



Close-up

A study of 7–18-year-olds and their lives with films, series, and social media.

Qualitative analysis conducted for the Danish Film Institute
January 2023

Photo by cottonbro studio

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Summary of the main insights

From laughter to reflection

Whereas the youngest participants have a here-and-now perspective shaped by the search for laughs and thoughts about how life is changing, the eldest participants are more focused on big questions, primarily regarding the personal development that takes place from ages 10 and up. Regardless of age, they lead lives that switch from a never-ending search for entertainment to a period of reflection (for the youngest) and concern (for the eldest) in the blink of an eye. This is also reflected in their content preferences.

Reaction seekers in search of sequence

Films, series, and social media content play a significant role in the everyday lives of children, but entertainment still has to fit into the daily routine, so time is key to their understanding and prioritisation of format and platform. Across the group, the children seek reactions and consequences, and series are perceived as the best format. While 7–9-year-olds seek out funny, quick laughs, 10–14-year-olds engage in binge-watching, where series provide entertainment at length with numerous actions. Meanwhile, 15–18-year-olds want to be bombarded with endings, which are best delivered in short formats.

The relationship with film changes with age

Most children associate films with weekends and quality time with family. Furthermore, film appears to be a format with which they create and develop a relationship as they grow older, whereas series are the first moving-image format to which they are introduced.

The big plot takes second place to characters

The 7–18-year-olds watch many films, videos, and series. This age group is generally more interested in characters than in story arcs. Age and appearance are not

deciding factors in character relatability, and the focus is on feelings and reactions. The themes can push the boundaries, even for the youngest children, who are becoming interested in excitement and scary things. The common denominator across the three groups is that all the children seek out limits and new universes in the narratives with which they engage.

From films 'in Danish' to 'distinctly Danish'

For the youngest participants, 'Danish films' primarily means 'films in Danish', but with age, this perception develops into a deeper understanding and recognition of what Danish films do particularly well. When a Danish film is successful, this is often because its humour and exciting characters are distinctly Danish. Across all age groups, Danish films are first and foremost associated with quality time and *hygge*, as Danish films are great for bringing the family together at home.

From screen to identity

Image-borne narratives play a significant role in how 7–18-year-olds experience the world. Much of the input they receive comes from films, series, and videos, and they use these formats to express themselves. Image-borne narratives are used as playful tools that challenge the 7–18-year-olds, position them in the world at large, and allow them to discover their own tastes and identity.

A high degree of involvement is sought out

Games and gaming are on equal footing with films, series, and videos and are a key part of 7–18-year-olds' entertainment vocabulary. What the group has in common is the perception that games create a higher degree of involvement than films. This makes games attractive, as they can feel their attention being directed. Games bring them closer to the content and the story, and they can affect the course of events.



Background

'Close-up' was conducted by the Danish Film Institute to support and strengthen the work with children and adolescents in the film and media industries, at the Danish Film Institute, and amongst practitioners in the fields of cinema culture and film education. The intent was to create deep, new insights into children and adolescents, firstly as the audience of fiction films and series and secondly as users of social media content and games.

The insights can be used for inspiration and a shared knowledge foundation by anyone who works in creative development or communicates content to children and adolescents.

Photo by cottonbro studio

Reading guide

This report is based on a qualitative analysis in which 122 children and adolescents ages 7–18 from all over Denmark shared their thoughts on what content, screens, and media mean to them in their everyday lives. The conversations covered everything from entertainment and education to thoughts on friends, families, the future, and the world. The report contains a qualitative introduction to their daily lives and how this is reflected in their use and perception of five areas of media and content: 1) Film, series, platforms, and social context, 2) Genres, characters, and themes, 3) Danish films, 4) Film as a medium of expression and education, and 5) Games and gaming.

The report is split into subsections of these five key areas, allowing the reader to examine the responses of three age groups: 7–9-year-olds, 10–14-year-olds, and 15–18-year-olds. This allows the report to be used as a reference work, but it can also be read as a cohesive report that gives a comprehensive 2023 insight into children and adolescents' relationships with the film industry.

World and daily life

Meet the 7–18-year-olds

Meet the 7–18-year-olds

Chances are that many parents recognise the feeling that their children go from Year 1 to having the right to vote in the blink of an eye, despite 7-year-olds and 18-year-olds being worlds apart. Still, when reading this report that looks at differences and similarities in how 7–18-year-olds live their lives and cater to their interests, one sees things from the parent's point of view. Across the board, shared characteristics define how children in each group approach their lives and day-to-day. Concerns and big thoughts about life are all part of their lives, and children from 7–18 all spend lots of time reflecting on big and small things alike. No matter their age, the perception of others is essential, both in terms of important and trivial matters. There are day-to-day pressures whether the child is 7 or 18 years old, and while spare time is limited, entertainment is seen as the default in life.

The following report introduces a range of key characteristics of children and adolescents divided into three age groups: 7–9, 10–14, and 15–18, where differences and nuances are highlighted.

MEET THE 7- 9-YEAR- OLDS

Laughter is key, but growing awareness gives rise to new reflections.

Spontaneity rules the lives of 7–9-year-olds, and the group is always on the lookout for laughter, fun, and inspiration. The day-to-day shaped by rituals and habits gives rise to increasing awareness of changes, which quickly turns into worries that hover and are shared. Meanwhile, there is a keen awareness of the need to position oneself as 'old'.

'I think about war ... and Roblox'

Leo, 9

Spontaneity rules, but worries creep in and are shared

The 7-9-year-olds are rooted in the present and less oriented towards the future than older age groups. Often, the future refers to the next few days, and the more distant future is tied to big personal experiences like an upcoming holiday or the arrival of a puppy.

As a result of this anchoring in the present, many of the 7-9-year-olds interviewed for this survey appear spontaneous, happy, curious, and playful. But the meetings with the children also show that at 7-9, they have already experienced significant degrees of concern. The study shows that most children in this age group are conscious of the world around them, and they openly share their concerns, which often relate to questions about life and (in particular) death. This is reflected in the children's focus on the well-being of their grandparents and pets, not to mention war and conflict around the world. The big concerns and small day-to-day worries tend to blend together, and young children often struggle to prioritise their concerns, whether big or small, as indicated by the quote to the left.

Compared to the other age groups, the youngest children's concerns extend to their surroundings to a greater degree. Older groups are more occupied with their personal and internal worries.

MEET THE 7-9-YEAR-OLDS

'I'm thinking about something called an advancement trip because I'm a scout, and I'm moving up a rank.'

Laura, 8

Habit-driven with focus on small day-to-day changes

In qualitative interviews about their weekly routines, 7-9-year-olds often talk about schedules, rituals, hobbies, and planning. Of course, they have to keep up with school, but the same is true for their various hobbies. 2021 statistics from Mandag Morgen and the LEGO Foundation show that 78.5% of students in Years 1-4 partake in organised activities after school with regular weekend activities*, and this trend is supported by the qualitative interviews carried out for this study.

The 7-9-year-olds often have much on their plate, and their day-to-day lives and weekends are planned around set plans, screen time limited by their parents, playdates, and family time. The 7-9-year-olds are creatures of habit who know their schedule and activities, which explains why small changes to their day-to-day lives take up so much space in their minds. All changes are noticed and highlighted when the 7-9-year-olds talk about what is on their minds, whether it is a new English teacher or moving up a rank as a scout.

*'Det gode børneliv - ifølge børnene', Mandag Morgen & the LEGO Foundation 2021

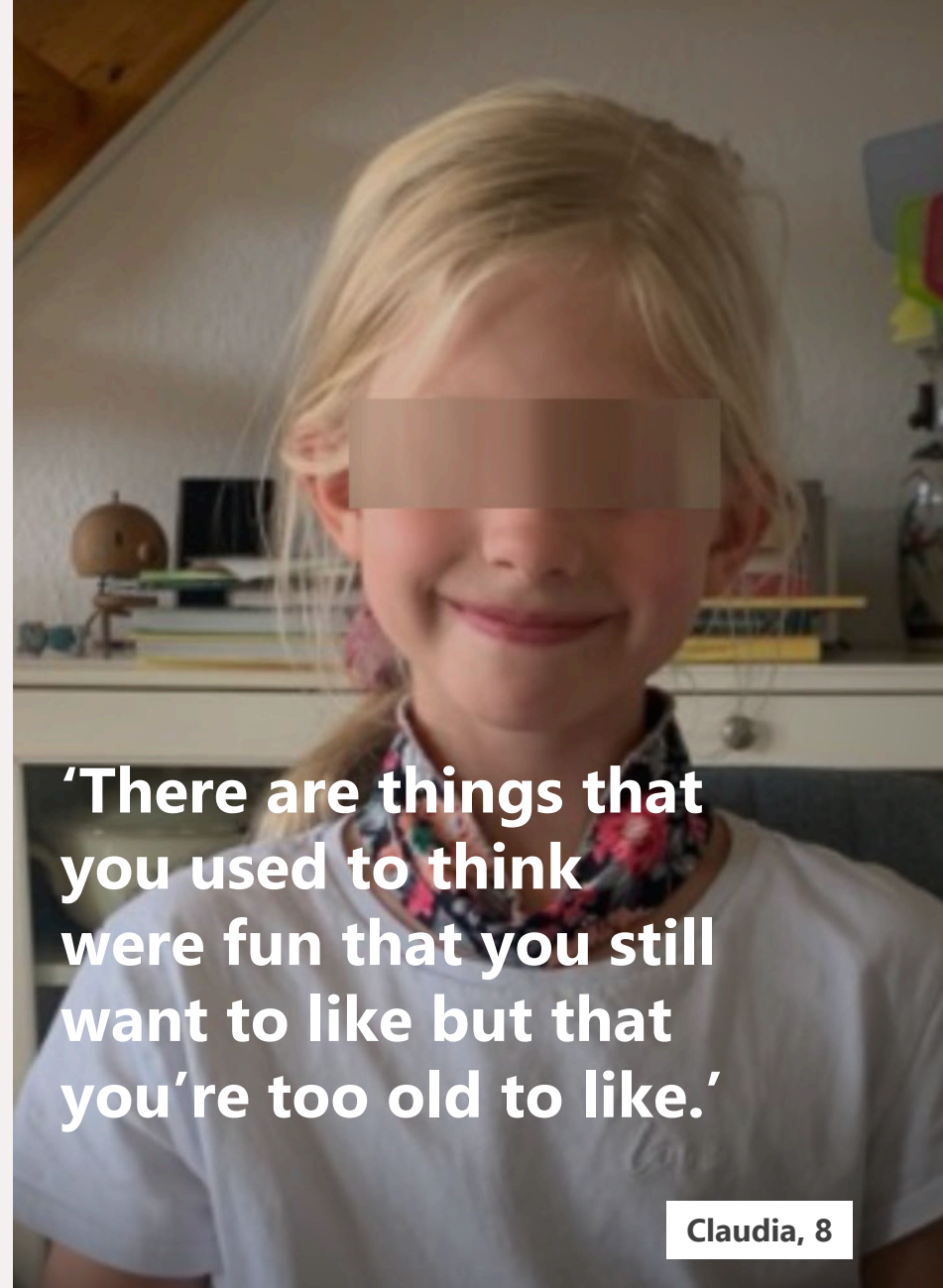
A growing awareness of age and desire for independence

The brains of 7-9-year-olds are developing. Brain research shows that children's brains are developing empathy, restraint, abstract thinking, focus, and the ability to see themselves from the outside* at this age. As children start school and gain experience with their home lives and increased freedom from the constant supervision of adults, many of them feel that they are growing up and gaining experience as students. Life at school develops their independence and participation, and studies from 2021 show that 46% of children in Years 1-4 would like to have more of a say at home**. This indicates rising faith in one's ability to make decisions, which is supported by this qualitative survey.

The 7-9-year-olds who took part in this survey were focused on the experience of getting 'old', a combination of internal and external factors. The presence and actions of younger siblings can accelerate this experience, which is reflected in various things, including hobbies, toys, and screen content, as children feel the need to position themselves as the oldest. *'I'm not watching that, it's Jacob!!!'*, an 8-year-old girl establishes when she opens the Netflix app and it suggests continuing to watch a cartoon that her brother is watching. Meanwhile, 7-9-year-olds increasingly want to set boundaries and control their own screens and time. Amongst other things, they say that they appreciate being able to close the door to their room, so they can have some alone time and a space where they are in charge.

*Hallo, er der hul igennem? Dit barns hjerne fra 0 - 18 år', Ann Elisabeth Knudsen & Karin Svennevig Hylding, 2011

**'Det gode børneliv - ifølge børnene', Mandag Morgen & The LEGO Foundation 2021



'There are things that you used to think were fun that you still want to like but that you're too old to like.'

Claudia, 8

“Laughter Seekers” on an eternal quest for fun and inspiration

When the 7-9-year-olds are asked to say what is on their minds, most of them write down things they find fun, especially fun activities with friends and family and things they find entertaining. For the 7-9-year-olds, entertainment means having fun, and they are always on the lookout for their next big laugh. Statistics from the LEGO Foundation* show that 84% of children in Years 1-4 feel that doing something fun after school is the most important thing. The qualitative survey shows that this search for fun things is reflected in physical spare time and digital screen time. It needs to feel like a game.

The Film Institute’s 2022 statistics* also show that 62% of children in this age range choose films that look like they will make them laugh. This trend also comes through in the qualitative interviews, where the 7-9-year-olds say that they seek out reactions, funny faces, and big laughs above all else when they are on their devices.

The survey shows that children, independent of gender, often use screen content to find inspiration for their physical and digital lives. The children highlight YouTube, which is seen as a kind of bank that is always open, where they can find good ideas for everything from arts-and-crafts project to tips for ‘Minecraft’, ‘Roblox’, or skateboarding. Aside from ‘fun’, ‘inspiration’ is also a keyword for the 7-9-year-olds, as they often seek ‘inspiration’ for having ‘fun’.

‘It has to be something that makes you laugh at least 3 times.’

- Martin, 8, on what it takes for him to choose a film.

*‘Det gode børneliv – ifølge børnene’, Mandag Morgen & the LEGO Foundation 2021

**‘Vidste du – om de 7-14 årige’, the Danish Film Institute, 2022

MEET THE 10- 14-YEAR- OLDS

**With newfound freedom
and an explosion of options
comes many questions**

The development of an independent identity is a seismic shift in the daily lives of 10–14-year-olds as the first awareness of self-realisation seeps in. With the increased freedom of the tween and teen years, where new personalities are tested in search of relationships and affirmation, the idea of 'performance' becomes prominent.



