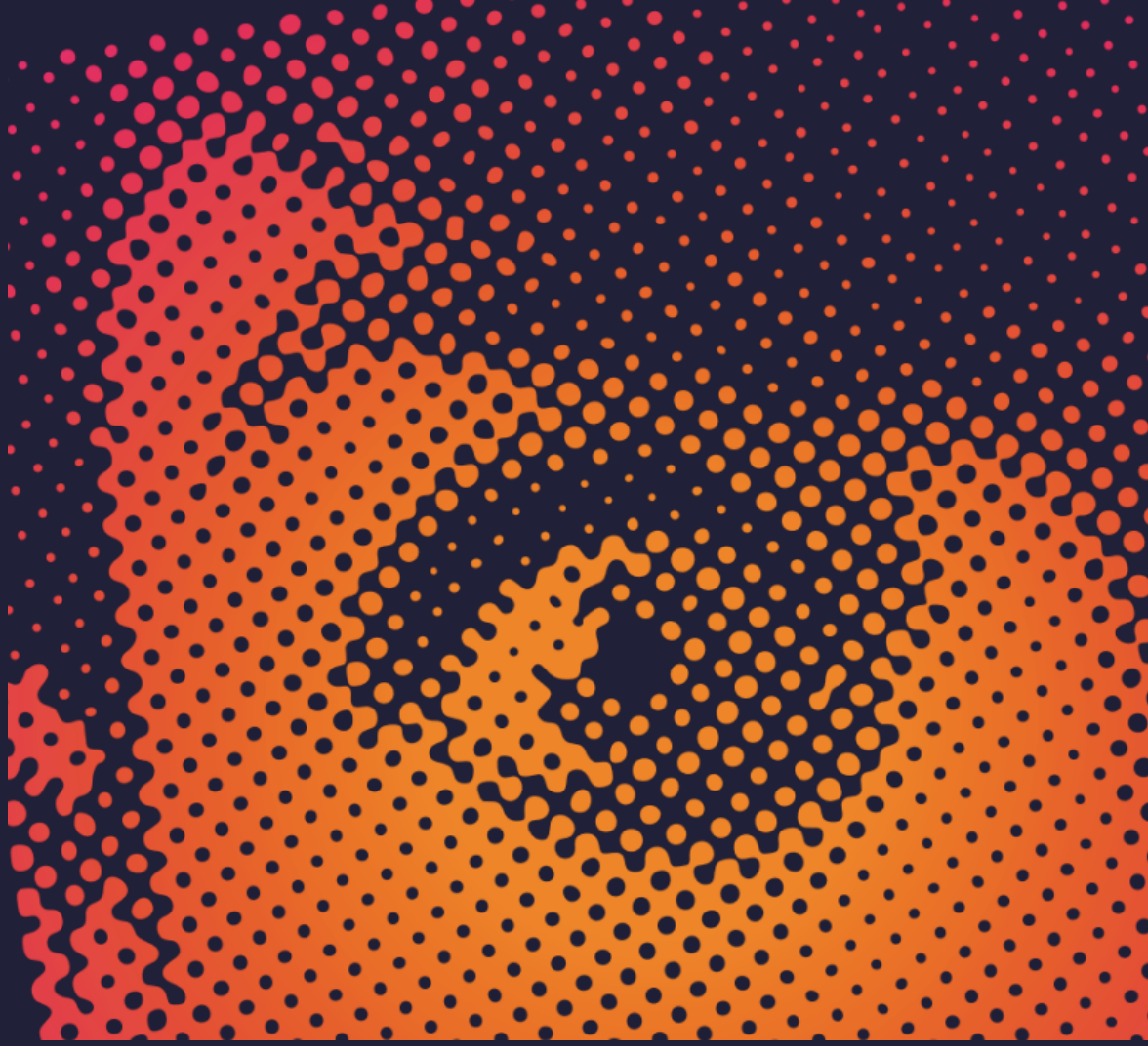


Audiences Perspectives on Harmful and Offensive Content

Background: Focus Groups with Adults



Coimisiún
na Meán



OIFIG AICMITHE SCANNÁN NA HÉIREANN
IRISH FILM CLASSIFICATION OFFICE

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Background

to the work

Project Background

Established in 2023, Ireland's media regulator, Comisiún na Meán is working to update the regulation of television broadcasting and audiovisual on-demand services.

In collaboration with IFCO, Ireland's Film Classification Office, they are looking to enhance their understanding of participant attitudes towards specified media content and the current regulatory measures. This will inform both parties in the creation of measures which work to protect Irish audiences, but also meet their viewing needs and respect freedom of expression.



OUR RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To deep dive into participant expectations and concerns regarding specific media content, and evaluate their awareness of and opinions on the effectiveness of the regulations already in place.



A 3 staged project



PROJECT SET UP

**Project Kick Off
Planning and
Recruitment**



GROUP PREPARATION

**Stimulus
Alignment,
Discussion Guide
Development**



FIELDWORK

**Conducting of
Focus Groups and
Download
Session**



DELIVERY

**Analysis and
Reporting**

WE ARE HERE

Our sample – 12-in person focus group

	LOCATION	CONSUMER SEGMENT			STIMULUS
1	Dublin	Mix of Non Parents and Parents	Mixed Gender	BC1	Violence/Harmful
2	Dublin	Parents with kids aged 12 and under	Mixed Gender	C1C2	Violence/Harmful
3	Galway	Mix of Non Parents and Parents	Mixed Gender	C1C2	Violence/Harmful
4	Galway	Parents with kids aged 12 and under	Mixed Gender	BC1	Violence/Harmful
5	Galway	Parents with kids aged 13-17	Mixed Gender	C1C2	Violence/Harmful/Sexual
6	Dublin	Parents with kids aged 13-17	Female	BC1	Violence/Harmful/Sexual
7	Athlone	Mix of Non Parents and Parents	Mixed Gender	C1C2	Violence/Harmful
8	Athlone	Parents with kids aged 12 and under	Mixed Gender	BC1	Violence/Harmful/
9	Cork	Mix of Non Parents and Parents	Mixed Gender	C1C2	Violence/Harmful
10	Cork	Parents with kids aged 12 and under	Mixed Gender	BC1	Violence/Harmful
11	Athlone	Parents with kids aged 13-17	Mixed Gender	C1C2	Violence/Harmful/Sexual
12	Cork	Parents with kids aged 13-17	Male	BC1	Violence/Harmful/Sexual



Please note that there was no specific criteria around ethnicity in the sample

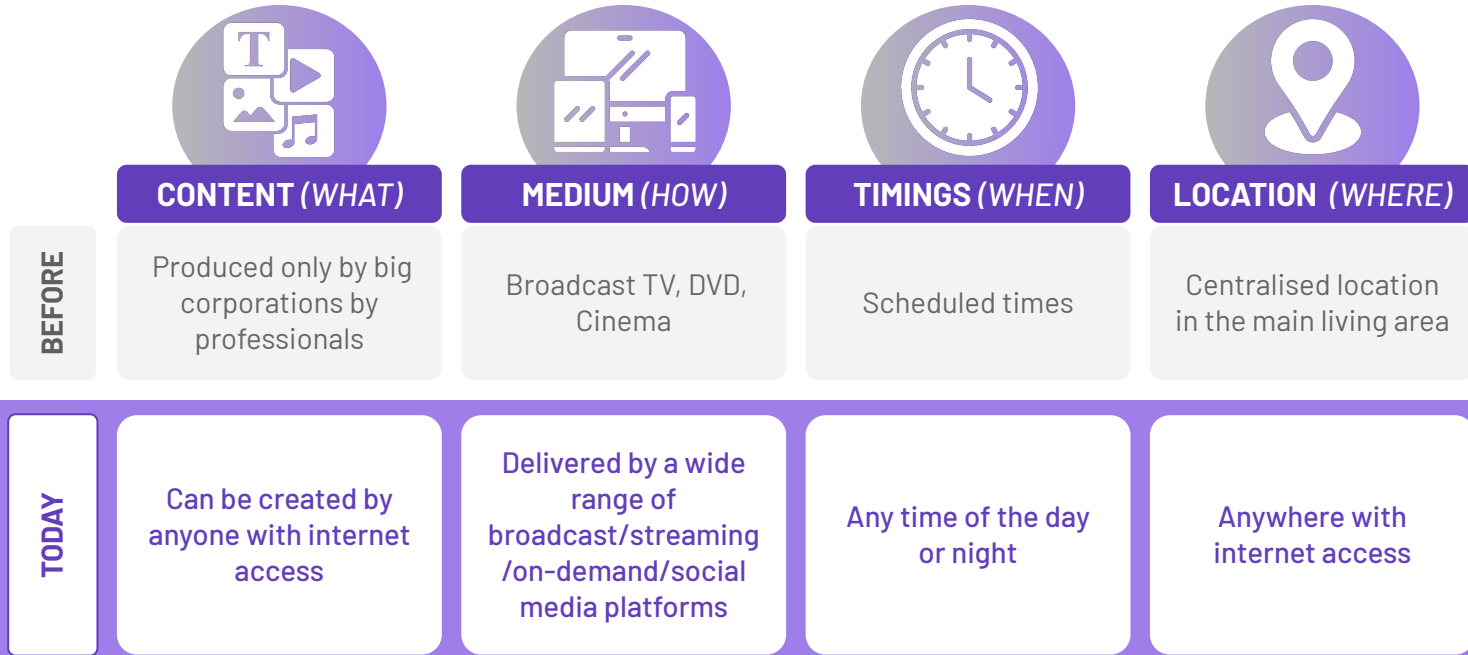


Wider Context of media consumption

The wider context in which both children and adults are consuming 'traditional' media (*i.e. film, DVDs, radio, broadcast TV, catch up services, streaming services*) has evolved rapidly – and looks like it will continue to do so ...



