YOUNG PEOPLE’S PERCEPTIONS OF THE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM AND POTENTIAL HARM FROM MEDIA CONTENT

DISCUSSION GROUP FINDINGS
Young people’s perceptions of the classification system and potential harm from media content: discussion group findings

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Young People’s Perceptions of the Classification System: discussion group findings
Foreword from the Chief Censor

New Zealand’s classification system is intended to prevent the injury to society that comes from the unrestricted availability of films, games and other publications. A key tool used by the Office of Film and Literature Classification to achieve this is the practice of assigning age-based restrictions to films and games.

Research into perceptions of the classification system has in the past often explored adults’ perceptions of the system and potential for harm from films and games, and found that many adults are concerned about the impact of content on younger people, particularly teenagers. Given that teenagers are the group most often affected by decisions of the Classification Office, it is important to engage with them directly and investigate their perceptions of both the classification system and the potentially harmful content which the system is designed to protect them from.

In this foreword, I am pleased to introduce you to a set of research reports that highlight the value and importance of engaging directly with young people. In this research we gave young people the opportunity to articulate their perceptions of the types of content they see as potentially harmful, and of the classification system which is designed to prevent this harm.

It is encouraging to see that young people support the concept of protecting audiences from potentially harmful content in films and games, even if at times they do not see themselves in need of that protection. At the same time, young people reported having been exposed, either intentionally or unintentionally, to content that they found undesirable, challenging or disturbing. They told us that they want to be able to make informed choices about the content they wish to view or, in some cases, avoid.

Unsurprisingly, our survey found that more 16 and 17 year-olds (43% and 39%) rated the classification system as ‘a bit too strict’ compared to 18 year-olds (24%). By the age of 18, age-restrictions no longer apply to young people’s viewing and gaming choices. However, those aged 16 and 17 are still restricted in their access to content by the classification system.

Young people in our study also felt that there should be more flexibility in the classifications, suggesting that the current system does not reflect the way young people mature at different rates and that they can sometimes handle and process restricted content at different ages. Participants said that there should be a way of differing ‘mature’ 16 year-olds (for example) from ‘immature’ 16 year-olds.

The literature review draws together findings from New Zealand and overseas to investigate what young people perceive the effects of media to be, what they think about content regulation, and

1 The titles in the research set referred to are:
1. Young people’s perceptions of media content: a literature review
2. Survey of young people’s perceptions of the classification system
3. Young people’s perceptions of the classification system and potential harm from media content: discussion group findings
what type of content concerns them. The literature review is unique in its focus on young people’s views. The findings of the studies included in the review in many instances reflect those of the Classification Office’s own research, of which this review is a component.

The survey presents the results of an online survey of 507 New Zealanders aged 16 to 18, in which respondents were asked about their perceptions and use of the classification system for films and games. The survey findings indicate that young New Zealanders are accepting of the idea of having restrictions on certain films and games, both for themselves and for those younger than them.

In our discussion group study, young people told us they actively select films or games with R16 or R18 classifications, because they feel emotionally ready and capable of viewing content with these restrictions. This reaffirms the intention of the classifications assigned by the OFLC to restrict availability of films to the point where there is unlikely to be any harm from viewing or playing (and no further). Young people also mentioned being disturbed by content they had seen prior to being old enough to handle it (and likely under the age of restriction), and expressed a desire for some kind of warning about content in films both for themselves and for those younger than them.

In discussion groups, young people also told us that although they feel they are on the whole mature enough to handle most types of content, they want to be able to make informed choices about films and games in order to view or avoid certain content. They feel the amount of information currently provided on descriptive notes is inadequate for them to make an informed decision about the content in a particular film or game.

Our classification system restricts young people’s access to content, and it is important that they are informed about both the reasons for classification decisions, and for the system under which they are made. It is hoped that by increasing understanding of the system, young people will be more inclined to comply with the classifications.

The purpose of this set of research is to explore the views of young people themselves about media content that may be considered harmful, disturbing or offensive, however, our responsibility is to assess the likely harm of material if made available to people of different ages, and the views of young people alone will never tell the whole story in this regard.

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the young people who participated in this research for their contributions and for sharing their views and experiences with us.

I would also like to acknowledge the excellent work of the team at Colmar Brunton who conducted the online survey and the discussion groups, and analysed and reported on the results: Celine Yockney, Venise Comfort, Andrew Robertson, and Sarah Woollett.

Finally, I would like to thank the Classification Office staff involved in the research — Henry Talbot who researched and wrote the literature review, Michelle Baker who co-ordinated the qualitative component, and Kate Ward who oversaw the three components of the research.

Dr Andrew Jack
Chief Censor
Executive summary

Purpose of the research

The Office of Film and Literature Classification (the OFLC) is the government body responsible for classifying films, games and other publications that may need to be restricted or banned. In 2011, the OFLC published research which explored adult New Zealanders’ understanding and perceptions of the classification system.\(^2\)

The OFLC has commissioned Colmar Brunton to carry out further research to understand and explore the views of young New Zealanders (aged 16 to 18), who are a group affected by New Zealand’s classification system. The research comprised two stages:

- A quantitative survey of 507 young New Zealanders
- A qualitative phase comprising of four focus groups

The quantitative phase was designed to measure young people’s use of, and perceptions about, the classification system, and the content in films and games that might be of concern to them. This phase was followed by a series of focus group sessions to explore their perceptions in more depth.

This document reports the findings from the qualitative stage which was conducted in May and June 2013 after the quantitative survey. The findings from the quantitative survey have been reported separately — see research reports on the OFLC website.

Research objectives and methodology

This document reports the findings from four focus groups with young people. All the young people in the research were aged between 16 and 18. Groups were divided by gender and age. Each group was 2.5 hours in duration and was moderated using a semi-structured topic guide that expanded on the question areas and topics covered by the earlier quantitative survey.

Main findings and conclusions

How young people use the classification system

Young people rely less on the classification system as they mature

As they mature, young people consider the classification system less relevant to their decision-making. However, they do still sometimes refer to it if they are unsure of the content of a film or game. Young people are more likely to refer to the classification if they are selecting something to view or play with someone younger than themselves.

Young people consider the classification system is more important to:

- Parents or caregivers selecting films or games for under 16 year-olds
- People younger than themselves when selecting content to view or play

Young people think that now they are between 16 and 18 they are mature enough to make their own decisions. They say the classification system is a blunt instrument that does not take into consideration factors other than age — such as, an individual’s level of maturity and life experiences. They think people their age should be allowed to view restricted content if they feel mature enough to cope with it, and would prefer a system that had the flexibility to cope with these factors. They are unsure how the OFLC might develop and administer such a system.

Occasional use of the classification label and descriptive note

On the viewing or gaming occasions when the classification is of more salience for young people, they refer to the classification label. Some will also read the descriptive note if they are unfamiliar with the content of the film. Young people think the descriptive note does not provide enough detail for them to evaluate the content of the film or game. They say it does not adequately convey the level or extent of the content, and they would prefer more specificity.

Young people use the classification to select or avoid content

Young people use the classification to select films they think are suitable for their age. This can mean deliberately selecting content classified as R16 or R18. Young people think that G, PG, or M rated films are aimed at people younger than themselves.

Young people will also use the classification system (including the descriptive note) to inform their viewing decisions in relation to content they wish to avoid. Some will avoid films containing sexual violence. Young people are particularly careful to check the classification (in order to avoid certain content) when they are viewing films with people younger than themselves.

Young people are actively circumventing the classification system

Young people circumvent the classification system by downloading content that is restricted at more traditional points of supply such as shops, cinemas and libraries. They also provide false details at the point-of-sale of traditional suppliers. They think there is no harm to themselves in these practices.
Young people question the classification of some films and games

Young people consider the classification does not always align with their own perceptions of the content of a film or game. They think some are classified too leniently, and others too strictly. This is subjective and depends on their perception of their own level of maturity — they consider that what is harmful and damaging for one 16 year-old to view may be perfectly harmless for another.

Perceptions of harms associated with certain types of content

Young people identify a range of types of harms

Young people think there are a range of harms that could be injurious to themselves, to people younger than them, and to wider society. The types of harms they identify can be summarised in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF HARM</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short-term</td>
<td>Getting a fright while watching a film — a momentary shock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer-term</td>
<td>Being afraid of the dark or having trouble sleeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Developing suicidal thoughts or triggering depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Becoming aggressive and getting into fights/hurting others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudinal</td>
<td>Thinking about women as sex objects from watching pornography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural</td>
<td>Treating women as sex objects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that some harms could fall into more than one category. For example, being frightened by a depiction of violence could be momentary and fleeting, or it could have long-term impact and harm on a young person’s mental health.

Young people discussed two factors that impact on how serious the harms from content may be:

- **How serious the consequences of harm might be.** For example, young people think that having a nightmare after seeing something frightening is less harmful overall than, for example, a severe reaction to content such as ongoing or severe emotional distress.
- **The maturity and mental fortitude of the viewer.** For example, one 16 year-old might be unharmed by viewing R18 content, but another young person of the same age might be badly traumatised. Experience, frequency of exposure to content and maturity all play a role in young people’s individual reactions to content that could be harmful.
Ranking harms

Young people in the group discussions ranked a series of 12 types of content into three categories, illustrated in the table over the page. A summary of the discussion of each of these rankings follows the table.

Table: Types of content and level of harm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOW OR NOT HARMFUL</th>
<th>COULD BE HARMFUL</th>
<th>COULD BE VERY HARMFUL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nudity</td>
<td>Violence being rewarded</td>
<td>Realistic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offensive language</td>
<td>Violence treated as normal</td>
<td>Sexual violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People talking about sex</td>
<td>Stylised violence</td>
<td>Self-harm or suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implied sex</td>
<td>Explicit sex</td>
<td>People using hard drugs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Harms associated with pornography and computer/console games are discussed separately at the end of this section.

Depictions that are considered of low or no potential harm

Overall, young people regard depictions of these four types of content (nudity, offensive language, people talking about sex, and implied sex) as relatively harmless to themselves, to others younger than themselves, and to wider society. This is because they are not deemed to provoke or trigger any dangerous or long-term harmful behaviours, or to cause any significant harms.

Young people consider these four types of content are capable of causing harm if they are combined with other types of content (such as violence or sexual content). However, as stand-alone depictions, young people do not regard any of these types of content as particularly harmful.

