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0508 CENSOR (236 767)



OFFICE OF FILM
& LITERATURE
CLASSIFICATION

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Introduction

The Term 1 2013 Censor for a Day events kicked off in Wellington at the Readings Courtenay cinema, before heading south to Dunedin (Hoyts the Octagon) and Christchurch (Hoyts Riccarton). In total 399 students and teachers from 18 schools attended.

Censor for a Day has three key purposes:

- to provide senior Media Studies students with first-hand experience of a system they are studying at school;
- to engage with students and inform them about the classification system which directly impacts their day-to-day media choices and consumption; and
- to give the Classification Office insights into the opinions of key stakeholders in the classification system. High school students form a significant group in terms of film and DVD audiences, and are directly affected by age-restricted film classifications in a way that adults are not.

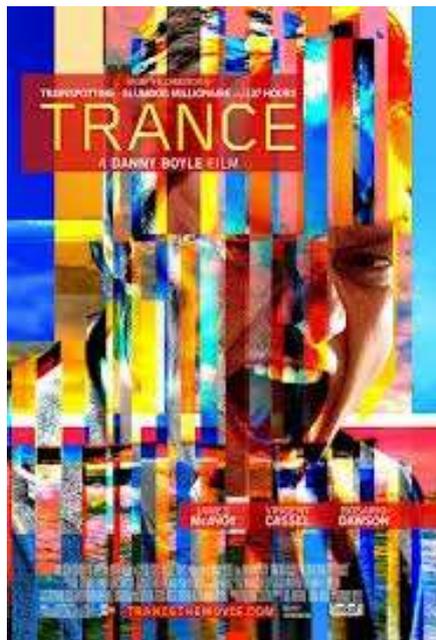
Students were given a presentation about New Zealand's classification system by Kate Ward, our Information and Policy Manager, including an overview of the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993. They learned about the process Classification Officers follow when classifying films, video games, and other publications.

Students were asked to evaluate the film *Trance* using New Zealand's classification criteria.

After watching the film, the students completed a classification form with the help of an advisor and decided on an appropriate classification. Students were then led through a discussion about how they applied the classification criteria to the film, and the reasons behind their individual classification choices. There was also opportunity for students to ask the Chief Censor and other Classification Office staff questions about the New Zealand classification system.

In order to ensure that the Classification Office performs its role effectively, it is important to be aware of the public's views on our decisions, and on the censorship system as a whole. Censor for a Day is not only about teaching young people about the classification system — it's about hearing their views on the role of censorship in our society, especially as it relates to children and young people as they are generally the groups most affected by the decisions we make. As always, the views of participating students were thoughtful, constructive, and sometimes challenging. We are grateful for the chance to hear them.

The Film



Trance is classified R16 with the descriptive note 'violence, offensive language and sex scenes'. The film is a British thriller about an art-heist gone wrong. It is directed by Danny Boyle, and stars James McAvoy as Simon, Rosario Dawson as Dr Elizabeth Lamb and Vincent Cassel as Franck.

Synopsis

Compulsive gambler Simon tries to pay off a debt by acting as inside man for the heist of a Goya painting from the high-end auction house where he works. However, during the robbery he takes the painting himself, leaving master thief Franck with only the frame. Simon escapes from the scene of the crime but is involved in a minor road accident; he loses his memory and is unable to remember where the painting is hidden.