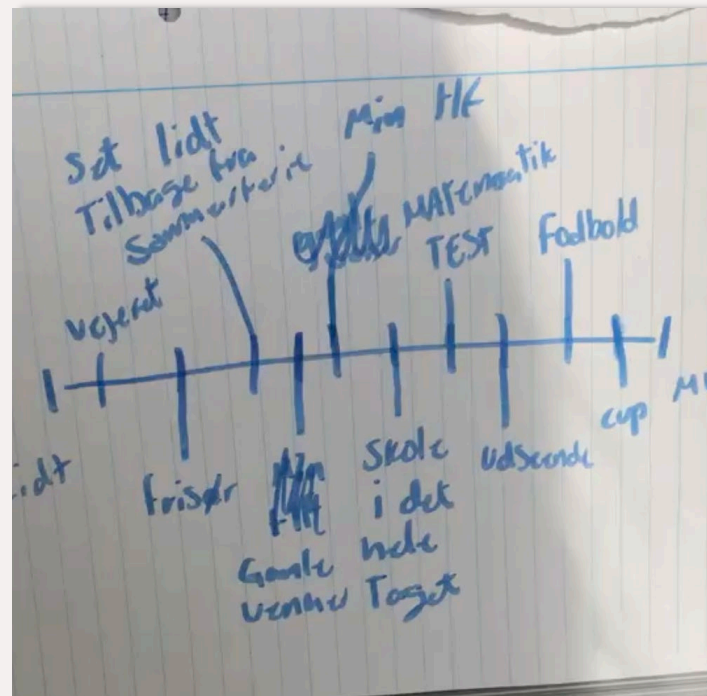
'The best thing about being 13? You're finally allowed on social media without getting banned'.

Nanna 13

The development of independent identity is a seismic shift

For many individuals in this age group, these years feel like a violent transition as the changes in their lives present new opportunities and anxiety-inducing changes that differ from what they have been used to. There are many new beginnings and constellations, which can feel seismic as the children are looking for stability while trying to find themselves and their place in the world. When the 10–14-year-olds are asked to say what is on their minds, they mention everything from the latest must-have haircut and upcoming maths tests to the cute scout leaving soon.

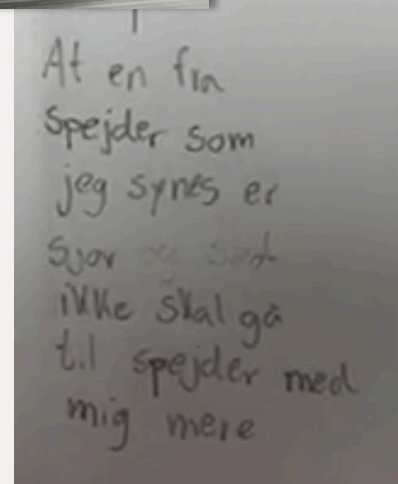
Various structural shifts characterise these years. Many children start and stop organised activities in their spare time. After-school care becomes after-school clubs, and most children are allowed to walk home alone after school. Their bodies change, they fall in love, and their hearts break for the first time. The 10–14-year-olds also experience more freedom in their day-to-day lives, but with this freedom comes a feeling of increased responsibility at school, with the survey showing that children in this age range are already preoccupied with homework and feel the pressure to perform.



Excerpts from the 10–14-year-olds' phone diaries.

Above: preoccupation with school, sports, appearances, and friends.

On the right: thoughts about the funny and cute scout who's quitting soon.



‘I think about being online a lot, if your friends are online, I think to myself, oh no, what if I’m missing out on something’.

Silja, 12

The awareness of self-realisation seeps in

As a result of the newfound independence that arises from 10–14, the participants in the survey appear conscious of life having much to offer, both in terms of opportunities and goals. The thought of self-realisation seeps in as the feeling of endless options contributes to a constant deliberation on how to best use time.

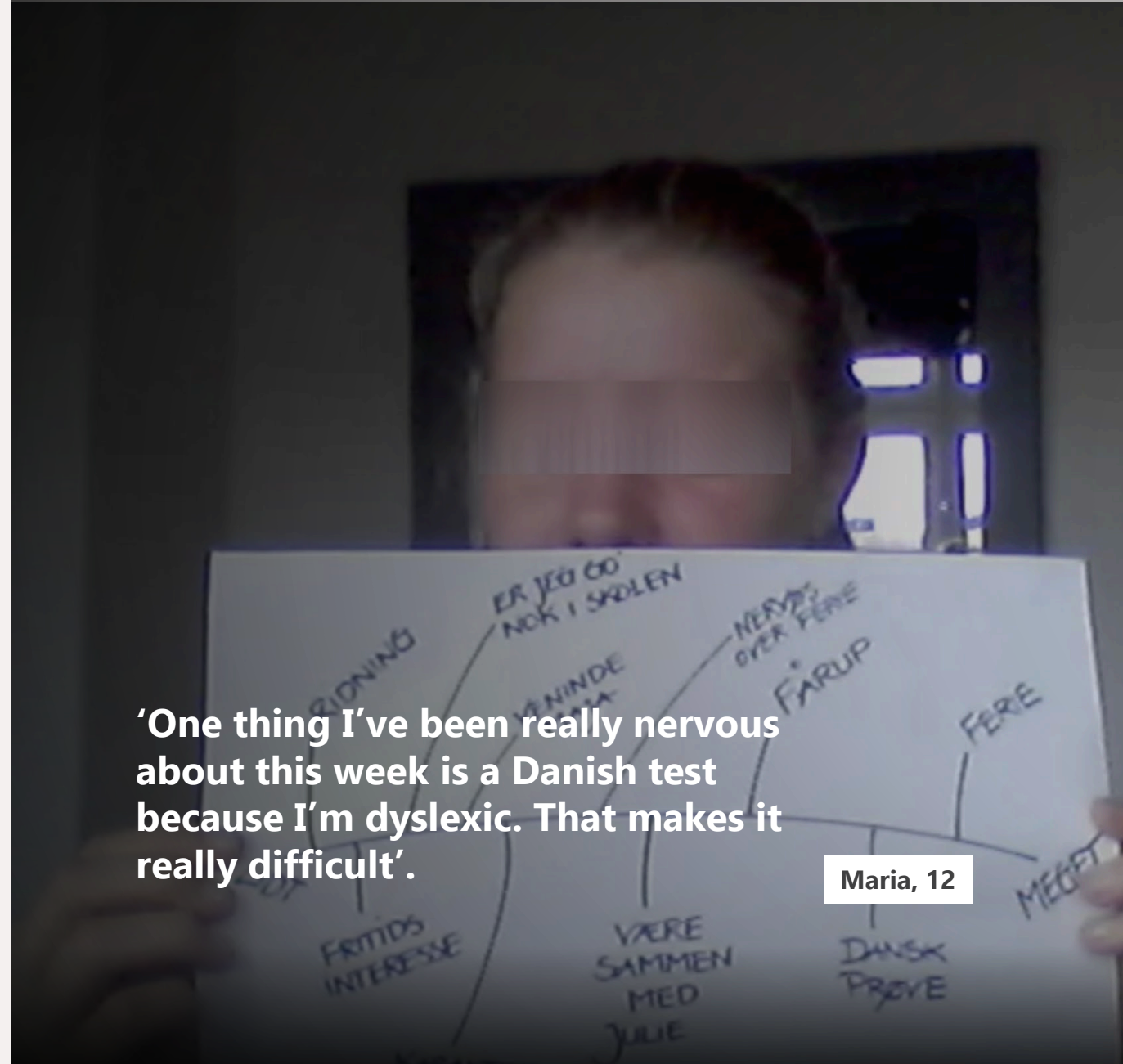
Birthdays, school and sports events, hobbies, homework, friends, and family factor into constant deliberation of what the 10–14-year-olds want and what they need to/should do. The many options are associated with great excitement but can also become a burden, and unlike the 7–9-year-olds, multiple respondents in the 10–14 age group describe sharing responsibility with regard to their schedules and planning. Some point out that the many choices—and things they do not choose—create a day-to-day life where they start to experience FOMO.

The initial awareness of self-realisation is also stimulated by the proliferation of smartphones and social media amongst 10–14-year-olds, which leads to more screen time and the ability to participate on new platforms, such as Snapchat. New norms have arisen regarding how one is and should be accessible to one’s social circle, and not being online leads to missing out on the digital community, which the children describe as difficult to handle. Research indicates a connection between stress and social media, as the people most likely to use social media regularly experience FOMO to the greatest extent.

Increased freedom makes 'performance' a new keyword

Whereas fun and laughter characterise the lives and day-to-day of the younger participants, this age group is perhaps better characterised by the high expectations they have of themselves due to gaining freedom and responsibility. The 10–14-year-olds are dutiful and want to deliver and live up to their own and other people's expectations. There is a perception that this freedom brings with it more adult expectations, and children in this age group spend a lot of energy decoding the new social rules for what they can, should, and need to do.

Participants in this age group reflect on their role and effort at school, after-school activities, and other performance-focused contexts. They also express being focused on wanting to perform well within these contexts. As a result, school is primarily viewed as an obligation—something they have to do and want to do well, rather than a place where they have fun and see their friends, as was the case for many of the 7–9-year-olds.



'One thing I've been really nervous about this week is a Danish test because I'm dyslexic. That makes it really difficult'.

Maria, 12

New personalities are explored in search of relationships and affirmation

The gaze of their surroundings is important to 10–14-year-olds, so they spend a lot of energy worrying about their looks, image, and confidence. Children in this age group frequently think about their role in the world and social contexts, and they wonder which new roles they can take on—particularly in their close relationships.

Self-consciousness and experimenting with personalities and ways to express oneself is common in this age group, where children have a constant inner dialogue around the questions, 'Who am I, and how do I want others to see me?' There are big thoughts in play, and identity is the central theme.

As a result of the host of options and new challenges, not to mention the changes to the world around them and the significant developments in their inner world, this age group actively seeks out affirmation for their many choices from their surroundings and on social media.

Excerpts from the 10–14-year-olds' phone diaries.

MEET THE 10-14-YEAR-OLDS

'I think about my style, my personality. I mean, I'm trying to figure out who I am as a person'.

Stine, 12

MEET THE 15- 18-YEAR- OLDS

An expanding world and screen time compete for attention

15–18-year-olds are conscious that they are in a transition period where their societal concerns meet personal considerations. Busy day-to-day lives make it difficult to relax, and films and content must be experienced as easily digestible for adolescents to make time for it. They consume a great deal of media during their busy lives, but the short format is a better fit for modern time pressures, and the excitement of adolescents can be difficult to measure because entertainment is the default setting.

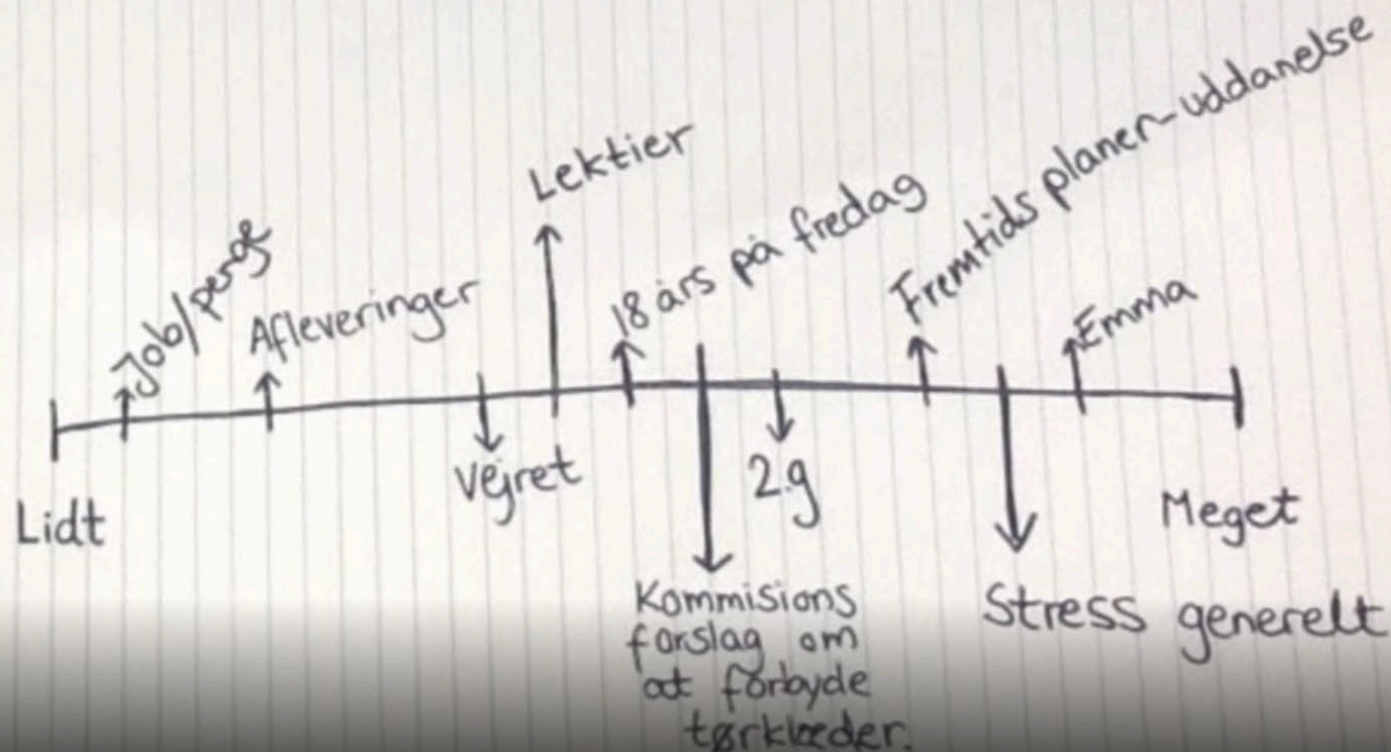
MEET THE 15-18-YEAR-OLDS

Societal concerns meet personal considerations

Interests, societal and global concerns, and everyday worries blend together for the 15-18-year-old. The survey shows that people in this age range are starting to form opinions on broader social issues and perspectives, which start to take up mental space. This is a stage of their self-development, where positioning and taking a stand in terms of values and views help create an identity.

Young adults in this age group need to be able to zoom in on themselves and zoom out to see the big picture, but in their busy day-to-day lives, they do not have time to do both to the same extent. Personal micro worries are given more attention than societal macro concerns.

In a 17-year-old girl's diary, the government's proposal to ban headscarves at school is listed along with concerns like planning an outfit for an 18th birthday, homework, and thoughts about the future.



‘There’s just so much to think about at the moment’

Lily, 16

Keen awareness that this is a transition period

The 15–18-year-olds who did not use the expression ‘at the moment’ in this survey were few and far between. Whereas the youngest group lived completely in the present and the 10–14-year-olds felt like they were in a new era (that might last forever), the 15–18-year-olds are conscious that they are in a transition period characterised by change.

