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT”

Others suggested that younger viewers in particular may misunderstand sexually violent content, and believe that it accurately reflects the world, or that such behaviour is normal in relationships.

“**RESPONDENT:** *It probably would if they kept watching movies like that, it'll paint a rough picture of what relationships should be*

- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT”

“**RESPONDENT:** *[My friend] gets really scared, she over-thinks. People get frightened of their own surroundings from watching those*

things on TV. Like I'll walk home from a party but [my friend] won't.

**RESPONDENT:** *I thought it was cute and romantic. And then I looked back at it [as a teenager] and I was like [disapproval]*

- OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANTS

### Media effects on adults or people their own age

A small number of young people took a fatalistic stance, arguing that if media effects were legitimate and operating on an individual basis, then individuals who watched high-impact content had already been and would continue to be exposed and affected. Therefore media effects, if they existed, were already pervasive and that nothing could counteract them. Thus, media effects should, by this logic, be accepted as inevitable and unavoidable.

In contrast, others argued that context was the key determinate in the experience of media effects. Therefore, positive cues within the content and wider social discourses were an important measure in counteracting negative media effects. For example, some participants suggested that sexually violent media might influence males to commit acts of sexual violence if they did not believe they would face punishment for their behaviour.

**RESPONDENT 1:** *Punishment needs to happen to show that it's bad. If you're watching something by yourself you could take it that it's all right*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *If you don't know it's bad in the first place*

- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS

**RESPONDENT:** *I feel like some guys would see that and think, "I can do that to girls and that's how I would get some", you know what I mean? I think it would have more of an effect on people in general... I think that stuff's kind of scary if you think about it*

- YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT

Overall, most young people believed that media effects were probably real. However, they qualified this stance

robustly, and insisted that media effects were not applicable to them or their own experiences.

**RESPONDENT:** *Short term impact. They'll grow up watching more of these movies so they'll get used to it. But I think it's just a short term emotional effect*

- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT

### Viewing sexual violence in media: impact and harms

#### Normalisation and desensitisation

Young people often suggested that viewers may become desensitised to high-impact content through repeated exposure and that this could in turn lead to the normalisation of certain behaviours.

Again this concern was framed as being for those younger than themselves, however participants acknowledged that people their own age, and even adults, may be effected in this way. This was often accompanied by the belief that adults were more desensitised to sexual violence and that they would therefore be less affected than young people when exposed to sexual violence. Female participants were more likely to think that males would become more desensitised to sexual violence, and therefore react differently to it than females would.



PHOTO: © P\_ponomareva | Dreamstime.com

**RESPONDENT:** *It definitely normalises these things. Like if you see violence all the time on TV, if you see it in real life, even if it's just a little bit, you're desensitised to it*

- OLDER PARTICIPANT, NON-BINARY

**RESPONDENT:** *It's common, you get used to it, I'm not shocked. If I saw it in the real world I'd be beside myself but not shocked as you're so used to it*

- OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT

**RESPONDENT:** *People might be more jaded to it. They might be desensitised to it*

- YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT

### Shocking, upsetting and disturbing younger viewers

Some young people expressed concern that viewers, particularly those younger than themselves, might learn about sexual violence through entertainment media, and that they might find this exposure shocking, upsetting or disturbing.

“RESPONDENT: For kids who’ve been bubble-wrapped, they might not be so aware of sexual abuse and stuff in the real world. Maybe seeing it on TV/movies it might be like ‘oh, that’s intense’, it might be a bit of a shock to them – OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT”

Participants generally felt that although content could be frightening or disturbing, this did not constitute actual harm to the viewer. For participants to consider something harmful, it needed to have a lasting impression on the viewer.

“RESPONDENT: For the next two years I didn’t sleep properly ‘cause whenever I closed my eyes I’d see the girl standing there. Now it’s just kind of her shadow but I know what it is and it still scares me... There’s no way I can go back and change my mind set – YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT, REFERRING TO WATCHING A HORROR FILM AS A CHILD”

### Concern about the impact on victims/survivors

Young people often expressed a high degree of concern and empathy when contemplating how victims/survivors might feel when watching sexually violent content. They were also able to critically reflect on and unpack why they reacted as empathetically as they did.

“RESPONDENT: Maybe if they haven’t talked about it and they watch it and they like sort of know what the person or character is feeling in the movie cause they’ve had that happen to them too – YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT”

“RESPONDENT: I think it depends. Some people couldn’t cope very well, or if they’ve had support/therapy they could cope. Some could cope better than others but for some it would be a very big reminder – OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT”

“RESPONDENT: I think that could really upset them because with stuff like that there’s nothing you can really do afterwards except try to forget about it and just bury it in the back of your mind. And then you see that, and I feel like it just brings back all of the emotions – YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT”

### Viewing sexual violence in media: personal impact and reactions

#### Reactions to the viewing exercise

Although some participants had previously seen content from the clips, most were viewing it for the first time. While participants often referred to having seen a lot of high-impact content in the past, many of these same participants reported feeling uncomfortable or uneasy on viewing sex or rape scenes. Again this suggests that young people lack exposure to high-impact content depicting sexual violence. Some expressed gratitude or relief when they did not have to watch actual acts of sexual violence.

Participants used a range of phrases to describe their unease, which was reflected in their body language. Expressions included “being kind of disturbed”, “it made me feel nervous”, “it felt like a bit too much”, and that the content was “weird”, “intense”, and “confronting”.