The “*what, how, when, where*” has drastically changed



Content is being consumed within a decentralized media landscape

Previously, we engaged with media content during set time periods

BEFORE

- We sat down to watch **specific programmes at specific time slots**
- There was a **'beginning, middle and end'** to our viewing periods
- We **primed ourselves** mentally and emotionally for our consumption

TODAY

- Nowadays, we lack these clear boundaries and media content **can be a nearly constant presence in our lives**
- With constant notifications popping up on our phones, scrolling through Tik Tok videos on the bus, radio a constant presence in the background, discussion on Whatsapp groups/Facebook on topical subjects
- Media pervades our lives in a way that can feel overwhelming, but **we often exacerbate this ourselves** by failing to take time away from our phones/dual screening

*"It's totally, totally different. When we were small, there was one channel at a time in the house, there were no phones, no laptops, no tablets, there was no streaming. **So if you missed your program, you missed your program that was it, it was gone.**"*

Female | Parent 12 and under |
Dublin

The pervasive nature of modern day media can feel intense and difficult to escape from

Developments in Social Media have driven many of the biggest changes we see in the wider media landscape,



from constant accessibility of content to the de-professionalisation of creation



However consumption of traditional media sources (Broadcast TV / Cinema / DVD) has been deeply impacted by this wider context due to



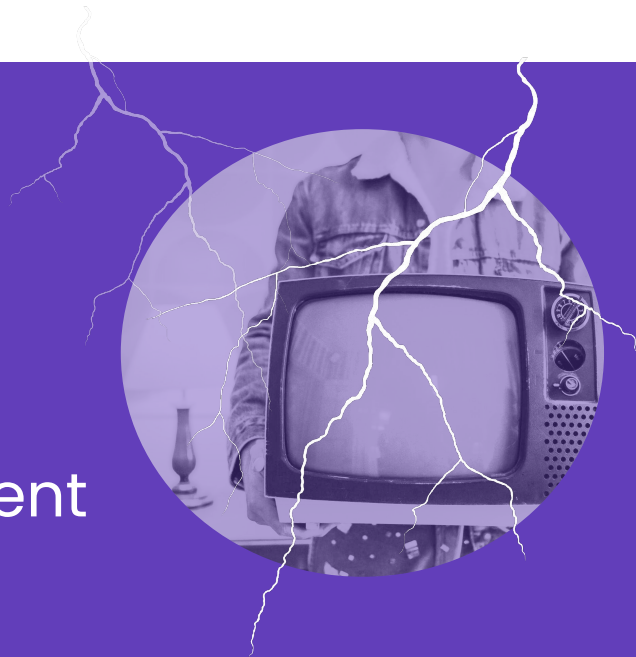
Inconsistency of regulation



Amplification of impact



Rise of consumer-created content



Inconsistency of Regulation

*"They could stumble across something very easily with smart TVs, they can get onto YouTube or whatever and inadvertently stumble across something. And **we've tried to explain to our eldest, that it's not that we don't trust you, it's just that we don't trust other people.**"*

Parent Mixed Group | Female | Dublin

While broadcast media is subject to regulatory frameworks, this doesn't apply to content on platforms like Tik Tok/YouTube.

While parents can rely on the watershed, classification and parental controls for broadcast/streaming, they know that children accessing social media platforms are negotiating a 'Wild West' where these standards don't apply.

I.e. accessing YouTube/TikTok on tablets/Smart TVs - blurring the boundaries between this and other more highly regulated platforms - making it difficult for parents to create consistency and boundaries across their monitoring



The lack of consistency in regulation means parents have to be 'always on'



Amplification of impact

Social Media is a constant presence in modern lives, which has a big impact on news stories in particular

Challenging news stories were once restricted to specific slots in news programming. Nowadays they are omnipresent on social channels and much harder to shield from (*an issue for both children and adults*)



- Similarly, controversial broadcast/streaming shows will be openly discussed on Social Media among peers, thus escalating their impact.
- In this environment, the difference between fact and opinion can be hard to identify, particularly for young viewers
- **Social Media algorithms create endless 'loops', keeping consumers locked into subjects that they find challenging to deal with**

*"There's so much stuff online about celebrities that now anytime a celebrity is mentioning anything, I think **kids now would even go and look for information themselves**, now they're being hit on Tiktok, they're being hit on social media, Snapchat it's everywhere!"*

Parent 12 and under | Female | Dublin

*"Kids are not gonna have the ability to sort of be like, 'Oh, I need to fact check that. I need to verify that' so **the TV news is having to fight against the social media stuff**"*

Non-Parent | Male | Galway

Challenging news stories / drama content become more problematic when they are constantly amplified and hard to escape from



Rise of consumer-created content

Platforms like YouTube have led to a **huge rise in user-generated content** – the rise of child-fronted material is particularly noted by parents/guardians.

There is a difference between **content created by professional/skilled creators** who understand the (often implicit) rules of storytelling and the boundaries between entertainment and other practices such as selling/advertising – and amateurs who may not.

Although these rules/boundaries are not explicitly codified, as a society **we start to realise their value when they aren't adhered to.**

Parents/guardians are having to monitor content that doesn't comply with the rules that they've always depended on

And there are indications that this kind of content is expanding out of user generated platforms and into the mainstream.

*"He'll pick say Vlad and Nicky, which is one which does my head in. Now ... **they speak in broken English, and I find that his speech is actually starting to, which is concerning for me,** because, you know that kind of way I just, but I can't filter that out"*

Parent 12 and under | Female | Athlone

*"Everything on Netflix, they're reading from a script. Do you know what I mean? **Their age rating, is appropriate, whereas there's a lot of kids influencers that say on Youtube whatever they want, you know?** And 10, 11, 12 year old girls are obsessed with it."*

Parent Mixed Group | Female | Cork

Parents/guardians may not have realised how much they relied on the fact that most media is produced by 'the professionals', until they face the challenge of monitoring content which is not

A recent Ofcom report highlights some of these issues

- The increasing professionalisation and commercialisation of online content.
- The increasing incidence of personalised algorithms.
- Targeted at children who may not have the capacity to critically reflect on what they are viewing.



“Very few of the children reflect critically on the motives of these content creators, even when their profiles advertised products for sale, such as relationship courses or growth supplement ‘gummies’. Many participants had, to varying degrees, been influenced by what they had seen posted by influencers, for example they had made purchases, taken exercise advice, or in one case sought a diagnosis of Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).”

- Ofcom, 2024

“Most of what children see now on social media was created by someone with the deliberate goal of capturing attention, garnering ‘likes’ or building a following - and it’s often their job to do this.”

- Ofcom, 2024

The motivation of this content is often radically different from that of traditional broadcast media

There are multiple implications for Coimisiún na Meán / IFCO in all of this



The most obvious being that monitoring content has become vastly more complex than in used to be, even in the space of the last few years



But in this context, the services Coimisiún na Meán / IFCO deliver may become more - *not less* - important in this environment.



**For parents/
guardians
and adults**

- Having some 'safe harbours' that they can rely on when it comes to their children's media consumption is valuable.
- Parents/guardians understand that part of their role is to help children navigate more grown up material as they get older. Having properly regulated media material, that abides by rules that we all (implicitly) sign up to, can be an important support to them in this task.
- For adults (parents and non-parents) there is comfort that there are regulated spaces that adhere to certain standards for their own consumption - as sometimes the non-regulated world can feel like 'too much'

And there is potential for our role to evolve to support people further in this fast changing environment



Monitoring Content

The vast majority of parents/guardians believe it's important to monitor their children's content

AT LEAST TO A CERTAIN DEGREE...

- Most try to take an active role in this up until age 13-14, depending on their child and family circumstances.
- Once children have access to their own screens/phones, this process becomes much more difficult. As children grow up, direct monitoring feels less appropriate.
- As a result, parents/guardians start to retreat.
- Though they may still have concerns about what their children are exposed to.

*"Say on YouTube, when they could just be typing in something and like, **even the thumbnail of something could look very innocent, but the video behind it kind of could have any kind of content.** And I just think it's the fear of the unknown, so that's why you keep an eye"*

Parent Mixed Group | Female | Dublin

*"The national broadcaster was probably under someone's control. That's all changed. I think if you educate kids right, they can watch all this stuff. **You have to tell them about it. It's up to us."***

Parent 12 and under | Male | Galway



Monitoring takes different forms and presents different challenges – *depending on the media/channel*

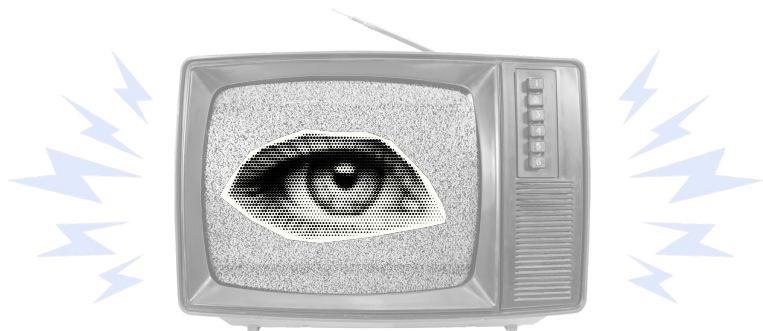


1. Classic broadcast media

The concept of 'the watershed' is not as widely understood as it once was

However there is an expectation that material unsuitable for children will be broadcast after their bedtime (8/9pm) Warnings/additional resources can be useful, but potential for them to lose power if used too often - and there are questions about where they are best positioned for maximum value.

Parents/guardians talk about the need to 'keep an eye on' adult-targeted material that may be on in the background in the early evening (news/soaps) and sometimes having to step in to turn off/mute material.



*"The most common soaps, they sometimes, too, can have a good message, because **they might portray something that's happened in the world** or would say a certain topic that's happening in the world and they'd do a couple of shows on that, and **then they would always have a warning**, not a warning, but a message afterwards, if you've been affected by blah, blah, blah, you can read such a number"*

Mixed Group Parent | Female | Dublin

"When you're listening to say the six o'clock news. You're not expecting any sort of, you know, in depth, detail or whatever. And then it's said, and then it's too late.

I suppose there should be consideration given to, you know, your kids being at the dinner table at that time"

Parent 12 and under | Male | Dublin

2. BVOD / Catch up

Doesn't feel like a huge concern for parents/guardians as they believe children would have to be very motivated to access unsuitable material on RTE player or similar.

However, on reflection, they acknowledge that if something did catch their child's attention, there's nothing to stop children accessing a catch up channel - so while low risk, it could be high impact.