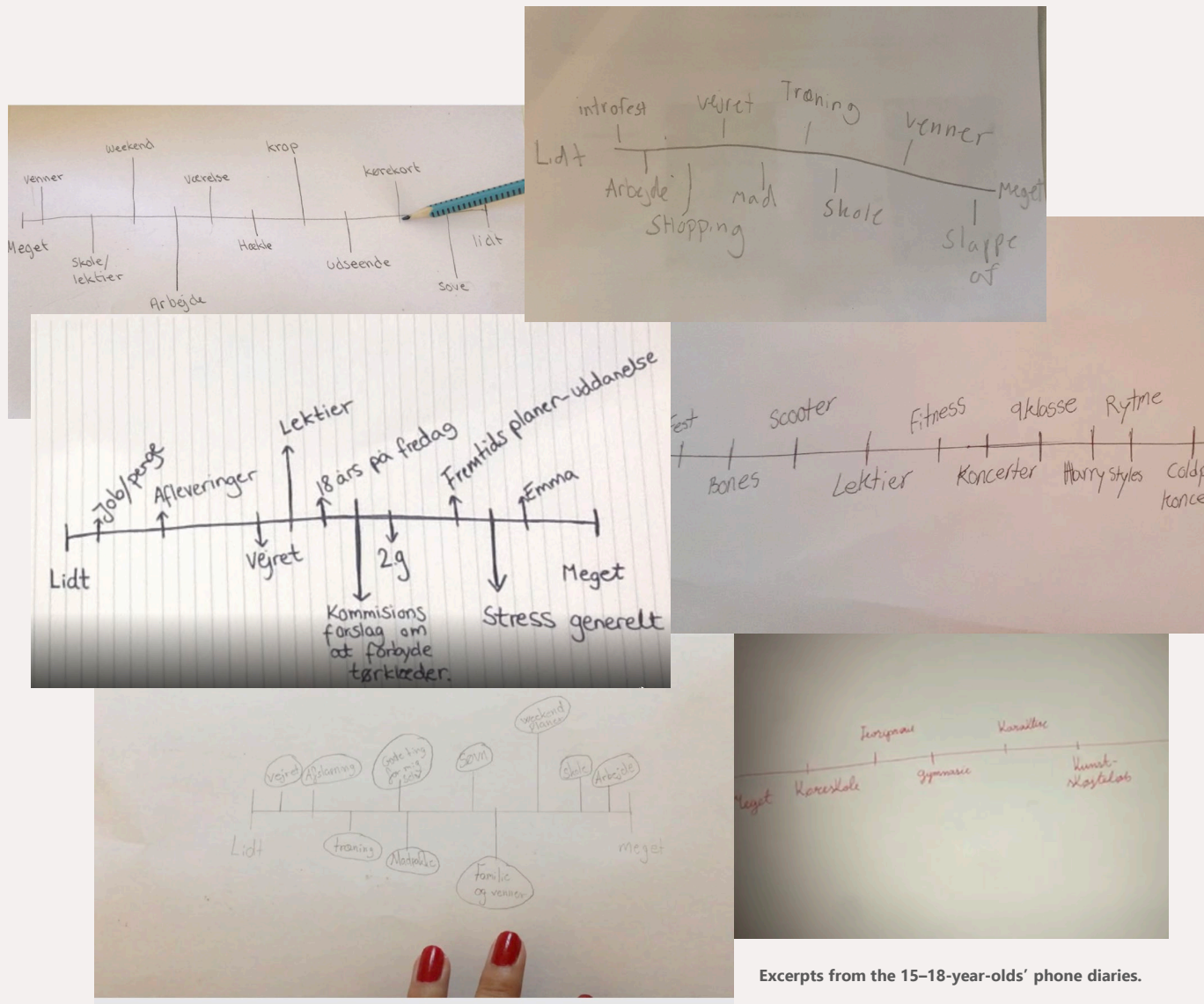
They know they are facing many changes that will not last forever but that they have to endure nonetheless. Many of the adolescents interviewed have a clear idea of where they want to be in 10 years—often much clearer than the idea of where they want to be in their early adulthood in 4–5 years. This is a time of transition and reflection, and everyone knows that this period is full of work—academically, physically, cognitively, and emotionally.

School/education is in focus, but the 15–18-year-olds also point out other things taking up mental space, such as how to approach their sport, getting their driving licence, going to work, and worrying about the state of the world.

Films and content are barely associated with main life tasks

As part of the qualitative survey, the adolescents were asked to write down what had been on their minds over the past week. Interestingly, only a small number of them mentioned entertainment of any kind. Nobody said films or other image-borne content had been on their mind. Their idea of entertainment was activities they created themselves, such as parties, friends, and sport. No participant mentioned anything screen-based.

Young adults are focused on main life tasks, and image-borne entertainment has to fit into their schedule because it is not the priority. This does not mean that entertainment does not play an important role. Instead, it is seen as a welcome break or a way to unwind between work and social events, which feature regularly in their schedules.



Excerpts from the 15-18-year-olds' phone diaries.

‘I need to remember to do things that make me happy’.

‘You have to remember to find time to relax’.

‘I’m not good at prioritising relaxation’.

Busy lives make relaxation and self-pampering demanding tasks

Mixed in with all the things this age group feels they have to find time for and live up to, there is an expectation that they take care of themselves. Young people associate this with finding the time to unwind and be themselves, which paradoxically is perceived as *another* task in their busy everyday lives. Many of the 15–18-year-olds interviewed say that they often forget to relax, and whereas people in older age groups often find films a good way to unwind and relax, this is not necessarily the case for this age group.

The 15–18-year-old participants indicate that a film is not necessarily relaxing. Part of the explanation is the length of a film—90 minutes is a long time, and 120 minutes is a *really* long time. Time is valuable in the lives of adolescents. They need to find time in their busy schedules, and as a result, they need to accept that they can only do one thing for so long. A lot of things happen in an hour and a half, especially on their phones. In other words, they potentially miss out on a lot when they relax, and that in itself is stressful.

Are adolescents' appetite for content overestimated?

The lives of 15–18-year-olds are already full of physically and mentally demanding events and tasks, both chosen and imposed. The last thing they need is more things to fit in, so 'sleep' often figures on the list of the most important things on an adolescent's mind during the week. Sleep is a bedtime they need to respect, an important factor in getting through the week, and something they look forward to after a long day at school.

This was especially pronounced during our visit to Viborg Gymnasium, where second-year students participated in the survey. At the start of the day, the class was focused and serious, but by the time the last two classes rolled around, there were energy drinks, sweets, and snacks on all the tables as the students' battle against their low energy levels reached its climax.

It is hard to imagine that these students go home and engage with content that asks questions and aims to challenge them—the 15–18-year-olds mention that Danish-language films are seen as something on which they are expected to reflect. Films and content must be delivered in a less time-demanding and more exciting way for people in this age group even to consider engaging.

'I've written "sleep" because that's something I really look forward to at the end of the school day'.

Malene, 18

Media consumption is still significant, but short formats fit time pressures better

The 15–18-year-olds might feel that they are in a life stage where they are swamped and barely have energy for big projects—such as watching a film—but that does not mean that they do not find the time to be entertained. Sometimes they even spend a lot of time being entertained, but time flies because the entertainment is made up of an endless stream of smaller parts as it feels more manageable to engage with shorter formats. Platforms like TikTok play a huge role, as the platform's short format seems appealing and easily digestible to adolescents. However, the study shows that TikTok often ends up stealing time because the time adolescents spend on the platform collectively is much longer than the time they would have spent sitting down to watch a film.

'Then you look at the time and think, "Fuuuck, it's 2:30", and you know you'll be knackered at school tomorrow. Sometimes you kind of hate TikTok'.

Jacob, 17

Content is often described as simply 'fine'

The 15-18-year-olds have access to—and are exposed to—billions of hours of content. Whether broad or niche, they are guaranteed to be able to upgrade their entertainment in the form of more content. Broad, niche, new, old. All of it is accessible. The number of subcommunities has exploded, and a young person simply cannot run out of content. They never need to settle for something that does not give them the desired input. This might be why 15-18-year-olds rarely feel blown away by a film or other types of content.

'Entertainment' seems to create a more restrained level of excitement in adolescents than in older generations, who still consider entertainment something that happens once one has finished something that felt more like a duty. Adolescents, on the other hand, expect everything to be entertaining—even gymnasium education. As a result, they often describe content as simply 'fine', even if they have spent a lot of time on it and genuinely like it.

'It's incredible how often you hear that things are just 'fine'. Even things where they've had a genuine experience. It's as if the content gives them more restrained experiences than the ones we had in my generation' (40s)

- Gymnasium teacher

Up close with the 7–18-year-olds

Summary: From having fun to unwinding

Across the age range interviewed, there is a love of light and playful entertainment, but with age, the purpose shifts from enjoyment to relaxation. Whereas the 7–9-year-olds appear to be on an eternal quest for laughs, fun, and inspiration, the 10–14-year-olds are looking for stories that invite them into other universes where interesting questions are asked. For the 15–18-year-olds, entertainment is more about unwinding in their everyday lives, where short and light formats are seen as all they have time for in this life stage characterised by a lack of time—but the overall screentime spent on short formats, paradoxically, exceeds the length of a film.

The 7–9-year-olds are driven by a here-and-now feeling in their daily lives characterised by spontaneity. Overall, there is innocent excitement, but worries about changes to the day-to-day take up mental space and are shared with others. There is an awareness of the need to position oneself as 'old' and distance oneself from things deemed 'childish', although the content they seek should include laughter, fun, and inspiration for play.

The 10–14-year-olds are in a state characterised by changes, and the status quo is up for discussion. The initial awareness of self-realisation settles in and is expressed through inner and outer identity, focus on performance, and FOMO. The many opportunities in life are nice and create space to try on new personalities, but they also lead to seismic shifts as bodies, thoughts, and friends change.

The 15–18-year-olds are in a life stage dominated by serious tasks, thoughts about the future, and general awareness of change. They look at and worry about society, but personal concerns and challenges often take priority. Short formats fit best into a day-to-day life where time pressures and lack of relaxation lead to a search for easy ways to unwind, but in the end, they take up lots of time.

Films, series, platforms, and social context

The 7–18-year-olds spend a lot of time looking at their screens. This section maps out how 7–18-year-olds explore and reflect on the use of content and formats in different social contexts.

AGES

7-9:

The choice of content is strongly influenced by time, family, and potential reactions

'A film is something you watch on a computer or a tablet or a TV. And it's funny. That's all I know'.

Olivia, 8

The 7–9-year-olds choose platform over content

The 7–9-year-olds have grown up with a wealth of content platforms they learnt to navigate early on. They are frequent screen users within the set framework and rules for screen time in the home, and they navigate the platforms and channels to which they have access with ease. That being said, the 7–9-year-olds cannot differentiate between platforms, content, and formats. Instead, they categorise almost everything that happens on the screen as entertainment. For this age group, it is clear that function is more important than the content itself.

This is particularly evident in interviews and home visits, where many 7–9-year-olds struggle to define the difference between different elements of entertainment available for consumption. ‘Films’, for example, are *something* you watch on a screen or, as an 8-year-old put it, ‘Like a long video that the adults watch’, and Netflix is used to describe any content watched on the screen—even content accessed through Disney+ or DRTV. YouTube seems to be the only platform that stands out, which might be explained by the fact that, in many homes, YouTube is a source of disagreement between children and parents.

‘I just go on Netflix, and then it’s always in the menu’.

Anton, 8

Content is measured in the length of a series - films are often divided into sections

The consumer behaviour of this age group is tied to time, and the units of time set aside and allowed are often measured in episodes rather than films.

Children in this age group see films as long stories that last between one and two hours, which is a long time. Outraged, some of the children surveyed highlighted that they know about films that last three (!) hours. During the interviews, children and their gatekeeper adults expressed that films, in many ways, require too much in their day-to-day lives. This view is reflected in the behaviour of children in this age group with regard to films, as many of them say that they rarely watch and associate films with their daily lives and that they often break them into smaller chunks. In comparison, the series format fits seamlessly into everyday life. Most 7-9-year-olds watch episodic content, primarily on their own or with siblings. One pro of the serial format is that tension builds and extends over a longer period of time.

'A film is a kind of thing ... like a series. It's just longer. It's kind of like watching many episodes in a row'.



Oscar, 7



Mille, 8

Dad: 'You watched something together last time Adrian was here, didn't you?'
Oscar: 'Oh, yeah, "Big Hero Six", but we didn't watch the whole thing'.
Dad: 'You didn't finish it?'
Oscar: 'No. Because apparently, playdates are really short'.

Family improves the film experience, but mainly on the weekends

When 7-9-year-olds watch films, it is usually a community-oriented experience. They watch films during the weekends, and more than anything, films are associated with family time.

This becomes clear as the focal point is not the film itself but rather the act of being together, lying on the sofa with a duvet and sweets and surrounded by family. It is safe and cosy, but the 7-9-year-olds indicate that part of the entertainment value comes from seeing other people's reactions. For a 7-9-year-old, watching Mum or Dad laugh can give as much as watching the film, so the family gives the content an appreciated boost.

Many 7-9-year-olds also express nostalgia when talking about the feelings, memories, and circumstances they associate with a particular film—more so than the film itself. As a result, 7-9-year-olds usually prefer to start watching a film when they know they have time for each other, and the word 'Friday' comes up a lot when the 7-9-year-olds talk about the film format. As films are associated with cosy family time, many feel that they do not fit into their day-to-day lives. At least, not the way they prefer to watch films.

'Then we put a mattress in front of the TV, and it's all cosy with duvets, snacks, and Friday sweets'.

- Lærke, 9

'We watch films on Fridays. With sweets. In the living room'.

- Maya, 8

'I prefer watching films with my family on Fridays after dinner'.

- Oliver, 7

Faces and reactions are more important than big stories

The 7-9-year-olds are big consumers of videos. The video format is seen as short, and neither language nor plot plays a significant role. The youngest participants are not preoccupied with overarching plots and story arcs but rather with faces and reactions. A picture is worth a thousand words, and the same goes for the youngest participants' relationship with short videos: They are all about funny faces and quick reactions, which are consumed in short formats to entertain or inspire the children to do their own activities on or off the screen.

The background is a typical example. It shows a Russian boy, who Alma does not understand, but the reactions in his short videos are so good (read: funny) that he is one of her favourite YouTubers.


'I don't understand anything, but I still watch it'.

Alma, 8

For better or for worse, cinema is about more than the film

For the youngest participants, the cinema is a lovely experience that stands out from daily routines. The sensory and atmospheric experience is emphasised because going to the cinema is the full package. The good seats, loud volume, big screen, popcorn, soft drinks, and sweets make more of an impression on 7-9-year-olds than the film itself. In other words, the physical setting creates a holistic experience reflected back onto the perception of the film. The cinema is also a good fit for the curiosity in this age range, as the selection of films, discussions in class, or trailers in, e.g., Roblox, creates a sense of newsworthiness and inspires children to go to the cinema.

But to the 7-9-year-olds, there is also a downside to the physical setting of the cinema in terms of the imposed limitations. At home, one can adjust the sound, which some may perceive as loud in the cinema, go to the toilet, and pause the film. As films are so closely associated with cosy family time, the experience of watching a film at home can be just as good as going to the cinema if the cinematic experience is replaced by quality time spent with the people the children love.



‘The cinema is always a little cosier, but at home, you can lie down on the sofa, grab two soft drinks, and pause the film’.

Dagmar, 8

AGES

10-14:

**Attention is fleeting,
and social context is
more important than
the content**

'The difference between a video and a film... Films are about something. Videos are about something too, but it's like you're not there, and you're looking at everything from above. With a video, it's almost like you're a part of it somehow'.

Ellie, 12

Films are impersonal, while videos foster relationships and a feeling of involvement

More children in the 10–14 age range highlight YouTube and TikTok videos as their favourite content. They point out that they feel closer to the content in videos because they can comment on or like the video and feel involved. There is a strong feeling of participation when it comes to videos compared to the experience of watching films and series.

Many children express that they feel like they have a distant co-creator role—or that their direct interactions with the content at least impact the content that different YouTubers and other influencers create in the future.

**‘My ears are
on the film,
my eyes are
on the
phone’.**

Samira, 9

Social media debut makes attention more fleeting

The 10–14-year-olds have more freedom when it comes to screen time, and there is less parental control compared to the 7–9-year-olds. This is the age range in which many children get their own profiles on various social media and start participating in digital social contexts.