“RESPONDENT: The one that disturbed me the most was Orange Is The New Black, how she got raped and just took it – OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT”



Sometimes participants sniggered or giggled during viewing, either from genuine amusement or as an expression of discomfort. This stands in contrast to the

way others expressed shock during the exercise, or recalled experiences of shock or disgust when watching similar programming. Most participants expressed an opinion on the content after viewing it. They stressed the fact that they saw sexually violent content as problematic in some way and/or that it had made them feel a certain way. The viewing experience was an evocative one for the young people, and we observed a range of emotional and attitudinal responses. None of the participants reacted apathetically or neutrally to the content.

Most male and some female participants reacted to depictions of sexual violence with the desire to retaliate with violence themselves. These participants reported wanting to hurt or kill the perpetrator, and believed that the emotions they were experiencing were positive, useful, and cathartic.

“**RESPONDENT 1:** *I hated that guy, he was such an asshole. She clearly said that she didn't want it but he just kept going*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *If I walked in on that at a party I'd find something really big and throw it at the guy*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *I would hit him so hard*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *That shit just makes me angry*

– **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS**”

### Discomfort viewing sexual depictions

Many young people giggled during clips of consensual sex scenes. Their body language revealed a sense of amusement or awkwardness. They also made jokes throughout, indicating an attempt to diffuse the awkwardness of the experience for themselves or others. This awkwardness can at least in part be attributed to the constructed and non-familiar environment of the interview and the presence of the interviewers. However, several other factors may have contributed.

“**RESPONDENT:** *Yeah, a little bit awkward for me, 'cause s outside of movies/media you don't really see that... I think even if there wasn't anyone else in the room I'd find it a little bit awkward. It just feels like something you're not supposed to be seeing*

**RESPONDENT:** *Sex because it's uncomfortable if it's shown for too long*

– **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANTS**”

Young people often stated that they felt awkward during scenes depicting consensual sex. Their experiences of viewing consensual sex appeared to be based on highly constructed scripts about what sex scenes in entertainment media should look like. In this vein, young people said that they were unfamiliar with these types of depictions of intimacy, positivity, and consent in the content they viewed. Therefore, the sexual depictions that young people are more commonly exposed to appear to significantly influence how young people think sex should be represented.

### Reaching their limit: responses to extreme content online

Young people now have unrestricted access to media content, limited supervision of their media consumption, and gaps in their knowledge. Not only are they experimenting with the boundaries of their viewing choices, they are experimenting with their own tolerance. This is a process of trial and error, and of discovering their upper limits and boundaries with extreme content. Young people reported having few resources available to assist them as they navigated and processed content on their own.

“**INTERVIEWER:** *What don't you like on Facebook?*

**RESPONDENT:** *Animal abuse, things about kids dying, stories of kids being killed brutally* – **OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**”

When young people were inadvertently exposed to content they found disturbing they felt uncomfortable or uneasy, and subsequently failed to trust the content source. Often they lacked the vocabulary to articulate these experiences in detail. The same was true of their feelings about and responses to extreme content. Instead, young people were often limited to the use of vague emotional language.

“**INTERVIEWER:** *What about afterwards, how did you feel?*

**RESPONDENT:** *I kind of felt like it was a bit too much.*

**INTERVIEWER:** *Do you remember how it made you feel?*

**RESPONDENT:** *Just weird*

– OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS ”

Young people reported that even when they were aware that extreme content might upset them, they were still drawn to it. In this sense, watching high-impact content signalled impulsivity and a need to engage in thrill-seeking behaviours.

“**RESPONDENT:** *Especially when people tell you it’s bad, that makes you want to watch it, and then you watch it and you’re like, “I hate myself for watching it”.*

**RESPONDENT:** *Like, “I just want to see how bad it is”, and then afterwards it’s like, “Yip, that was bad”.*

**RESPONDENT:** *I kinda wanna watch it but I always regret it afterwards*

– OLDER MALE PARTICIPANTS ”

### Experience of survivors

Young survivors described avoiding sex scenes, explicit material, and relationship-driven narratives in the media they consumed. The general consensus was that viewing sexually violent content was a deeply distressing experience for them.

“**RESPONDENT 1:** *It triggers me so much*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *It depends how I’m feeling at the time. If I feel fine I’ll keep watching but maybe not on one of my not-so-great days*

**RESPONDENT 1:** *Yeah, I can’t watch it. If that comes up on TV I start crying or I just leave. I just can’t handle it at all*

**RESPONDENT 2:** *Yeah, they shouldn’t joke about that at all. It pisses me off that they think it’s funny*

– OLDER FEMALE SURVIVORS ”

### Strategies for dealing with negative viewing experiences

The content shown during the viewing exercise had been classified and was age-appropriate for the participants. Despite this, participants still diverted their eyes at times or otherwise distracted themselves on their phones or notepads. This behaviour strongly implies that the young people felt uncomfortable with the content they were viewing and sought refuge in distraction. This observation matches young people’s reporting about the coping mechanisms they use in order to avoid content that makes them uncomfortable. For young people, then, withdrawing into their devices appears to be a means not only of distracting themselves, but also of finding refuge in a safe place. Other strategies young people used to navigate and cope with extreme content included:

- Turning the content off, skipping through it, ignoring it, or leaving the room

“**RESPONDENT:** *I could always skip through it*

– YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT ”

“**RESPONDENT:** *I just sat there looking like “Ok, this is nothing for my eyes to see”. I walked off, waited for the movie to finish*

– OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT ”

- Seeking information about content before they viewed it. For some this included looking at websites that detailed the high-impact content or whether there was sexually violent content in what they were planning to watch.
- Deliberately avoiding films and shows that they knew contained sexual violence.