*"It's not really a concern, but like, if that got out in school and **their friends were saying "oh did you see this?" then they'll go and start rooting in the player.** My kids do not watch RTÉ, because they prefer watching Netflix and stuff like that, you know?"*

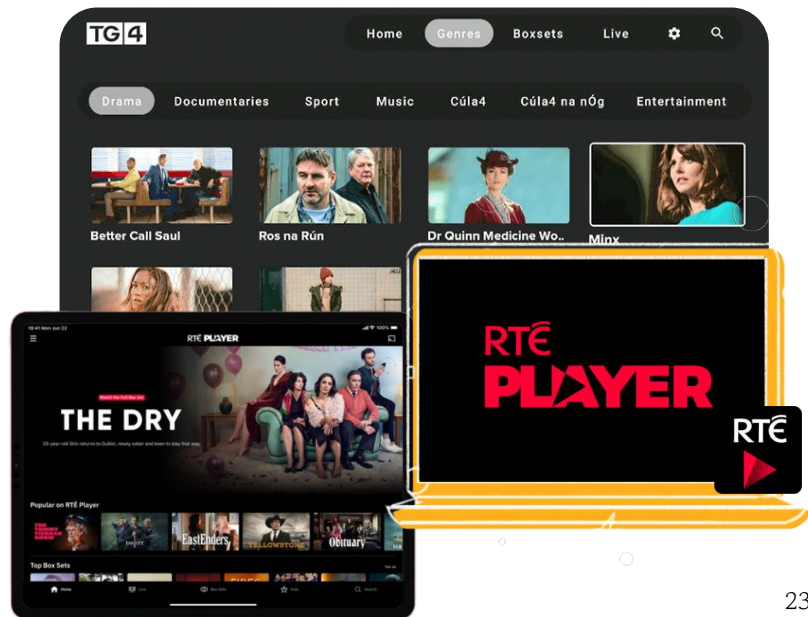
Parent (13-17) | Female | Dublin

"I think the media (referring to catch up TV) is the least of our worries"

Parent Mixed group | Male | Cork

"Is there no guidance on RTÉ players at all? I don't watch it a lot"

Non-Parent | Female | Cork



3. Subscription streaming services (*Netflix/Disney/etc*)

These services come with parental controls and child settings, which parents generally utilize and trust, particularly when their children are very young. However, questioning can reveal loopholes that parents aren't aware of.

Parents/Guardians also take comfort in the fact that they can retrospectively check what children have consumed - however there isn't much evidence they do this...

*"We have Disney, we've locked everything - profiles, **we lock the actual app itself**, and then once they get in, they can only go in the child section and you choose the ratings that you allow. So they can't go see anything, **it won't come up, because that's what we've set. We make the decisions.**"*

Parent Mixed Group | Male | Cork

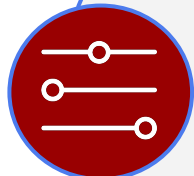


*"You can also kind of see the history of what they've watched, what they have been doing and also what's already been watched. **So at least you have some sense of what they, you know, have been looking at already**"*

Parent Mixed Group | Female | Dublin

4. User generated platforms (*YouTube*)

More challenging for parents to monitor



You Tube Kids is well known as a profile option – but Controls are seen as unreliable
(and don't seem to apply to ads)



It can be more difficult to spot unsuitable content due to the user-generated nature of it

*"If you're watching YouTube, and I find a short video in school, and I've got to literally play it just in case, like, **I don't know what kind of ads will come up. I can pray there's no inappropriate one** in the middle of the video. Like the gambling app."*

Parent 12 and under | Male | Galway

The 'unspoken rules' professionals adhere to are not necessarily honoured.

(e.g. boundaries between entertainment and advertising/selling, adult themes in childish aesthetics)



Though this is primarily a concern for parents of younger children

5. Film Classification

They are seen as broadly reliable - *though they are used as a guide rather than a definitive ruling*. Whether in the cinema or watching DVDs at home, parents/guardians are guided by ratings as well as their general feelings based on what they see in trailers/on the media/what other parents are doing.

This system usually works well, but can occasionally fall down if parents over-rely on semiotic cues

(the look/feel of the film rather than the actual classification - *Sausage Party* came up as an example as well as *Manga* as a genre.



"The way they do in movies is the simplest and probably the most effective, like this has been classified as suitable for this audience because of this reason, (...) I don't think there's a better way than that, like, give the information up front so that people know what they're about to get into"

Non-Parent | Male | Galway

Parents/guardians don't tend to check external sites like Common Sense Media in the normal run of things, though there may be exceptions when their children's friends will be watching.

Here, there are motivations beyond simply the suitability for the audience - around fear of social censure and/or maintaining social cohesion.

"I just kind of felt her parents are on the same wavelength. Like a couple of years ago, I probably would have been like, texting, 'Is this okay?'"

Parent 13 - 17 | Female | Dublin



Parents see themselves as being the primary gatekeepers in ensuring the suitability of what their children watch

- they accept a high degree of responsibility here

However, they want to feel supported and assisted in this task, with the media brands being top of mind in terms of supporting their needs as parents/guardians (RTE/Netflix/etc).

*"Whether it's watching a film, watching TV, being allowed online, being allowed access to things in it, or what areas of it, **adults have got to be responsible, but they've got to be informed.** You know, TV and film does a better job in a lot of ways, of giving that information upfront in a way that the older generation can"*

Non-Parent | Male | Galway



The regulators are also seen to have a part to play as 'overseers'
- however there isn't in-depth understanding of their precise role and function, particularly for Coimisiún na Meán.

This feels like an opportune time to communicate our purpose to parents/guardians in more detail

Media is an important tool by which children learn about the world

How it works, their place within it, relationships with others, what's acceptable in terms of viewpoints, behaviour and attitudes.



A degree of flexibility and ambiguity is always going to be a fundamental part of this process
- there is no 'one size fits all'.



What parents/guardians see as suitable material for their children is constantly evolving.

Gatekeeping content needs to accommodate this growth, so being overly draconian about restricting content isn't the answer either.

Parents/guardians see a difference between ...



Content that they want to
be able to avoid completely

when it comes to their child's consumption
because they see it as totally age inappropriate

vs



Content that they are
happy for children to watch

but with a degree of supervision/oversight - so
*that they can monitor reactions, talk through
tricky subjects, explain more complex ideas.*



And therefore differences in the support they need



Strong, reliable parental controls, clear
boundaries (such as *The Watershed*),
responsible/transparent classification
and labelling of content.



Clear warnings of subject matter being
covered, being able to monitor what's
been watched, guidance on how to tackle
more challenging discussions and topics.

A range of techniques are employed by parents to manage children's exposure to problematic content



MORE PROACTIVE & PLANNED

- Setting up parental controls
- Avoiding broadcast TV after the watershed
- Checking Film/DVD classifications
- Paying attention to warnings
- Ensuring that platforms like YouTube are watched in public areas



MORE REACTIVE & SPONTANEOUS

- Turning off / muting problematic content mid flow
- Distraction - *'Look what I found', 'He said grape, not rape'*
- Contextualising and reassurance - *'it's just a story, it wouldn't happen in real life'*



MORE RETROSPECTIVE & ANALYTICAL

- Reviewing their consumption
- Discussions about characters motives / behaviour to contextualise
- Contrasting with their own norms/moral universe - *'you'd know never to say that', 'that's terrible behaviour, isn't it?'*

A wide arsenal of approaches. These aren't all 100% effective, all of the time, but the mix covers a wide range of possibilities.

Parents/Guardians also rely on implicit narrative norms to help them gatekeep – *though they may not be totally conscious of it*



The belief that child and adult content is clearly differentiated and **demarcated** – *and that children generally aren't interested in material that isn't aimed at them*

Though this is being challenged by the emergence of genres like Anime, that can look child-oriented while dealing with adult themes. There can also be issues with user-generated content on platforms like YouTube – *e.g. Peppa Pig parodies.*



That storytelling reinforces moral conventions that reflects society's values.
– *e.g. Heroes triumph and evil gets punished*

Again, something that user/amateur generated content may not deliver on as reliably as professionally-produced material.

With these assumptions, parents/guardians are not on such solid ground as they used to be, a fact that is only starting to become clear

Self-monitoring is something that adults talk about when it comes to their own content

- The focus being being more on monitoring their overall exposure/impact and less about avoiding specific content
- Most acknowledge that they should be doing more of this, but the nature of modern media consumption can make this very difficult
- In terms of more specific content, most adults have a good sense of the kind of content they find difficult to watch and generally avoid - things like horror/extreme violence - or specific issues related to their own experiences
- But issues occasionally occur when content like this crops up unexpectedly

"I wouldn't find it triggering myself, personally (violence on TV), but I think people would, because they would say, "Oh, I know my friend lives in a household like that, where this constant, you know, screaming and shouting and things like that", (...) it just feels like real life."

Parent | Female Mixed Group | Dublin

Things like warnings are appreciated when problematic content is likely to pop up unexpectedly

However, the biggest challenge being faced by parents/guardians...

*Lies not within the realm of fiction or storytelling but the various **conflicts going on in the world today** and the **graphic depiction of these on social media / classic news channels***

- The 6pm news becomes a particular flashpoint here, as it's a point in the day when children are at home and the TV might be on in the background.
- Radio can also be problematic, but the lack of visual content makes a difference.
- News content is then amplified on social media, making it a 'talking point', which can be even more challenging if the story is about someone/something that is engaging to a young audience.



"Even the Israeli war depending on what news channel you're on or reporting on social media, or even the Conor McGregor case,(...) It's just funny what's coming up on my stuff like the Irish stuff is completely slating him and the US sites aren't."

Parent 12 and under | Male | Cork

News content is particularly problematic, because it's hard to monitor in a planned/proactive way (short of not having it on when children are present) and it's clearly 'happening in real life' so it can't be explained away as fiction

This is not just an issue for parents/guardians

Adults (parents and non-parents) can find news content difficult to deal with also

- Much of this comes down to the bombardment with these kinds of stories on social media, but the graphic nature of news coverage on broadcast media is another avenue that can feel like it's amplifying the overall effect
- There's a sense that what's broadcast on TV channels now is more explicit than it used to be - though obviously this is a subjective judgement
- While a lot of adults don't necessarily get their news from TV/radio, most want the option to, if it suits them

"I think with COVID and now the wars have been amplified... Anytime the news comes on now i just turn it off. The world's hard enough. I don't need to hear all of this now. I'd listen to it more on the radio than I would have the visual."

Non-Parent | Female | Cork

Looking into perceptions of IFCO and Coimisiún na Meán in more detail ...



Perceptions of IFCO



There's general awareness of IFCO as an organisation, though many don't know its official name and older respondents still associate it with "the censor."



While the role and function of the organisation is not always top of mind, there is support for what the organisation does.



Even if film/DVD represent just one aspect of their children's viewing, it's reassuring to know that this one area is properly regulated or classified.



"The classification in Ireland is good. I think Netflix slightly different, but again, I think they'll classify them so they'll put the name as recommendations only if they're suitable"

Parent 12 and under | Female | Dublin

"Every 12 year old or every 15 year old is going to be exposed to different things. There has to be a baseline somewhere. So they provide that. They provide that baseline time, whether it's above or below us"

Parent 12 and under | Male | Galway

However, there's little engagement with IFCO on a more proactive level
- visiting the website, checking the nuance behind the classification

Perceptions of IFCO

Most have a broad understanding of IFCO classifications, but there is some confusion around ...