Many of the 10–14-year-olds interviewed are active users and participants on various platforms, where different formats catch their eye. Asking the 10–14-year-olds, it is not always simple to make clear distinctions between format and content, which is reflected in how these children flit between various digital profiles. This flitting behaviour rubs off on the way in which they watch content, and it may feel most natural for them to have their ears on a film or a series on one screen while their eyes are on their phone. In other situations, the picture-in-picture feature might be useful, e.g., if they want to watch a film and a YouTube video simultaneously.

Time alone with the screen and binge-watching become popular

Whereas the 7–9-year-olds start closing the door to their rooms to get some alone time with their screens, this alone time becomes pronounced in the 10–14 age group. This is backed up by 2022 statistics from the Film Institute*, which show an increase in children ages 10 and up choosing to watch films and series alone.

The age group indicates that films feel like a bigger commitment that requires much more attention (a newly scarce resource now that social media profiles have become accessible). As a result, series start to gain popularity on the individual level.

The entertainment potential of series is considered significantly 'longer' than that of film, and binge-watching behaviour begins. A full season can be inhaled on a Saturday because the 10–14-year-olds have more free time and more control over how they spend this time. Many even say that they wait and plan so that they can binge a lot in one go.

'I never watch things right when they come out. I wait a little, so instead of waiting a week for the next episode, I'll wait a little longer to watch it all in one go'.

Arthur, 11

**'Vidste du? Om de 7-14 årige', The Danish Film Institute, 2022*

“Snap Judges” seek immediate excitement across formats

Content for 10–14-year-olds is complicated, as most children use multiple media and platforms simultaneously. The swipe culture of social media platforms—particularly TikTok—carries over into general media behaviour regardless of content, format, and platform. The choice to engage or not to engage with something is based on the reactions that the content creates in a short period of time—often seconds rather than minutes. Swipe culture does not differentiate between types of content, and films and series are subject to the same criteria for quick evaluation as short videos and clips.

Tracking the group’s screen behaviour, it is difficult not to see them as snap judges who move on if they do not detect immediate excitement—and often, this opinion is formed before the content has even begun. As a result, much content is quickly filtered, even if this is not necessarily the intention, as regret drowns in the selection of content and new criteria.

‘If it doesn’t look that exciting, sometimes I just change it’.


Nikolaj, 11

Friendship calls for content compromises while parents are screened

The 10–14-year-olds are moving into their adolescent identity. In this process, films and series are divided into two main categories: theme and plot.

Films and series with pure, innocent, and familial themes, such as Danish family films and Disney classics, are often watched with family. Many of the 10–14-year-olds state that they like watching things with their family and let their younger siblings call the shots. The study shows that 10–14-year-olds are hugely empathetic in front of the screen, with most of them being very attentive to the interest level of the people watching with them. This is especially true for siblings and friends, where they seek compromise and clearly prioritise the positive shared experience over the specific content.

Films and series with more 'adult' or adolescent themes are complicated because many physical and cognitive developments are underway, which affect the group collectively and individually. As a result, 10–14-year-olds generally avoid watching 'grown-up content' with adults, as this quickly leads to an awkward atmosphere. Naturally, this primarily applies to content with prominent themes of love and sex, but it also extends to violence, drugs, and alcohol. The 10–14-year-olds are very interested in the content, but they screen their parents, which can make it difficult to find something to watch with the adults if the child does not have younger siblings.



'On my own, I generally watch cheesy romantic films. I don't usually watch that with my parents. Because ... I just think it's awkward'.

Karma, 14

'There's a bigger screen and better sound, so jump scares work better'.

Emine, 12

Planning and studying reactions define a good trip to the cinema

The cinema is popular with the 10–14-year-old interviewees. For example, a film experience gains more recognition from classmates if the film is seen in cinemas. As an 11-year-old puts it, it is more 'experience-like'. Most of the children also tell us that they would love to go 1–2 times per month, but they are aware that it takes time and money. Most participants in this age group do not know what it costs to go to the cinema, as Mum or Dad sponsors the activity.

Like the 7–9-year-olds, this group is preoccupied with the overall experience of going to the cinema. The big difference between the two age groups is that the 10–14-year-olds have more freedom and have started going to the cinema on their own with friends and siblings. Even the individual planning (choice of film, transport, handling money, etc.) becomes a big part of the experience.

Another important dimension of the cinema experience is how the children and their friends react. In their experience, the big screen, immense sound, and darkness turn up the emotions and reactions. Many older children mention that horror films are perfect for the cinema, but they also like comedies, as they talk about how fun it is to watch their friends jump from jump scares or double over in laughter. For many of them, seeking out the most extreme experience is almost a challenge, and conversation afterwards revolves around people's reactions rather than the film's plot.

'I was there (the cinema) a few days ago with my friends because I got this ticket. We watched the new "Minions". It was just us. We took the bus to get there and again to go home. We hadn't done that before'.

Albert, 11

AGES

15-18:

Endless endings, increased presence, and easy access determine the choice of formats, platforms, and social context

Happiness is being bombarded with endings

It only takes a few seconds, but we just want you to stay a little longer ...

The attention of adolescents is often viewed in terms of their ability to concentrate and the concern that TikTok and other platforms with extremely short content have ruined their concentration skills. But the survey shows that this is not necessarily a correct juxtaposition—in any case, it is not the whole truth. Because adolescents decode content, messages, and relationships in a way that is difficult for older generations to follow, and as a result, they are ready for the ending of a story much earlier. Adolescents also find it easier to jump in and out of things, such as series, without necessarily catching the complete story arc. And this is a growing trend. TikTok use has grown by 50% in the past year alone*, and video games—which often bombard the player with endings—take up a lot of space. 96% of boys and 70% of girls between the ages of 13 and 19 play video games, and this age group more or less reflects the people who spend the most time on games, that is, 15–19-year-olds**.

Whether regarding games, TikTok, series, films, or other things, the keys for this group are being in control of the content and exposed to many endings throughout the day.

* Medieudviklingen 2021, DR Medieforskning

** Berlingske: <https://www.berlingske.dk/samfund/mange-unge-spiller-computer-mere-end-40-timer-om-ugen-det-skal-foraeldre>

225

endings are experienced by adolescents every day on TikTok alone (2021). This does not include Snapchat, Instagram, series, films, and games*.

‘You can watch episode 2 without having seen episode 1. That’s something about “Klovn” that I find really cool’.

- Carla, 18

'Short + quantity' almost always beats 'long + quality'

Time is content. Benjamin Franklin's famous adage about money could easily be adapted as such for young people and content. Despite the day-to-day pressure of school, jobs, chores, friends, choices, and expectations, many adolescents in this age group use the expression 'to pass the time' to describe why they watch different content. It might sound like content is not important, but of course, this is not necessarily the case. The appetite for content is vast, and most importantly, there is enough content that is 'fine'—to use the description popular amongst 15–18-year-olds. Of course, the group is interested in what many would consider quality content (original stories, important themes, good actors, beautiful production), but they ascribe greater value to quantity. They want access to lots of content that does not bore them, and ideally, it should be possible to consume this content in small chunks. Short series and ultrashort content on social media can be consumed for hours. And whilst the film format is still appreciated, it is viewed through eyes that spend much more cumulative time on content significantly shorter than films. For example, 12–18-year-olds today spend more than 5 hours a day on social media, with YouTube being the biggest consumer of time, closely followed by TikTok and Snapchat*.

HOURS

'Sometimes it feels quite long to sit down and watch something for like half an hour ish'.

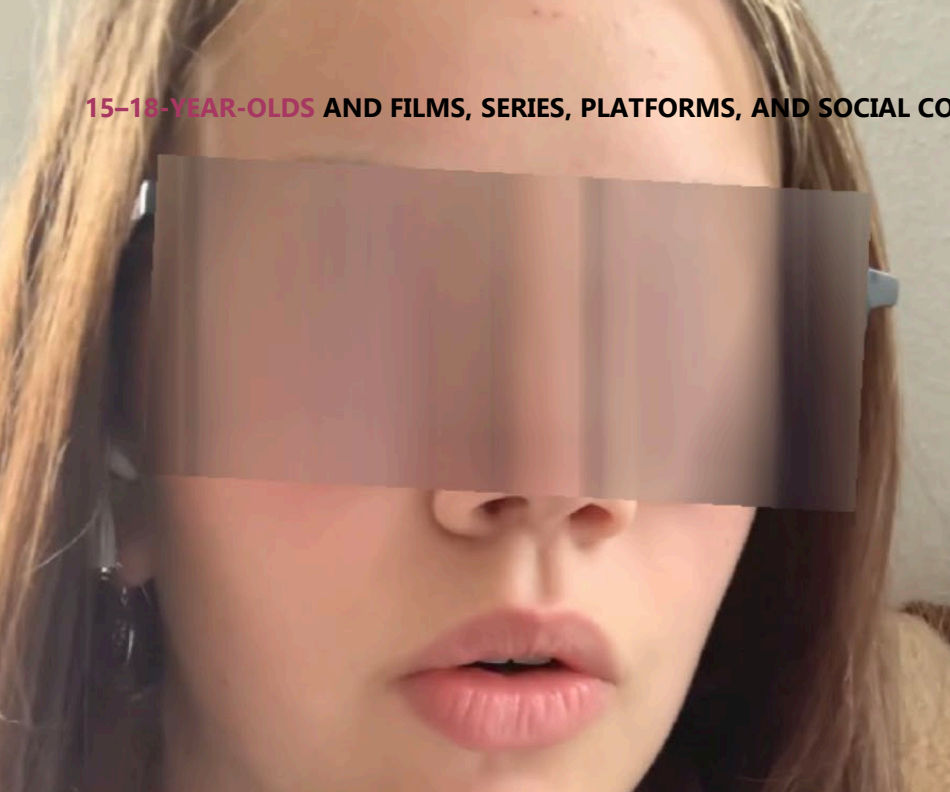
MINUTES

'The best thing about comedy series is that the episodes are 20–30 minutes long. It's easier to stay focused, and you don't lose patience with them'.

SECONDS

**17-year-old girl: 'On social media, you want something interesting to happen within the first 30 seconds'.
19-year-old boy: 'Seriously? I'd say more like 7 seconds'.**

* The Ministry of Culture: Internetbrug og sociale medier 2021



Films are mostly associated with 'hygge' and family time

Danes will be Danes—even at the age of 17. Adolescents frequently use the word 'hygge' to describe what films mean to them. Watching a film is a social experience often associated with the home and family or the cinema and friends. Films are not associated with time alone to the same extent as shorter content. Generally, the need to be social with the entire family is intact throughout childhood/youth. Many participants express that they often compromise on what to watch, as younger and older siblings, not to mention their parents, have to agree. Comedies are generally best for compromising.

Although the first thing associated with 'film' is spending time at home with family, films are still an important part of friendships, and in recent times, 7-18-year-olds have started talking about how films are something they watch when spending time with their friends, and—to an even greater extent—they are a topic of conversation.

'When I hear the word "film", I think of hanging out on the sofa. Watching a good film with your family on a Friday evening. It's something you can talk about. With your friends or just with your aunt that you haven't seen in a while'.

Mira, 17

Trust in algorithms but not blind naivety

15–18-year-olds are amongst the first to use 'recommendation media' over 'social media'. This shift is especially driven by the prevalence of TikTok. As far as the algorithms are concerned, the users themselves are in focus, as opposed to social media, where the content shown is based on followers and friends.

In many ways, 15–18-year-olds have grown up with algorithms and do not necessarily view AI and algorithms as the enemies. They do not share the same scepticism that we often hear from older generations. Many 15–18-year-olds mention that the algorithms help them find the content they want to consume. This is true for match features on, e.g., Netflix, and content on 'for you pages'. However, this openness does not necessarily indicate that they are oblivious to the power of the algorithms and that these can potentially decide what they watch. But there is a sense of balance, and as far as this age group is concerned, many things are more dangerous than algorithms.

Perhaps it is worth considering this perception with this generation's openness to the advantages of other technological areas in mind. Take the widespread support for nuclear energy amongst adolescents, for example. 52%* of 18-year-olds are pro nuclear energy in Denmark, a drastic shift from their parents' and grandparents' generations. Some of the adolescents interviewed mention that they do not use TikTok, either because they do not want to become addicted or because they do not like the content. The decision to use TikTok is an active one, and in any case, it seems like most adolescents think it through before signing up.

'I base my decisions on stars, and Netflix has a match feature based on how you rated other films. If the match is low, I don't watch it. If I'm not sure, I usually watch the trailer'.

Marika, 17

*Politiken, 2022 <https://politiken.dk/viden/Viden/art8958875/Danskernes-holdning-til-atomkraft-er-%C3%A6ndret-p%C3%A5-f%C3%A5-m%C3%A5neder>

A cinematic potential to bring youths and creators closer together

'You're more focused in the cinema, and you're seeing the film as the director intended'.

'At the cinema, you don't just put on a film while you do something else. The cinema is a holistic experience'.

'I love watching behind-the-scenes content'.

A number of 15-18-year-olds highlight that the cinema 'allows them' not to look at their phones. Part of the fascination with the cinema seems to be that it is a space where adolescents agree just to watch what they are watching. The cinema is an immersive space, and both individual and collective focus are honed. It could be interesting to consider what creators and adolescents have in common, as many adolescents indicate an interest in a closer relationship between the creator and the consumer. For the adolescents, viewing films in the cinema offers a more immersive experience that allows for greater focus and engagement.

'It's easier to have the experience that the director intended'.

Such are the words of one of the interviewees. The cinema might have the potential to bring creators and audiences closer together, creating relationships like those we see in the music industry and on social media with influencers. We often talk about the 'creator economy', which builds on democratisation of content development as everyone has easy access to developing and publishing content. And compared to a few years ago, the odds of earning money are fairly good. The survey shows that no matter whether they create or publish content, the 15-18-year-olds have creator identities, and they see it as natural and interesting to be close to the creators. Aside from Jonas Risvig, the adolescents interviewed barely mention any off-screen names. But cinematic releases could potentially highlight the directors' intentions more explicitly as the young audience seeks closeness and is generally remarkably capable of understanding the various aspects within and surrounding the film.

Summary: From faces to endings

Across the entire age range, time plays a deciding role in the understanding and prioritisation of formats and platforms. Timewise, a series is the best fit for everyone's daily lives, and watching a film is considered a weekend activity. Whereas the 7–9-year-olds seek funny faces, the 10–14-year-olds engage in binge-watching behaviour, as series ensure extended entertainment worth the investment. The 15–18-year-olds want to be bombarded with endings, a need best satisfied by short formats.

For the 7–9-year-olds, format is first and foremost about time, followed by platform. All content is measured in series length, as this time format is a better fit for the everyday lives of 7–9-year-olds. They like watching films with their families, although this is more about quality time than the film itself. The same goes for the cinema, where the film is not necessarily the most important part of the overall experience. On their own, they seek content with funny faces and reactions rather than extended story arcs.

For the 10–14-year-olds, alone time and binge-watching have become synonymous with screen time. They make snap judgements on everything they do and watch on the screen, but when they are with friends, family, and younger siblings, they seek compromise and appreciate the social element. 10–14-year-olds see the cinema as a main event they can organise with their friends, where they can see each other's reactions. The holistic experience often includes pride in organising and transporting themselves to and from the cinema.