“**RESPONDENT:** *I’d definitely choose not to watch it, especially in movie form ‘cause it’s concentrated into an hour or two. In TV it’s drawn out and I can skip over the strong parts.*



PHOTO: © Biabalewicz / Dreamstime.com

**RESPONDENT:** *If you know it's coming you can choose not to watch it*

- OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANTS

- Watching high-impact content with friends, particularly so they can talk about it afterwards and debrief about what they have just seen (very few suggested that this would be acceptable with a parent, caregiver, or other adult).
- Relying on their mental resilience. Most often participants referenced this as “not dwelling on things”.
- Watching other entertainment content or light-hearted content to ‘detox’ from what they had just watched.

**RESPONDENT:** *Yeah I would turn the show off and watch something fun* - YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANT

While some young people reported that these coping strategies were learnt at home and/or with the help of their parents, others appear to have developed these mechanisms independently based on the strategies and tools at their disposal.

**RESPONDENT:** *My parents were just like, “If it's too much for you just turn it off”, rather than like [checking the rating] beforehand* - OLDER PARTICIPANT, NON-BINARY

**RESPONDENT:** *It was definitely a bit of a shock. I wasn't expecting it in the movie. And my parents sort of fast forwarded over it* - OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT

The survivors were the most adept at recognising sexual violence, their response to it, and avoiding engaging in unwanted viewing experiences. They were also acutely aware of what triggered them, their own levels of resilience, and which coping mechanisms most helped them process harmful content.

## Mitigating harms of sexual violence in media

Young people reported a number of strategies for making representations of sexual violence less impactful, or counterbalancing and mitigating the potential harms they may cause, with various interventions. Many participants expressed strong preference for narratives where perpetrators suffered judicious consequences for their actions, and where there was a positive resolution for the victim/survivor.

**RESPONDENT:** *If there was a massive big consequence on the guy it'd be like “good”, but if he just got away with it and was all sweet I'd be a bit disturbed that he was getting away with it* - YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT

Participants felt that focusing on the victim/survivor and their response gave viewers a better sense of the severity of their experiences. When the perpetrator or other characters connected to the experience were shown, participants felt that the victim/survivor's experience was being trivialised or minimised.

**RESPONDENT:** *I felt they were focusing more on Theon's pain rather than Sansa's pain. The amount of time spent on his face. It was making it about him. They minimised her pain* - OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT

Participants found narratives that implied sexual violence to be acceptable, and felt that graphic portrayals of sexual violence were both gratuitous and unnecessary, increasing the impact of the content overall.

**RESPONDENT:** *Show less, you don't need to show so much to get the point across* - OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT

Young people reported that when sexual violence was depicted alongside physical violence, or when scenes made use of gory or gruesome imagery, the impact of the content increased significantly.

Young people noted a lack of alternative representations of sexual violence in current entertainment media. Sexual violence in the content that they watched did not depict female perpetrators and male victim/survivors, or sexual violence between queer couples. Some young people felt that this led to gaps in their knowledge about the realities of sexual violence and how it was perpetrated outside the narrow confines of heteronormative narratives.

**INTERVIEWER:** *If there were more positive depictions of gay relationships would that help?*

**RESPONDENT:** *It would make it not such a taboo. Encourage discussion. More openness* - **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**

*whether I actually felt uncomfortable or not watching them*

- **YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANTS**

This illustrates that young people are willing to engage in conversations about the content they consume and the potential impact their viewing has on them. Young people simply require safe and supportive environments for these discussions to take place in.

Generally, young people desired to see a wider range of positive, healthy relationships depicted in entertainment media, and believed that the wider dissemination of these representations was likely to mitigate some of the harms caused by exposure to unhealthy relationship models.

### Feedback on the interview process

The young people reported that they really enjoyed participating in the Classification Office research. As a whole, they felt the controlled and supportive environment, coupled with the targeted discussion, provided an open and safe space to discuss their ideas about media consumption and effects. Some even expressed a sense of validation and empowerment as a result of the interview process, which they felt helped further develop their critical thinking skills.

**RESPONDENT:** *The incredibly open and validating discussion around issues discussed and a safe place to communicate ideas* - **OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT**

**RESPONDENT:** *Having questions asked about particular movies, as I had never thought of it and it made me think.*

**RESPONDENT:** *I liked talking about things and just having discussions because it made me really think about the things I watch and*

# Young people's views about classification, content labels and warnings

## *Main findings from this section:*

- Young people generally agreed that warnings were helpful and necessary for victims/survivors of sexual violence
- Young people were more likely to heed content warnings when younger viewers were around
- Although young people did not place a high value on official classifications generally, several considered the R18 classification to be a strong indicator that content included material they may wish to avoid
- Classifications and warnings were strongly associated with parental supervision, however participants reported that parents became less concerned about classifications and warnings as their children grew older
- Young people held significant misunderstandings about the meaning of various ratings/classifications and content warnings they were exposed to across various media platforms. Most did not consider classifications to be important in their personal viewing choices, but many sought content information of some kind before viewing. The low reported use of official classifications appears to be associated with the difficulty of finding this information on the variety of platforms used to access content
- Young people wanted warnings to be developed with young people in mind, incorporating terms common to their vernacular. This was coupled with a desire to see adult language and attitudes minimised
- Language was clearly an important but fraught area for young people, and there was disagreement about what terms they thought were appropriate or useful when warning viewers about sexual violence.