The difference between G and PG
- and occasionally the difference
between PG and 12A



16 is often
forgotten about as
a classification



The meaning of the "A"
qualification - does it mean
accompanied or advisory?

Also, with an A qualification,
are there any limits to how
much lower a parent should
go if they feel it's appropriate
for their child? *For example, a
non-parent participant was
surprised to see a 10/11 year old
taken to see Gladiator (15A)*

*"I don't know what the difference between PG and G is, like, I know what
parental guidance is, but yeah, what exactly does that mean? It's more
from like the DVD era where you go to rent a DVD or video, or whatever.
You know, we were like, get something PG"*

Non-Parent | Female | Cork

*"Geez, it's a lot, isn't it? But what's the difference between
16 and 15A? A because the obvious, there's a year and
there's an A there for when they've been accompanied from
12 to 15? Is it the first time now that you're not with them?"*

Parent 13-17 | Male | Cork

There's room to clarify some of the points raised above in a proactive way,
though it's not seen as a huge priority by parents

Perception of Coimisiún na Meán

Overall there is a lower spontaneous awareness/detailed understanding of what the Coimisiún do

- There is a vague understanding that they have some kind of supervisory role over Irish media and tackle 'complaints'.
- Some limited references to its role being linked to misinformation/disinformation - and the monitoring of that.
- Suggestion that it was mentioned during election campaigning, but vague on the details.



"They ensure it's suitable for the audience and its above board with the content that it's showing I suppose?"

**Parent Mixed Group |
Female | Galway**

"Was set up, I think for the media, general media. It wasn't just TV. I think they are going online with the internet.. Something like that, I think it was set up because of misinformation, disinformation. So that's why I'm weary, because I decide what's misinformation for me, I don't like anyone else deciding. So I know that that set up. Yeah, maybe, I think last year."

Parent 13-17 | Female | Athlone

"They regulate for watersheds and all that kind of stuff. Yeah, that's all I know... They get the complaints"

Parent 12 and under | Male | Cork

Opportunity for an education piece to clarify our purpose – on our own terms

In monitoring the 'Irish Media' – important to understand that this is made up of increasingly disparate strands

With consumers having different relationships with each of them...



The state sponsored broadcaster, funded by the taxpayer – the feeling is that RTE should be held to higher standards when it comes to regulation monitoring of content as it isn't possible to 'walk away' from it in the same way.

A regulatory function here is seen as very relevant



(opt-in streaming services)

It's a straightforward, commercial relationship. If they are unhappy with the service/controls/material, they have the choice to unsubscribe

A regulatory role here would not be unwelcome, but fine for it to be more hands off



(and other user generated content)

Relationship is different again, more like 'making a pact with the devil'. Because it's free, people return to it, but they have little expectation of proper monitoring on this platform.

Regulation here would be highly desirable, but it's seen as a near impossible task

Implications ...

- **Overall, current strategies, official/unofficial, regulator led/guardian led for helping consumers navigate broadcast media are seen to be working reasonably well**
- **There are questions about how warnings could be better utilised and potential weak spots when it comes to accessing catch up services like RTE player**, but these are minor concerns in the overall scheme of things
- **News content is the biggest issue** when it comes to challenging media content and there are suggestions that more graphic language/imagery featured in the 6pm news could be toned down (though warnings are noted)
- **Thinking about the regulators role going forward, there are opportunities to help parents navigate discussions** around challenging content as this can feel like a daunting task for some
- **It's also worth anticipating the challenges that new genres and user-generated content pose for parents** who are relying on long established, but implicit narrative 'rules' to guide their decision making
- **There's room to clarify the roles and the specifics in terms of classification of both IFCO and Coimisiún na Meán** as consumer understanding is not very comprehensive



Deep Dive into the **Areas of Concern**

We explored the following areas of concern with parents and guardians within the research

Violence

***Physical violence** occurs when someone uses a part of their body or an object to control a person's actions.*

***Sexual violence** occurs when a person is forced to unwillingly take part in sexual activity.*

***Emotional violence** occurs when someone says or does something to make a person feel stupid or worthless such as coercive control.*

The intensity, duration, detail and impact of the violence are relevant in deciding on the relevant rating."

Harmful Behaviour

***Harmful behaviour** constitutes any decision or action which causes, or has the potential to cause, harm, injury or pain to yourself or others whether this is intentional or not.*

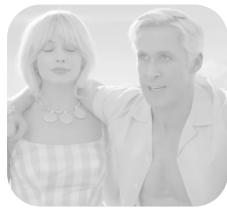
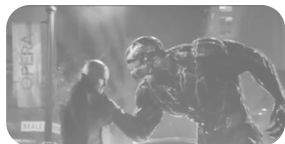
Examples include bullying, drug use, self-harm and anti-social behaviour. The intensity, duration, detail and impact of the harmful behaviour are relevant in deciding on the relevant rating."

Sexual Content

***Sexual content** is material depicting or referencing sexual activity and behaviours. Nudity can be presented in a sexual or non-sexual context.*

***Sexual content** may be explicit including depictions and descriptions of actual sexual activity. It can also be implicit where the activity and behaviours are referenced visually or verbally. The intensity, duration, detail and impact of the sexual content are relevant in deciding on the relevant rating."*

A range of clips were shown from to prompt engagement with the 3 areas of concern:



VIOLENCE

- Harold & The Purple Crayon
- The Little Mermaid
- Red One
- Venom
- The Hunger Games
- Fair City
- Solo Levelling
- Civil War
- The Substance
- Eastenders
- An Creatur
- Six One Sexual Violence (*Conor McGregor*)
- Alien Romulus
- Simone Lee Trial
- Wonka
- A Haunting in Venice
- Paddington

HARMFUL BEHAVIOUR

- Halal Daddy
- A Man Called Otto
- Brendan O'Carroll Clip
- Asal: Discrimination Violence
- Operation transformation
- Love, Simon
- Powerpuff Girls
- Invisible Men
- The Dry
- Joker: Folie à Deux
- Pat Shortt

SEXUAL CONTENT

- Barbie
- Good Luck To You, Leo Grande
- Are you there God? It's me Margaret
- Strange Darling
- Challengers
- Tommy Tiernan
- Gravity Falls
- Survivor
- How to Have Sex

A note on the methodology / use of clips

The purpose of using the clips was to prompt conversation around the areas of concern.

We are aware of the limitations of these clips in isolation, the impact of the areas of concern will be lessened or heightened depending on the wider context - and this was frequently referenced by respondents in the course of the groups.

Nonetheless the clips were useful in achieving the aim of prompting conversation - respondents also brought their own examples to the discussion which unlocked further insights.



Across all the areas of concern, common themes emerge ...

In terms of factors that lessen/heighten the impact of material



Narrative Arc

While troubling incidents can occur within films/TV show, the wider narrative arc and resolution are important in determining how problematic this content is. If, by the resolution, bad treatment is avenged and good triumphs, then problematic incidents have less overall impact than if these things are resolved unsatisfactorily.

The length of time spent on such material matters also. One or two brief interludes of violence/bullying are less problematic than sustained incidents throughout.



Humour

Humorous tone/context will often lessen the impact of material, as characters joking around indicates to the viewer that they feel in control and unthreatened by the actions of others.

Respondents raised a range of examples to illustrate this, but Halal Daddy is a good example of racial language/stereotypes being referenced, but often by the protagonist themselves or in a humorous way that indicates warmth rather than alienation / judgement / aggression. However, this could be seen to contradict with other points raised during the groups - that people didn't feel they are equipped to decide what other societal groups should find acceptable

Obviously this doesn't apply if the humour is at the expense of a character - *and we will go into this in more detail in the Harmful Behaviour section*

Across all the areas of concern, common themes emerge ...

In terms of factors that lessen/heighten the impact of material



Expectations

Unfortunately, problematic human behaviour exists in our realities and that's reflected on our screens.

There are some problematic behaviours that are more normalised on our societies than others and viewers have a higher tolerance for material that reflects this normalisation.

There is more pushback on material that defies our expectations. For example, domestic violence in which the child is the perpetrator is more shocking than the more normalized pattern of male on female - *reaction to Eastenders clip* illustrates this. Baby Reindeer was brought up as spontaneous example also - the rape scene instigated by a female character is more shocking than the (unfortunately) more normalised rape conducted by males.





Deep Dive into
Violence

Violence is a complex topic ...

And one that it can sometimes feel we have a high tolerance for as a society

- **Multiple examples across history/culture where violence has been necessary, justified, even lauded** - and our storytelling traditions reflect that. Stories that feature violence have long been a key part of our education process.
- **Children being exposed to violence in the media is not a new thing** - there's a long tradition in Tom and Jerry/Bugs Bunny style cartoon violence which children have access to from a young age.
- **Evolving into Marvel / superhero movies, action hero flicks, thrillers, horror** - all of which can have violent content as a key draw and are extremely popular.

"You know, Dracula that had no warning. You have all these films in life. We're starting from silent movies, they've all come from books that kids read before us, before them. Fairy tales, monsters, yeah, I don't go in the woods - something might kill you."

Parents 12 and under | Male | Athlone

"Nothing that goes on the TV is as violent as Tom and Jerry was and we all watched that from a very early age"

Non-Parent | Male | Galway



Violence in traditional media can feel like the least of parent/guardian's concerns

Nowadays, concerns parents/guardians have about violence in films/TV shows tend to be dwarfed by the violence children are exposed to in other contexts:

- **Video games** – which can be particularly graphic and have compounding issues – i.e. children have a participatory role in, content can reinforce misogynistic ideas
- **Graphic news content** of conflict across the world
- **Even real life** altercations



"I watch the main news at six o'clock and it's nearly all bad news. There's so much happening, you know a murder here or murder there. I know good for people that have gone off the TV because of that, because it's depressing to be watching the news most of the time."