For the 15–18-year-olds, short content and many endings fit seamlessly into busy daily lives, which affect their choice of platforms and formats. Recommendation media and algorithms are seen as helpful in the search for new content that matches 'me and my needs'. Films are still associated with family and quality time, and unlike other content, these are not considered a regular part of their daily lives.

Genres, characters, and themes

Throughout the age range interviewed, the experience of the character is much more important than the genre, theme, and narrative of a film or series. This section maps out the behaviour and motives of 7–18-year-olds when it comes to the choice of content.

AGES 7-9:

Unaware of genre,
these children seek
content that makes
them feel more
mature

The youngest participants are driven by the desire to 'watch something' rather than a specific genre or type of content

When 7-9-year-olds talk about the time they spend on screens, most of them are preoccupied with rituals and situations rather than genre and content. This might be tied to the fact that they still have limited screen time and rules, and the time they spend on their devices is scheduled. Driven by the desire to 'watch something', they often watch films and series, and when they talk about the things they watch, they describe them based on feelings. Most 7-9-year-olds are not well-acquainted with genres and lack the vocabulary to describe them. Instead, they talk about fun films, exciting films, and sad films, and all films are in one of two categories: 'animated films' and 'human films'.

When these young interviewees look for content, their search is based on the prevailing context, situation, and feeling. As previously described, 7-9-year-olds have a strong sense of here-and-now that influences their desire to consume content. It is all driven by mood, ritual, and time. How much screen time do I have? What time is it? What mood am I in? These are some of the questions that inform their choice of content.



'When I get home from school, I just want to watch something on the iPad'.

Ellen, 8

40

% of the 7-9-year-olds have chosen to watch an age-inappropriate film/series.

Excitement becomes a prominent motivation alongside fun, as they begin to explore scarier content

Children in this age group are in a transition period, where they start exploring the unknown and have the desire to portray themselves as 'old'. This is also reflected in their choice of content, where shorter formats serve as early bridges to the exciting, the unknown, and things that are harder to decode than traditional children's content. Ever so carefully, they dip their toes in the things to come. Statistics from the Film Institute* show that 57% of 7-9-year-old boys and 66% of 7-9-year-old girls have watched a film/series that was *too* scary for them.

When the 7-9-year-olds surveyed talk about the videos, films, and series they watch, it is obvious that they are testing limits, and 'excitement' becomes more of a keyword for children at this age, taking up all their screen time along with 'fun' content. Frightening content and violent themes start rousing interest.

A shared characteristic amongst these children is their pursuit of content that challenges their boundaries. When they feel that they have 'outgrown' certain content, they indicate no longer finding the action exciting, and the plot does not draw them in as much as it used to. Everything from 'Paw Patrol' to Danish classics like 'Father of Four' is highlighted in this context.

*'Vidste du? Om de 7-14 årige', The Danish Film Institute, 2022

7-9-YEAR-OLDS AND GENRES, CHARACTERS, AND THEMES



LITTLE
NIGHTMARES

COMPLETE EDITION

'I was at a friend's house, she had a birthday party, and we were going to watch something scary. I didn't want to look, so me and my friend put a blanket over our heads and built a fort'.

Alma, 8

Daring but not overconfident

Although many 7-9-year-olds seek excitement, action, and content with blood, they still seem a little cautious in case the content gets too scary.

It is easy to come across content deemed too scary, and children looking to test their limits often do so with their friends. Children can be introduced to actions perceived as scary through everything from films and series to videos and games. Many children—especially the girls—in this age group point out that they are happy to turn off the content and change the channel if it becomes too much.

Adults are uninteresting, but themes are allowed to feel grown-up

There is a clear trend of children in this age group watching content with characters older than themselves. Their explanation of this phenomenon is that it is more 'exciting' to watch someone older than oneself. But most of them point out the importance of the characters being children or adolescents and not adults. The responses and reflections of the 7-9-year-olds indicate a desire to look towards the future, so the themes are allowed to feel a little more 'grown-up'. For example, elements of love could be exciting, but it has to stay at a level that is not too pronounced.

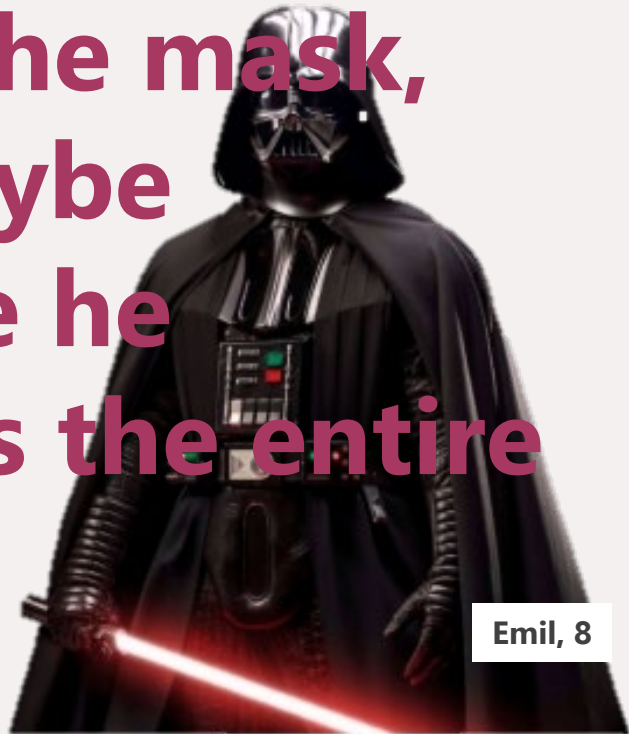
The children are starting to be introduced to more adult films and content, and they watch Marvel and other films with their parents. This is how they discover bigger international productions, and especially the boys notice that there are more and bigger explosions in international productions compared to Danish films.

Looking at what makes a character interesting, this age group says secrets are exciting and that they like when they share an interest with the character. This applies to films, series, and YouTube videos.

'I don't want adults, like, it just gets too serious. I prefer films with teenagers and a little older, maybe 18, but that's it. Their sense of humour is better'.

William, 8

‘Darth Vader is cool ... the light sabre, the mask, and maybe because he controls the entire army’.



Emil, 8

Happy-go-lucky stories must make space for nuanced characters and motives

An important behavioural pattern in this age group is the preference for fast-paced content, and they like for the characters to undergo some sort of development. Perhaps due to watching films not necessarily intended for children and families with their parents, these children also develop an interest in plots that do not necessarily pan out in favour of the ‘good’ character. As a result, the group starts to find nuanced characters interesting.

In the words of an 8-year-old: *‘Children’s films have a happy ending, and sometimes grown-up films have a happy or an unhappy ending. My dad sometimes watches films with unhappy endings for the good guys’.*

Despite the introduction to films not intended for their age group, the children often have a nostalgic path back to the more classic children’s films. Younger siblings are often a justification for returning to more childish content, which usually comes complete with a happy ending.

AGES 10-14:

The openness to original storytelling and characters with a strong personality is often bigger than the chances of finding such films

Genre combinations are more interesting than classic frameworks

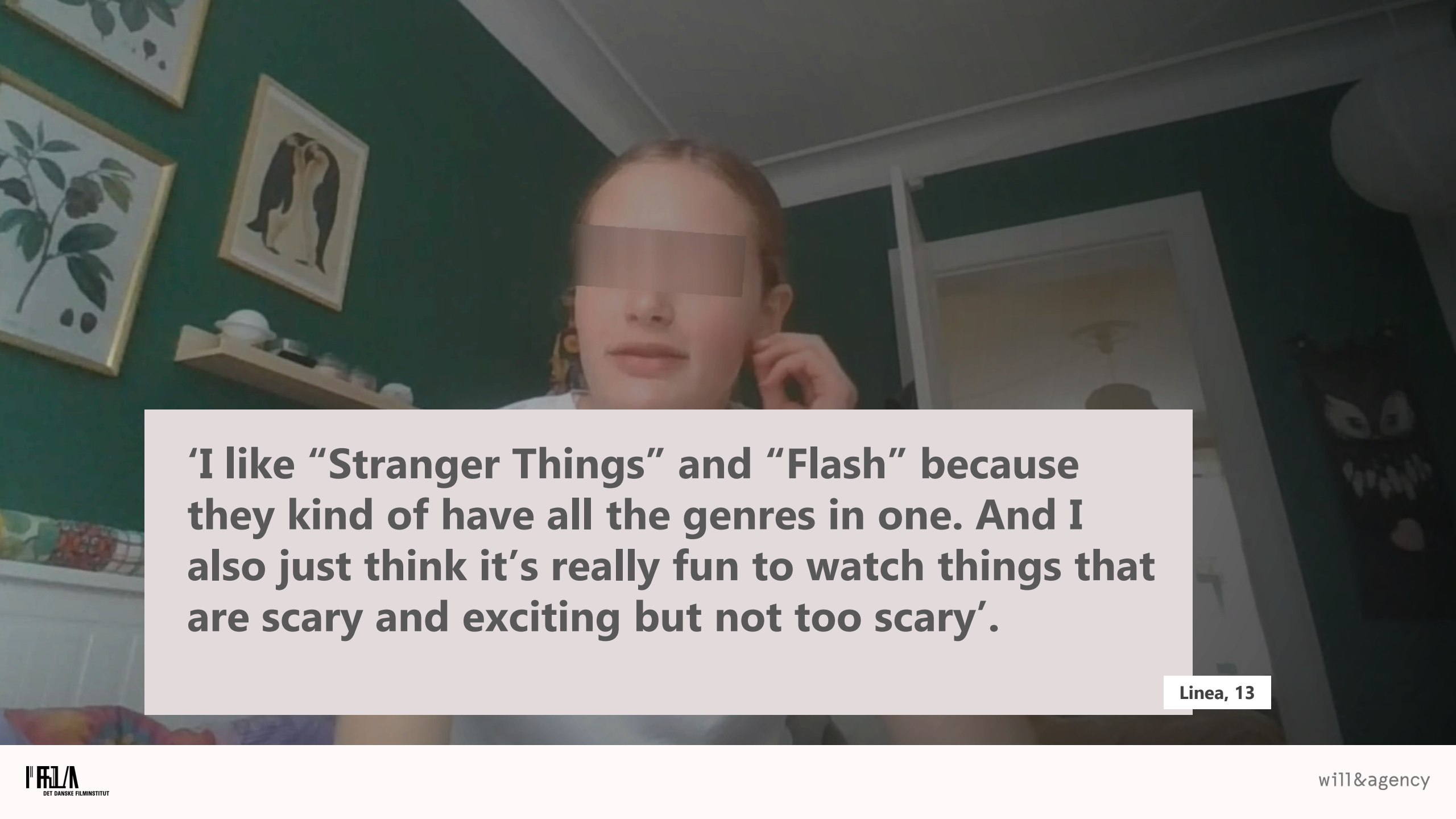
The 10–14-year-olds are busy trying different kinds of content to find out what they like. As a result, we see a thirst for creative and original content, where classic and genre-heavy films and series are seen as old-fashioned and a little boring. In a day-to-day life filled with original content across different platforms and media, genre films are seen as unoriginal because they come across as predictable. The 10–14-year-olds seek content that breaks with the status quo of traditional narratives, as this makes it surprising. Whereas the 7–9-year-olds did not have the vocabulary to describe genres, the 10–14-year-olds are playing around with genres and working them into their vocabulary, where they use the words to explain which elements they want to see in their ideal content.

Films and series that transcend genre are highlighted as modern and creative, but there are certain rules governing the mix of genres, and balance is the be-all and end-all. Dosage is key, as the combination is what makes the content exciting. Some of the 10–14-year-olds interviewed mention 'Stranger Things' and 'Flash' as examples of titles that successfully combine genres, and emphasis is placed on the mix that includes scary content, coming-of-age elements, love, action, and drama. Having a good mix and not too much of any specific genre appeals to this age group.



'I think it's important for a film to have a little bit of everything'.

Frida, 12



'I like "Stranger Things" and "Flash" because they kind of have all the genres in one. And I also just think it's really fun to watch things that are scary and exciting but not too scary'.

Linea, 13

‘The important thing is what their personality is like’.

Hjørdis, 13

A character’s appearance is secondary, emotions are the priority

When 10–14-year-olds talk about good and exciting characters, the word ‘authentic’ often pops up. As far as this age group is concerned, an authentic character is on a credible and realistic inner journey that, ideally, does not perfectly mirror their physical, familiar day-to-day lives. Many 10–14-year-olds point out that they do not care if the characters look like them, neither in terms of age nor appearance. Instead, the focus is on inner feelings, which harmonises with the group’s day-to-day, where pre-puberty is strongly informed by physical differences. Girls and boys hit puberty at different times, and it is not unusual to be a head taller than one’s classmates. As a result, focus and communities are tied to internal rather than external similarities, as there are many differences in the latter. In terms of films and content, this means that the 10–14-year-olds primarily rank the characters based on their actions, situations, and emotions, which inspire empathy or apathy amongst them.

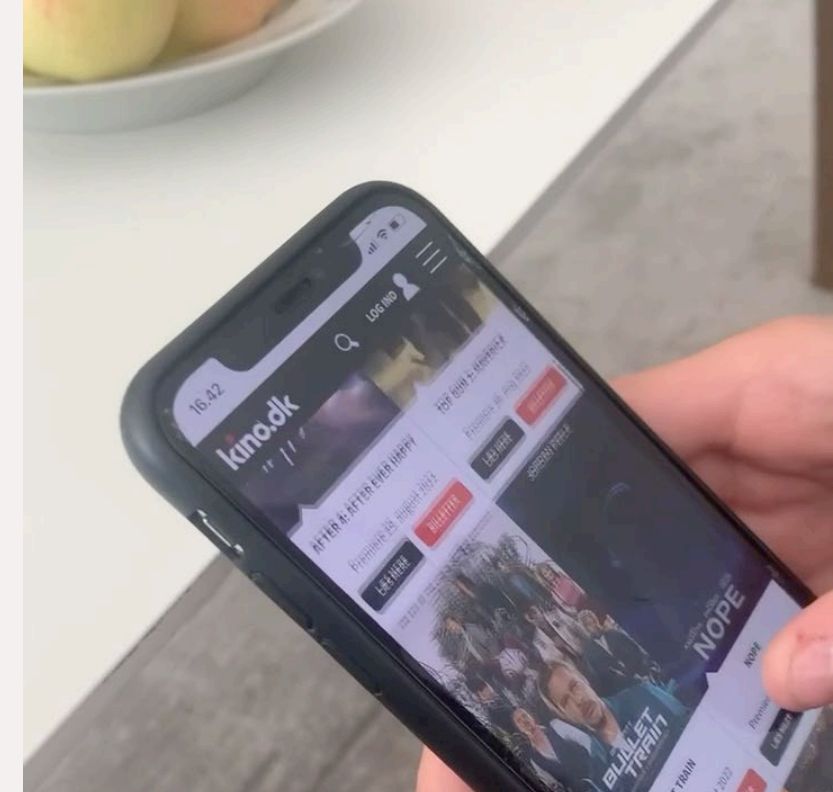
The focus on inner identification of values and feelings applies to narratives where the everyday context is similar to the one experienced by 10–14-year-old Danish children as well as narratives where the universe is significantly different. It does not matter whether the character is a 13-year-old Danish girl, a Thai gymnasium student, or an adult wizard who embodies superheroes’ dreams in ‘The Sandman’. As explained by a 13-year-old girl, he teaches the viewer that *‘even though he’s very powerful, he also makes sacrifices’*.