## Young people's views about official classifications and content warnings

### Victims/survivors should be warned about sexual violence

All young people believed that victims/survivors should be warned about sexually violent content, although most expressed this as preferable rather than mandatory. The survivors we spoke to were adamant that content warnings were integral to their ability to make safer content choices. Content warnings helped them manage their expectations about what entertainment media may contain, and helped them to avoid trauma/triggering.

“RESPONDENT: *I get why they play it, but they need to warn, they don't know what might have happened to people in their lives. I walked out of class and bawled my eyes out, I couldn't handle it. Just the abuse part of it as well. It's a full-on movie* – OLDER FEMALE SURVIVOR, REFERRING TO THE FILM 'ONCE WERE WARRIORS' BEING PLAYED IN CLASS”

### Official classifications and content warnings are important when choosing for younger viewers

Young people frequently reported being more likely to pay attention to content warnings when younger viewers were around. When being held accountable for younger viewers, rather than just themselves, participants often discussed media effects from a paternalistic perspective, rather than an individualistic one.

“RESPONDENT: *I'd look on the marker, what the age rating, what the things are. Sexual violence, sexual content, nudity. I'd avoid the film to make sure my younger siblings don't watch it* – OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT”

“RESPONDENT: *For me personally ratings aren't a problem, they're irrelevant, but I would care if I was with kids* – OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT”

“RESPONDENT: *I'd look at the classification of course but if I had kids or was with kids I'd watch it myself first then decide if they could watch it with me, or alone, or not at all* – OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT”

### R18 classification labels send a strong message to some young people

Amongst existing official classifications, R18 seemed to inspire some deference in young people. Although an R18 classification label did not necessarily dissuade participants from viewing, it still represented a strong warning to young people about the high-impact nature of the material.

“RESPONDENT: *I don't not watch it when it's R18, but I brace myself for it if it's horror* – OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT”

### Experience of parental use of official classification labels and content warnings

Young people generally relegated the significance of classification labels to a past time where they had more parental boundaries around the content they were allowed to watch. Thus, young people's relationships with their parents appeared to determine how relevant official classifications were to their viewing options. For some, a lack of parental warning or authority around appropriate content could be perceived as signs of their parents not being interested or caring.

“RESPONDENT: *Mum was extremely big on not letting us watch stuff above our age. Like when we were 14 or 15 we couldn't watch an R16 or R18 film. But now it's hard to find New Zealand ratings online* – OLDER FEMALE PARTICIPANT”

“RESPONDENT: *My parents let me watch anything but say that it's me who has to suffer the consequences afterwards* – YOUNGER FEMALE PARTICIPANT”

Some young people reported that their parents continued to monitor their viewing material, guided primarily by official classifications. Others reported that although their parents were still conscious of classifications, their relaxed attitude towards them facilitated access to restricted content.

### Confusion about different types of content warning systems

There appears to be a fundamental misunderstanding about what content rating systems exist and how they are applied to content. The majority of participants had a limited awareness of current classifications, despite the fact that many still actively seek warning information about the content they intend to view.

### So do young people support official classification/content warning information?

While young people described checking the IMDB website's Parents' Guide and comments on YouTube videos for content warnings, many did not know how to find New Zealand's classifications. Participants reported no longer seeing classification information in the spaces where they accessed and viewed content – online. Similarly,

those who were not engaged with classification could not identify where classification information could be found on the media platforms they used to consume media. Those who were familiar with the current classification system tended to endorse it.

Several young people expressed a desire for more classification information about the nature of the content when deciding what to view. Young people

actively engage in information-seeking behaviour when deciding what to view, at least in part in order to protect themselves from being exposed to content they do not want to see.

Overall, these findings suggest that the limited attention young people pay to the current classification system has more to do with format and delivery than a disregard for

content warnings in general. Indeed, the opposite is true: young people generally see classifications as useful, and as playing an important role in informing their viewing choices.

### How should content warnings be developed and used?

Young people drew on a pool of knowledge about how warnings are signposted in various spaces to describe what they considered ideal. They believed that content warnings should be prominent, simple, tangible, and make use of descriptive language through the use of words like 'intense' or 'disturbing'. It was important that warnings appear onscreen and be read aloud (voiceover) before the content begun. Young people gauged the effectiveness of ratings based on their size, when they appeared, their use of colour, and whether or not there were age restrictions. They were clear that effective warnings are still important signifiers as they navigate content and their own personal limits.

**RESPONDENT:** *It needs to be the first thing they see and catches their eye.*

**RESPONDENT:** *I'd put a warning at the beginning of the movie. Just in case they didn't realise*

– YOUNGER MALE PARTICIPANTS

**RESPONDENT:** *Say if I'm on Netflix, the little M is like tiny as. And so on there, it needs to be bigger. DVDs and stuff, it shows it fine*

– OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT

### Language used on warnings should be simple and meaningful

Language can be a barrier to meaningful communication between adults and young people. All participants agreed that content warnings should be developed with young people in mind, using informal language familiar to young people's vernacular. They felt efforts should be made to minimise adult language and attitudes. In saying this, most young people struggled to find the right words to describe the types of behaviour they thought audiences should be warned against.



Young people suggested terms that correspond with meanings they understood to describe a number of sexually violent behaviours, terms such as “sexual abuse”, “real rape”, “sex slavery”, “abusive relationship”, “heavy sex”, “got pressured”, “sex without consent”, “took advantage”, and “harrassment”.