Depictions that could be harmful

Young people consider violence being rewarded, treating violence as ‘normal’ and stylised violence have the potential to cause harm to themselves, to those younger than themselves, and to wider society. The types of harms they identify are:

- People mimicking these behaviours in real life and hurting themselves or others
- People feeling that violence is an acceptable way to interact with others to get their way
- An increase in acceptability of violence across society
- Desensitisation to violence in real life
- People being shocked when viewing these depictions
- People thinking that violence does not have serious consequences (for stylised violence in particular)

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3 These 12 types of content were supplied by the OFLC and were used in both the survey questionnaire and the qualitative discussion groups.

4 Note this table is a summary of the four groups and a full breakdown by group is provided as an appendix to this report.
Thinking violence looks ‘cool’ (again, particularly for stylised violence)

Young people think that the manner in which these types of violence is depicted contributes to how harmful they might be, which is why they categorise them as potentially harmful rather than potentially very harmful. There are a range of factors that impact on the level of potential harm. They think the context, genre, extent, manner and intent of the depiction have an influence on the level of potential harm.

Any violence (not just violence being rewarded, violence being treated as ‘normal’ and stylised violence) is considered potentially more harmful if it is glamourised, shot in slow motion, or otherwise cinematically manipulated.

Depictions that could be very harmful

In contrast to the previous set of content, young people consider the types of content below are more likely to be very harmful, regardless of the context, genre, extent and intent of the depiction.

Young people think that depictions of realistic violence, sexual violence, self-harm or suicide, explicit sex, and people using hard drugs could be potentially very harmful to themselves, to others younger than themselves, and to wider society. This is because they think the types of harm could be longer-term, more serious, and affect people more seriously than the harms from some of the other types of content.

The types of harms they identify are:

- Being upset and disturbed, shocked, traumatised (particularly for people who might have experienced these types of content in real life)
- People mimicking these types of behaviours in real life
- Behaving more fearfully, seeing the potential for violence in everyday life and being afraid
- Triggering these types of behaviours in others (particularly for suicide and self-harm)
- Encouraging this type of behaviour in real life (such as drug use, sexual assault)

Young people suggest these types of depictions could be very harmful regardless of the context, manner and degree of the depiction.

Harms associated with pornography

Young people’s views on pornography differ by gender. Young women consider pornography potentially very harmful, particularly to themselves, people younger than them, and to wider society. Young women identify a range of harms associated with pornographic content.

Young women consider pornography could be harmful to all women, including themselves and those younger than themselves, as well as wider society due to:

- Depicting unrealistic and damaging portrayals of sexual relations
- Men believing that women should behave and look similar to pornographic actors
- People believing that unsafe sex is acceptable
- Putting pressure on women to engage in sexual acts depicted by pornography
Young men also think there are some potential harms from pornography. The types of harms they identify are similar to young women. They think there is potential for harm to women, and to wider society, but less potential for harm to themselves.

Young people suggest that people are learning about sex from pornography because sex education in schools is less than adequate. They think pornographic depictions can assist young people to understand how to ‘do’ sex. However, they think this is problematic as pornography does not truly reflect actual sexual interactions. They are concerned that people younger than themselves could develop harmful attitudes towards women if pornography is their only source of information on the topic.

Harms associated with playing computer/console games

Young people consider playing games has some differing characteristics to viewing films. While this affects the types of harms they identify, it does not alter their use of the classification system (as discussed earlier).

Some young people consider depictions in games less harmful than depictions in films because the gamer can control the game by turning it off. While this is also true of a film, young people think that a gamer has a greater degree of control over the content of a game than a viewer has over the content of a film.

Other young people think that the immersive, repetitive, intensive and frequent nature of gaming may increase the potential for harm to gamers. They identified the following harms associated with gaming:

- Potential to desensitize gamers to violence
- Becoming aggressive with other gamers (such as in online games) and replicating this behaviour in real life with siblings, parents and others in society
- Being obsessed with games and doing little else, reducing interactions with others around them
- Being upset, depressed, anxious or shocked by harmful interactions with other gamers in a competitive environment
Background and research objectives

Background

The Office of Film and Literature Classification (the OFLC) is the government body responsible for classifying films, games and other publications that may need to be restricted or banned. In 2011, the OFLC published research which explored adult New Zealanders’ understanding and perceptions of the classification system.5

The OFLC has commissioned Colmar Brunton to carry out further research to understand and explore the views of young New Zealanders (aged 16 to 18), who are a group affected by New Zealand’s classification system. The research comprised two stages:

- A quantitative survey of 507 young New Zealanders.
- A qualitative phase comprising of four focus groups.

The quantitative phase was designed to measure young people’s use of, and perceptions about, the classification system, and the content in films and games that might be of concern to them. This phase was followed by a series of focus group sessions to explore their perceptions in more depth.

This document reports the findings from the qualitative stage which was conducted in May and June 2013 after the quantitative survey. The findings from the quantitative survey have been reported separately — see research reports on the OFLC website.

Research objectives

The objectives of the research were to:

- Investigate young New Zealanders' perceptions and use of the classification system
- Investigate young people’s perceptions of the potential harms/injuries from content in films and games (in particular, those targeted at their demographic)

The OFLC has also conducted a literature review to complement the findings of this research.

Methodology

A qualitative approach

Once the quantitative survey was completed and findings analysed, the OFLC and Colmar Brunton refined the topics for discussion in the qualitative phase.

This phase of the research entailed group discussions with young people aged 16 to 18. The aim of the group discussions was to understand and explore young people’s perceptions in-depth, and to explore any of the themes that emerged from the survey findings.

Group discussions were selected as the most appropriate methodology for this research, as they allowed young people to interact and discuss their perceptions of the classification system, and of the types of harms they associate with specific types of content.

Sample structure and participant sources

The sample was divided by gender and age

The following diagram illustrates the sample for the four focus groups. The groups were separated by gender due to the sensitive nature of some aspects of the discussion (such as pornography). Young people were also separated by age to ensure there was a distinction between those who were 16 and 17 years old, and those who were 18 years old (as restricted classifications no longer apply to these young people).

Diagram: qualitative sample breakdown (four group discussions)

Each group was 2.5 hours in duration and comprised four to seven young people. Groups took place in the evenings between 29 May and 12 June 2013 in Auckland and Wellington. A semi-structured topic guide was used.
Participants were predominantly recruited from the quantitative survey phase

The participants in the groups were originally all intended to have previously undertaken the online survey. At the conclusion of the survey, young people were asked if they would be happy for Colmar Brunton to re-contact them and invite them to take part in a focus group. Those in Auckland and Wellington who agreed to further research were contacted by telephone and recruited for the groups.

Insufficient numbers of young people in the survey agreed to further contact, so Colmar Brunton used its qualitative panel to recruit young people in the specified age ranges.

Those recruited from the panel were asked to complete the online survey prior to the focus groups. The data from their survey responses was not included in the quantitative findings (as these young people completed the survey after the results had been reported to the OFLC). The aim of asking these young people to complete the survey was to acclimatise them to thinking about the classification system, and to ensure everyone in the groups was working from the same framework of experiences.

Fieldwork process and techniques

Participants completed a pre-task workbook prior to the group discussions

The workbook contained questions about the young person’s life, their attitudes to different types of media content, and their attitudes to New Zealand's classification system. The aim of the workbook was to acclimatise participants to thinking about the classification system. In this way, group time was maximised as young people had considered some of the topics to be discussed. Commentary from the workbooks has been incorporated throughout this report.

A semi-structured topic guide was developed to explore the research objectives

The topic guide was structured as follows:

1. Introduction and warm-up
2. Perceptions and use of the classification system
3. Young people’s requirements from the classification system
4. Discussion of content types and potential levels of harm from content

The discussion was also aided by content from an article from The Standard provided by the OFLC.⁶

Moderators were gender matched to group composition

Female moderators conducted the two groups with young women and a male moderator conducted the two groups with young men. This enabled young people to feel comfortable and speak freely, particularly in the discussion of their views on pornography.

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⁶ An article published by the *The Standard* in Australia was used as a stimulus for discussion in the groups and the extract is appended to this report. Note that in several of the groups, the discussion about pornography preceded and reflected the content in the article. The full article is available here: [http://www.standard.net.au/story/1509844/our-young-drowning-in-a-sea-of-porn/](http://www.standard.net.au/story/1509844/our-young-drowning-in-a-sea-of-porn/).
Notes to this report

Terms and analysis

Throughout this report, the term 'young people' refers to all young people in the four groups. Any differences by group (for example by age or gender) are highlighted where appropriate.

Use of verbatim comments and workbook entries

Verbatim comments and content from workbooks are used throughout this report to illustrate key findings. These are attributed by the age and gender of the participant, and by the location of the group.
Detailed findings
Perceptions and use of the classification system

This section discusses how young people use the classification system and for what purposes. It explains their use of classification labels and the descriptive notes, and how young people behave in regard to complying with classification restrictions. Perceptions of the accuracy of the classification system, as well as who it best serves, are included.

Young people's perceptions of the potential harms from viewing certain content are covered in the section that follows.

The classification system becomes less relevant to decision-making as young people mature

Young people between the ages of 16 and 18 report limited reliance on the classification system to guide their choices and decision-making around viewing film content, or engaging in online or computer/console games. However, they still consider it important to some of their decision-making in some instances (particularly when unsure of the plot of a film), and for other people.

Young people think the classification system is most salient for three situations and audiences:

1. For parents or caregivers selecting films or games for people under 16 years of age
2. For people younger than themselves when selecting content to view or play
3. For themselves when selecting films or games for younger people.

Young people think the classification system is primarily designed to help parents and people older than themselves decide what people their age, or younger, can view and play.

Young people say the classification system was more salient in their decision-making (involuntarily in some cases) when they were aged under sixteen. Now they are older, they think the system applies less to them and people their own age.

I'm not too bothered at this age, I'll watch things all over the spectrum. I use [the classification] more just to know what I am watching, rather than should I watch it or not.

18 year-old male group, Wellington

I would think people my age would be mature enough to realise what is right and wrong and just plain stupid.

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland
Perceptions and use of the classification system

Some young people think it should be acceptable for them to attend a film at the cinema, that they would not otherwise be allowed to see, if their parents accompanied them to it.

[Participant was refused entry to a film] It was an R16 and I was half a month away from turning 16 but [my friend] wasn’t [as old], she’s a few months younger than me. And I thought, well, we were with her parents, we were obviously old enough to be in the age group of 16. I thought that didn’t make much sense to me [to be refused].

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

Young people consider parents the main users of the classification system.

It’s good to have a system to help parents or adults decide what is suitable for children to watch.

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

If parents are going with them to buy the game or the movie they would be informed of what they’re buying for their kids. Kids aren’t really tending to be that fussed, they would rather buy something that’s restricted. So it’s more for the parents’ needs.

18 year-old female group, Wellington

You need to let parents know what they can let their kids watch.