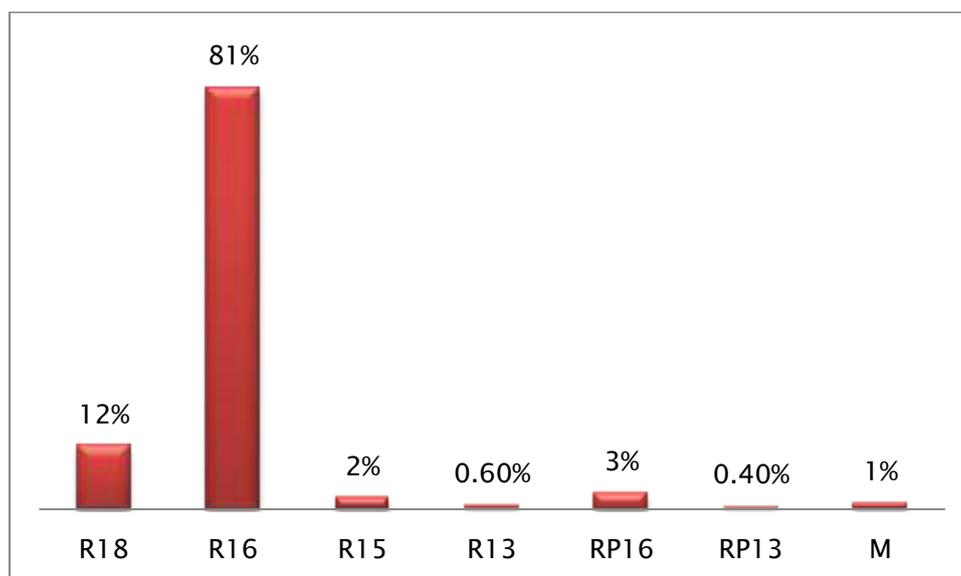
Franck and his minions try to torture Simon for the information but still he can't remember — so he is persuaded to take a course of hypnotherapy with Dr Elizabeth Lamb. He poses as someone who has lost his car keys, but Elizabeth sees through the imposture, discovers what is really going on and seems to cut herself in on the robbery proceeds, while also beginning a relationship with Franck. Under hypnosis, Simon uncovers memories of a woman driving a red car. He tries to stay ahead of the game by plotting to kill the rest of the gang — a fantasy that Elizabeth encourages him to act out. Simon eventually remembers that the painting is in the boot of the red car, which also contains the corpse of the woman (whom he strangled), in an underground car park. Elizabeth reveals that she always knew who Simon was, having once had a relationship with him which she eased from his mind to escape. Elizabeth exploits the situation to best both Simon and Franck. (Synopsis from *Sight&Sound* magazine, April 2013, p.107)