The word ‘rape’ stood in stark contrast to many other terms, and young people clearly demonstrated how loaded and evocative ‘rape’ was for them. Young people responded to the word extremely negatively. They generally disliked it not only because of the behaviour it describes but because of an apparent stigma attached to discussing the act of rape. The use of the word ‘rape’ clearly shaped young people’s expectations about content, and some were so averse to the term that they refused to watch anything that was described as depicting it.

“**RESPONDENT:** *That’d usually say sexual violence, eh? I’d use rape. That sounds scarier to me* – **OLDER MALE PARTICIPANT**”

# Conclusions: using this research to help our communities

## *What did we learn from young people?*

This research provides a window into the experience of young New Zealanders with entertainment media as they develop views about relationships, sex, and sexual violence. Young people told us they are accessing media content from a wide variety of online sources and that they do not generally have much adult supervision or engagement with what they are viewing, particularly as they get older. Content people their age are viewing might include sexual violence in movies, disturbing content on social media, or hardcore (and potentially illegal) pornography.

As expected, young people were unlikely to acknowledge that entertainment media influences the behaviours or attitudes of themselves or people their age. However, they told us they were concerned about how these effects or influences could impact on people younger than them, for example their siblings. They were clearly emotionally affected by some of the clips shown, and often described having viewed things that they regretted seeing.

Young people told us that they learn about sexual violence from media, however their ability to critically engage with this content is often limited, having little experience of doing so. Older participants were more likely to engage critically and distinguish between media depictions and real life, and to identify and question problematic or unrealistic depictions. However we observed many young people repeating the kinds of tropes, stereotypes and unrealistic beliefs about sexual violence that are often depicted in media.

It is therefore not surprising that young people think warnings for sexual violence should be clear and specific, and be available on all types of content, wherever they find it.



PHOTO: Cameron Kirby

## *What kinds of support do young people need?*

Young people are accessing potentially harmful media content from a wide variety of sources, and this exposure is often unintentional. Too many young people do not have the information, support and tools to process and understand this material, to deal effectively with negative consequences of exposure, or to avoid this material in the first place.

Some depictions of sexual violence may provide benefits to younger audiences if they encourage informed, open, and safe discussion of this important issue. Other depictions may be more harmful to younger audiences due to their problematic or unrealistic nature, and may perpetuate harmful attitudes and beliefs among young people about sexual violence.

Young people told us that they want better information to empower them to make informed decisions about what they choose to view. They also need resources to help them understand problematic or unrealistic depictions of content like sexual violence when they are exposed to it.

Young people need support from trusted adults, their families, and the wider community. This means talking openly about content young people are viewing, and providing emotional support and understanding when they are exposed to something distressing.

## **Providing better information and support for young people is easy to achieve**

### **Gaining better insights on young people's media use with further research**

In order to provide New Zealand young people and families with the most effective support we must continue to provide strong research from their perspective. The Classification Office has been a leader in this area and will continue to drive robust, informative research that addresses the real questions and gives a voice to New Zealanders of all ages and backgrounds.

Following on from this research with young people and support agencies, a primary focus of our ongoing research programme will be parents, teachers, and other adults who are responsible for children and young people. We know that New Zealanders are concerned about sexual and violent content in media,<sup>13</sup> but we need to know more about how adults are engaging with the media use of those in their care in order to encourage open and informed conversation at schools and within families.

### **Supporting young people to become informed and resilient consumers of media**

This research shows that young people are willing and able to talk about their media use and the concerns they have about content, but that they are often unwilling to approach adults about this, or think adults are unwilling or unable to provide guidance. Some adults may lack the knowledge and experience to discuss sensitive (or technical) topics with confidence, and so the Classification Office will explore ways in which these conversations can be encouraged at home and in schools in a way that resonates with young people as well as the adults who care for them.

Better education of young people about media effects and media literacy is required, including guidance and resources about content that may be outside any official regulatory regime. This includes social media, pornography, and other extreme or disturbing content available on websites.

Young people told us that they first learnt about sexual violence either in entertainment media or in programmes provided in schools. It therefore makes sense for existing sexual violence programmes to include information about relationships, sex and sexual violence in media. As with pornography, young people need to be aware that media representations often portray sexual violence in an unrealistic way that could be detrimental to their attitudes and understanding.

Young people are generally sceptical about the idea that the media they access can negatively affect their attitudes and behaviours, and so a paternalistic approach will likely be ineffective. Messages are likely to be dismissed if they appear simplistic or do not resonate with young people's own lived experiences.

The Classification Office will continue to develop and strengthen our relationships with schools, libraries and government agencies, and with NGOs involved with sexual violence prevention, youth health, media regulation and online safety.

Given the changing media environment, there is an opportunity to take a more collaborative approach with entertainment content service providers where adherence to the official classification system is not currently enforced. This means working directly with service providers with information about best practice for assessing and rating content they are making available. This could involve official classification, or other means of providing the guidance and protection that New Zealanders want and need.

### **Providing better consumer labels and warnings**

The Classification Office was established to offer guidance and a level of protection from content that might be harmful to the community, while at the same time



PHOTO: © Danit Chepko | iStockphoto.com

<sup>13</sup> OFLC 2017. Children and teen exposure to media content. <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/research-children-and-teen-exposure-to-media-content/#concern-about-media-content>

protecting New Zealanders' rights to free expression. This remains our role regardless of changes in how media is being accessed.

This research will help us construct clear, meaningful and detailed warning information for viewers in relation to sexual violence in particular, and we will continue to provide this guidance to families and encourage responsible media use.