18 year-old male group, Wellington

Decision-making and sources of information

The diagram below highlights how young people use the classification system and when it might be more, or less, of an influence on their viewing choices.

Diagram: Influence of classifications on decision making
The label is their main source of information about the classification

While the physical label is young people’s main source of information about the classification of a game or film, young people also notice the classification in film listings on cinema websites, and on flyers or posters at retail outlets. They do not tend to actively seek out the classification of a film or game for their own viewing or playing, but may do so if they think they might view or play with people younger than themselves. Young people will also report the classification of a game or film to friends during the recommendation process, either as a warning or an endorsement.

The young participants could recall the classification of a number of films and games they had viewed during the year. They recalled the classification because the film contained content that was previously restricted to them. This was particularly true of the 16 and 17 year-olds.

Young people do not always refer to the descriptive note in conjunction with the age restriction

While the classification label catches young people’s attention, the descriptive notes are also referenced on some occasions. The main reason young people might refer to the descriptive note is that they are unfamiliar with the plot or content of a film or game. They will use the descriptive note to add to their understanding of the nature of the content.

On the occasions that they do seek guidance from the descriptive note, young people want more detailed information about the nature, context and type of content. The questions they have are:

- Is the sexual content part of the plot or gratuitous? Does it form a significant part of the story or is it incidental?
- Does the offensive language add to the story? Or is there just a lot of offensive language that does not add to the plot?
- What content may disturb? What is meant by disturbing content?
- Is the violence sustained or short-lived? Will I be able to handle it?
- How realistic is the violence?

Young women express more interest in receiving more detailed information from the descriptive note. This is because they prefer to be warned about any content that they may choose to view or avoid.

_I would like a warning. If there is a rape in it, you want to know that._

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

_I feel like [the descriptive note] doesn't tell me enough. It says 'adult themes'—what does that mean?_

18 year-old female group, Wellington

Young men express some interest in receiving more detailed information from the descriptive note in order to help them make viewing decisions, although to a lesser extent than young women. Young men are less concerned about being warned about violent or frightening content. However, the area of sexual violence is one example where young men might want more information.
Perceptions and use of the classification system

_I really only read the note for sexual stuff. I don't want to see rape._
16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

Both young men and young women report a desire to keep key plot details unspoken in order to enhance the surprise or fright elements of some films. They recognise that this balance is not an easy one.

_I mean, don't give away the plot line or anything._
18 year-old female group, Wellington

_You want the [descriptive note] to tell you what's in the film without telling you what's in the film. It's a fine line between informing you but not explaining it all to you. If it said 'animal violence' [for example] and you're watching the film, and it's a man and his dog, you know something bad is going to happen to the dog._
18 year-old male group, Wellington

The classification system is only one source of information

While young people report using the classification system to some degree to determine their viewing choices, they also get information from a range of other sources such as:

- Discussions and recommendations from friends, family and school or workmates
- Film trailers at cinemas (and film posters in the same location)
- Online reviews and websites such as the IMDB website¹
- Viewing trailers on YouTube or the film website itself
- Facebook and other social media recommendations (for example, by 'liking' a particular actor or director, young people can be informed of upcoming films)

Young people often use multiple sources of information in order to inform their viewing decisions. The classification itself plays a small part in their overall decision-making. Young people say that the content of the film, the actors, the director, and the type of film are more important factors in their decision to view.

_Some of them, I might just hear about from friends — then I check them out on IMDB, YouTube, the trailer or whatever._
18 year-old male group, Wellington

Young people think that the classification system does not take maturity levels into account

Young people think that the classification system is a blunt instrument. The system places a blanket restriction on people under a certain age regardless of their individual level of maturity, personal experiences, or viewing frequency. Young people think the system does not address the differences these factors make. They see this as less than ideal, and feel justified in circumventing the restrictions imposed on them.

¹ www.imdb.com
Young people think that they are mature enough to differentiate depictions in films from real life. This indicates to them that they are adult enough to watch restricted content without any real harm to themselves.

Young people say the classification system could be more flexible for people who are able to handle and process restricted content, regardless of their age. They say the 'maturity line' is crossed by different young people at different ages, and this is not addressed by the current system. There should be a way of differentiating 'mature' 16 year-olds from 'immature' 16 year-olds.

Be more realistic. Some young people are very mature, whereas some are not. Whether someone is mentally capable of viewing something is completely up to the individual.

18 year-old male group, Wellington

If I feel I am mature enough and 'ready' to see a film, but I am not legally allowed to due to the restriction [that bugs me].

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

My opinion is that the harmful aspect of DVDs and games are all caused by lack of maturity. This does not necessarily link to age, but probably pertains to the maturity and personality and morality of the individual.

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

When young people do rely more on the classification system

Young people use the classification system, in some circumstances, for three main reasons:

- To decide what content to view themselves
- To decide what content to avoid, and
- When selecting films for others younger than themselves

It gives us an idea of what to expect.

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland
Using the system to determine what films and games to select for themselves

Young people feel they are mature enough, and old enough, to start making their own decisions about what content they view. They therefore use the classification to actively select films and games with R16 or R18 classifications. This is because they feel emotionally ready and capable of viewing content with these restrictions. Those young people who use the system in this way reject content classified as G or PG because, to them, these classifications indicate subject matter that is immature and childish, and no longer suitable for young people of their level of maturity.

I think it affects me because I don't walk into any store now and hire out G rated movie. I mainly look for R18 and R16 because I know if it's R18 it might have really good action.
18 year-old male group, Wellington

If I'm looking for a horror I don't go for M [classified films] or anything cause, I'm just like 'nah it's not really scary enough for me'.
16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

If I'm with my friends [we select] high rated films because we want to watch scary or violent things, we want to laugh at them or something.
18 year-old male group, Wellington

Using the system to determine what content they wish to avoid

Young people, particularly young women, also use the classification system to avoid content they do not want to watch or play. Many can recall instances of viewing content they regret selecting and feel they were not mature enough to handle. This can cause them harm (such as giving them nightmares). Young women prefer to be warned about sexual violence or rape scenes so they are not surprised by these in a film. They may avoid the film entirely, or they may use the classification and descriptive note as a warning. This helps them prepare better for the content when it occurs.

People just need to be well informed about the fact that [something that justifies that classification] is going to happen ... and this could be very triggering for you or this could be very mentally disturbing for you, and you just need to be aware of that. I have gone in to films before not knowing at all what to expect and gone 'oh well that was absolutely terrifying, I am so regretting even starting to watch that movie'.
18 year-old female group, Wellington

Young men tend to use the classification system to avoid content that might be embarrassing to watch with parents or relatives. For example, they might avoid a film with sexual content if they are planning to view it with their parents.
Selecting for people younger than themselves

Young people see potential for harm in allowing people who are younger than them to view or play restricted content. They recognise that people who are younger than them may not be mature enough to cope with restricted content. Many young people will actively restrict content for younger viewers or gamers, even though they may have taken opportunities to view restricted content when they were under 16.

Young people think they should protect younger siblings from restricted content because they can recall being upset or shocked when viewing restricted content before they felt able to handle it. Young people will use the classification system to help guide their choices in circumstances when they will be viewing with a person younger than themselves.

Young people take the view that it is partially their role to restrict content for people who are younger than them. Young people consider 'younger than them' to be up to about 15. Some of the young people in this research were vigilant about this role, while others were a little more relaxed.

What's the film, that Kiwi film, Once Were Warriors. You don't want to be showing that to a child because then he'll think it's okay to hit people.
18 year-old male group, Wellington

I don't let my sister watch half the stuff I watched at the same age as her.
16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

Young people think that people younger than them (those under 16) are unable to make good viewing decisions for themselves, and should have classification restrictions imposed on them. They think that people younger than them are not as able to process and understand restricted content, and are rightly denied access to it by the classification system.

If I was getting a movie for my younger sister, I would get her a chick flick, not Saw. She's only 13. I don't want to have to explain sex stuff in movies to her either.
16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

I want my sister to remain as sheltered from that as possible, for as long as possible, so she feels safe. If you watch something awful in a film ... you see things differently, you watch different people more suspiciously. And I don't want my younger sister to go out to the mall and feel unsafe.
16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland
How different contexts impact on the use of the classification system

To help frame discussion of the impact of content, and potential harms from different types of content, young people were asked to think about how content is presented in different genres, and how that impacts on their use of the classification system. The table on the following page illustrates how the context of genre can impact on young people’s use of the classification system.

*Note this ranking is qualitative in nature and should provide an indication only of the influence of genre on young people’s decision-making.*

Table: Summary of the influence of genre on young peoples’ reference to the classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENRE</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romantic comedy</td>
<td>Less likely to consult the classification for this type of film as restricted or harmful content is not expected in this genre. More likely to check if viewing with parents or those younger than themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other comedy</td>
<td>Potentially more likely to check, particularly for a black comedy. More likely to check if viewing with parents or those younger than themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>More likely to check and more likely to read the descriptive note for clues about content (eg, a warning about sexual violence).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>More likely to check and more likely to read the descriptive note for clues about content (eg, a warning about sexual violence).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentary</td>
<td>Not discussed in the context of films, but some discussion of this genre in relation to broadcasts on television. More likely to check if the topic of the documentary is likely to be violent or sexual in nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horror</td>
<td>More likely to check — either to avoid content or to aid selection.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Romantic comedy**

Young people do not expect (or particularly want) to see harmful or restricted content in this type of film. They expect (and are comfortable with) a certain level of offensive language and partial nudity in this genre. They do not, however, expect to see explicit sex, violence, or anything that might shock them. Young people consider a romantic comedy should be safe to watch at home with their parents and younger siblings. They tend not to check the classification for this type of film, nor will they pay much attention to the descriptive note. Some young people mentioned that these films tend to be rated G, PG or M (with a green or yellow sticker) which indicates to them that the content will not be harmful. Some young people might check more carefully that a film is unrestricted (G, PG or M) if they intend to watch it with people younger than themselves.
Other comedy

Young people consider it acceptable to include content such as offensive language, partial nudity, and stylised or unrealistic violence in other types of comedy, particularly in black comedies. They also note that some films, such as *The Hangover 3*, depict the use of hard drugs to comic effect. As long as the film does not glamourise these activities, or shock them, young people tend to be comfortable with this type of content. *Tropic Thunder*, which contains some violence and a beheading, was mentioned in the groups. Participants said due to the humorous manner of the presentations, the degree and extent of the violence did not detract from the overall comedic effect, in this case.

As with romantic comedies, young people do not expect to be shocked or upset by content in other types of comedy. However, they will use the classification to assess for any content that might be unsuitable for younger siblings or others younger than themselves. They will also scan other sources (such as online film reviews and the IMDB website) if they want more information about the content of the film.