Dunedin students at Censor for a Day

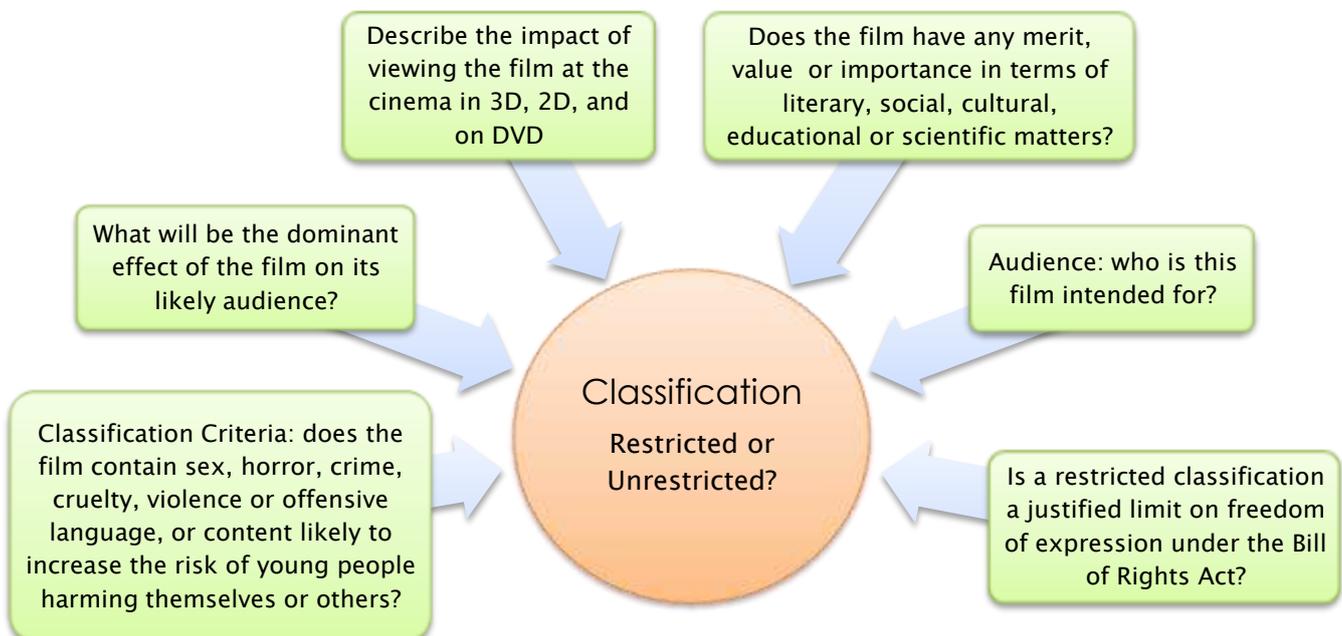
Evaluation Results: The Classification

A clear majority of students (99%) thought that the film should have an age restriction assigned — these ranged from RP13 (restricted to people 13 years and over unless accompanied by a parent or guardian) to R18 (restricted to people 18 years and over). Most students (81%) decided the film should be classified R16.



The Classification Exercise

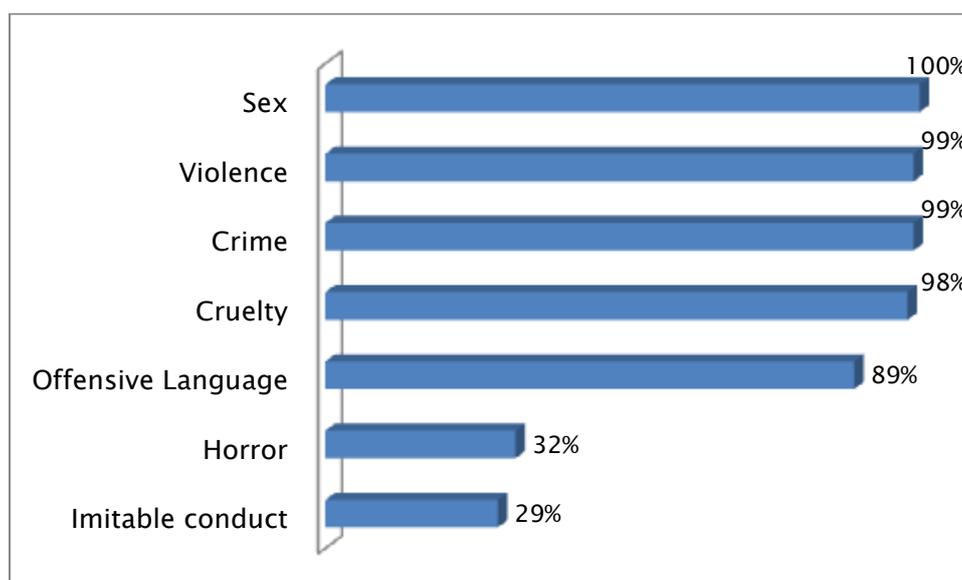
After viewing the film, students applied the classification criteria which had been explained to them and filled out a classification form — a pared down version of the 21-page consideration sheet Classification Officers use when classifying a film. The exercise involved students answering the following questions which relate to specific sections in the Classification Act. The students were asked to use their answers to these questions to decide on a suitable classification and descriptive note.



Evaluation Results: Content for Classification

Students were asked to consider whether the film contained matters such as sex, horror, crime, cruelty, violence, highly offensive language, or content likely to increase the risk of young people harming themselves or others. The students were also asked to describe how this material was depicted or otherwise dealt with in the film.

Almost all students agreed that *Trance* contained elements of sex, violence, crime and cruelty, and most also thought the film contained offensive language.



The Classification Office decision

The Classification Office restricted *Trance* to people 16 years and over due to its treatment of violence, sexual content and offensive language. In the summary of reasons for its classification decision, the Classification Office noted that:



Hypno-therapist Elizabeth works with Simon to find something he has lost

The dominant effect of the publication is of a tense and engaging mystery focusing on an art heist and hypnotherapy. The unrestricted availability of this publication would be injurious to the public good because of the spikes of strong violence and sexual content. Violence and cruelty are likely to greatly shock and disturb children and younger teenagers. The sexual material is likely to adversely affect impressionable children and younger teenagers who are still in

the process of forming sexual attitudes and behaviours. Highly offensive language is likely to cause serious harm to children by inuring them to such language and encouraging them to use it for themselves. The publication is classified as objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 16 years. This is the minimum necessary restriction required to prevent likely injury to the public good.