Parent Mixed Group | Male | Galway

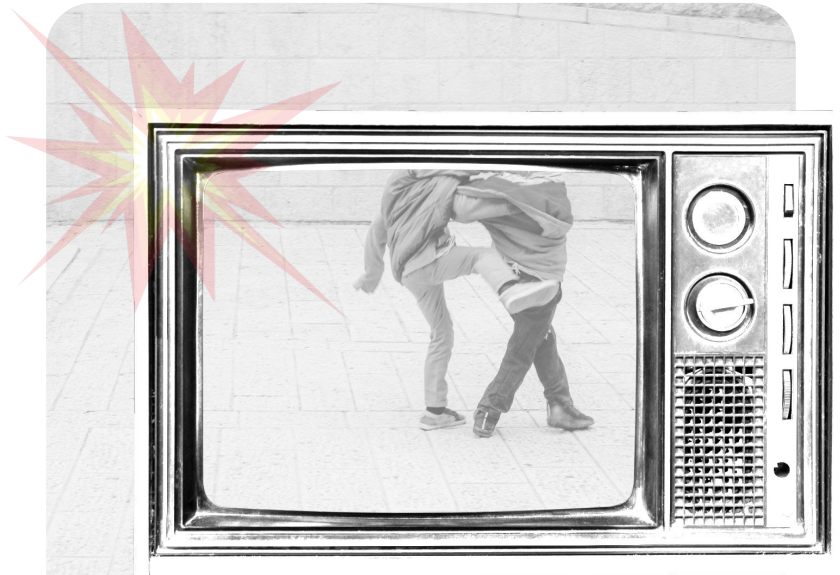
"There's a video game that's really bad, vicious with women, it's a fighting game. I don't know it's really, really bad. This guy, that hurt my daughter, that's what he thought consent was. He didn't realise, because he saw that in the game and thought it was okay. Yeah, so it's the consent thing, or it's reenacting."

Parent 13-17 | Female | Dublin

Significant proportion of parents are feeling that they have become more immune to violent content overall in the last few years

From a media content point of view then ...

Parents/Guardians know that violence exists in the world (*in our real lives and our wider cultural reference points*) and is a powerful weapon that can be used for multiple purposes



"There's no point as well, just living in like, a little bubble. Like, you know, things do happen. Words do get said, boys do throw punches, like, this kind of way is all **a part of life.**"

Non-Parent | Male | Dublin

It's important that children learn that, so parents/guardians are less concerned with the media covering this in an age appropriate way.

What they are more concerned about is children understanding - in a tangible way - how violence could have an impact on them in real life.

Either as a victim - *the sense of fear/pain/degradation that would involve*

Or as a protagonist - *if they internalise an idea that violence is a desirable means of achieving power/status*
- a concern for parents of boys in particular

The following factors can have a **mitigating effect on the impact** of violence featured in media content



Violence that feels removed from the real world / real life experiences – *easy to dismiss as ‘not real’*

- Whether that’s because it’s **distanced by genre/media** – i.e. animation
- Or because it’s **set in a fantasy universe** inhabited by superhumans
- If it’s very **stylised** and/or obviously staged
- Or has been **sanitised** – i.e. no graphic effects are shown



Red One – Response to clip

Again, violence is pretty graphic here, but nothing about this feels real (the universe it’s set in, the characters) and it’s very stylised and obviously ‘choreographed’
[12A rating seems appropriate here and many parents would be happy for younger children to watch]

“It was an unrealistic sounding punch [in Red One]. It was exaggerated, like, apart from the monster punching or whatever, but the other side was far more exaggerated. And there’s a bigger deal made of it – it was comical and plastic.”

Parents 12 and under | Male | Galway



Classic Cartoons – Spontaneous

Some of the violence here in this material is objectively shocking, but it’s animated, often involves animal rather than human characters, part of a well-understood genre



If the violence depicted is historically/culturally removed

– *unlikely to affect them, therefore not quite so impactful*

- **Seeing this kind of violence doesn't have quite the same effect** as it's removed in time and space
- **There's also an educational component to depicting** this kind of violence, so it's seen as justified in that way



Dunkirk/Saving Private Ryan/Braveheart

– *Spontaneous*

A few examples of 'historical' violence came up spontaneously to illustrate this point. While this kind of violence can be difficult to watch, it's also in a context that feels very unlikely to affect the view personally and also has an educational function.

"To compare this film to say, now something like Saving Private Ryan, which is also extremely violent, I actually think it's kind of more justified in a film like, because it's based on a true story, I don't know if that is extremely close to a real thing that happened, but it's still got historical context"

Non-Parent | Male | Cork

If violence feels 'justified' in a particular situation or used in self defense – *because there's a moral dimension to how we view its use*

- While parents/guardians aren't necessarily advocating that their children 'hit back' in real life, **these kind of actions in media content are viewed very differently to unprompted violence**
- Violence being deployed for the underdog is generally seen in a much more positive light



"I don't think the violence was upsetting as the taking advantage of the kid"

Parent Mixed Group | Female | Dublin

An Creatur – Response to clip

Although this is a hard scene to watch for many reasons, the violent behaviour of the child defending the disabled boy is seen as morally justified and would be a learning opportunity for children as they come to understand the complexity of moral codes. Parents can see how this would be suitable (if challenging) content for 12 and up, if an adult is on hand.



The following factors can **magnifying effect on the impact** of violence featured in media content



When violence is presented as attainable, even desirable

– *i.e. conveys social benefits*

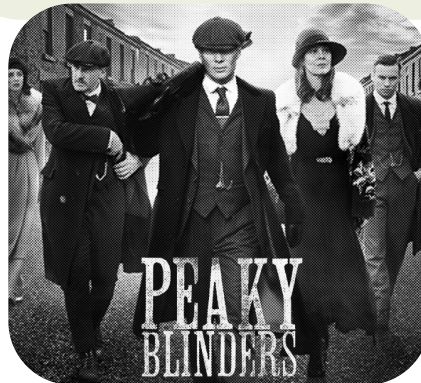
- Parents/Guardians are particularly concerned about material that **glorifies violence**, making it seem like **an aspirational act**, that can convey status or benefits to the perpetrator
- We all know that there are sections of society and sub-cultures that operate like this, but parents/guardians want to **avoid advocating this as a viable moral framework**.

*"It's actually attainable, that's the big thing. You know, I think everyone wants to be Batman or Superman as a kid, or whatever you want to be, but if you want to be King Nidge, or whatever, **you can actually find someone to do that.**"*

Non-Parent | Male | Galway

Kin, Love/Hate, Peaky Blinders – Spontaneous

There have been a range of dramas that focus on these kind of subcultures (*current and historical*) and while it makes for excellent TV, there are concerns about the lessons that teenage boys (*in particular*) could be taking from this when violent individuals are glorified



When violence feels realistic and something that could feasibly happen to a child – *rather than just something in a film*

- So much violent content is dismissed with a **'it's not real life' or 'this could never happen to you'**.
- So when we see violent content that can't be dismissed in this way, this is a real problem for parents. **The more realistic and centred in real life the violence is, the easier it is for children to imagine it happening to them** – which is among the most traumatic things for children to process.
- This is exacerbated if the violence is **amplified by bullying behaviour and abusive language** – if it feels like the violence is part of a wide arsenal of tools to degrade/humiliate the child.

Hunger Games – Response to clip

While this is an obviously fictional story, the very realistic portrayal of young teenagers and the way in which they turn on each other makes this violence feel very impactful and could have a strong impact on a tween/younger teen. However the wider context of the film and ultimate triumph of good over evil is an important qualifier



*"It's not just the violence that's upsetting, but if there's **bullying, humiliation, ridicule** on top of that – like the whole package"*

Parent Mixed Group | Female | Dublin

When violence provokes a disgust response

– *uncontrollable physical reaction*

- **Gore and gruesomeness** tends to exacerbate the impact of violence, making the effects more tangible and visceral
- This can tip into a **disgust response**, where the viserality of the imagery makes us feel sick/recoil, which can have a significant impact on some people (though others have much stronger stomachs)
- **There is a fine line here however**, where gruesome realism can tip over into over-the-top obvious 'fakery' and then the spell is broken completely

Alien: Romulus – Response to clip

Has that degree of viscosity that makes it difficult watching for some. The idea of the body being 'contaminated' by this creature is baked into the creative idea and plays with the disgust response very strongly, becoming more psychological in its effects. 15A rating (at least) would seem appropriate here, even if the actual violence of the content isn't too alarming.

Venom also has a degree of this, but less visceral.



*"It's the same with the blood and all – **you look and then you're like ew**"*

Non-Parent | Female | Cork

When violence erupts in an unpredictable way

– *unexpected times/places*

- Violence can be more difficult to deal with when **it emerges unexpectedly and/or from places** that should feel 'safe' for children (and vulnerable adults)
- **Narrative conventions often signal that violence is on the horizon**, giving the viewer time to prepare mentally for it - but if these conventions are flouted/played with, it can feel disconcerting for the viewer and therefore the violence can have more impact. This applies to adult viewers also, and it feels like more vulnerable adults might be particularly affected by this

Eastenders – Response to clip

A degree of violent language/behaviour is expected from soaps, but this particular example goes quite a bit beyond expectations, on a number of levels. Firstly it's domestic violence instigated by the child, which is unexpected. Secondly it takes place in a space that should feel safe for all concerned. Thirdly, the pacing – it looks like it's going to be a minor incident that builds into something much more serious.

Compare this to the **Fair City** clip, where the violence unfolds more predictably and violence in a jail setting is much more expected.



*"At the end of the show it will say 'if you have been affected by it', so I think it's it very much could be going on in a lot of houses, and seeing it, then I suppose I know it's only EastEnders, **but seeing it kind of acted out might spur Mam or a Dad or a younger brother or sister to speak up**"*

Parent Mixed Group | Female | Galway

When the media reports on violence that has happened in real life – *the realism can be hard to handle*

- **News reports** being the most obvious example of this, though documentary content could also feature
- **This is a clear indication that violence is happening to real people**, in real life and there's no way for the parent/guardian to downplay/deny that (*once the child is past a certain age*)
- **Raises hard questions** that conflict with the vision of the world parents want their children to have
- **The closer this content feels to the child themselves**, the more significant an impact it can have – children suffering the effects of war for example, or violent incidents in Ireland

Simone Lee Trial – Response to clip

An interesting example – this clip contains no visual material at all, however the descriptions of the violence are very clear, graphic – and the violence described is horrifying.

Parents/guardians would have big concerns about a child aged 8-14 (approx) as they could understand it perfectly, but are not necessarily old enough to table a conversation about such things as this happening in the world.



"I suppose there's violence, but then there's evil."

Parent 12 and under | Male | Dublin

"It's very in depth, like that description of the sanctuary of your home, it's like you would be thinking someone can come into our house and do that"

Parent 12 and under | Female | Dublin

“ —

‘Mandy’ has taught in a Limerick city primary school for many years and requested anonymity. She says she avoids discussing news in class where possible, explaining: “I find they’re very tuned into the news. They know a lot about Ukraine, for example ... there isn’t any filter from home on the news and they bring this to school with them. As the years have gone on I have tended to come to the belief not to talk about current news too much in the classroom as they have it all already from home, and it has in the past overcome them at such a young age, and you can see the anxiety in some of the children when others bring it up.