Young people may be more likely to check the classification of a black comedy, especially if they intend to view it with others younger than themselves.

Action

Young people are potentially more likely to check the classification of an action film because they expect more violent content in these films and there is a higher possibility of sexual content. Young people consider action films have become more graphic and violent over time. An example of this is the *Harry Potter* series which became progressively more violent and frightening. Later films in this series are rated M with warnings about violence and fantasy horror. Some young people think these films are quite frightening for people younger than themselves.

If young people plan to view an action DVD at home or in a cinema with other people younger than themselves, they will tend to check the classification. This is not to say they will necessarily enforce the age restriction on the movie at home (for example, they may rent an R16 movie and allow their 14 year-old brother to view it with them). However, they will use the classification, and potentially the descriptive note, to give them an indication of the type of content the film contains to help make their decision whether to watch it or not.

Young people tend to regard action films as unrealistic. They think the action does not represent real life and is therefore less disturbing. They know and understand that actors are playing at being shot, punched or hurt, and that the audience is not expected to fully believe in the reality of the violence. Some young people tend not to rely on the classification system too much for this type of film, particularly if they plan to view it with peers. Having said this, they recognise there is potential to be shocked or disturbed by content in this genre, and may look at the classification to arm themselves with information.

Drama

Young people are more likely to use the classification system to provide them with warnings and guidance for drama DVDs and films in cinemas. The genre is very broad, so young people use cues such as the classification label (or online via the cinema website), the director, the actors in the film,
Perceptions and use of the classification system

and the general plot from the trailer or other sources, to determine the content. Young people say they have a good idea that a Quentin Tarantino movie, for example, will contain violence and offensive language. If they plan to view a DVD or attend a film with someone younger than themselves, young people will check the classification more carefully. Young people arm themselves with as much information as they need to assess the content of a film and regard the classification as one of the clues to the content of a drama film or DVD.

Young women in particular might use the classification to warn them about depictions of sexual violence which are more likely in this genre. They will use the descriptive note (among other sources) to guide them on the type of content to expect.

**Documentary**

Young people tend to discuss documentaries in the context of television broadcasts. They did not talk specifically about renting or buying documentary DVDs or going to cinemas to see documentaries. However, they expect some disturbing or upsetting content to be contained in the documentary genre. Specific examples include war or historical documentaries that might show actual footage of war or the aftermath of battles. Young people say this type of content is educational, rather than produced for entertainment.

While this does not reduce the harm of viewing depictions of violence or disturbing content in documentaries, some young people say these depictions are justified in order to educate people (for example, about the horrors of war). They did not discuss their use of the classification system specifically for this genre. However, they did mention warnings that appear (or are provided by the newsreader) prior to screening of some television documentaries or news/information content (for example, prior to screening the aftermath of a terrorist bombing on the news). They think these warnings are both appropriate and adequate.

**Horror**

Young people who watch horror movies report enjoying being scared by this type of film. However, they do sometimes like a warning about content and are therefore potentially more likely to check the classification on a film they plan to view. They consider that people choose to view horror, and should therefore know what to expect from this type of film. They expect to be surprised and disturbed, and to view violent depictions of torture, murder, injury and other staples of the horror director's toolkit.

However, young people want some kind or warning about the content of horror films, both for themselves, but especially for people younger than them. They mentioned being disturbed by horror content they had seen prior to being old enough to handle it, for example, in films such as the *Hostel* and *Saw* series.

*Seeing that film [Hostel] makes me freaked out to stay in a hostel now.*

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland
Some young people use the classification to determine whether a horror movie is going to be **horrifying enough** to bother renting or viewing it.

*If a horror movie gets an M rating I immediately think 'oh it’s not going to be as horrifying'.*

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

**Young people are actively circumventing classification restrictions**

Young people circumvent classification restrictions in two ways: by downloading content from online sources, and by providing false age details at point-of-sale.

**Downloading restricted content from online sources**

Young people are aware that content is available online without New Zealand classification restrictions. They are downloading and viewing material online that they cannot access via conventional means in New Zealand. They are aware that this is a direct evasion of the classification system. They consider the ability to access restricted content online is a benefit to young people who would otherwise be restricted by the classification system. They consider they are mature enough to actively seek out and view restricted materials — and that it is their choice to do so.

*That’s the point of going online, isn’t it? To avoid the classification.*

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

*I think that it’s a lot harder now [to restrict films] because you can watch it online. So [the] purpose has been defeated a little bit because you can’t be completely legally stopped from seeing [restricted content].*

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

Some young people make an active choice not to download restricted material, either because they are not interested, or because they do not feel compelled to view it. They are aware restricted content is accessible to them, should they want it.

**Providing false age details at point-of-sale**

Young people consider that while the classification system identifies and restricts content in theory, it cannot always work to restrict content at or after the point-of-sale. Most young people regard the point-of-sale (either a retailer or a cinema), as the main restriction on their access to content. Some say that this barrier is easy to circumvent, for example, by using their older brother or sister’s ID to gain admission to restricted films. Others report being able to purchase or rent DVDs and games without being asked for age identification.

*The people who are selling these products, if they are [restricted], are not enforcing the law or asking for ID. I know this first-hand as I was always wanting to get the fun and exciting games and DVDs that were R rated, and due to me being quite tall and having two older brothers, these multimedia were easily accessible.*

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland
Once a DVD or game has been purchased or rented, young people believe the restriction is less enforceable. While parental control remains as a restriction mechanism, parents are failing at denying young people access to age-restricted content, and in fact can sometimes implicitly endorse young people viewing restricted content. This could be because parents consider their child to be emotionally capable of viewing restricted content.

*There is a difference between the restriction and the enforcement. Parents don’t bother. I was playing Grand Theft Auto when I was eight or nine.*

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

*I don’t think the classification system is enforced as well as it could be. Parents let their kids watch movies they are not allowed to and nobody seems to really care or do anything about it. Or when a parent is obviously buying a game that is R16 or R18 and nothing is said or done. There should be stricter penalties.*

18 year-old female group, Wellington

Those young people whose parents do not allow them to view restricted content can view it online, visit a friend’s house, or seek the assistance of an older sibling or friend. Young people consider that they can ignore the restrictions because what they view or play should be their decision based on their self-perceived level of maturity and ability to manage and process restricted content. They see little harm in this.

*People can lie about their age, or if they have different heights and appearances, they may look a certain age while actually being another.*

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland
Young people do not always agree with the classification given to a film or game. Sometimes they think the OFLC's decisions do not reflect their own views. For example, they may think that an M classified film or game should have been classified R16, or that an R16 movie is 'tame' and should have been classified M.

Young people make their own judgments about whether they consider a classification is too lenient, too strict, or appropriate. These findings are similar to the quantitative survey.8

Young people also think the underlying rationale for specific classifications can be unclear, and they are not aware of the process or criteria for determining a classification.

Some things are not classified right. Some movies which are R16 should be M which annoys me when going to rent a DVD.
16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

I wish the M classification was a bit clearer. It can be a bit lax, although that doesn't concern me because it works in my favour. I just wish it was a bit clearer — who can watch M rated films?
16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

The reasons that cause a programme or game or movie to get an M or R classification don't always warrant it.
16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

I wish the classification system would be a bit more sensitive and [classify] movies with violence and rape R18.
16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

8 Survey of young people's perceptions of the classification system. Colmar Brunton, 2013
What young people want from a classification system

Young people regard the classification system as important — just not always for themselves or others in their age group. They think it is more important to protect people younger than them, and for society (particularly parents) in general. They regard themselves as mature and adult enough to handle restricted content and therefore think they can safely ignore any restrictions that might apply to them. Interestingly, there is little differentiation qualitatively between those aged 16 and 17, and those who are 18. Young people in this age range use and perceive the classification system in the same way.

While they consider themselves mature enough to disregard classification restrictions, young people still think the system provides useful information to help their viewing and gaming choices to some degree. Whether they comply with the restrictions is a separate matter. It is clear that by 16, many young people have accessed restricted content either online or via traditional means.

Young people want the ability to gain more specific information from descriptive notes including a better ability to determine the extent, degree and manner of content depicted.

Young people consider the level of information in descriptive notes is inadequate. They therefore do not make full use of them, and rely on other sources of information (website reviews, friends recommendations and plot descriptions on the DVD case) to inform their choices and evaluate the suitability of a film or game for themselves and others they plan to view it with. For example, some young people would like a warning notification about nudity or sex scenes so they can determine if they want to watch it. Young people would also like notification of how prolonged or extensive a violent scene is (for example) so that they can determine if they want to watch the film or not. A short period of violence might be manageable, while sustained and extensive plot-driven violence may not.

_I wouldn’t mind a paragraph, I would read a paragraph of warnings._

18 year-old female group, Wellington

_Be more descriptive of an offensive activity that may be involved in games, movies or DVDs._

18 year-old female group, Wellington

_The film might be rated, but it doesn’t explain the severity of the violence or drug use in the caption._

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland
In summary, young people consider the classification of a film or game almost irrelevant to them and others their age in determining their viewing choices. However, young people will sometimes refer to the classification as one of the ways to determine if they want to avoid or watch a particular film.

They are more likely to refer to the classification when viewing with parents or those younger than themselves. They think that the main target audience for the classification system is parents. Young people’s main use of the system is when looking for information to restrict those younger than themselves from viewing content, and to inform themselves about the nature of the content of a film for their own viewing.

Young people have access to detailed information online about the nature of content of films and games. They therefore use the classification system in conjunction with other, more detailed, descriptions of the content of films and games.

Young people consider that the classification system is a blunt instrument because it restricts content for all people in their age group, regardless of individual levels of maturity. They have ready access to restricted content online and are actively circumventing the classification system. They consider this practice acceptable and appropriate given their self-perceived level of maturity.

Young people like specific and detailed information about the content of a film and would, potentially, be more likely to use and refer to descriptive notes if they were more specific.
Perceptions of harm associated with certain types of content

This section describes young people's perceptions of the types of potential harms that could occur from viewing films or playing computer games. Young people's overall comments are provided and any differences by age and gender are noted. Included in the discussions about each type of content is:

- An indication of the level of potential harm (note this is qualitative in nature)
- A list of harms identified by young people (linked to the content type)
- Comment and examples to illustrate how young people perceive the extent, context, degree and manner of a particular depiction can escalate or reduce the potential for harm

A discussion of the harms associated with pornography and games is included at the end of this section as these two topics were discussed separately.