Content considered by students

Sex

All of the of students included matters of sex as part of their classification decision-making process. Students also noted that the sexual content was part of the story and showed the relationships between the characters.



There is one sex scene between Elizabeth and Franck which is brief but intense and has a focus on their naked bodies. At a later point there is a scene of full frontal nudity where Elizabeth is shown walking towards Simon. Some students said this nudity was a reason for restricting the film, more so than other content such as violence.

Relationships between characters formed a pivotal part of the film's plot

There was some nudity although there were no graphic sexual scenes which would cause offence. Most nudity was there to portray what was happening with the paintings that he [Simon] liked and why he became so obsessed, so the nudity was important for the film's meaning. The sex was not harmful to the public good.

– Student from St Hilda's Collegiate (Dunedin)

Violence and Cruelty



Most students said that the film contained violence (99%) and cruelty (98%). When discussing this content, many of the students noted a scene of physical torture, as well as gun use throughout the film, noting the number of fight sequences and killings.

The gang tortures Simon to help 'prompt' his memory of what happened to the painting

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Students also felt there was psychological cruelty in the film, for example when one of the characters believes, while under hypnosis, that he is trapped in his worst nightmare – being buried alive.

Close up nail shots made me wince. Graphic. Essential to the plot.

– Student from Paraparaumu College (Wellington)

[Cruelty] consistent throughout the movie. Hard to watch at some points, but it was needed for the storyline.

– Student from St Hilda's Collegiate (Dunedin)

Horror

Only 32% of students felt that the film contained horror. Most students who discussed this content as being relevant to *Trance* mentioned a scene where a character seemingly comes back to life after being killed, and a scene of the discovery of a rotting corpse.

Crime

Most (99%) of the students felt that the film depicted matters of crime, pointing out that the film was based around the consequences of a robbery. Students also mentioned assault and murder as matters of crime, but suggested they were not presented in a way that would encourage audiences to copy them.



Franck discovers the stolen painting is missing.

Highly offensive language

Most students (89%) thought that the film contained some offensive language, but described its use as being justifiable in context, making it less offensive.

Language wasn't highly offensive, but it was present quite often. It was used how people use it every day.

– Student from Tawa College (Wellington)

Often just expressive/space fillers, so no directly offensive [language].

– Student from Hutt Valley High School (Wellington)

Used when someone was angry, so not very offensive.

– Student from Hutt Valley High School (Wellington)

Content likely to increase the risk of young people harming themselves or others

Only 29% of students felt that some of the content in *Trance* could have this effect on a young audience. Some felt younger audiences might be desensitised towards violence and be encouraged to imitate the violent crimes presented in the film. Some students discussed the depictions of a relationship involving domestic violence under this criteria.

It is not promoting but [showing] Simon to have beaten the woman, and the woman lets him back in, [which is] not the right thing to do.

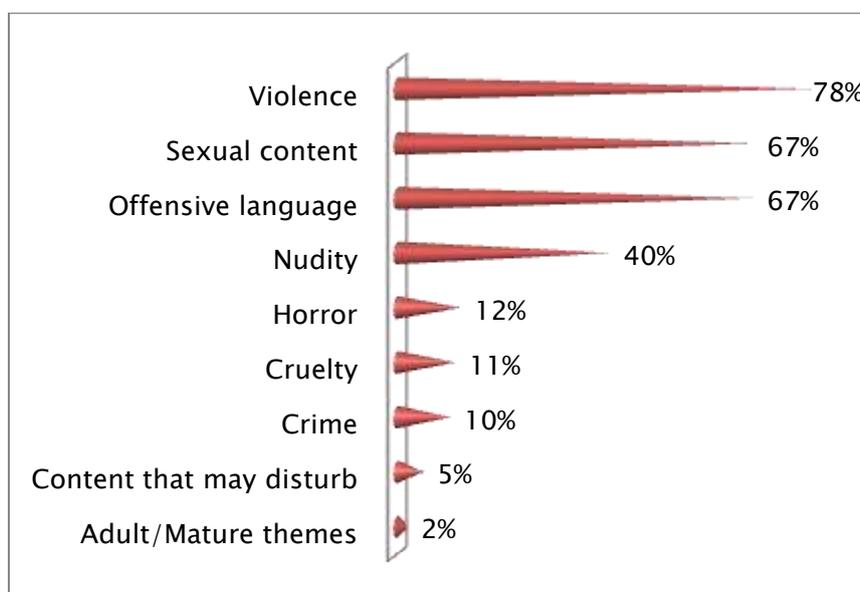
– Student from Tawa College (Wellington)