There are occasions when the news can be particularly difficult for children to process. “In comparison to when I first started teaching, there has been an explosion in particular in the past five or six years to an over-exposure of children to the news. We forget as adults how we process negative news, but children, developmentally, are not in the same mindset as an adult to process such things.

Jen Hogan, The Irish Times

— ”



Naturally, these factors intersect in many clips,
**creating further complexity when it
comes to their suitability**



To illustrate ...

Solo Levelling – Response to clip

An interesting example where the genre creates a lot of conflicting responses. **On the one hand, being animated and ‘removed’ from reality definitely lessens the impact of the violence** – the beheading doesn’t have the impact it would have if the setting were more realistic.

On the other, genre sets expectations in terms of suitability and the idea of anime as a much more adult focused animated form is a relatively new concept to many people – they may not be adept in reading its cues. A 15A rating seems appropriate for this material, but it could be more problematic if children were to come across this on broadcast TV/streaming and parents make assumptions based on it being a cartoon



Civil War – Response to clip

On the face of it, a very graphic, realistic, upsetting depiction of violence, where the impact of violent actions are made very clear.

However, parents/guardians find it possible to distance themselves a little from what’s depicted here, because the machine gun violence (while obviously horrendous) is not something that would realistically happen here in Ireland, therefore it’s easier to dismiss as removed from us culturally.

A 15 A rating feels appropriate here as a result, even given the graphic nature of the material.



A note on threat/peril

- **Parents/Guardians themselves don't tend to be too concerned about the difference between a G/PG rating**, apart from the very youngest children (under 6). When watching at home, there's sense that 7-12 age group will be fine with parental support 99% of the time with PG content.
- Though interestingly, the issue of schools requiring parental permission to show PG films came up spontaneously (and as a source of frustration for parents) - **can be seen as excessive by schools**
- **Threat/peril is an interesting topic for this age group** - the adult viewer knows that narrative convention means a much loved protagonist is not going to suffer excessive harm, but children have to learn about these conventions

G/PG Content – Response to clip

We explored Paddington 2, Wonka, The Little Mermaid and Harold and the Purple Crayon

Of the examples we looked at within this category, Paddington 2 stood out - the threat/peril being most acute in this example. This comes down to connection with the much beloved/vulnerable protagonist, the realism of the threat (drowning), the length of time before it's resolved. Whereas in the other clips, the protagonists do not feel in danger in the same way. But important to note that this is from an adult's perspective.





Violence | **Key Takeouts ...**

- In a world where computer games and real life context continue to normalise violence, parents/guardians can see themselves becoming more accepting/immune to violence in a general sense, in films/TV
- So they focus in on specifics - biggest concerns are around violence that feels real and could feasibly happen to children in the context of their day to day lives
- With this in mind, material that glamorizes violence can be problematic
- Or material that brings home the genuine fear/threat/vulnerability that living with violence would entail
- Factual, real life violence, taking place in the world today is one of the biggest problems parents refer to - *particularly the availability of this material on mainstream media channels and amplified by Social Media.*



Deep Dive into
Harmful Behaviour

Within the Harmful Behaviour topic, there is a wider range of views across parents/guardians

- Though this is a much broader category to begin with, with a range of sub-topics covered within
- And there will be a full spectrum of views within each of these subcategories
- From a classification point of view, there's a sense that you won't 'please all of the people all of the time' here - and the area is constantly evolving

*"As parents we'll have different views,
different values to pass on to our children.
That's all okay, we are all different.
It's good for us to be able to discuss these
things together"*

Parent 12 and under | Male | Galway



This topic area touches on real life experiences

To a greater degree than violence. Areas like bullying and discrimination are, unfortunately, a fact of life.

Parents see media representation as being highly valuable in helping children understand the impact of these behaviours and how to deal with them - though this is not always an easy process

Experiences of bullying/discrimination are not restricted to children either - *adults (parents and non-parents) can also get reassurance and support from media representation of these topics*

"Violence you can talk around and is not as common as you see but bullying can be in every aspect of everyone's lives, in school, work, home, family, everything, and it's trying to make sure that kids are aware and not affected or even know how to deal with it."

Parent Mixed Group | Female | Dublin



"Media can be really helpful like that. The things they'll come up against, particularly as teens. If they see these things in the shows they watch, it can help them process it all"

Parent 13-17 | Female | Dublin

And at the heart of all this, there are core societal values here that parents/guardians want to see held up
- that all people deserve to be treated with dignity and respect - and that care sometime needs to be taken to ensure this is the case with the more vulnerable

Therefore, context and the wider narrative arc are, of crucial importance in terms of gauging the suitability

Especially for a younger audience, parents/guardians (*consciously or unconsciously*) **pay attention to tone, power dynamics, reactions of protagonists, reactions of onlookers, and the broader storyline in determining suitability of content here.**

"Well, like, just say there's a room full of people there. No one tells them to stop or stand up - **it kind of the normalises that it's fine to just make fun of someone.** Just stand back and watch [referring to Love, Simon clip]."

Parent 12 and under | Male | Galway



"It's, you know, it's the character, the glamorous girl, the good looking one, that's been in **other things that teenage girls will see, and there's going to be an element of, I want to be like her, if she can do that - what can I do.**"

Parent 13-17 | Female | Galway

For weightier topics, like suicide, graphic-ness of content is an important factor and the outcome is key

- There's a huge difference between these topics being hinted at versus shown in a very realistic way
- Parents/Guardians have much fewer concerns if the topic is introduced obliquely. Either children won't pick up on it, or if they do, questions can be answered in an age appropriate way.
- Whereas a graphic depiction could be very upsetting for the child.
- Warnings/helplines can play an important role here, if viewers are struggling to process the content

*"If there's a big moment in it, like, let's say, like euthanasia or something like that. They will tell you then, or if there was suicide in it, **they tell you where to reach out to if you were affected by some of it**"*

Parent Mixed Group | Female | Galway



*"You know, as long as there's a caution, like, they definitely seem like **there's a lesson there somewhere that something really bad has happened. Then I don't think the content might be too dangerous. I think it might be even healthy**"*

Non-Parent | Male | Galway

When it comes to language, clear hierarchies of problematic language exist in people's minds



Within that, there is wiggle room and context plays an important part.

For example, self-referencing with a racial slur/humorous tone is viewed as less problematic - illustrated by the Halal Daddy clip

Use of the 'F word' in a violent or abusive situation can be more serious.

The amount of bad language can make a difference, usually the more prevalent it is, the more concerning. However if the tone is humorous to begin with, excessive swearing can heighten the humour and make it more light-hearted.

"Yeah I'm talking about swearing, as in, like, hard swearing, you know what I mean? (...) like, constantly using the F word and then even getting worse saying really offensive language towards another person is derogatory"

Parent 13-17 | Female | Dublin

The following factors can **lessen the impact** of harmful behaviour featured in media content



When bullying/discrimination is part of a wider story

– *with a positive resolution*

- **Parents/Guardians understand that the world their children live in is not perfect** and bullying or discrimination do occur
- But if there is a positive narrative arc, **behaviour endured can be seen as obstacles to be overcome, building strength of character**
- **Particularly when it can be used as part of a teaching aid to illustrate what's right and wrong and that negative behaviour can be overcome/ignored**

"My kids they grew up knowing that gays and lesbians and all that stuff (...) whereas it wasn't really been talked about when I was younger, and we probably would have had [negative] reactions like that, whereas my kids, even my eight year old, comes home was like, Boys love Boys. Girls love girls. It's a norm now"

Parent Mixed Group | Male | Dublin

Love Simon – Response to clip

While the abuse/bullying the character receives was seen by participants as harmful, there was solace taken from the fact that the character stood up for themselves. And for those familiar with the wider film, it resolves in a positive way.

The role of onlookers prompted some interesting discussion in the groups, their reactions can be used as a means of educating children further



If harmful actions are hinted at – *rather than explicitly shown*

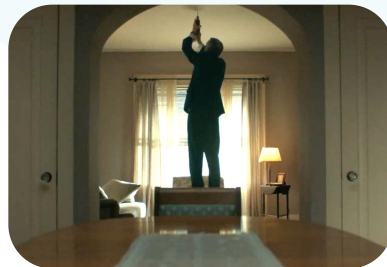
- A violent or harmful act can really impact an impressionable or vulnerable young audience, **but a reference to, or hints at such actions are seen as less impactful**
- Additionally, while violence and harm is clear and the impact is negative, parents/guardians expressed that a **reference to these actions may go over the heads of younger viewers, not understanding the meaning**

"Most of the children wouldn't understand, yeah, you know, a five year old watching that isn't going to know what he's doing

Parent 12 and under | Male | Galway

A Man Called Otto – Response to clip

Parents/guardians felt that there was nothing really in this clip that could have a negative lasting impact on their children. This clip depicts a man contemplating suicide, with parents remarking that younger children would not understand the reference and it would be fine for older children as the act was not carried out. From a classification point of view 12A feels fine.



Bad language is used in frustration, for comedy or colour

– *though age and social demographics play a role here*

- **In Ireland, we have a particular relationship with swearing/bad language** and are more forgiving of it in some situations than other cultures
- **Bad language used to express personal frustration carries far less weight** as to when the language is used to target another individual
- **Humour is a great diffuser**, if bad language is exchanged between characters, the tone of the scene is important and whether it is intended to be humorous instead of hurtful

"It's very funny, I wouldn't I wouldn't be like, it wouldn't be shock, shock horror, just because I would just turn it off or I'd say, go to your room wherever, watching that's and say it straight up, this isn't so suitable that there's bad language that you can't hear."

Parent 12 and under | Male | Cork

The Dry – Response to clip

While obviously, this tirade of bad language is not something you'd want a very small child to see, parents/guardians don't see any real harm in this kind of swearing – because it's culturally specific, it's used humorously, it doesn't feel threatening, it escalates in a ridiculous way.



The following factors can **magnify the impact** of harmful behaviour featured in media content



When children are being shamed – *if the bullying obviously affects self esteem/worth*

- Bullying between children, when the wronged party is able to stand up for themselves is one thing, **but this can become more problematic if the power dynamic is obviously out of sync and one party is made to feel shamed/worthless as a result**
- Obviously wider context needs to be taken into account here, but a situation where this kind of behaviour goes unchallenged would be seen as very problematic for parents. **They don't want their children to absorb that it's ever acceptable to make people feel this way.**

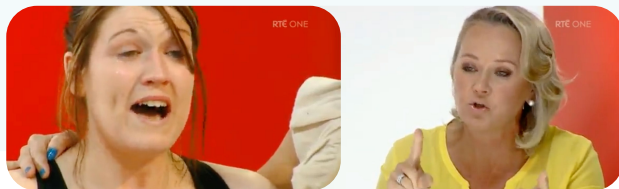
"I think, imagine the show having somebody up there quite vulnerable, like in a semi undressed state, while everybody else in their full stage clothes, full makeup, and a panel of three people judging you. The whole show is probably out of line."