What young people mean by the term harmful

Young people describe a number of potential harms associated with particular types of content. The table below provides an indication of the types/categories of harm that young people mentioned.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF HARM</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short-term</td>
<td>Getting a fright while watching a film — a momentary shock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer-term</td>
<td>Being afraid of the dark or having trouble sleeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Developing suicidal thoughts or triggering depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Becoming aggressive and getting into fights/hurting others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudinal</td>
<td>Thinking about women as sex objects from watching pornography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural</td>
<td>Treating women as sex objects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that some harms could fall into more than one category. For example, being frightened by a depiction of violence could be momentary and fleeting, or it could have a long-term impact and harm a young person’s mental health.

Included in the types of harms are young people’s perceptions of the seriousness of a particular harm. For example, young people think that having a nightmare after seeing something frightening is less harmful overall than, for example, a severe reaction to content such as ongoing or severe emotional distress.

Note that the level of harm has been identified by Colmar Brunton based on discussions about particular types of content, rather than by directly asking young people. The level of harm is provided to give some indication of how serious young people consider a particular harm is to them, to others younger than them, and to society.
In addition, young people consider that people will have differing levels of reaction to some content. A person’s reaction can depend on their personality, frequency of exposure to content, and their level of maturity. One 16 year-old might be unaffected by a depiction of realistic violence, while another might be significantly traumatised by it.

The following section is structured using a list of twelve types of content supplied by the OFLC. These types of content were also used in the quantitative survey. These types of content formed the basis of the discussion about potential harm.

**Ranking each type of content by level of potential harm**

The following table illustrates how young people categorise the twelve types of content. Categorisation and ranking varied slightly within each of the discussion groups, depending on each young person’s perspective and experiences relating to examples of the types of content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOW OR NOT HARMFUL</th>
<th>COULD BE HARMFUL</th>
<th>COULD BE VERY HARMFUL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nudity</td>
<td>Violence being rewarded</td>
<td>Realistic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offensive language</td>
<td>Violence viewed as normal</td>
<td>Sexual violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People talking about sex</td>
<td>Stylised violence</td>
<td>Self-harm or suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implied sex</td>
<td>Explicit sex</td>
<td>People using hard drugs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other types of content were identified by young people and used in the groups, but are not discussed separately here. For example ‘beheadings’ was identified as a specific form of violent content. Discussion about this particular act is used as an example when discussing types of violence.

A separate list of the way each of the four groups categorised the types of content is included at Appendix I. It includes types of content that young people identified as potentially harmful in their workbooks and at the group discussions.
Content considered of low or no potential harm

Depictions of these four types of content are not regarded by young people as particularly harmful.

1. Nudity
2. Offensive language
3. People talking about sex
4. Implied sex

1. Nudity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived harm to...</th>
<th>Level of harm identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others younger than themselves</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It’s just our bodies.
16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

Simple depictions of nudity are not considered harmful by young people. They consider this could have some low level degree of harm for people younger than themselves for example, if a very young person has not seen nudity before.

I still think that [for] younger people it’s not a damaging thing to know what people look like naked.
18 year-old female group, Wellington

Young women express views that female nudity can be used to titillate men and this can veer into more harmful territory if the context and genre are not appropriate. They note that female nudity is more likely to be depicted in films or games for male amusement. They also note that depictions of 'ideal' female bodies in films or games could give rise to body image issues in women. They consider there is the potential to trigger anorexia or other eating disorders in women as a result of this. However, on balance, they think that depictions of nudity alone are unlikely to be harmful.

The manner, extent and degree of nudity are important to young people. There are some types of exploitation of nudity that could be harmful (for example, during a rape scene). In these cases, the combination of nudity and sexual violence would be considered more harmful.
2. Offensive language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived harm to...</th>
<th>Level of harm identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others younger than themselves</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It's just become such an everyday thing now though, I feel like especially the last two years. They can swear in PGs almost — it [seems] to me.
18 year-old female group, Wellington

Use of offensive language in films and games is not considered particularly harmful by young people. However, they tend to regard some words as more harmful and offensive than others, especially if they are used to abuse or denigrate, for example, to abuse women or ethnic minorities. Young people consider the intent of offensive language is important, and how offensive language is used in films and games has the potential to reduce or escalate the level of potential harm, for example if the offensive language used is:

- To indicate violence or abuse
- Used to offend a particular gender or ethnicity as a form of hate
- Part of other harmful content (such as within a fight scene or sexual violence scene)

Offensive language in combination with these factors has the potential to be more harmful.

Young people consider offensive language is part of everyday life within some contexts like school and among friends. They feel mature enough to handle offensive language in films and games, and know when it is inappropriate to use this language themselves.

Similarly to their comments about nudity, young people think that combining offensive language with other types of content, such as violence, can impact on the level of potential harm.

Young people think people younger than themselves could mimic depictions of offensive language in inappropriate situations. This is because they may lack the maturity to differentiate when it is acceptable to use offensive language, and when it is not.

You can't go around in the streets and just swear at random people. You don't go out with your family somewhere and start swearing.
16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

[You] learn not to say it around your family, because when it's your family, it's not funny, it's not respectful.
16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

Young people think that use of offensive language in films and games does not generally harm society as a whole, but can have some negative consequences if people mimic this language in settings where it could show disrespect.
3. People talking about sex

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<th>Level of harm identified</th>
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<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Nil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others younger than themselves</td>
<td>Limited</td>
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<td>Society</td>
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Young people do not consider depictions of discussions about sex to be harmful. They consider 'normal' conversations about sex can usually be included in a range of genres. They note that if the depicted conversation was to become particularly graphic, violent or disturbed, the content might be more potentially harmful.

Young people consider it could be harmful if a younger brother or sister was in the room viewing a discussion about sex. They would be a little concerned about their sibling being shocked or traumatised, but on balance, think that depictions of this nature are acceptable and generally harmless.

4. Implied sex

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<td>Self</td>
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<td>Others younger than themselves</td>
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<td>Society</td>
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[Implied sex is like] they go off to the bedroom and pull the covers up and then [they are] sort of lying in bed with him with his shirt off and the hair all messy.

18 year-old female group, Wellington

Half the time young kids don’t get it anyway. They don’t understand what’s going on.

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

Young people do not consider depictions of implied 'normal' sex harmful. By this, they mean depictions that do not include graphic content, violence or other escalating factors. They are comfortable viewing this content themselves, although not always with parents, and would only be slightly concerned about a person younger than them viewing this type of content.

Overall, young people regard depictions of these four types of content as relatively harmless. This is because they are not deemed to provoke or trigger any dangerous or long-term harmful behaviours or attitudes, or to cause any significant harm to themselves, to others younger than to themselves, or to society. Young people consider these four types of content are capable of causing harm if they are combined with other types of content (such as violence or sexual content). However, as stand-alone depictions, young people do not regard any of these types of content as particularly harmful.
Content considered potentially harmful

Depictions of these three types of content are regarded as potentially harmful:

1. Violence being rewarded
2. Violence treated as ‘normal’
3. Stylised violence

Young people think the manner in which violence is depicted contributes to how harmful it might be. Any violence is considered potentially more harmful if it is glamourised, shot in slow motion, or otherwise cinematically manipulated.

Young people tend to regard depictions of violence as potentially harmful regardless of the genre, manner, extent and degree of the depiction. Some factors, as discussed in the following sections, can escalate or mitigate the level of harm.

1. Violence being rewarded

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<td>Others younger than themselves</td>
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<td>Society</td>
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Young people think that depictions of violence being rewarded have the potential to be harmful. The harms young people identify are:

- People mimicking violent behaviour and hurting themselves or others
- People thinking violence is an acceptable way to interact with others to get their own way
- An increase in the acceptability of violence across society
- Desensitisation to violence in real life.

Young people think there are some instances where violence being rewarded is a legitimate plot device. They cite films where the good characters triumph over the evil characters. In these instances, young people recognise that they are being manipulated to side with the good characters, so when the evil characters are killed or beaten, the audience should feel that violent behaviour is justified. More mature younger people can differentiate the fictional context from real life and do not replicate this kind of behaviour in their own lives. They consider that some immature people their age, and people younger than them, may not be capable of making this distinction, and this could lead them to mimic this type of behaviour.

*[It] could inspire some people to become violent.*

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland
Manner and point-of-view escalate or mitigate the perceived level of harm

Young people evaluate the manner in which acts of violence being rewarded are presented. Is the act of violence intended to make the audience sympathise with a character, or revile them? Is the viewer’s point of view intended to be the perpetrator or the victim? Young people cite examples where acts of violence being rewarded are ultimately shown in a negative light — the character inflicting the violence is eventually defeated. This can minimise the harm of some depictions of violence for some young people. Young people think that instances where the perpetrator of violence is not penalised have the potential to be more harmful than when the perpetrator is ultimately punished or shown to suffer as a consequence.

2. Violence treated as normal

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<td>Others younger than themselves</td>
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<td>Society</td>
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*It depends what’s normal for you. I grew up in a council estate in the UK. I saw someone getting stabbed when I was 11. But something like guns, they don’t happen in New Zealand, so it’s less realistic here. You feel like it wouldn’t happen here.*

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

*[Referring to depictions of domestic violence in Once Were Warriors] It affects me more than some of the films [involving] guns and that kind of thing, because it was so real.*

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

Young people regard depictions of violence being treated as normal as potentially harmful. The main potential harm of this is that people might incorporate violence into everyday life, mimicking violent acts, and ultimately creating a more violent and dehumanised society.

Young people recognise that depictions of violence being treated as normal are generally fictitious and they wouldn’t replicate such acts in real life. They understand that, for example, *Gangs of New York or Fight Club* are not real life, and therefore do not perceive harm in these depictions. However, they think that those younger than them, or those who struggle to differentiate fiction from reality, may be harmed (or harm others) by viewing this type of content. Harms could include being frightened or shocked, or having nightmares. Other potential consequences include harming others by inflicting violence on them.

They also think that depictions of violence being treated as normal are more harmful (upsetting, shocking) if our role as the viewer is to empathise with the victim. For example, in *Once Were Warriors*, the audience is invited to side with Rena Owen’s character, rather than Temuera Morrison’s. This makes the depictions of violence all the more realistic, and therefore shocking.

Young people recognise that violence of this type in action films, dramas, in some animated films, and in games, is intended to be entertaining and fictional. However, it can cross the line into being potentially very harmful if the degree and extent of depictions of violence are extreme and realistic.
Young people think those younger than themselves could potentially suffer more harm from such depictions.

[It depends on] the age, personality, or what type of person he or she is ... processing it ... you get teenagers, they process things differently to adults. We see all of the violence and we pass it off, yet adults look into it better, and children expand on it and actually think too much about what happened.