The research has also enhanced our understanding of how depictions of sexual violence affect children and young people. The perspective it provides on young people's beliefs and attitudes and their ability to view problematic content critically are of particular importance.

### ***Working with Government to support effective policy***

Young people are now accessing content from online platforms that do not provide traditional classification information or the safeguards that are available in cinemas and stores supplying movies, TV shows and games. This means that young people and their parents are receiving less guidance in an environment where restricted (and objectionable) content is more accessible than ever before.

It is no longer possible for any regulatory regime to cover every single point of access to media that could cause harm and negatively shape the attitudes of young people, but the emerging media environment provides some great opportunities to provide effective consumer information and support for young people about what they're viewing.

This is a significant issue for New Zealanders. Our previous research shows that the great majority of New Zealanders:

- are concerned about access to media content such as sex and violence<sup>14</sup>
- believe classifications are important when making choices on what their children view<sup>15</sup>, and

- believe a single set of classifications should apply to all entertainment content, wherever it is accessed.<sup>16</sup>

In response to the changing entertainment media landscape, the Government has announced a number of reforms, including bringing online streaming services under the Broadcasting Standards regulatory regime. The Classification Office is committed to working with participants to help ensure that these reforms work for industry, regulators and New Zealand families.

Young people told us that content variety and ease of access is of primary importance to them. With the increasing popularity and diversity of online streaming services in New Zealand homes, young people will inevitably be turning more and more to reliable, high quality services (such as the household Netflix account) before looking for illegal copies. Young people told us they would make use of content warnings if they were available where they actually access content, and this service can be so easily provided. Rather than relying on ad-hoc, fragmented or non-existent systems of warnings or ratings, New Zealand families should have access to quality, standardised information they can rely on.

<sup>14</sup> OFLC 2017. Children and teen exposure to media content. <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/research-children-and-teen-exposure-to-media-content/#concern-about-media-content>

<sup>15</sup> OFLC 2016. Changing media use and public perceptions of the classification system. <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/research-public-understanding-2016/>

<sup>16</sup> OFLC 2016. New Zealanders want one classification system for movies, TV shows and games. <https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/news/latest-news/news-single-classification-system-2016-research/>

# Appendix 1: Clips used in viewing exercise

Audio-visual clips were used as prompts throughout the discussion

## *Clips shown to younger groups, 13-15 year-olds*

**Adventureland** (M: Offensive language, sexual references and drug use)

A young adult comedy-drama. The clip shows a young couple, James and Emily, about to have sex for the first time. After some small talk James kisses Emily. They begin taking their clothes off and James asks, "Are we really doing this?" Emily replies, "I think so". Mutual consent is clear.



**Easy A** (M: sexual references)

A teen comedy-drama. Olive lied about having sex in order to advance her social standing, and now less-popular boys are paying her to say she has slept with them. In the scene shown, Olive thought she was going on a 'real' date with a boy until he pulls out a gift card and tries to kiss her, believing he has bought the right to have sex with her. He persists in trying to kiss/touch her after she makes it clear she does not want to.

**Family Guy: Season 8, episode 11** (series classified R13: violence, offensive language and sexual references)

The adult satirical sitcom, popular with young people, follows a middle-class American family and their talking dog, Brian. At a rodeo event, a talking bull indicates that he is going to sexually assault Peter, the show's father character. Meanwhile, Brian talks to a female journalist who is writing a piece about teenage girls. Brian says that he loves teenage girls because "they haven't turned into bitches yet". We then see the bull talking to Peter after the assault has occurred. Peter cowers on the ground in his underwear while the bull stands over him and demands that they see each other again.



**Glee: Season 3, episode 5** (PG: violence, coarse language and sexual references)

The musical-comedy-drama series follows members of a fictitious high school glee club as they deal with various social issues. The clip shows gay couple Blaine and Kurt socialising at a nightclub. When they leave, Blaine is drunk and urges Kurt to have sex with him in the back of a car. Kurt refuses, they argue, and Blaine storms off.

**\*The Vampire Diaries: Season 1, episode 3** (series classified R13: horror, violence and low-level sexual material)

The teen supernatural drama series follows a group of characters, both human and supernatural, as they deal with various relationships, dilemmas and supernatural threats. In the scene shown, malevolent vampire Damon has bedded human Caroline and bitten her. Caroline wakes up and is confused by the blood on her neck. She tries to creep out of the room but Damon stops her and shoves her onto the bed. Smelling her blood, he bares fangs and lunges toward her.





### ***Clips shown to older groups, 16-18 year-olds***

**\**Game Of Thrones: Season 5, episode 6*** (R16: violence, sexual violence, offensive language and sex scenes)

The medieval fantasy series chronicles the violent dynastic struggles among noble families jockeying for power. It is known for its strong depictions of violence, cruelty and sex. The clip depicts an antagonistic character rape his new wife and force another man to watch.

***Love And Basketball*** (M: sex scenes and offensive language)

The teen romance-drama follows high school sweethearts, Quincy and Monica, who fall for each other whilst pursuing individual basketball careers. The clip depicts their romanticised first sexual experience. Consent is mutual, contraception is evidently used, and the sex is very implicit.

**\**Orange Is The New Black: Season 3, episodes 10 & 12*** (R16: violence, sexual violence and offensive language)

A comedy-drama series set in a women’s prison. In this clip, a young woman named Tiffany is raped twice – first in a flashback by a man known to her, and later by a prison guard. Tiffany and a fellow inmate consider revenge-raping the guard with a broom handle. They get as far as drugging him, however Tiffany realises she has no rage in her to act so violently.