The issue of domestic violence is raised in the film.

The Descriptive Note

Descriptive notes inform the public about content within a film which may concern them. The descriptive note for *Trance* informs potential audiences that the film contains 'violence, offensive language and sex scenes'. When students were asked what descriptive note they thought the film should have, most noted 'violence' (78%), followed by a warning of 'sex scenes', 'sexual references' or 'sexual content' (67%), and 'offensive language' (67%).



Audience

Students were asked who they thought was the intended or likely audience for the film. The majority of students identified teenagers and young adults as the target audience for *Trance*, with many students adding that they thought the film might appeal more to males.

Dominant Effect

When asked what the dominant effect on the film's likely audience would be, most students thought the film would entertain but maybe confuse people, leaving them thinking about the film afterwards and trying to understand exactly what was real within the world of the film.

Intense and engaging.

– Student from Marian College (Christchurch)

Confusion. Uncomfortable. Intense. Hard to watch.

– Student from St Hilda's Collegiate (Dunedin)

Intense and attention grabbing. Also shocking in some scenes.

– Student from Paraparaumu College (Wellington)

Merit, Value or Importance



Just over half of the students felt that the film had some merit. Of those, 42% thought the film had some social importance, 41% said it has artistic merit, and 11% suggested the film had cultural value. Students discussed the film's depictions of works of art, and also suggested that there was value in people seeing the depiction of a female character escaping a situation of domestic violence. Students also commented on the film's artistic merit in terms of cinematography and direction.

The film's plot revolves around the painting *Witches in the Air* by Goya

The structuring of the narrative is thought-provoking.

– Student from Newlands College (Wellington)

It's a good psychological thriller which allows us to greater understand some mental illnesses or strong obsessions. Overall a well constructed film.

– Student from St Hilda's Collegiate (Dunedin)

It was really different and made you think. It was also really well made, good plot.

– Student from Tawa College (Wellington)

Impact of the Medium

Students were asked to describe the impact of viewing *Trance* in a cinema, and on DVD.

Overall students said that the surround sound, darkness, and large screen of the cinema would increase the intensity of the film compared to watching it on DVD at home. Many also pointed out that there are greater controls around who can see the film at cinema, but less control in that context over how the film itself is viewed (for example, people can't re-watch or skip scenes).

Cinema - horrific. The sound/volume really make a difference in the effect of the film. DVD - less horrific, due to the smaller screen and lower volume.

– Student from Bayfield High School (Dunedin)

Cinema - Only a restricted audience is allowed entry to watch the film. DVD - Younger children are likely to be exposed to the film and its explicit content.

– Student from St Thomas of Canterbury College (Christchurch)

Teacher feedback

Teachers who attended Censor for a Day were encouraged to fill in a feedback form about the event. This feedback helps us ensure that the event is meeting the needs of Media Studies educators and their students.

Of the 12 teachers who filled in the feedback forms, all agreed that:

- The length of the programme was suitable
- The classification form was easy to follow
- The programme provided students with sufficient information
- The programme enhanced students understanding of film censorship
- Their school would wish to attend a similar event again
- The programme as a whole was 'very good' or 'excellent'.

Some teachers suggested some possible improvements to the programme, such as:

- Providing an example of a classification decision/report
- A longer food break to allow students to discuss the film with each other
- More time for discussion
- A classification exercise on a short film would be good as many students are making short films

Some additional comments:

“Students were spoken to at their level and they loved *Trance*. There was so much they could discuss. A fabulous day and well worth going to.”