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

3. Stylised violence

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<td>Society</td>
<td>Limited to moderate</td>
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Young people consider stylised violence has the potential to cause harm. Harms identified are:

- Being upset or shocked at violence
- Thinking that violence does not have consequences (such as a permanent injury or damage)
- Thinking violence looks cool

You know it’s real, but you can’t really re-enact it... you know you can’t do it [yourself].

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

Similar to the discussions about other types of violence, young people think that they are mature and sensible and can differentiate between real violence and stylised violence. They tend to think that the potential for harm is less than for some other types of violence. Stylisation can assist in reducing the level of harm (because the violence is depicted as unrealistic). However, if the violence is extended or extreme, even stylised depictions have the potential to be more harmful (by shocking or upsetting the audience).

Stylised horror almost ... It’s like [the film] Saw. Ten seconds of Saw and that was enough to put me off for life. I didn’t sleep very well for the two weeks after watching it.

18 year-old female group, Wellington

Young people recognise the cinematic manipulation of stylised violence in action films. They understand that films like *Batman Returns* or *Die Hard* are not expected to depict the realistic consequences of violence. They think that a mature audience is able to make this distinction and this reduces the level of harm. However, people younger than them may not be capable of making this distinction and could be more likely to be harmed (by being upset or shocked).

Young people suggest stylised violence in films could cause harm by glamourising violence and making it attractive and cool. They also think this about depictions of stylised violence in games. If violence starts to be considered cool and acceptable, young people think there may be a societal tendency towards an increase in violent behaviour. Young people consider people younger than themselves to be the most vulnerable to this tendency, because they may be more susceptible to
the appeal of stylised violence (as they may lack the maturity to differentiate between stylised and real violence).

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<th>SUMMARY</th>
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<tr>
<td>Overall, young people categorise depictions of violence being rewarded, violence being treated as normal, and stylised violence as potentially harmful. There are a range of factors that impact on the level of potential harm: the context, genre, extent, manner and intent of the depiction have an influence on the level of potential harm. This is in contrast to the next set of content types which young people think are more likely to be harmful, regardless of the context, genre, extent and intent of the depiction.</td>
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Content considered very harmful

Depictions of these five types of content are considered potentially very harmful:

1. Realistic violence
2. Sexual violence
3. Self-harm or suicide
4. Explicit sex
5. People using hard drugs

1. Realistic violence

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<th>Perceived harm to...</th>
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<td>Others younger than themselves</td>
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<td>Society</td>
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Young people discuss realistic depictions of violence in two main contexts:

- As part of a documentary or re-creation of crimes (such as on the Crime Investigation channel)
- As part of an action or drama film (such as *Pulp Fiction* or *Drive*).

Realistic violence in a documentary

Young people consider realistic violence in a documentary can be upsetting. They identify the harm to themselves and people younger than them as:

- Making them realise the world is not always a safe and happy place
- Realising that people can hurt others and can want to do so
- Realising that aspects of the world (such as war, genocide, bombings, terrorism) are real and shocking.

They therefore regard realistic violence in this context as harmful to themselves and those younger than themselves. They appreciate warnings on television news about graphic content. While the content of documentaries can be upsetting, young people think it is more ‘worthy’ of watching than pure fiction, because it has an element of education. They consider the benefit can outweigh the potential harm. They place caveats around what might be too upsetting to see (such as bomb victims, car accidents or dead bodies). The potential for harm is considered greater for realistic documentary-type content because young people recognise that real people, not actors, have been hurt or killed. Documentaries can be upsetting for young people because they are factual depictions of real events.
Realistic violence in drama, action and other genres

Young people consider there is high potential for harm because realistic fighting or war scenes can be both graphic and upsetting. They feel people are asked to believe in the realism created by a director in this context (particularly in drama) and this can make the content more upsetting. They say that a successful film is one that draws the audience in and works on an emotional level — this can make it more affecting and potentially harmful. A good example of this is Drive, when Ryan Gosling's character kills another character by stomping on his head in an elevator. Young people mentioned this as an upsetting example of realistic violence, particularly as the young female protagonist witnesses it and is horrified by the violence.

The harm identified from this kind of realistic violence is:

- Becoming upset and disturbed, frightened or shocked
- Behaving fearfully such as sleeping with the light on, or being unable to get to sleep
- Fearing you could become the victim of violence
- Seeing the potential for violence everywhere

_You know that could affect you going to work the next day. It's realistic horror._

18 year-old female group, Wellington

_Realistic violence is harmful. I believe it takes away the 'it's just a movie' factor and makes it more real._

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

_[Things like] torture you do not want to see, or [things that] are a surprise. Like the beheadings in Game of Thrones. It gives you a realisation of what people can (and have) done._

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

_I think very graphic violence, or simple techniques on how to fight [are harmful]. Basically anything that provides information on how to kill or just hurt other people._

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

Some young women in this research enjoy being entertained by stylised or other types of violence in films, but find realistic violence less entertaining, and may seek to avoid films or games that contain realistic violence. While this is not the case for all young women, it highlights that some young people will simply avoid an entire genre rather than using the classification system to pick and choose films to watch within a genre.12

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12 This comment was made in one of the female groups. Males did not mention behaving in a similar manner so comparisons cannot be made between the genders on this point.
2. Sexual violence

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<td>Self</td>
<td>Moderate (Male) High (Female)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others younger than themselves</td>
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<td>Society</td>
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Young women in particular consider there is significant potential harm from viewing depictions of sexual violence. They think that there is great potential for harm to themselves and younger girls. They identify these harms as:

- Reliving trauma for those who may have experienced sexual violence
- Being upset or shocked
- Being afraid and changing behaviour as a result (such as locking bedroom doors, not wanting to go outside at night, or being fearful of contact with men)

Young women prefer to be warned if there is a rape or sexual assault scene in a film so they can either decide not to view it or can prepare themselves psychologically for the depiction when it occurs. They do not like to be surprised by sexually violent content. Most would not select a film with sexual violence in it if they were watching with a younger sibling (male or female). Young women regard this type of content in entertainment as highly upsetting. They cite the film Once Were Warriors, which contains depictions of both sexual violence and suicide, as being particularly upsetting. Young women consider the extent of the sexual violence, and the manner in which it is presented have a limited influence on how upsetting the content is. They think that depictions of sexual violence will always be very harmful.

_I think it's called Straw Dogs and it's got rape scenes in it...I watched it and I was like 'that was pretty bad' ... it was really realistic ... it was scary, it was ... violent and kind of mixed up. It's horrible, I don't need to see that._

18 year-old female group, Wellington

Young women are also concerned that some men might be aroused by the sexual nature of sexually violent scenes.

_[In the book of] The Lovely Bones [there is a rape scene] and people were complaining that the rape scene wasn’t shown [in the film version]. And the guy that played the dude [Stanley Tucci as George Harvey] he’s like 'who the heck would want to see that ever?’ And so I think that there’s a line and you don’t want to entice people. There are some sick people out there and if they’re enticed by watching that sort of thing._

18 year-old female group, Wellington
Young people think that it is harmful and upsetting to use sexual violence as the subject of humour.

I saw the most horrible thing the other day, I was hanging out with my friends and they were watching some things on YouTube and it was a couple of guys and me. And they showed me a scene from a horror movie where a woman gets raped by a tree. I know it sounds crazy and funny but it was traumatising and they're sitting there laughing and I'm sitting there going 'this is awful — stop it'. And it was like they found it funny.

18 year-old female group, Wellington

Lots of people think it's funny at my school, [rape is the] funny word of the term. They are all: 'you're going to get raped', 'ha ha it's real funny'. Actually it's not. And in cartoons like Family Guy they've got a paedophile living next door to one of them and it's funny? It's kind of borderline.

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

You don't want to put sexual violence in a comedy, you don't want to portray it as a joke ... because if people start portraying sexual violence as a joke, and it becomes normal as being a joke, it's harmful in the fact that then people stop thinking about it. If it becomes a normal thing ... that's just not right.

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

Young men are also concerned about sexual violence in films, although they do not feel the harm is to them personally. They consider people most likely to be harmed are women, and people younger than themselves.

I think there're two ways to look it. There's the one where people have been sexually assaulted, so they'll feel uncomfortable watching it because it'll bring back those dark memories of those awful times. Or, there's the people who almost get off on it, they get that excitement, buzz — maybe we shouldn't be feeding that.

18 year-old male group, Wellington

Like young women, they would not want to view this type of content with a younger sibling. This is because they think a person younger than themselves could be upset by the content, or not understand what is being depicted. Young men do not want to have to explain the nature of sexual violence to people younger than themselves.

Sexual violence is the biggest [type of harmful content] for me. It can be alluded to in the right context and can be used in the form of documentary, but every other use of it is unacceptable.

18 year-old male group, Wellington

Young people think that there is considerable potential harm from the possibility of people mimicking sexual violence.

You don't want to plant an idea in someone's head.

18 year-old male group, Auckland
3. Self-harm or suicide

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<td>Self</td>
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<td>Others younger than themselves</td>
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Young people regard depictions of self-harm and suicide as potentially very harmful, particularly if these depictions glamourise or endorse these behaviours in some way. They are concerned that if a suicide is depicted as the easy way out of a difficult situation, it could be a strong influence on a vulnerable young person.

Young people acknowledge the context of New Zealand’s high suicide rates and do not want to see suicide glamourised in films. They think that suicide can be hinted at in a film, but not directly depicted.

*You see that other people are doing it ... it gives you an excuse to do it.*  
16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

*Worrying. As a teenager you don’t know what people are going through. A boy last year [from] my school committed suicide. And then you’d actually watch films and so many display [suicide]. [They show that] an easy way of getting out is [by] committing suicide.*  
16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

*I think it’s Girl Interrupted. It’s a movie about a girl who’s depressed. She tried to kill herself, but didn’t. She goes in to a mental home and all these girls are there. It’s kind of psychotic and [with me] knowing so many friends with mental disorders and depression and suicidal thoughts and stuff like that ... it’s almost the fact that they’ve made a movie about it — almost glorifying it.*  
18 year-old female group, Wellington

*I think that suicide and self-harm are some of the most harmful things that people around my age can see. I feel that children are so strongly influenced by what the media displays to them and this can lead people to act the same way.*  
16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland
Young women in particular are concerned about the potential for depictions of self-harm (such as cutting), to trigger these behaviours in vulnerable people. They think this is the main harm. They also think that some vulnerable young women could pretend to cut themselves to get attention. Young women think that it is best not to draw attention to, or glamourise, these behaviours as they can trigger both serious and attention-seeking imitation.