Original content overruled by thumbnails

As a result of the ingrained habit of quick hands and quick decisions, 10–14-year-olds often skip content that is otherwise a good match for their preferences and tastes.

Whether picking a film, series, or YouTube video, the thumbnail is often used to evaluate the content. And it has to happen quickly. 10–14-year-olds are adamant that 'something has to happen' in films and series to catch their attention, and they do not waste time on words and descriptions. Similarly, they do not look for genres, instead navigating purely based on posters. Accustomed to swiping, the group has mastered navigating thumbnail grids, and they barely spend a second deciding whether it is worth spending time on the content behind the picture. Photos that signal excitement, action, and recognisability often win—even though the group is generally more interested in original genre mixes and content that breaks with convention.

If the photo reels them in, the next judgement falls five minutes into the content. Stop or go. Most of them risk it and go on to the next thing rather than taking the time to get into the action by reading the description or watching the trailer. The period of consideration is even shorter for series and videos.



Amina, 13, scrolling through the selection on Kino.dk.
Researcher: What about this one (NOPE)?
Amina, 13: No.
Researcher: Why not?
Amina, 13: It just looks boring.
Researcher: It's by the same guy who made 'Us' (Amina's favourite film), and it's horror (Amina's favourite genre).
Amina, 13: Nah

The themes are more interesting when they have some edge, feel mature, and represent different cultures

The 10-14-year-olds are interested in content with themes and characters that feel grown-up. As this is a transition period where feelings and identity are in a state of perpetual development, they find it interesting when content and narratives tell stories that push boundaries, represent different cultures and give the children a taste of something unfamiliar.

For participants from a non-Danish background, representation is important. A number of Year 9 students from Vejle point out 'Shorta' as a Danish film they liked because the cast made the film feel more relevant.

Across the age range, children are interested in content that is not Danish, and both internal and external identification in international content are highlighted. Many of the girls are fascinated by K- and T-drama, where they see themselves in the characters' emotions, and many of the participants with non-Danish backgrounds find films and series from their parents' home countries more relatable.

'At least there are immigrants in "Shorta".'

Mousa, 9

AGES 15-18:

Despite genre awareness,
the young audience finds
characters more
intriguing than storylines

Extensive awareness of genre elements but no ties to any particular genre

Media formats and genres blend together, and 15–18-year-olds generally are not fans of genres. Compared to the younger age groups, however, they have developed an understanding of genre elements and an awareness of what makes each genre unique.

There is also significant variation in terms of the content with which the age group engages. For some, it is relatable and down-to-earth content; for others, it just has to be funny. For others still, it is dramatic content that encourages them to discuss the message, while some prefer abstract universes that challenge them. All these universes and genre traditions coexist, and the 15–18-year-olds do not express a need for clear-cut genre identification. Instead, they highlight unpredictable characters and fascinating universes that differ from their day-to-day lives.

The group's tastes are broad and versatile, and unlike older generations, 15–18-year-olds do not consider genre a navigation tool.

THREE ADOLESCENTS ON GENRE

'Genres? It really depends. I just want there to be a happy ending and good actors'.

'Mainly comedy. But also romance and drama—and films with murder. And films about businesses. It all depends on my mood'.

'I don't have a favourite genre, I just need to avoid horror, documentaries, and old films'.



'I like Shutter Island, Harry Potter, and Jonas Risvig'.

Caroline, 18

In search of big emotions

‘When I was younger, I watched a lot of horror because I wasn’t that intellectual—at least I could feel something. Now I watch everything. Especially things that are funny’.

Hossain, 18

The common denominator for 15–18-year-olds is that they seek emotional—but varied—content that makes it easier for them **‘to feel something’, which is otherwise difficult at a time when they feel pressure from the worlds within and around them.** The content needs to create an emotional response quickly because time is of the essence.

They want ‘something to happen’ that can distract them, ideally in ways that may seem exaggerated to adults. Extreme reactions, cliff-hangers, big topics like death and love, and content that pushes the limits are all equally effective, but most importantly, they want the content to be funny.

Many 15–18-year-olds mention being fascinated by universes COMPLETELY different from their own, where they can push the day-to-day to the backs of their minds. That said, it has to be easy to get into the narrative, as they quickly lose interest if this is not the case. With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that adolescents often use the word **‘fun’** to describe good content, and given their busy daily lives and numerous screen options, they are stingy with their time if the first few minutes are not perfect. This short window does not equal a lack of interest in originality and depth, but an indisputably entertaining perspective is a key element that gets more important as the format gets longer. In other words, films are required to be more entertaining than shorter formats, like series.

Character explosion is preferred over character development

Focused on experiencing strong emotions throughout their day, the 15-18-year-olds have different expectations regarding the speed of character development in films and series. The development still needs to be based on credible reasons, but this does not mean that it should (read: can) be slow. Good character development is not a smooth, almost unnoticeable process but rather a series of jumps or notable explosions.

This can be in the form of movement from A to B in no time or from A to Z over a longer period of time. Walter White, who breaks bad shortly into the first episode of the first season, becoming the exact opposite of who he was at the beginning, undergoes both of these developments. Unsurprisingly, he is an extremely popular character amongst the 15-18-year-old participants in the study.

'I really like when someone develops in an extreme way. Especially when it goes way over the line and stuff'.

Jonas, 16

Focus on character makes the plot less important

When the 15–18-year-old participants describe the content to which they are drawn, it is remarkable to what extent the group is focused on character and how little they are concerned with the story, plot, and themes.

The age group is captivated by many types of character, but there is a clear appetite for people who cross some sort of line: anti-heroes whose character and moral compass they cannot pin down. The captivating and fascinating characters that command attention are the ones that stand out in the adolescents' responses.

An example is the internet celebrity Andrew Tate, who pops up in multiple interviews with this age group. The adolescents struggle to figure him out. Is he genuine, or is he joking? Does he have a point, or is he completely crossing the line? Despite being known for his extreme sexism, even some of the girls were drawn to him, as he sparks serious reactions, and the lack of clear response is appealing and relatable in this life stage, where there are so many questions about personal preferences and identity.



**‘To visit a
completely
different
world’.**

**Astrid, 16, on why she watches
films and series**

Great interest in universes with questions they struggle to put into words

Content that inspires a feeling of either ‘If only that were me’ or ‘I’m so glad that isn’t me’ is particularly popular with 15–18-year-olds because it articulates questions that the adolescents want to ask themselves but do not have the life experience to put into words. Reality content has significant appeal, but documentaries and fiction are also popular—especially if they take place in surroundings that differ from the adolescents’ everyday lives, so they can distance themselves slightly while focusing on the meta-level.

The word ‘psychological’ is used frequently when referring to content, as this age group seeks out content that mirrors their psychological state. On a thematic level, the group orients itself towards content that provides information about life rather than information about the world.

The opinions expressed by the 15–18-year-olds are supported by media research, which shows that children and adolescents are often interested by alternative worlds, universes, and premises. Genres and terms like magical realism, sci-fi, or fantasy serve as an unproblematic way to learn about the good life, relationships, and values.

Stories about the present need to contain a high degree of authenticity

15–18-year-olds have developed a unique relationship with time and identification in relation to films and series. The group indicates that the present is the hardest thing to get right on the screen. The past, on the other hand, is considered exciting because it teaches them about collective memory and what the world looked like before their time or why the world appears the way it does today. The adolescents' desire for and interest in nostalgic content seems almost insatiable.

The group finds the future exciting because it gives them a glimpse into a space of opportunity where fantasy, creativity, and ambitions come to life. But in terms of the present, the adolescents themselves are the experts and immediately decode **inauthentic stories**. **Multiple participants point to this experience when discussing content that seeks to portray the reality that they themselves experience.**

However, stories set in the present become interesting again when **the familiar meets the unfamiliar, arousing interest with a potential for development** in which they see themselves reflected. Multiple respondents highlight 'Euphoria' as a good example despite the story unfolding in the US and in a dramatised version of the reality they themselves experience.

'I just kind of feel like films and series about the present don't have much to say. The past and future are more interesting'.

Mathilde, 18

Summary: From 'just watching something' to preferences

Across the age range, respondents are more interested in character than plot. The common denominator for all ages is a preference for content with characters older than themselves, as this gives a taste of the time to come. Age is not a deciding factor in whether a character is relatable, as the focus is on feelings and the reactions of oneself and others. The themes can push the boundaries, even for the youngest respondents, and all three age groups seek to push limits and find new universes in the narratives with which they engage. They want content that resonates with them in some way, and this effect is primarily achieved by content that does not resemble their everyday lives.

The 7–9-year-olds do not navigate by genre but are driven by an overarching desire to 'watch something', which translates to having screen time. Funny content is appreciated, but they try exciting and scary elements. Adult themes are starting to become interesting—but not portrayed by actual grown-ups. They develop an awareness that the guaranteed happy ending is a sign of a children's film, and the group becomes ready for more challenging narratives. They are brave when it comes to 'dangerous' content, but they are still careful, and most of them know when to turn it off.

The 10–14-year-olds have developed an awareness of genre elements, but films and series are best when they feature a little bit of everything. The group is interested in content that feels unique, but choices are influenced by a swipe culture in which even unique content is quickly rejected. Characters need to show emotions and development rather than physical resemblance. Representation becomes a key parameter, and the group feels that international content provides internal and external representation better than Danish content.

The 15–18-year-olds have wide-ranging tastes, and few see themselves as genre fans. They seek big emotions and they are drawn to sudden and seismic character development. As their primary interest is character, the classic story arc is not essential to this group. Instead, the adolescents are interested in narratives and universes that ask some of the existential questions that are on the 15–18-year-olds' minds and for which they do not necessarily have the words.

Danish film

Children from 7–18 show an increased and age-defined interest in international content, which is reflected in their audience behaviour. Danish films or series are rarely the first choice. This section maps out the 7–18-year-olds' thoughts on and relationships with Danish films and series.

AGES 7-9:

The language spoken
is the only feature
that defines a film's
country of origin

Mum:

'Is there a Danish film you don't really like?'

Amil, 8:

""Paw Patrol"" because I think I'm too old for that now'.



Danish language is more important than Danish content

Only a few of the 7-9-year-olds interviewed mention genres, actors, aesthetics, and country of origin. To them, a film is just a film, and if the language spoken is Danish, the film is perceived as Danish. Even if meaning were ascribed to the Danish origin, the children would still struggle to identify the Danish origin in the actual content at hand. This is illustrated by the participants' difficulty deciding which animated titles are Danish if these are watched dubbed in Danish. Generally speaking, the group is not concerned with differentiating between 'Danish' and 'international' content beyond wanting to understand the language spoken.

When it comes to films and series, the 7-9-year-olds prefer Danish-language content, and this is mainly tied to their language skills. They primarily watch Danish content, and many of them watch animated films. Multiple children express enjoying content like clips, videos, and reels in foreign languages and/or without subtitles, as this is a more accessible version of the content with which they would not engage normally. It is worth remembering that the 7-9-year-olds expressed an interest in content in languages they did not understand, and Russian and English that is too hard to understand (in either speech or subtitle form) still makes for good entertainment.

However, there is one parameter on which the group notices the difference between Danish and international films: explosions. Many of the 7-9-year-olds (especially the boys) point out that explosions in international titles are bigger and more epic than in Danish titles.

'I like it a little better if I understand'

Mads, 8

Danish films are cosy to watch but not necessarily more so than other films

When 7-9-year-olds talk about their relationship with films, it is clear that films are primarily seen as a social activity. Films are content one watches with other people. The same goes for Danish films. First and foremost, the 7-9-year-olds interviewed associate Danish films with words like 'family' and 'hygge', and Danish films are synonymous with shared family experiences.

Statistics from the Danish Film Institute underscore this audience behaviour. While only 10% of 7-year-olds watch films on their own, around 30% watch series alone*. Films are a distinctly social experience associated with family. In this regard, there is no difference between Danish and international films.

Many of the 7-9-year-olds interviewed make a point of describing the film-watching rituals they have with their families. Many of them mention 'The Olsen Gang', 'Father of Four', and 'Krummerne' as films they like to watch with their family. It is interesting to see that while 7-9-year-olds watch many films in Danish, they refer to the classic titles when talking specifically about Danish films.

*'Vidste du? Om de 7-14 årige', The Danish Film Institute, 2022



'We watch "The Olsen Gang" on the weekends a lot. I like watching "The Olsen Gang" at dinner or after dinner'.

Dicte, 8

AGES 10-14:

Fascination is increasingly sourced from international storytelling that reflects elevated everyday life and recognisable feelings—with a twist

'I like them better now that I don't think English is hard to understand anymore'

Frida, Year 6, on international films and series

New language skills expand the world of content

At this age, the participants seek out international rather than Danish content. This trend is reflected in the Danish Film Institute's own statistics*, which show that children from the age of 10, regardless of gender, increasingly look to international content. In this age group, there is a clear preference for anything but Danish-language content. When the participants are asked to explain what they consider important differences between Danish and international content, they use terms like 'exciting', 'bigger', and 'better actors' to describe international content, while the Danish counterpart is often described as 'boring' or just 'funny'.

When the 10-14-year-olds interviewed talk about why international content (in English or with English subtitles) speaks to them, it is first and foremost tied to their new language skills, but curiosity about the world is also a factor. From the ages of 10-14, many children start finding it easier to speak, read, and understand English, which opens up a world of content. They are no longer limited by needing content in Danish because they understand English, and they seek new narratives and genre elements that they do not find in Danish films. Multiple respondents cannot think of a Danish action film or a Danish film with magic, both of which are elements that pique their interest and curiosity in international productions.

*'Vidste du? Om de 7-14 årige', The Danish Film Institute, 2022

Danish films are not as big or epic as international films

Whereas the 7-9-year-olds are fascinated by—and notice—bigger explosions in international productions, 10-14-year-olds also feel like international productions have more muscle overall. One 13-year-old boy reasons that there are more people in the US, so statistically speaking, there must be more creative minds who can make better films.

In the 10-14 age range, there is a feeling that international content—especially from the US—delivers more when it comes to production value. The respondents point out that international films always have bigger and better action sequences and that the setting and visual expression are generally seen as 'better'. On top of having a wider range of content and bigger production budgets, the English language also opens the door to big **international sources of inspiration and bigger universes**.

Many of the interviewees in this age group are introduced to entertainment on TikTok, where they quickly discover what is trending. Due to the platform's international nature, the users are also exposed to international content. For example, TikTok is one of the platforms responsible for introducing many of the children in this age group to T-, C- and K-genres.



TEN YEARS OF HEROES
EXHIBITION SINGAPORE

'Look at Marvel Studios and Hollywood films, for example, those are perfectly made. They spend a lot of money on them. In comparison, Danish studios don't spend as much money'.

Viggo, 11

Fascination with feelings and settings

As the interest in global content grows, many 10–14-year-olds feel that Danish films and series are not as interesting. When the 10–14-year-old interviewees explain the ‘problem’ with Danish films and series, they often mention the framing of the content. Children in this age group are more fascinated with content featuring a visual framework that does not perfectly mirror their everyday lives. They want to see themselves reflected in more than just the day-to-day of the characters, and they seek fascination and relatability in feelings and situations.