Parent Mixed Group | Female | Dublin

Operation Transformation – Response to clip

Parents are familiar with the premise of the show. The language, power dynamic, reactions here create a situation designed to deliberately berate and belittle the young girl – reducing her to tears, going far beyond the line of what the show should be trying to achieve. While a minority feel that the cultural differences of the judge and what the judge is trying to achieve should be taken into account, most feel that this went way over the line.

Reality TV is a less controlled space than some other forms of content, so it's accepted that sometimes these things might happen, but a full apology to the girl in question and message to the public that this is not acceptable would be an appropriate response



If there are obvious, unmitigated, negative consequence – and the harm done has a lasting effect

- **Either physical or emotional, if the harm done is seen to have a deep and lasting** effect on the character it is seen to be more problematic than a temporary impact.
- **The lack of a redemption arc, or even a sense of closure/understanding** can be difficult for younger brains to process, especially at this more impressionable age.
- **Adults (parents and non-parents)** might also find this kind of content difficult, especially if they've had any specific trauma in their own lives that might be activated by it

Joker Folie à Deux – Response to clip

The negative consequences of the clip are indisputable, there is no expectation of a positive outcome or resolution which could mitigate what's just happened. While the 15A reference probably makes sense in terms of a lack of graphic content, parents do have concerns about the impact of an ending like this on their child's mental state.



*"It seems like a psych ward as well, like, I just think that whole, **those scenes are really for older, you know, developed brains.**"*

Non-Parent | Female | Dublin

When more powerful characters are taking advantage of weaker – *exerting power over someone more vulnerable*

- **Bullying/harassment/discrimination happening to obviously vulnerable characters** – which could cover a whole range of characteristics, from disability, to race, to sexuality – the lack of a level playing field make this kind of content problematic.
- **Again, this comes back to societal values.** Parents want to emphasise that this is not how we treat people in the real world. Though material like this can be valuable as a learning aid.

An Creatur – Response to clip

The language, the smoking, the peer pressure, the violence and all targeted towards a character who is otherwise helpless to stand up for themselves crosses the line into downright cruel behaviour. Subtitles here have an amplifying effect, as we see the harsh words in print as well as what's playing out. This is the kind of content that parents would prefer children to see supervised – as they want to monitor their reactions and reinforce values – rather than leave to impressionable minds



"I would say that it's a good way of showing, like, how mean kids can be, the bullying, the bad language, smoking, they shouldn't be doing it and then, you know, going after disabled children"

Parent Mixed Group | Female | Dublin

Humour throws up some knotty challenges within this area



Our sample acknowledge that the nature of comedy – means that it will occasionally push against the boundaries of what's deemed acceptable

- **Many feel that the current climate can be too stifling on this issue** – that there should be a little more latitude for comedians to make mistakes without fear of being 'cancelled'
- **Reactions when these mistakes are made are also important.** That we need to foster a culture where people can admit when they've gone too far, reboot, apologise if necessary – and get on with their jobs.

Late, Late Show, Brendan O'Carroll – Response to clip

This clip, which involves O'Carroll talking about material that he retracted from Mrs Brown's Boys is seen as interesting context and a topic that respondents don't have a problem with being covered in this way.

Much of this comes down to O'Carroll's own positioning of the incident in question. His reasoning behind the joke is explained, the complaint by a crew member, his own reaction to this – which is seen as both reasonable and appropriate. Slightly more pushback around his retelling of the suicide reference – can be seen as opportunistic. No concerns with children old enough to engage with a talk show format seeing this.

*"Yeah, I think this is fine to show. **You know who he is, you know he's a comedian, like, can't apologise for everything he's saying.** But I suppose his point is, it offended someone. He apologised straight away, like they didn't actually say the word. But it obviously offended someone.*

Non-Parent | Male | Galway



However consensus around who/what it's acceptable to make jokes about has changed

- **General agreement that we shouldn't be 'punching down'** when it comes to joking about groups of people
- **And that there are types/styles of humour that may have been acceptable in the past**, that are not any more. The *Pat Shortt* clip being a good example
- **And while there will be disagreements about what's funny and what isn't - and the degree to which minority groups might themselves find this material funny** - the majority of people acknowledge that they aren't equipped to decide what other societal groups should find acceptable when it comes to comedy that targets them



Children seeing material like the Pat Shortt clip isn't seen as very problematic by parents. It would be important to explain to them how attitudes have changed and that comedy like this wouldn't be encouraged now, but that's life - we learn and grow and make changes along the way.

That's a positive and realistic message to be sending to our children.

Harmful Behaviour | **Key Takeouts**

- This topic is often more directly relevant to children's lives than the others (*or at least until children are in their late teens*).
- There's very little here that parents/guardians want to block access to completely - there are plenty of challenging issues, but parents/guardians feel they can be handled with parental guidance, with appropriate warnings, with open conversations, with discussion about what's right/not right within our own moral code.
- There is clearly room to give parents/guardians more resources to help these conversations.
- This is also a topic area where it would be helpful sometimes to admit that we don't have all the answers - that things can be very nuanced, that there's value in checking in with groups of people who are featured in the material, that judgement calls can go either way.



Deep Dive into
Sexual Content

Openness to sexual content is an area where opinions have shifted significantly – *in the last decade or so*

- The national conversation has moved from a very top down, censorial, morally 'certain' starting point, **shaped by Ireland's history and the influence of the church**
- To one which **is more open, personalised or subjective and we are all feeling our way to a certain degree.**
- Being able to talk about **sexual feelings and behaviour in a much more open way** with their children has become important to today's parents/guardians – there is a high degree of consensus that this is the right way to approach the topic.

"I don't think sex is a bad thing, it's normal (...). I think they're normal things and hormones that he's going through. Yeah, you have to bring up a matter if it's embarrassing to him or not. You have to be able to sit down and talk to them."

Parent 13-17 | Female | Galway



But as with many things, the reality is complex

- **While some parents feel very ready and empowered to have these conversations with their children, that's not everyone's experience.**

The current cohort of parents are products of their own upbringing also and they might find it hard to broach these areas

- **And the topic is continually evolving.** Consent is at the heart of whether we feel sex acts are positive or negative, but consent may not be as straightforward a question as we would like it to be. Most parents do not feel like they will always have the answers on this topic.

"But I suppose the tricky thing is when your children start asking about sex, it's all about consent. So in one sense, I'm teaching them how important these things are and that back in our day, we never had consent debates whereas now it's a massive thing."

Parent 13-17 | Male | Galway



Age and maturity don't necessarily go in lock step – parents understand that these discussions are unique to each child

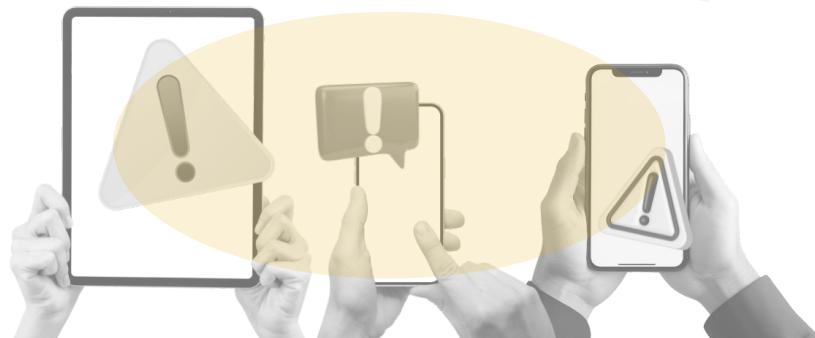
Regardless of what children are seeing on traditional media

This exposure is happening in a world where sexual content on social media and pornography are more available than ever.

- Which, clearly shifts the Overton window in terms of what are target are used to seeing.
- But equally, as a society, we **do not necessarily have the boundaries and etiquette around online sexual content worked out**. So it makes conversations/openness about acceptability, consent, safety more important than ever.
- Traditional media has the potential to play an important role here. **It can be an powerful means of broaching topics** and ultimately teaching young people about positive sex behaviours and what is acceptable.
- The wider context of narrative arcs are significant here as the **nature of the relationship is key in how sexual acts are perceived**. This is something that traditional media explores that pornography doesn't.

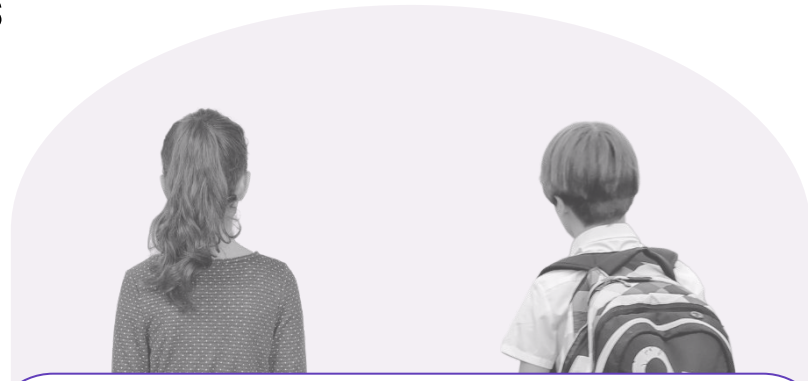
"We have such an open dialogue with our kids because we know that they're going to be exposed to stuff that we don't have control over. So we have always, always had really open discussions about their bodies, about their privacy, about what's out there in the media, about what they might see on YouTube, (...) getting in front of it and getting ahead of it is really, really important"

Parent 13-17 | Female | Dublin



This is an area where parents/guardians of girls versus boys can have different concerns

- **Which reflect wider discussions around sexual behaviour** and how that impacts girls versus boys
- **Parents/guardians of girls** are more focused on how the treatment and feelings of women are portrayed - *i.e. the woman's reactions in sex scenes and the wider messaging around consent and how that's respected*
- **Parents/guardians of boys** are more concerned about societal messaging to boys. This can range from worries about them taking less positive role models as acceptable behaviour to finding themselves (unjustly) on the wrong side of disagreements about consent
- **In some cases, there's a strong sense of projection with regards to their own child/children and that can evoke strong emotions from parents**



*"That one with that teenage girl (Strange Darling) still affects me because, again, I have a young daughter, and again, it can happen to your boys I think **you just hear of it more happening to the girls only but again, it's showing if you get her drunk, then she can't say no.**"*

Parent 13-17 | Female | Dublin

**In this area, parents/guardians
have fewer concerns
about the following ...**



Candid discussion about sex and sex acts

– *at an appropriate age*

- A good example of how culture around **sexuality has moved on** since the parents we spoke to were teenagers themselves.
- A strong feeling that there should be **no shame or taboo around clearly referencing sexual terms** and having open conversations about them – in an age appropriate way.