*The worst part about it is not only [that] it is [depicted] and some people shouldn’t be seeing it, it’s that it’s incorrectly represented, it’s false. I have never in my life seen a correct representation of a schizophrenic person. I very rarely see actual correct depression, bipolar disorder, any of the abnormal psychiatric disorders. And I see people going in [to cinemas] who have friends who I know who have the disorder. They will go in to a film and they’ll come out and say ‘I feel nuts right now’ and I’m like ‘no this isn’t you’. Because it’s been really triggering for them.*

18 year-old female group, Wellington

Young women also find depictions of suicide can be very upsetting. Again, they cite the scene in *Once Were Warriors* where the Grace Heke character hangs herself after being raped by an associate of her father. This scene is both affecting and upsetting for young women.

Young men tend to regard depictions of suicide as potentially harmful to others. They consider that depictions of suicide could encourage people to imitate it, increasing the instances of suicide in New Zealand.

*I think it’s strong for people emotionally. [They think it] could happen to them and [they] see something like that and think that [suicide] might solve the problem. Then they do that and other people would see that and think that’s a great idea. It would just be a loop.*

18 year-old male group, Wellington

Young men mentioned the potential for self-harm from people mimicking depictions of risky or dangerous activities for comedic effect. They think that young people could be encouraged to try dangerous activities and viewing these activities should be limited to people who have the maturity to understand the dangers.

*Driving my friends, whenever they see me out, [they] tell me to do stupid things — and I’m thinking ‘it’s a car ... it might crash ... it’s going to do a lot of damage’. It’s stupid. They see all the stunts you see in the action movies, and go ‘let’s try that!’ And I’m thinking ‘I like living. How about not’.*

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland
4. Explicit sex

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> I have stumbled across it accidently so many times. You are watching a video and then there’s ‘come on webcam chat’. It’s like ‘go away naked woman, why are you here, what are you doing on my computer?’

18 year-old female group, Wellington

Young people discuss depictions of explicit sex in films in a similar way to depictions in pornography. It is possible they conflate both types of content as the discussion of the types of harm is very similar in the discussion of pornography later in this section of the report.

5. People using hard drugs

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Young people consider depictions of hard drug use to be potentially very harmful, particularly if use is glamourised and endorsed in some way. The potential harms young people identify are:

- Encouraging drug use and experimentation by vulnerable and gullible young people
- Triggering addictions by encouraging drug use
- Making drug use seem fun and without consequences — which masks the negative consequences
- Normalising illegal activities

Young people consider depictions in films that glamourise hard drug use have the potential to encourage this behaviour, particularly in vulnerable young people. They think that these depictions could result in increased drug use across society.

> It depends on the context. If they are glorifying the use of hard drugs that would be over here [in the serious harm section].

18 year-old female group, Wellington

> When they glorify the use of hard drugs in films...it definitely encourages [teenagers] to go out and maybe try it themselves.

18 year-old female group, Wellington

> Use of Class A drugs is a bad example for teenagers.

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland
Young people regard people their age and younger than themselves as particularly susceptible to trying drugs. They feel there is significant harm in portraying this type of content. They consider that the degree, extent and manner of the depictions could reduce the harm, for example, if hard drug use is shown to have negative consequences on characters’ lives.

**SUMMARY**

Overall, young people categorise these five types of content: realistic violence, sexual violence, self-harm or suicide, explicit sex, and people using hard drugs, as potentially significantly harmful. This is because they think the harms could be longer-term and affect people more seriously.
Harms associated with pornography

This section discusses young people’s perceptions of the harms associated with pornography. Pornography was discussed as a separate topic in the groups. The discussion was also aided by content from an article from The Standard provided by the OFLC. Discussion of this type of content is strongly differentiated by gender.

Young people say that pornography is increasingly pervasive and accessible online. They regard this as harmful, although young women tend to regard the accessibility of it as more harmful than young men do.

Young women think that pornography is harmful

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Young women consider that depictions of pornography are aimed at men. They do not report viewing this content themselves (although this may be due to the nature of group discussions). They therefore discuss pornographic content in this context.

*Porn is more aimed at men. There’s no good porn for women really.*

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

They regard young men’s access to pornography as harmful to others in two ways:

- It provides a false sense of what ‘real’ sex is like
- It promotes women as always sexually available to men (either willingly or by force)

Pornography promotes artificial depictions of sex and female sexual behaviour

Young women think that there is potential harm to young women from men having a poor or false understanding of the way to engage in sexual relationships. The harm can include being asked to participate in sexual acts they are uncomfortable with, or by not living up to the false image that pornography promotes for how women should look and behave.

They think this is harmful to all women, including themselves. Young women consider pornography demeans and dehumanises women, and does not portray ‘real’ sex. This harm can manifest itself in women being objectified and subjugated by men.

*Pornography gives guys ideas of what they want sex to be like and they can push it too far sometimes. It gives them unrealistic expectations.*

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

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13 An article published by the The Standard in Australia was used as a stimulus for discussion in the groups and the extract is appended to this report. Note that in several of the groups, the discussion about pornography preceded and reflected the content in the article. The full article is available here: [http://www.standard.net.au/story/1509844/our-young-drowning-in-a-sea-of-porn/](http://www.standard.net.au/story/1509844/our-young-drowning-in-a-sea-of-porn/)
It's not like in a real and loving relationship with two people who are committed to each other, it's just 'let's make this guy feel awesome. Let's just make him come everywhere'.

18 year-old female group, Wellington

Young women consider pornography harmful to women in society because it promotes false perceptions about female sexuality and response. It also promotes dysfunctional relationships between men and women. For example, men might think that their own sexual gratification is more important than women's needs and rights.

Young women also think that the pervasiveness and accessibility of pornography trivialises and demeans sex in relationships. They can feel pressured to have sex when they are not ready because their partners are viewing and accessing pornography and would like to experiment. They think that young women have enough pressures on them without the pressure to either have sex, or to demonstrate the same characteristics and willingness as a pornographic performer. This includes body image issues, such as pressure to conform to weight and breast size ideals depicted in pornography.

**Pornography does not portray safe sex**

Young women note that pornography does not depict or show safe sex (such as use of condoms). They think that this could normalise non-safe sexual practices among viewers of pornography. This may make it more difficult for young women to raise the issue of contraception and safe sex with their sexual partners.

*I think for a lot of women it's actually kind of sexy to see the contraceptive because then you don't have to worry. But no porn is going to go 'oh hold up, I need to put a condom on'.*

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

**Pornography is used as a poor substitute for good sex education**

Young women mentioned that their own sexual education was inadequate for their information needs. They think that this gap in their own (and young men's) education has led to young men (and potentially young women) seeking out pornographic depictions of sex as the only means they have of learning about how to 'do' sex. They think that pornography fills a void in their education, but in a harmful and less than ideal manner.

*[The article is saying] there's people learning about sex through porn. That usually means that they don't have any other alternate way that they've learnt about sex which is worrying. Because health [education] in schools, doesn't tell [you] anything.*

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

*I know people who have tutorials almost because they are too worried to ask people. People who go and search pornography to teach them what they need to do.*

18 year-old female group, Wellington
Young women agree with comments made in *The Standard* article, as they think they are relevant to young women in New Zealand. However, they argue that while some young women feel pressure from male sexual partners to engage in acts depicted in pornography, not all do. Young women express their own agency in sexual relationships, and think that they have some capability to counteract the harms that depictions of pornography have the potential to inflict.

*I also think it puts pressure on us to be what they’re expecting — not just the way they want you to act but the way they expect you to look.*

16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

Young men think that pornography could be harmful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived harm to...</th>
<th>Level of harm identified</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others younger than themselves</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Young men have differing views to young women about the availability and ubiquity of pornography. They consider there is less potential harm to themselves, but potentially more harm to others (particularly women and those younger than themselves). They think that people younger than themselves may not be able to differentiate violent sexual pornography from sex in a relationship. They are concerned that there is potential for violent pornography to become normalised. They also feel there is a risk that young men (younger than them) will learn the wrong things from viewing pornography. For example, they may learn to demean women and treat them as sex objects.

Young men think that there are levels of acceptable pornography that could be classified R16. Less acceptable pornography such as that depicting violence could be classified as R18.

*I can see what she’s saying [see Appendix 2], if you’re at a young age and you’ve had no sexual experience, you don’t really know what happens, and the things you see — some of the violent porn — you may think that is the norm.*

18 year-old male group, Wellington

*I think I saw some porn too early my brother showed me. I think you could think that women are just things you can have sex with.*

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland
Perceptions of harm associated with certain types of content

**Pornography is a poor substitute for sex education**

Like young women, young men describe their own sexual education as limited and feel it does not fully meet their information needs on the topic. They therefore find themselves both uninformed and curious about women and sex. This leads to exploring the internet for clues about how to 'do' sex. They are mostly aware that pornography is not 'real sex', but they consider viewing it is a better education than nothing at all. Pornography provides young men with some indication of what to expect from sexual relationships.

> I think it shows there should be more put into sex education, maybe at an earlier age, more aware of it, know about it. Instead of [what happens, which is] you get to an age where you hear about it, and you sort of [want to] find out yourself, and you end up on pornography [websites].
> 18 year-old male group, Wellington

> Getting educated ... The main concern is the type of porn they learn it through.
> 16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

> I am pretty sure girls are watching it too. Or they just read Fifty Shades of Grey.¹⁴
> 16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

Young men in this research are aware that pornography depicts a distorted portrayal of sexual behaviour. This is reflected by their views that young women would not be comfortable participating in sexual acts they have seen in pornographic content. They think that they can differentiate porn sex from real sex.

> It really is dependent on what both [partners] would want. They teach you in schools that you should discuss [and consent] before experimenting. Maybe that [consent and discussion] should be reflected [in pornography], 'yes let's try this, no I don't want to do that'.
> 18 year-old male group, Wellington

> It's porn, it's not supposed to be real. You don't care about those people.
> 16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

> I think you probably learn the most though from personal experience. If you try to [do] something the way it's shown in porn, she's going to be like, 'what the hell are you doing?'
> You're not going to get very far.
> 16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

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¹⁴*Fifty Shades of Grey* is a well-known erotic romance novel by E. L. James, published in 2011.
**Pornography could lower the age of sexual debut**

Young men also mentioned that a potential harm from pornography is that watching it could lower the age of young people's first sexual experiences. This could be harmful to young men and young women who are not ready for the emotional effect of participating in sexual relationships. Having said this, they agreed that many young males have accessed porn online well before feeling old enough to participate in a sexual relationship.