“The film challenged preconceptions and showed how fine the line can be in censorship ratings.”

“Very good speaker. Issues covered clearly and succinctly.”

“Great choice of film – pleasantly presented in an easy to understand way (workshop)”

“Thank you for putting on a great day.”

“Enjoyable and pertinent to our Media Studies programme.”

“Great format, informative/educational, a great day.”

“Students enjoyed the film, it really got them thinking and was a good level of film.”

“Great to have a chance to ask questions of the Chief Censor.”

“Great film, led to some interesting discussion. A good balance of facts, viewing and thinking.”

Acknowledgements

The Classification Office would like to thank 20th Century Fox Film Distribution. Without distributors’ generosity in lending us a film, Censor for a Day would not be possible.

We would also like to thank the cinema managers, projectionists and caterers at Readings Courtenay, Hoyts the Octagon and Hoyts Riccarton who provided us with excellent service and ensured the events ran smoothly.

Lastly we would like to thank the students and teachers from Wellington, Dunedin and Christchurch who made the event another success and who gave us valuable feedback in the process. We hope to see some of you at a future event!

For information or resources on the classification system, please contact the Classification Office on 0508 CENSOR (0508 236 767) or at information@copyright.govt.nz.



Appendix: Results by student location, gender and ethnicity; and overall reasons for the classification

Reasons for the classification

The reasons students gave in order to justify their choice of a particular classification were relatively consistent across the events.

R18 – restricted to people 18 years and over

Twenty-three students chose the R18 classification. Students who chose this classification did so mainly due to the level of sexual content and violence in the film.

R16 – restricted to people 16 years and over

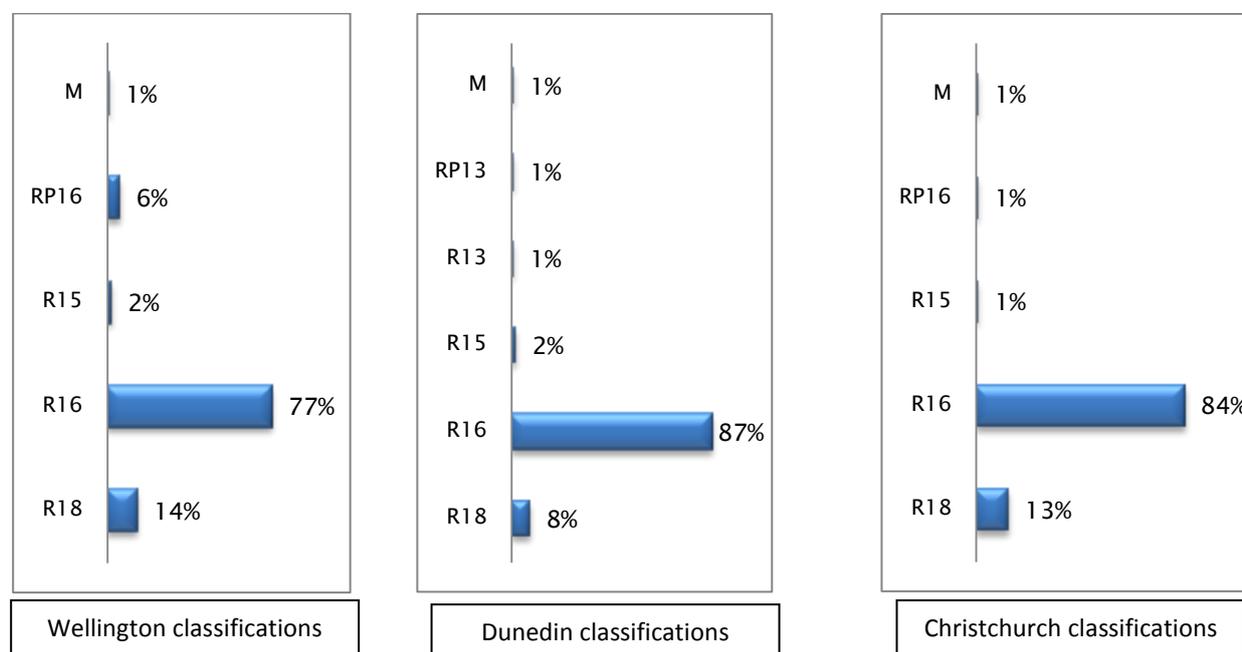
Students who classified the film R16 based their classification choice on the levels of nudity, sexual content, and violence in the film. They suggested that because the legal age of consent for sex in New Zealand is 16, it should follow that depictions of sexual activity and/or nudity should be restricted to people aged 16 and over.