***The Girl Who Played With Fire*** (R16: violence, sexual violence, offensive language and content that may disturb)

The Swedish mystery/thriller follows Lisbeth, a troubled young woman who was raped and framed for murder. The clip shows Lisbeth and another woman negotiating the terms of their relationship then beginning to have oral sex on the floor of their apartment. The sex is relatively explicit, although brief, with breasts and pubic hair shown.

A reduced version of this clip was shown to the survivor groups.

\*Clips not shown to survivor groups

### ***Supplementary clips for older groups, used if appropriate and time-permitting***

***Jack & Diane*** (R16: violence, sexual violence, offensive language and sex scenes)

The teen romance-drama follows a young lesbian couple, Jack and Diane. One of the issues they face together is how to help Diane’s sister, Karen, who had recently been sexually assaulted. The clip shows an online video of the assault. Karen has been drugged at a party. Two teenage boys implicitly masturbate and ejaculate over her as she lies semi-conscious on a mattress. This is filmed by another boy. Jack sees the video and remarks that Karen was raped.

***Watchmen*** (R16: violence, offensive language and sex scenes)

A neo-noir, satirical superhero film. The clip shows the ‘superhero’, The Comedian, attempt to sexually assault a female, Silk Spectre. She violently resists before another character comes to her rescue.

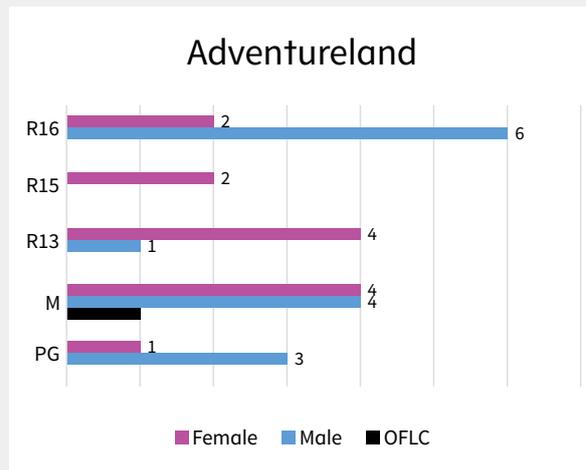
## Appendix 2: Classification exercise

At the end of each interview, participants were asked to assign classifications and warning notes to the clips viewed.

Generally participants were quite conservative when rating clips, and males tended to be more so than females. On average, the ratings the participants assigned were at least on par, if not higher than those given by the Classification Office.

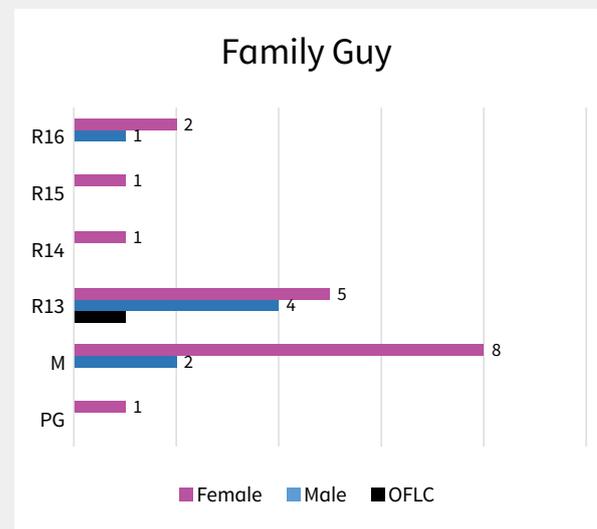
The classifying of sexual activity (consensual and non-consensual) was approached with caution and apprehension. With an awareness of sex as something that ‘mature’ people do, and as the legal age of consent in New Zealand is 16 (a fact a number of participants cited), many felt that any obvious sexual content warranted age-restriction. Depictions of sexual violence were generally assigned higher restrictions than those of consensual sex.

The following graphs are an indicative sample showing the ratings assigned to each clip, split by gender.



*Adventureland* was shown to all younger groups. The most popular ratings assigned by females were Unrestricted M and R13, while the most popular rating assigned by males was R16.

Participants (particularly females) recognised the romantic context and the presence of mutual consent. The fact that the characters were about to have sex was enough for some participants to see a need for age-restriction, while others relaxed their ratings because no sex was actually shown. Generally participants believed the relationship depicted was a healthy one.

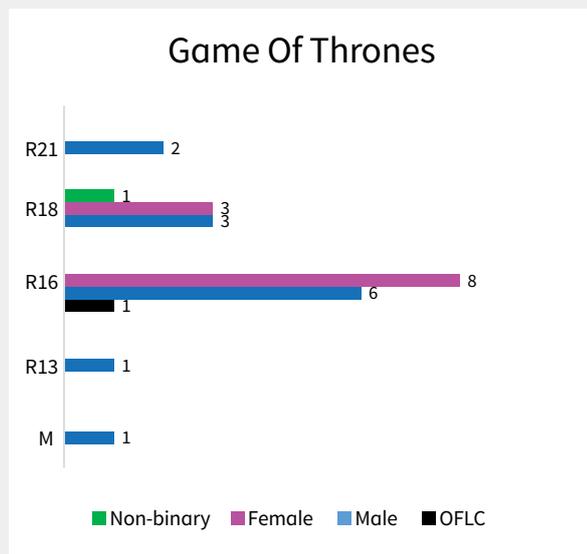


*Family Guy* was shown to all younger groups and some older female groups. Many young people were familiar with the series or even avid fans. The most popular rating assigned by females was Unrestricted M, while the most popular rating assigned by males was R13.