Many of the 10–14-year-old girls interviewed talk about the popularity of international rom-coms and K-drama high school series, highlighting actions with deep, romantic feelings, classic narratives of youthful drama, and similar. The themes are neither new nor inventive, but they are framed by an everyday life that feels special, exotic, and different. This underscores that the 10–14-year-olds are looking for feelings and reactions with which they identify whilst highlighting the importance of the presence of elements that feel different and offer a new take on the lives they know and live. Danish productions are capable of offering this experience as well, with the participants highlighting ‘The Rain’ and ‘Checkered Ninja’ as examples of everyday narratives with a lovely twist.


‘Danish might be more relatable, but I just think international is more exciting’.

Emine, 13

Danish social media profiles offer inspiration, community, and humour as part of everyday life

While the group is sceptical of Danish films and series, Danish content on YouTube is a different story. The 10–14-year-olds are big YouTube users, where they form communities based on interests and fascination. Many of the participants follow various Danish profiles, and they look up to Danish influencers, YouTubers, and TikTokers.

YouTube is full of funny videos that attract the attention of children in this age range, but they are also drawn to channels that offer tricks for games they play, skills videos for arts and crafts, sports, or challenges they want to join. Many of the participants highlight the Danish YouTuber Morten Münster as a particularly interesting profile, as they feel that he talks with rather than to his audience, supported by community references, humour, and reactions in his videos.



'If I'm angry, Morten always makes me laugh. He's really funny when he plays "Minecraft" or "Roblox" because he reacts to what happens. For example, he says "Ugh, that was the monster" and stuff like that'.

Frida, 10

AGES 15-18:

Danish films have a
credibility issue and
lack fascination

Danish fiction lacks fascination

Multiple interviewees in the 15-18 age range mention that the best films and series have the ability to **'transport me far away'** through characters, environments, and worlds that have very little to do with the respondents' normal lives. This can be interpreted as a desire for escapism, reflecting the number of young people looking for a break from their everyday lives as they grapple with stress and anxiety. Another factor is that many of the 15-18-year-olds consider Danish content **boring**.

When the adolescents themselves explain this label, many of them highlight that the settings in Danish films and series are too recognisable and that recognisability takes away from the desired magic and element of surprise. Numerous respondents feel that they already know the story, and significant character development can feel **odd when set in a universe that closely resembles reality**.

Although the adolescents seek relatability in films and series, their audience behaviour shows that they also want fascination. Social media and reality TV compete for relatability as the newer platforms have taken over, providing more 'authentic' relatability from 'real' people rather than actors. These days, 15-18-year-olds often find fascination in bigger productions that build on expensive universes with which Danish budgets cannot compete.

'Why would I watch something about a 17-year-old Danish gymnasium student when that's my life? I already know *everything* that could possibly happen'.

Andreas, 17, gymnasium student

Danish social realism is often perceived as fake and has been overtaken by social media

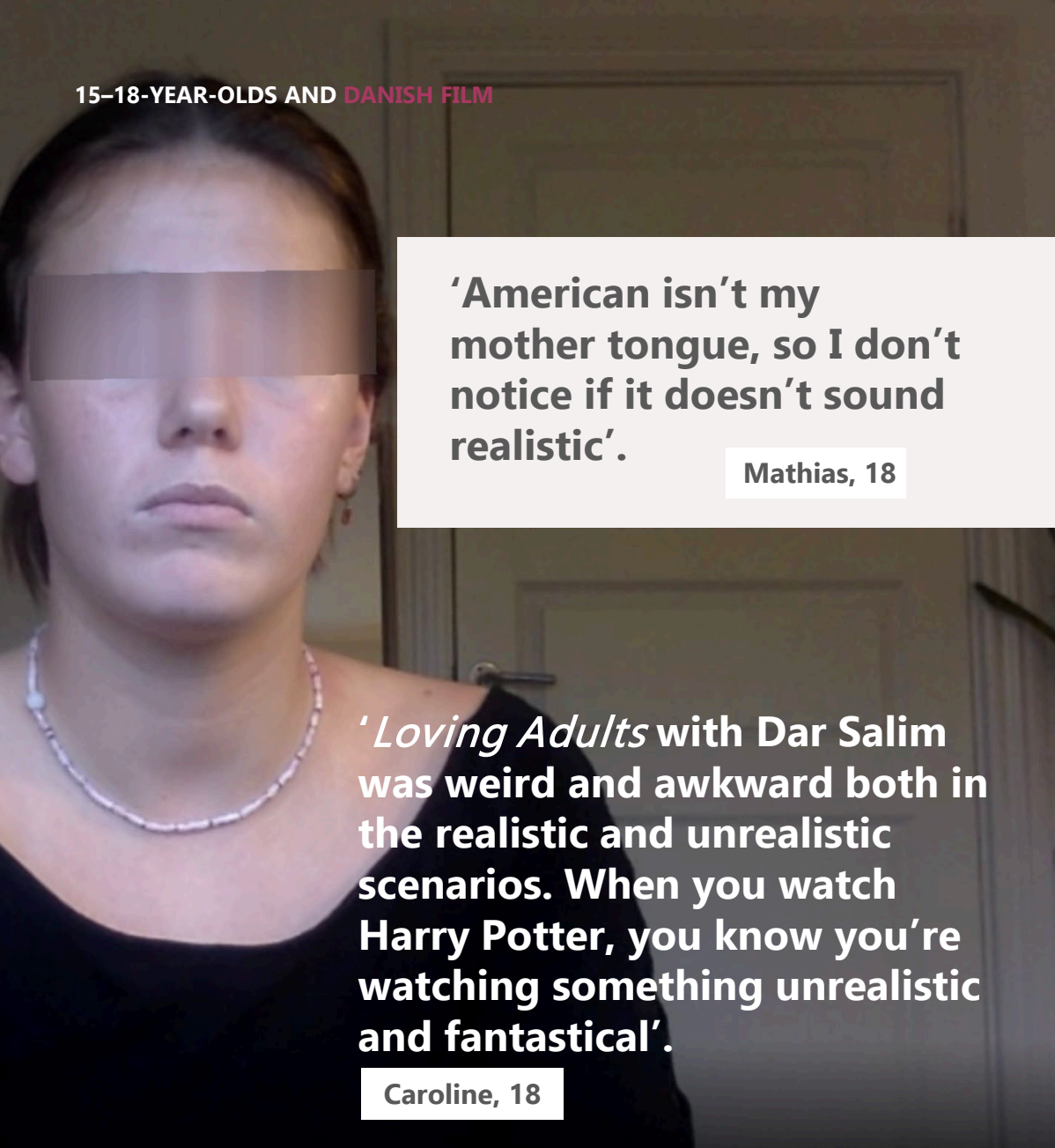
Although many of the 15–18-year-olds only have a few—often quite old—references to Danish films and series and Danish films are generally described as fairly boring, their use of other types of content shows that Danish content is actually quite popular. Scepticism towards classic Danish content rises as the participants grow older, while the opposite is true for influencers and YouTubers. The same goes for reality shows with Danish participants.

The adolescents see themselves reflected in these formats because it features real people genuinely testing boundaries. In short, there is more at stake. Even when the content is set in an island paradise. While older generations would never dream of comparing influencers and reality TV with fiction and social realism, adolescents make no real distinction between these categories. To them, feelings and reactions are more important than scripts and production budgets, and both staged reality and influencers are clearly perceived as more entertaining than controlled, scripted fiction.

While the adolescents do think about the characters and messages in a film, content in the local language also contributes to the adolescents viewing the content through a 'theatre lens'. They quickly decode language, actions, and reactions based on their own reality. Or, as one interviewee puts it: **'To me, a film is something that isn't real'**.

'Obviously, social media is staged, but you already know that, so you can look past that. But in films, everything is fake'.

Isabella, 17



'American isn't my mother tongue, so I don't notice if it doesn't sound realistic'.

Mathias, 18

'Loving Adults with Dar Salim was weird and awkward both in the realistic and unrealistic scenarios. When you watch Harry Potter, you know you're watching something unrealistic and fantastical'.

Caroline, 18

International productions and 'emotional realism' often do a better job of mirroring Danish everyday life

The term 'recognisability' often pops up when the 15–18-year-olds talk about Danish content, and it is typically viewed negatively. Recognisability makes content boring and predictable, minor details (especially in terms of language) give away the lack of credibility, and the young audience quickly decodes whether the content has a message or something it wants to teach them.

Content from the US has an advantage, as the adolescents are so exposed to this content that it feels recognisable. But as the surroundings are not judged based on whether they are recognisable—simply because they are not—and the language is not their mother tongue, this content is often more effective at portraying emotions and creating stories, plots, and characters with which the adolescents identify.

Although the adolescents may not be familiar with Berkeley or have a locker room at their gymnasium, they appear to be uninterested in 'factual realism' and instead prioritise 'emotional realism'. The latter has more space to unfold when the young audience is not distracted by bad lines, strange surroundings, and other 'mistakes'.

In Danish cinema, contemporary films often beat coming-of-age films

The frequency with which an older generation of actors is mentioned during conversations about Danish content is notable. No young actors are named at all. Jonas Risvig is often mentioned as a creator, but aside from that, the complete lack of Danish talent in the participants' responses stands out. This indicates that content for adolescents does not need to be about adolescents. In fact, it should not be too 'young' as 15-18-year-olds experience targeted youthful content as aspirational, and they see straight through it. There is an interest in content that brings together children, adolescents, and other generations. Naturally, 'Another Round' is a good example.

As indicated by other statistics and studies, 'Drunk' is very popular with the young Danish audience, and almost all the survey participants mention the film as an example of good Danish content. The explanation is, undoubtedly, multifaceted. Some point to the film's sense of humour and the questions it raises about Danish (alcohol) culture. The film shines a light on this culture, not through the youth perspective that this age group often sees in public discourse, but rather through the lens of drunk old men, who may remind them of someone they know but who act in a way the adolescents themselves would act or want to act. Furthermore, the film could, perhaps, serve as an illustration that contemporary film and the explosive character development that appeals to adolescents are not mutually exclusive. 'Another Round' succeeds in combining the two because the dramatic shifts in character (helped by alcohol) are the explicit creative premise. It is exaggerated and oversimplified, making it a rare example of Danish film that successfully shows character development on steroids, while making a point about modern life that is perceived as neither strange nor moralising.



When the adolescents talk about Danish actors they consider good and interesting, they tend to mention actors from their parents' generation.

Danish humour has a higher peak than that of other countries

When it comes to Danish films, the 15–18-year-olds do agree on some positive points. Danish humour is something special. Of course, there is no guarantee that Danish humour works, and asking the young audience, it is clear that many have tried and failed. But when Danish comedy works, it is funnier than international comedy films and series. The same goes for the young audience's experience of character and plot—when Danish films succeed, these are the elements the 15–18-year-olds highlight as what makes Danish films stand out.

However, the films that stand out and mean something to this group are few and far between. In terms of recent films, the participants mention 'Another Round', 'Riders of Justice', and 'Alle for Fire'. They mostly point to older films. 'Flickering Lights' is popular amongst the 15–18-year-olds, but like the 7–14-year-olds, many also mention 'The Olsen Gang' and the actor Dirch Passer. 'I just think Danish films used to be more creative. Most of them feel really similar these days', one participant said.

Cinema statistics support the idea that local humour still has an effect on the young audience, and this is also true for adolescents in other European countries.



'Some of my favourite films are "The Green Butchers", "Riders of Justice", or "Flickering Lights". I think they're super funny, and I really like comedy, especially Danish. I don't like foreign comedy that much. Nothing beats Danish humour. Those are some of the best films I've ever watched'.

Lily, 16

Danish film.

Summary: From films in Danish to Danish humour

Between the ages of 7 and 18, children go from seeing Danish films as films in Danish (including dubbed international productions) to having a more refined understanding and recognition of the things at which Danish films excel. Regardless of age, Danish films are, first and foremost, associated with 'hygge' and quality time with family, where Danish comedies are particularly good at bringing the whole family together. Danish films and series are not associated with individual consumption in the 10–18 age group, where the children instead seek out narratives that fascinate and inspire engagement through everyday narratives with a twist set in distinctly different surroundings.

The 7–9-year-olds are not particularly concerned with whether a film is Danish or not. There are no markers of recognition beyond the spoken language. Danish content is content in Danish, and this is often the first choice. However, this choice is more about the language than the content itself. The 7–9-year-olds have started watching international content with their parents, where they are fascinated by big explosions that they do not come across in Danish productions.

For **the 10–14-year-olds**, Danish films and series lose momentum as the interest in international content is exploding. The group seeks out fascinating everyday narratives with a twist that Danish films and series do not seem to provide. Fascination is found in feelings, characters, and settings, and Danish films struggle to compete with fascinating tales from abroad on these parameters. To this age group, Danish film becomes a family category, as they primarily experience Danish productions with their families.

The 15–18-year-olds are not dismissive of Danish films and series, but they want the content to inspire more fascination. They are drawn to emotional rather than factual realism, and they are especially interested in films and series that push the boundaries. As far as the 15–18-year-olds are concerned, contemporary narratives beat films aimed at young audiences, as they are not interested in films for youths but rather films about young people or with young themes. Danish film remains a category that brings the family together, and they highlight Danish humour.

Film as a medium of expression and education

Films and series give the 7–18-year-olds inspiration for their own lives, and through their own image-borne narratives, they show the world who they are. This section explores how the 7–18-year-olds feel that films and videos affect how they see the world and how the world sees them.