*I first saw it [pornography] when I was 11.*

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

**Pornography does not depict safe sex**

Like the young women, young men mentioned that pornographic content does not show people using condoms or depicting other safe sex practices. Similar to young women, some young men consider it could be harmful to normalise non safe sex practices.

*An harm is that* not using condoms is *taken to be* more acceptable than using them. *I've only ever seen one video where they actually use condoms.*

16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland
Harms associated with playing computer/console games

While young people mainly discussed their views on content in films, they also discussed the content and use of the classification system in relation to games. They identified a range of harms and effects specific to gaming.

The following discussion describes how young people think game content differs from the content in films. Games also have a participatory and interactive element that does not apply to films, which young people consider can impact on gamers and on people watching others play.

Some young people consider gaming is less potentially harmful than viewing films

Young people think that because the gamer is in control of the game they can either avoid or minimise viewing violent content, and they have the ability to turn off the game. In this way, some young people think that because they actively control the way the game progresses, they can minimise exposure to violence if they choose. They also think that because they consider themselves mature, they can play games that have violent content without replicating this behaviour in the real world.

“You’re playing and you kind of control that in a way.”
16 and 17 year-old female group, Auckland

Games like Grand Theft Auto promote lawlessness and reckless behaviour, but at our age we should know better.
18 year-old female group, Wellington

I play games which reward violence and massacre, this does not however affect the decisions I make in reality [quote from participant’s brother].
18 year-old female group, Wellington

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15 As part of the workbook exercise young people were asked to consult with friends and family members about their views on the harms associated with certain types of content. This workbook entry reflects comments made to an 18 year-old female from her brother. It is not clear if he is older or younger than her from the workbook.
Some young people think gaming is more potentially harmful than viewing films

Gaming could be more harmful because the gamer is immersed in the game world. Young people think that gamers are so involved in the game that there is potential to view and engage in more violent content if they so choose. This is particularly true of first-person shooter games where the gamer sees the action through the eyes of their avatar. It is also true of massively multiplayer online role playing games as both the onscreen depictions and the off-screen/headset audio interactions can combine to create a sense of realism.

> With games with the first person [perspective] like Call of Duty, you get rewarded for killing, and then your screen [immediately] re-spawns and you go straight forth to killing another person. [Gamers] start to think that’s okay. Say someone [a gamer] may have a mental disorder [and] they don’t see the real consequences which is going to jail for a life sentence.
> 18 year-old female group, Wellington

> People I talked to said that violence in video games is the most harmful thing that happens day to day.
> 16 and 17 year-old male group, Auckland

Why are games potentially more harmful?

Young people consider that due to the extended and repetitive nature of games, and the frequency with which gamers play them, the types of issues and potential harms might be different to those for film viewers. They think that violence and other restricted content depicted in a film could be fleeting and one-off, whereas the same violence or content in a game has the potential to be viewed repetitively and frequently. They think this can increase the potential for harm.

> It’s something you play more of, it’s not something you sit down and watch one time [like a film]. With a game you can’t really do that.
> 18 year-old male group, Wellington

> I think that the time period that you spend doing things [playing games] the more you do it, the more it’s going to desensitise you.
> 18 year-old female group, Wellington
Playing computer or console games can involve engaging with other gamers. Interactions between players and their avatars have the potential to be violent, misogynist or abusive. Young people note that gamers can interact with each other (via their avatars) in violent and abusive ways (such as threatening, abusing or shouting). This element is in addition to the content gamers see depicted on screen. They feel this is harmful in two ways:

- Gamers could become upset, depressed, anxious or shocked by these interactions, or
- They could replicate violent and aggressive interactions in real life

Young people think that because gamers feel strong emotional connections to their avatars and to others on their role-playing team, this can lead to strong language, violence and abuse. The anonymity of online gaming can also engender more violent or aggressive behaviours in gamers playing against other gamers.

*Once they start playing it for a long amount of time it gets serious. He’s [participant’s brother] an online player so he plays to go to the top rankings. They get aggressive.*

18-year-old female group, Wellington

*Over-sexualisation of women and rape [depictions in games] ... perpetuates the sexism and hate within the games industry and within the misogynistic culture in which we live. In games the less armour you wear, the higher your score.*

18-year-old female group, Wellington

Young people consider that gaming (especially frequent gaming) can desensitise gamers to violence, abusive language and aggression in real life. They think that this could potentially contribute to violent and aggressive behaviours outside the gaming sphere and in wider society (such as with family, or at school or work).

Young people also consider that extensive periods of gaming have the potential to disrupt and inhibit normal interactions and relationships (eg with family members, friends, and colleagues).

*[Games] directly affect their ability to function well within society, to reach their full potential to be a really good part of society. And I think that ... it's kind of overlooked, the mental side of things — because people don’t see it, it’s not talked about, people don’t say ‘these people are affected [by] this mental disorder’.*

18-year-old female group, Wellington

*I have a brother who is addicted to playing Halo and he has been for the past five years. There’s no books [he will read], nothing [else] he will play. I read something that it’s actually really bad for their brain. So it shows that people even our age are just as susceptible to playing games like that.*

18-year-old female group, Wellington
Young people use the classification system for games the same way they do for films

Young people consider game content is harmful in different ways to content in films. However, they tend to feel the same way about game content as they do about film content — that is, that they are mature enough to make decisions and choices for themselves. Many young people report playing restricted games well before they should have. Young people use the classification system for games in the same way they use it for films — to assist in determining if they want to play a game or avoid it.

As with films, young people believe it is important to restrict some games and types of content from people who are younger than themselves.

In summary, young people are aware that certain types of depictions can be harmful. They tend to believe strongly that people younger than themselves are the most vulnerable to harm, but they also think that they themselves, as well as wider society, have the potential to be harmed by viewing depictions of some types of content.

The main harm that young people identify is that people will mimic violent behaviour. They are also very concerned about depictions triggering mental health issues for people.

Predictably, young women are more concerned than young men about the effect of pornography on themselves, on others younger than themselves, and on society in general. However, young men are also concerned, and also think that there are some potential harms associated with pornography from it being so accessible and pervasive, such as desensitising society and demeaning women. All the young people we spoke with thought that they were mature enough to differentiate between pornographic portrayals of sex, and the reality of sexual relationships. However, they consider that there is potential for some people to confuse real and pornographic sex.

Young people say that games have some specific potential harms due to their repetitive and frequent use. They think some gamers have the potential to replicate game behaviours (such as violence and aggression) outside the game world, with real people.
Appendix I - List of harms by age and gender

Note that depiction types in italics are from the respondent’s workbook entries.

### 18 year-old female group (Wellington) 29 May 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOT VERY HARMFUL</th>
<th>COULD BE HARMFUL</th>
<th>COULD BE VERY HARMFUL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talking about sex</td>
<td>Use of hard drugs</td>
<td>Self-harm or suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stylised violence</td>
<td>Violence treated as normal</td>
<td>Sexual violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offensive language</td>
<td>Realistic violence</td>
<td>Violence being rewarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implied sex</td>
<td>Explicit sex</td>
<td>Realistic horror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nudity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Psychological horror</td>
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### 16 and 17 year-old female group (Auckland) 4 June 2013

<table>
<thead>
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<th>NOT VERY HARMFUL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offensive language</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>People talking about sex</td>
<td>Violence treated as normal</td>
<td>Sexual violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nudity</td>
<td>Explicit sex</td>
<td>Realistic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implied sex</td>
<td><em>Criminal behaviour (such as stealing)</em></td>
<td>Self-harm or suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stylised violence</td>
<td><em>Death and murder</em></td>
<td><em>Domestic and child abuse</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Inappropriate use of alcohol</em></td>
<td><em>Sadistic violence and torture</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Sexual harassment</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Glamourising eating disorders</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Animal abuse</em></td>
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</table>

### 16 and 17 year-old male group (Auckland) 5 June 2013

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>COULD BE VERY HARMFUL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stylised violence</td>
<td>Use of hard drugs</td>
<td>Sexual violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People talking about sex</td>
<td>Realistic violence</td>
<td>Torture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implied sex</td>
<td>Self-harm or suicide</td>
<td>Animal Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sexual harassment</em></td>
<td>Violence being rewarded</td>
<td><em>Domestic and Child Abuse</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>Swear words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Information on how to kill</em></td>
<td><em>Death and murder</em></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Note the younger males did not categorise the following types of content: nudity, violence treated as 'normal', explicit sex, although these types of content were discussed in the group.
18 year-old male group (Wellington) 12 June 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOT VERY HARMFUL</th>
<th>COULD BE HARMFUL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implied sex</td>
<td>Use of hard drugs</td>
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<td><em>Glamourising eating disorders</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Swear words</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Information on how to kill others</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Racism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Death and murder</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beheadings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Dangerous stunts as comedy</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Criminal behavior like stealing</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Torture</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Mentally abusive behaviour</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexual harassment</td>
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Appendix II - Article excerpt used in focus groups

The following is an excerpt from an article written in The Standard in Australia. The article interviews Maree Crabbe, who is based in Warrnambool, a regional city on the south-western coast of Victoria, Australia. She has worked on projects with young people from the south-west of Australia.

Our young drowning in a sea of porn

There is a growing body of evidence and research that suggests young people are learning about sex from pornography.

The reason this is concerning is because porn is becoming more violent, particularly towards women. A 2010 study of best-selling porn found that 88 per cent of scenes included physical aggression, with 94 per cent of that aggression directed at the women performers, Ms Crabbe said.

That research also analysed the target’s response to the aggression and found that 95 per cent of incidents were met with either a neutral or positive response — the woman is shown to be enjoying it.

If this is where young people are learning about sex, the fear is they will deduce that this is what sex is like and this is what is expected of them, she said.

In fact, it's more than a fear. It's already happening.

Many young women we've interviewed describe that their male partners have eroticised and are keen to engage in what they’ve learnt from porn, Ms Crabbe said.

I’m not suggesting that’s always about ill-intent on the males' part. We've spoken to young men who were genuinely surprised that what they've seen in porn is not what their partner wants to do.

They think real sex is like porn. But (most) porn is not created about what is pleasurable for women.

The portrayals of sex in mainstream porn raise a lot of issues (about) sexual health, considerations of pleasure, gender roles and aggression and what consent means, she said.

We don’t generally see negotiations or discussions about sex.

Pornography dates back to ancient times, but never in human history has it been so prevalent.

There are millions of images available and while there's always been aggressive porn, before the internet, the most accessible porn was a centrefold, Ms Crabbe said.

Now the most accessible porn is hardcore sex, often with very aggressive behaviour.

Porn has never been so pervasive. Consumption of porn has been completely normalised. Some of the young people I spoke to said it was harder to avoid porn than to see it.