Justifications for an R16 classification in relation to the violence in the film were based around concerns younger audiences would be shocked or traumatised by the depictions.

RP16 and RP13– restricted to people 16/13 and over unless accompanied by a parent or guardian

RP16 was chosen by ten students and RP13 by one student. Similar to the reasoning used by other students who restricted the film, students who assigned the film these classifications felt that the violence and sexual content in the film warranted some sort of restriction on the ability of young people to view the film.

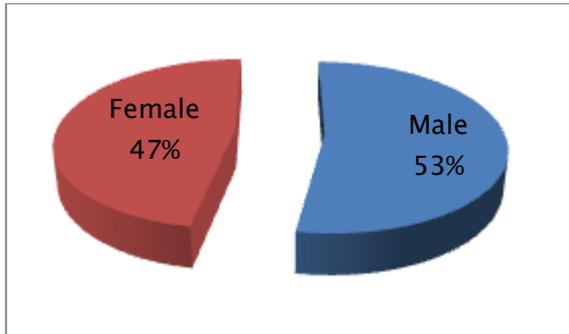
Classifications by location of students



At each event, R16 was the classification chosen by most students. Wellington students were slightly more likely to choose an RP classification allowing parents/guardians to decide whether a younger person could see the film. Dunedin students assigned the lowest proportion of R18 classifications.

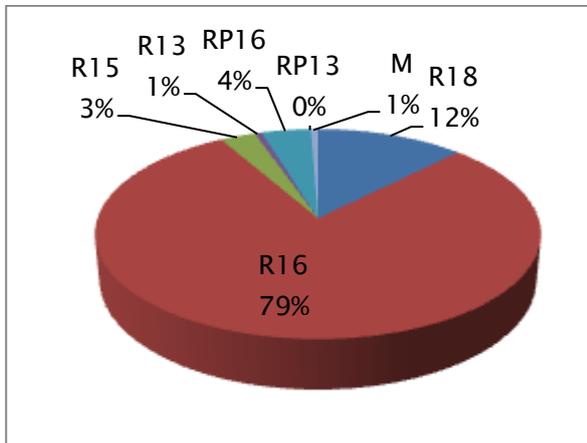
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Classifications by gender of students

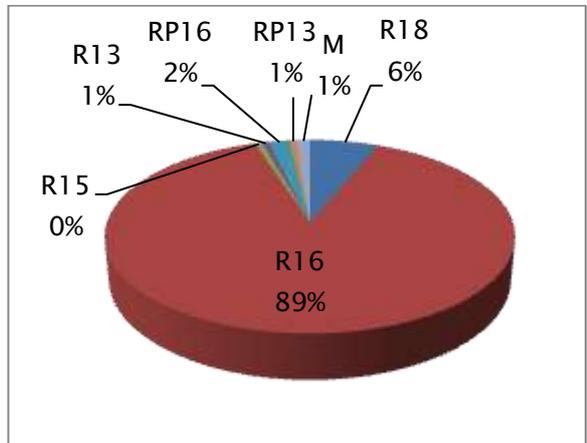


There were slightly more male than female students at the Term 1 Censor for a Day events.

Overall, male and female students' classification decisions were similar, though male students favoured unrestricted classification slightly more.



Classifications assigned by male students



Classifications assigned by female students

Classifications by ethnicity of students

The majority of the students identified as Pakeha/New Zealand European, 15% identified as New Zealand Māori, 5% as non-New Zealand European or as Pacific Islanders, 4% as Other Asian, 3% as Chinese, and 2% as Indian.