Here's to you, Leo Grande – Response to clip

There's nothing referenced here that a child old enough to engage with the film wouldn't already have heard – they are probably exposed to far worse on social media any day of the week. There's something refreshing about how straightforwardly sex is referenced and the vulnerability of an older woman leading the conversation. Not that most teens would be particularly interested in that, but it is normalising frank and open sexual discussion.

*"I think having that film [referring to Good Luck, Leo Grande] in Ireland is really important sometimes like that, because **there is a huge amount of Catholic guilt even up to my age**, coming into and going into later in life and **realising that you have sexual freedom, and it's not a bad thing**"*

Parent 13-17 | Female | Dublin



Showing sex scenes that are clearly consensual and respectful – *may be uncomfortable but ultimately positive*

→ While there may be feelings of discomfort or embarrassment around this kind of content, in theory (at least) parents/guardians feel that **illustrations of intimate, consensual and respectful relations** is safe and even beneficial for teenagers to have reference points for what that looks like.

→ Obviously adult themes like those are unsuitable for younger children but there is a different view with teenagers.

Bridgerton/Normal People – Spontaneous

While sex scenes in material like these can be surprising and potentially embarrassing, it is a mark of how things have changed in Ireland that this material isn't (generally) seen as problematic for an age appropriate audience.

"Thinking of Normal People and all that, it was really, steamy and it was grand, (...) but we're all sitting watching it with our parents like, that's the only reason [it could be embarrassing]"

Parent Mixed Group | Female | Dublin



*"I know you've all heard of Bridgerton, but I found that my eldest girl got really into it, and then the other two watched it. Then we all watched together, and, like, did this stuff seriously happen? And I was like, **it's just a period drama. But it's, it's pretty okay to watch.**"*

Parent 13-17 | Female | Athlone

Sexual innuendo deployed in a light hearted way

– often in movies for a younger audience

→ A sense among parents/guardians that most **light hearted sexual innuendo** will go over children's heads, so will not cause any issues – no harm, no foul.

→ **This has become a bit of a tradition with certain types of content**, usually animation/family viewing – Shrek being a frequently cited example. These jokes are seen as an innocent way to entertain the parents.

Barbie – Response to clip

The innuendo here is seen as a bit of silliness, that will go over most children's heads. At a certain point, children will start to understand the references, but this represents a gentle enough education



"We have all the younger kids who are obsessed with Barbie and there was parents like, is it okay for them to go watch it? (...) But it was okay because any of the stuff that was in it is more for adults, so they were able to go watch it.

The innocence was still there"

Parent Mixed Group | Female | Dublin

More experimental sexual activity, so long as it's also consensual and respectful

- The majority of today's parents/guardians are of the opinion that **sexual experimentation, within reason, is acceptable to show as long as it is done consensually.**
- Featuring sexual content that's a bit more out of the ordinary can be reassuring for teens that are becoming more aware and comfortable with the idiosyncrasies of their own sexuality.

Challenger - Response to clip

Interpretations of this clip varied a little, but the majority see nothing wrong with this as consensual sexual experimentation/play, presented in a light-hearted manner. Others were more suspicious of the main character's motives (though that's not born out in film's wider storyline)

*"I think it's pretty normal, or should be, that everyone's free to have sex **whatever way they want**"*

Parent Mixed Group | Female | Dublin



**In this area, parents/guardians
have more concerns
about the following ...**



Sex scenes that are non-consensual/coerced sex

– *depictions of rape*

- While rape exists in the world, this is not something that parents/guardians want children to be confronted with the full reality of when not fully mature.
- While discussion and education around this topic is very important, parents are concerned that **seeing the act occur in the media will be upsetting and unlikely to benefit these conversations.**
- It is very much a sensitive topic that parents want to feel they have to the power to broach in their own time when they feel their children may be ready.
- This would also apply to adults (parents and non-parents), particularly to women, especially those who have unfortunately had experience of this in real life

"But like, you know, the Conor McGregor case, like, you know, the word rape and stuff like that. I want to explain that to them in my own way, without it, just like foisted in it, like a quick little sound bite from the radio. And so, yeah, there's difficult topics that you want to sort of broach in your own time."

Parent 12 and under | Female | Dublin



Messaging that undermines key values around sex

– *particularly for females*

- **Parents have concerns about the wider messages** around sex and sexual ethics that are being broadcast to teenagers.
- **Societal values around sexual boundaries have shifted significantly** in the last little while, and parents/guardians have a desire to see these positive, emerging values backed up in the media, not undermined.

Survivor – Response to clip

This clip, in isolation, is seen as sending out a problematic message to young girls that they shouldn't have an expectation of something being done about unwanted sexual advances. Parents would hate for their daughters to absorb such a message. However, the wider context of 'what happened next' is important here and an incident like this could easily be countered by programme messaging either directly after this clip or at the end of the show.



"I'm thinking of my two girls, if we were watching that, I'd pause that, and I would be asking them, What do you think of that? Now, you think, is it okay for this kind of like, touching the hair, touching the ribs?"

Parent 13-17 | Female | Galway

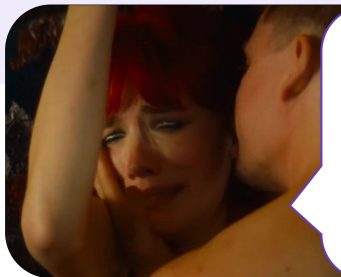
Sexual activity where the boundaries of consent, enjoyment, power relations are ambiguous

- There's a lot of complexity within human sexuality and teenagers, still maturing and developing, may not always understand the dynamics and nuance of it all.
- Material that is **particularly intense, where the lines of consent are blurred, where the power dynamic feels problematic - can all be problematic** for this age group, particularly for boys, but also girls in terms of what they should be prepared to go along with.

Strange Darling - Response to clip

It was understood by participants that this scene included a roleplaying exercise, yet the graphic/violent nature of the actions and the girl's response is still distressing. Parents are concerned that teenagers' still maturing minds may not grasp all the nuance of this scene and come away with a problematic understanding of what's acceptable or not. Clearly wider context would play a role - *but regardless, this scene is upsetting, even if consent has been technically given.*

Many adults (parents and non-parents) would also find this clip difficult, as the female character's reactions are upsetting, regardless of context



"I don't know what way my younger son is going to go. None of us do. We can only do our best, but he might watch something. Nobody sends our kids out to do these things, you know. So should he be watching that at 14? No"

Parent Mixed Group | Female | Dublin

Determining suitability of content can be very nuanced, particularly for older teens



***How to Have Sex* is a good example of how it's hard to generalise**

- This clip is a trailer, so not giving away a great deal in terms of the plot
- Though it's clear that some sort of sexual trauma has occurred
- But from the material we have here, it's not obvious whether there will be graphic depictions of that trauma, what the wider context brings, how it will end, what are the wider messages about consent, respect, power, etc.
- **All of which points to the importance of the classification system doing its job**

How To Have Sex – Response to clip

The trailer alludes to an incident around sexual assault but nothing is graphically shown. The generalisation of the clip allowed parents to discuss how they could use this as a discussion between their children – with their sons it was a lesson around respect and consent and with girls it was a lesson about looking after one another, especially in the context of what was assumed as a trip abroad perhaps for the first time without adult supervision

*"I would say it seems to be coming across as a cautionary tale. Like, at first, you're seeing everyone's out there enjoying themselves, over indulging in losing a lot, and you're going, okay, as long as they don't portray that in a positive light all the time. **You know, as long as there's a caution, like, they definitely seem like there's a lesson there somewhere that something really bad has happened.**"*

Non-Parent | Male | Dublin





Sexual content | **Key Takeouts ...**

- Again, there's been so much change in terms of how parents/guardians are handling this topic compared to even a decade ago - important to remember that we are still feeling our way to a certain degree
- There is significant agreement among parents that it's important to be open with teenagers and foster open and non-judgemental conversations with them about this material - but important to remember that some parents feel a lot more comfortable/competent about this than others.
- There are key differences within this topic about what's top of mind for males versus females - a very different thought process is at work when parents are assessing the material with boys/girls in mind.
- Consent is at the heart of whether sexual acts are deemed acceptable or not - as this is so central to our thinking, there is serious pushback when the concept of consent is undermined.
- However it's also worth noting that consent isn't always a straightforward concept - and parents/guardians fear young, evolving minds drawing the wrong conclusions.



Final Thoughts

Overall Implications ...

- **Overall, current strategies, official/unofficial, regulator led/guardian led for helping consumers navigate broadcast media are seen to be working reasonably well**
- **There are questions about how warnings could be better utilised and potential weak spots when it comes to accessing catch up services like RTE player**, but these are minor concerns in the overall scheme of things
- **News content is the biggest issue** when it comes to challenging media content and there are suggestions that more graphic language/imagery featured in the 6pm news could be toned down (though warnings are noted)
- **Thinking about the regulators role going forward, there are opportunities to help parents navigate discussions** around challenging content as this can feel like a daunting task for some
- **It's also worth anticipating the challenges that new genres and user-generated content pose for parents** who are relying on long established, but implicit narrative 'rules' to guide their decision making
- **There's room to clarify the roles and the specifics in terms of classification of both IFCO and Coimisiún na Meán** as consumer understanding is not very comprehensive



Violence | **Key Takeouts ...**

- In a world where computer games and real life context continue to normalise violence, parents/guardians can see themselves becoming more accepting/immune to violence in a general sense, in films/TV
- So they focus in on specifics - biggest concerns are around violence that feels real and could feasibly happen to children in the context of their day to day lives
- With this in mind, material that glamorizes violence can be problematic
- Or material that brings home the genuine fear/threat/vulnerability that living with violence would entail
- Factual, real life violence, taking place in the world today is one of the biggest problems parents refer to - particularly the availability of this material on mainstream media channels and amplified by Social Media.

Harmful Behaviour | **Key Takeouts**

- This topic is often more directly relevant to children's lives than the others (*or at least until children are in their late teens*).
- There's very little here that parents/guardians want to block access to completely - there are plenty of challenging issues, but parents/guardians feel they can be handled with parental guidance, with appropriate warnings, with open conversations, with discussion about what's right/not right within our own moral code.
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