Some younger participants did not pick up on the sexual violence that occurred here. This is likely because the rape was not directly shown, the perpetrator was an animal, and there was no dialogue explicitly indicating what was happening. For those who lack awareness of what sexual violence is, it is reasonable that they would not recognise it when it is not expressly shown. In this case, this supported the hypothesis (offered by the participants) that acts of sexual violence may ‘go over the heads’ of younger people.

Of those who did recognise that rape had occurred, most saw past the violent assault and recognised the humour involved. The majority felt that the comedic cartoon format, and the fact that the perpetrator was an animal, significantly limited the impact of sexual violence. For these reasons, lower classifications were assigned. The fact that many participants were fans of the series may also have contributed to the lower ratings. A minority found the scenario unamusing and unappealing.

classification system. These participants justified this high rating by saying they were very angry about the scene. They reported that they had heard of peers who had been raped and said they were conscious that women face these situations on a regular basis.



*Game Of Thrones* was shown to all older groups with the exception of the survivors pairing. Overall, the most popular rating assigned was R16.

‘Many of the participants were familiar with the series, its rating and its representation of sex and violence. Some knew the characters and/or had seen the scene before, so they anticipated, and therefore were less shocked, by the rape. These participants all felt the content should be restricted to at least R16.

Interestingly, two male participants assigned a highly conservative rating of R21, which is higher than the maximum age restriction of R18 used in New Zealand’s

## Appendix 3: Demography of participants, by age

Gender	Age	Region	Ethnicity	Decile School
Female	13	Christchurch	NZ European/Pākehā	6
Male	13	Christchurch	Māori	6
Female	13	Hamilton	NZ European/Pākehā	10
Male	13	Hamilton	Māori	3
Male	13	Hamilton	Māori	7
Female	14	Auckland	Scottish/Egyptian	8
Female	14	Christchurch	NZ European/Pākehā	7
Female	14	Christchurch	NZ European/Pākehā	7
Male	14	Christchurch	Māori/ Pākehā	6
Female	14	Hamilton	NZ European/Pākehā	10
Male	14	Havelock North	NZ European/Pākehā	8
Male	14	Havelock North	NZ European/Pākehā	8
Female	14	Hastings	NZ European/Pākehā	10
Male	14	Maungakaramea	NZ European/Pākehā	5
Female	14	Whangarei	NZ European/Pākehā	5
Female	14	Whangarei	NZ European/Pākehā	5
Female	15	Auckland	NZ European/Pākehā	10
Female	15	Christchurch	NZ European/Pākehā	6
Male	15	Christchurch	NZ European/Pākehā	7
Female	15	Taupō	NZ European/Pākehā	10
Male	15	Whangarei	NZ European/Pākehā	5
Female	16	Christchurch	NZ European/Pākehā	N/A
Female	16	Christchurch	NZ European/Pākehā	N/A
Male	16	Christchurch	NZ European/Pākehā	7
Male	16	Hamilton	NZ European/Pākehā	7
Male	16	Hamilton	NZ European/Pākehā	7
Female	16	Feilding	NZ European/Pākehā	5
Male	16	Feilding	NZ European/Pākehā	5

Gender	Age	Region	Ethnicity	Decile School
Female	16	Wellington	Greek	9
Female	16	Wellington	Māori	7
Female	16	Wellington	Māori	*
Male	16	Wellington	Samoan	1
Male	16	Wellington	Niue/Māori	Not stated
Non-binary	16	Wellington	NZ European/Pākehā	10
Female	16	Whanganui	NZ European/Pākehā	4
Female	16	Whanganui	Māori	4
Female	17	Feilding	NZ European/Pākehā	5
Male	17	Feilding	NZ European/Pākehā	5
Female	17	Napier	NZ European/Pākehā	6
Female	17	Napier	NZ European/Pākehā	6
Female	17	Wellington	NZ European/Pākehā	N/A
Male	17	Wellington	Samoan	1
Male	17	Wellington	NZ European/Pākehā	*
Male	17	Wellington	Māori	N/A
Male	17	Wellington	NZ European/Pākehā	*
Male	17	Whanganui	Māori	9
Male	17	Whanganui	NZ European/Pākehā	9
Female**	18	Wellington	Samoan	8 (Graduated)

\*Some participants were studying at institutes which had not been assigned a decile by the Ministry of Education.

\*\*Identifies as pansexual

# Appendix 4: Organisations that assisted with participant recruitment

[VIBE](#) is a 'youth one stop shop' that provides free confidential health and support services to Hutt Valley young people aged 10-24.

[START Healing Stop Abuse | Timataia te mahu-oranga](#) is a Christchurch organisation that provides early intervention, counselling and support for children, young people and adults, and their families, who have experienced sexual violence or other trauma. START also provides education about sexual violence and other trauma to the wider community.

[298 Youth Health](#) in Christchurch provides free medical care and counselling services for young people aged 10-24 years.

[Youth Services Trust \(YST\) Whanganui](#) provides services to young people aged between 14-24 years of age and currently has a doctor and nurse clinic, counsellor, and youth worker. YST works with other service providers to offer youth specific support groups and workshops.

[InsideOut | Kōaro – Tatū Ki Roto, Tatū Ki Waho](#) in Wellington works to make Aotearoa a safer place for young people of minority genders and sexualities.