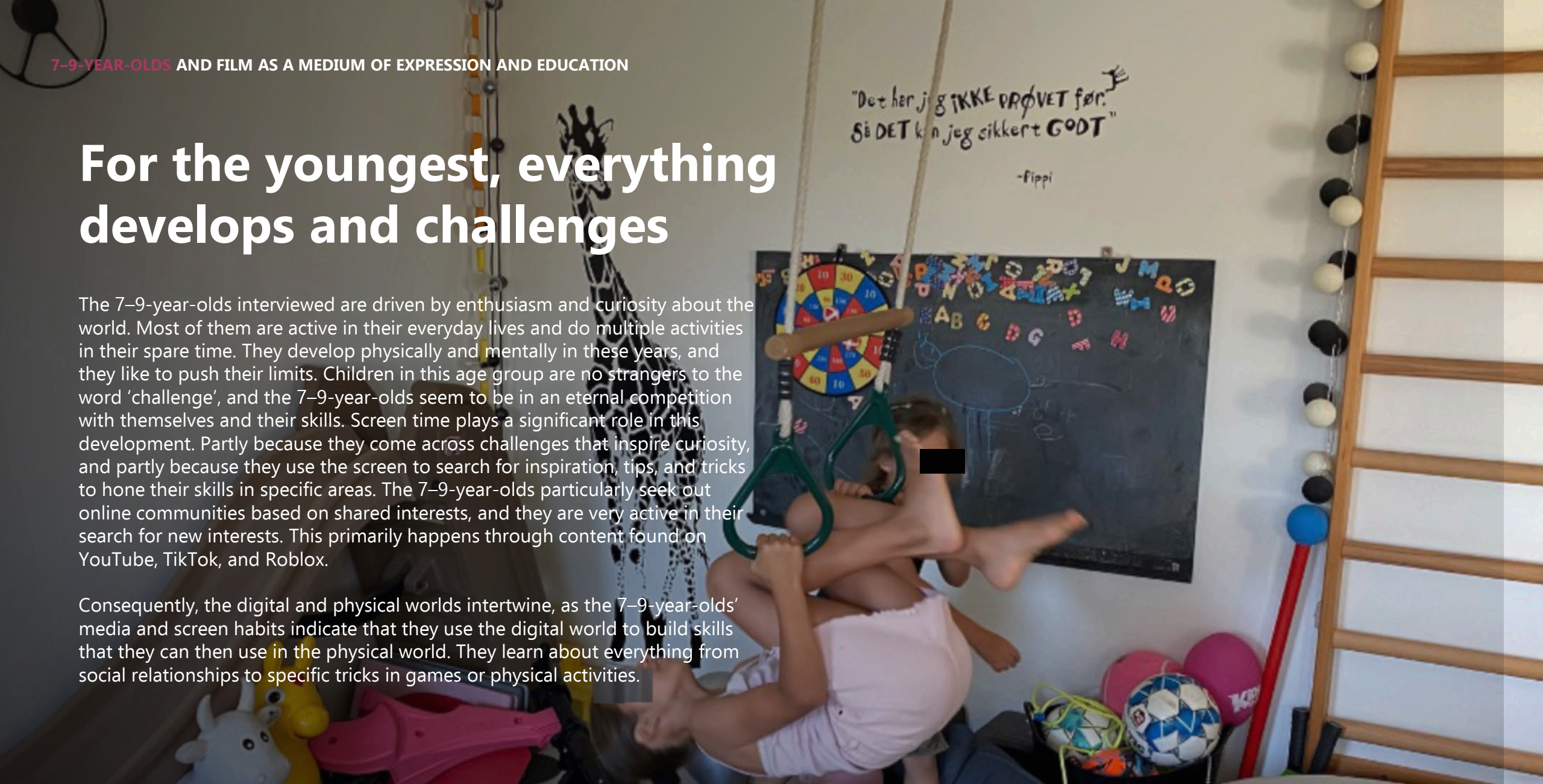
AGES 7-9:

Personal videos are mostly used for play, and videos at school have to be funny too

For the youngest, everything develops and challenges

The 7-9-year-olds interviewed are driven by enthusiasm and curiosity about the world. Most of them are active in their everyday lives and do multiple activities in their spare time. They develop physically and mentally in these years, and they like to push their limits. Children in this age group are no strangers to the word 'challenge', and the 7-9-year-olds seem to be in an eternal competition with themselves and their skills. Screen time plays a significant role in this development. Partly because they come across challenges that inspire curiosity, and partly because they use the screen to search for inspiration, tips, and tricks to hone their skills in specific areas. The 7-9-year-olds particularly seek out online communities based on shared interests, and they are very active in their search for new interests. This primarily happens through content found on YouTube, TikTok, and Roblox.

Consequently, the digital and physical worlds intertwine, as the 7-9-year-olds' media and screen habits indicate that they use the digital world to build skills that they can then use in the physical world. They learn about everything from social relationships to specific tricks in games or physical activities.



They know when films and series are all about learning

The 7-9-year-olds interviewed have all watched films at school, but **they quickly pick up on whether a film has a purpose** and whether it is a way to kill time, a reward, or part of an overarching educational theme. Most of the participants associate films at school with something unscheduled, and the association often includes a substitute teacher or having no adults in the room. However, the youngest age group is keenly aware that when their teacher presents a film, it has an educational purpose. This is sometimes the case when a specific theme is being explored. They do not often watch series at school. The only example that the 7-9-year-olds can come up with is 'Ultra Nyt' on DR TV, which they are allowed to watch while eating lunch or as part of a break.

As far as the youngest age group is concerned, films and series at school **rarely serve entertainment purposes, instead serving educational purposes**. The result is a big perceived difference between the films they watch at home and the films they watch at school.

Statistics from the Danish Film Institute show that more than half of 9-year-olds are excited to watch films at school. In comparison, the equivalent figure for 13-year-olds is under 30%*. This development makes sense in light of the youngest age group still finding it exciting and **fun 'just' to 'watch something'**, whereas 13-year-olds have developed higher expectations for the content, not to mention criteria for how they spend their time. These criteria extend to content consumed at school.

'We watched Asterix and Obelix in arts class, and we learnt about history since it's somewhat related to Roman times'.

Sebastian, 8

*'Vidste du? Om de 10-14 årige', The Danish Film Institute, 2022

**'In films, lots of things
happen, but in class you just
have to learn, learn, learn,
learn ...'**

Vigga, 8

Films and videos in teaching bridge the gap between school and children's lives

When the 7–9-year-olds are asked about their experience with film at school, the group is generally excited to receive education paired with films and videos. This type of learning is perceived as entertaining, stimulating, and engaging, and the reasoning for this is that it is perceived as different from the usual routines defining the school day.

The 7–9-year-olds already navigate various platforms, but unlike the 10–14-year-olds, only a few children in this age group have their own profiles and social media channels. They are allowed to play with the profiles of their older siblings or parents but for a limited time only. As a result, the group is still discovering the many possibilities of these media, and the children enjoy playing with them and giving themselves challenges in the forms of recording videos, playing around with music and voiceover, and generally trying different things. Many of the 7–9-year-old participants say that they have tried stop-motion, editing, voiceover, and other audio-visual techniques at school—and they express that this has made them want to continue playing around and exploring these further at home.

‘I’ve made videos at school. We edit them ourselves! We didn’t add music, we did a voiceover. We came up with it ourselves’.

Klara, 8

Films and videos are made for the fun of it and for a very limited audience

Most of the 7-9-year-olds have strict rules on screen time set by their parents, and many have age restrictions on, e.g., Snapchat and TikTok. As a result, most of the 7-9-year-olds are dependent on borrowing their parents' or older siblings' apps when they want to make their own films or videos. When they talk about and show how they make their own videos and films, it becomes clear that it is seen as a game. They play with the different apps and filters, and their behaviour in front of the camera is playful. In the case of the 7-9-year-olds who create their own films and videos, it is clear that the focus is on laughing and being silly, and rather than being seen as actual content, the videos are considered tools that facilitate an internal game.

The audience for these productions is very limited and primarily consists of parents, grandparents, and siblings—or even just the child themselves, as they can revisit the photo album on their phone whenever they want to laugh. When the 10-14-year-olds look back on the videos they made when they were younger, they often describe the process as 'mostly for fun'—unlike the videos they make and share now.



Personal films are often imitations

Videos and films are good playmates with which the children entertain themselves or which they share with others. Many of the 7-9-year-olds say that they like making TikTok videos with older siblings, where they play, dance, and imitate other people's videos. This group is all about following trends rather than inventing and coming up with their own, and the creation process that interests the 7-9-year-olds involves playing around with expressions, filters, and movements.

The 7-9-year-olds like playing around with the video format, and they like being creative and making things themselves. They make videos to play around with their personality and identity, and fun filters let them see themselves as a cat, with a bigger nose, with twisted eyebrows, or with hearts on their cheeks. This creator behaviour is largely informed by the desire to play. For the same reason, the 7-9-year-olds seek trends on platforms like YouTube and TikTok, which they want to imitate and try at home. These trends can be everything from dances to competition-driven content.

'I've made TikToks with my big sister, and it's cool because those are the ones that get most likes. We do things that she's seen on TikTok. Not dancing, I don't really like that so much. It's challenges'.

Villum, 8



AGES

10-14:

Screen time is key to
the development of
identity and
understanding of the
world

‘I made this video with my sister, but I don’t want the public to see it’.

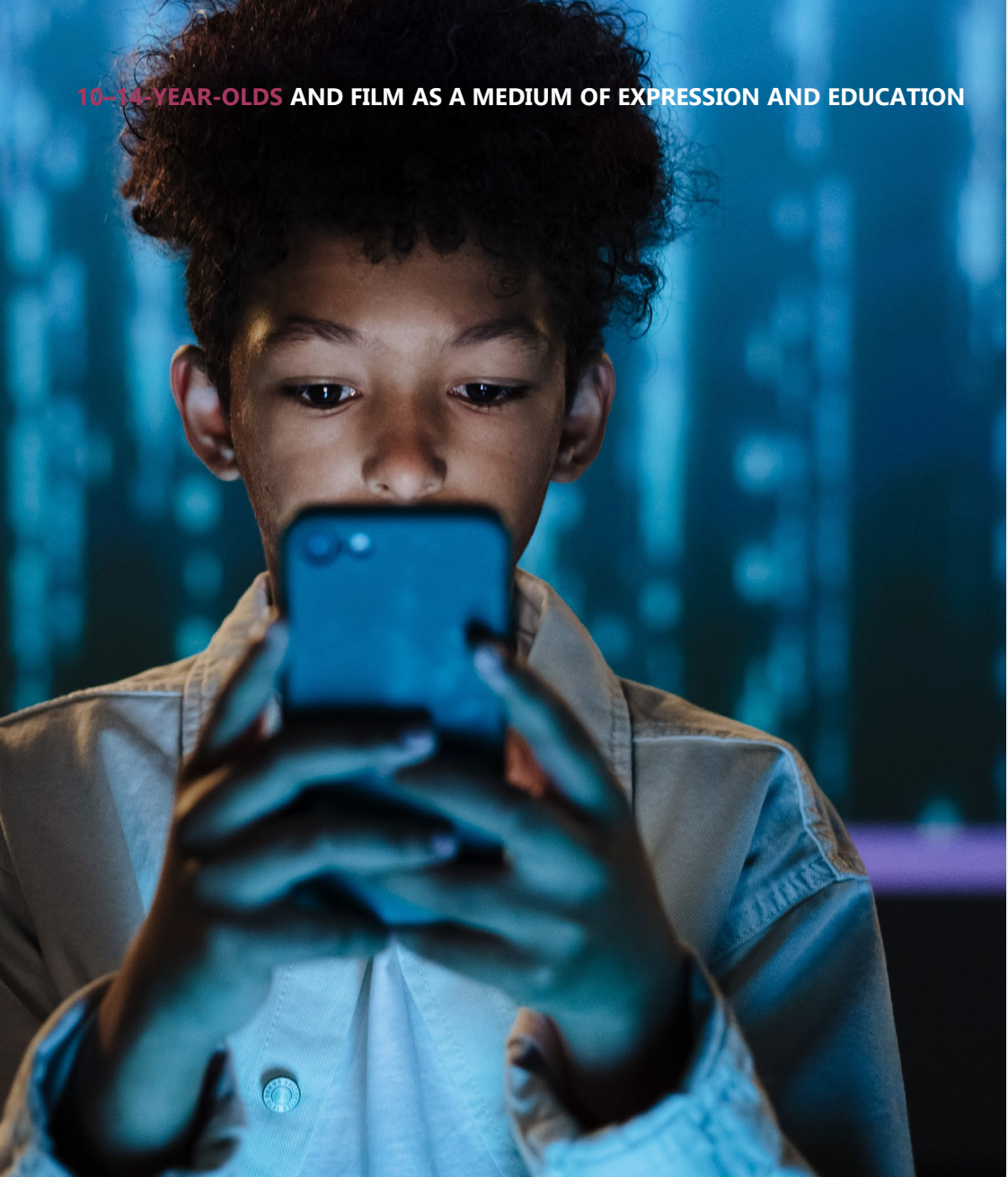
Hannah, 12

Social consciousness meets individual insecurity on screen

What was a game to the 7–9-year-olds becomes serious business for the 10–14-year-olds because there are social consequences. Children in this age group do not aim to be influencers or trendsetters, but rather to be part of a bigger community, and an awareness of ‘likes’ starts to take up mental space.

The 10–14-year-olds practice expressing themselves through image-borne narratives as they get their own profiles on various social media and platforms. Whereas those on the younger end continue the playful behaviour they have been used to, primarily making videos for fun that they keep to themselves, the slightly older segment starts to decode online behaviour and norms through the channels and profiles they follow. Many of the 10–14-year-olds say that they use a kind of copying, where they imitate content and behaviour found on platforms like YouTube and share these imitations on their own profiles. They play around with hashtags and catchphrases, and they have to create content to follow the trend.

The girls in particular say that they often make many videos before deciding which one to share. They carefully consider what to share with a broader audience, reserving funny or embarrassing videos for their closest friends. They usually do not send these, opting instead to show the videos on their own screen.



Identity building amidst friends, celebs, and subcommunities

Most of the 10–14-year-olds are focused on finding themselves, and the question of identity is a big one in these years, where the children are building internal and external versions of their identities. These processes of development happen as the children start to get their own profiles on various social media and have more free time and alone time with their screens. As a result, the screen is central to a 10–14-year-old’s understanding of themselves.

Many of the 10–14-year-olds say that they are on their devices for multiple hours daily, mostly on their phones. Many of them follow people and profiles that inspire them or with whom they have shared interests while seeking subcommunities that give them access to content and friendships. The 10–14-year-olds follow everyone from close friends to complete strangers to celebrities, and this beautiful chaos has significant influence on how the 10–14-year-olds see themselves and the world. They often follow public profiles of people older than themselves, finding fascination in Ronaldo’s cars, Tom Holland’s style, or vloggers inviting them into their lives.

Similarly, many of the 10–14-year-olds use social media to find new interests, trends, films, and games through the recommendation media algorithms. Through ‘For You’ pages, these algorithms help children in this age group discover their tastes and preferences.

Growing fear of shaming as both bully and victim

Although there are big differences in skill level and sharing frequency, one factor ties the group together. At school and at home, the children are hyperaware of the possible consequences of sharing things about themselves online. 'Sharing something' can be enjoyable and dangerous at the same time because the possibility of social shaming is constantly looming. While the younger children are practicing, the older segment has figured out how they want to and should portray themselves. The learning curve is steep, and they quickly learn how wrong things can go if they portray themselves in an incorrect or inappropriate way. Although many of the children point out that online bullying is a huge problem in their age group, many also admit that it can be difficult not to do it themselves. The social dynamics in play are difficult to avoid, and as a result of this awareness, many of them start to sort through their own and other people's content, keeping only the content that feels empowering and positive.

Many of the children also mention trying to create safe spaces and channels for sharing. This is often done in the form of 'closed' lists limited to selected users. These lists give access to stories and posts that have been carefully curated by the creators themselves. Only trusted people are allowed to watch, and close friends, friends, classmates, and others are carefully separated into their respective groups.

'That's the worst thing about social media... But I do it too'.

Rihat, Year 9, on bullying on social media

Snapchats is more about creating connections than expressing oneself

For many of the 10–14-year-olds, Snapchat is the main platform they use to stay in touch with their friends. As a result, terms like 'streak' are important when the 10–14-year-olds talk about their day-to-day screen habits.

The concept of a 'streak' is not new, and a study from Børns Vilkår* shows that in 2020, every sixth girl in Year 10 would get someone else to watch their Snapchat to keep up a streak. None of the participants in this survey mention a similar approach, but they all say that Snapchat is an important part of being part of a social group, making new friends, and maintaining friendships. The 'S' trend is currently important to the 10–14-year-olds, who send each other daily snaps simply depicting an 'S'. Children in this age range keep up with the trend despite many of them stating that they are unsure what the 'S' stands for. One participant says that he tried sending back an 'A' one day but that it was not well-received. Often, the important thing is not the photo that is shared, and although the sharing takes place on a platform centred on photos and videos, the streak is neither about content nor expression. It is about being part of a social group, and the absence of this is keenly felt by those on the outside, such as children not included in big class snap groups.

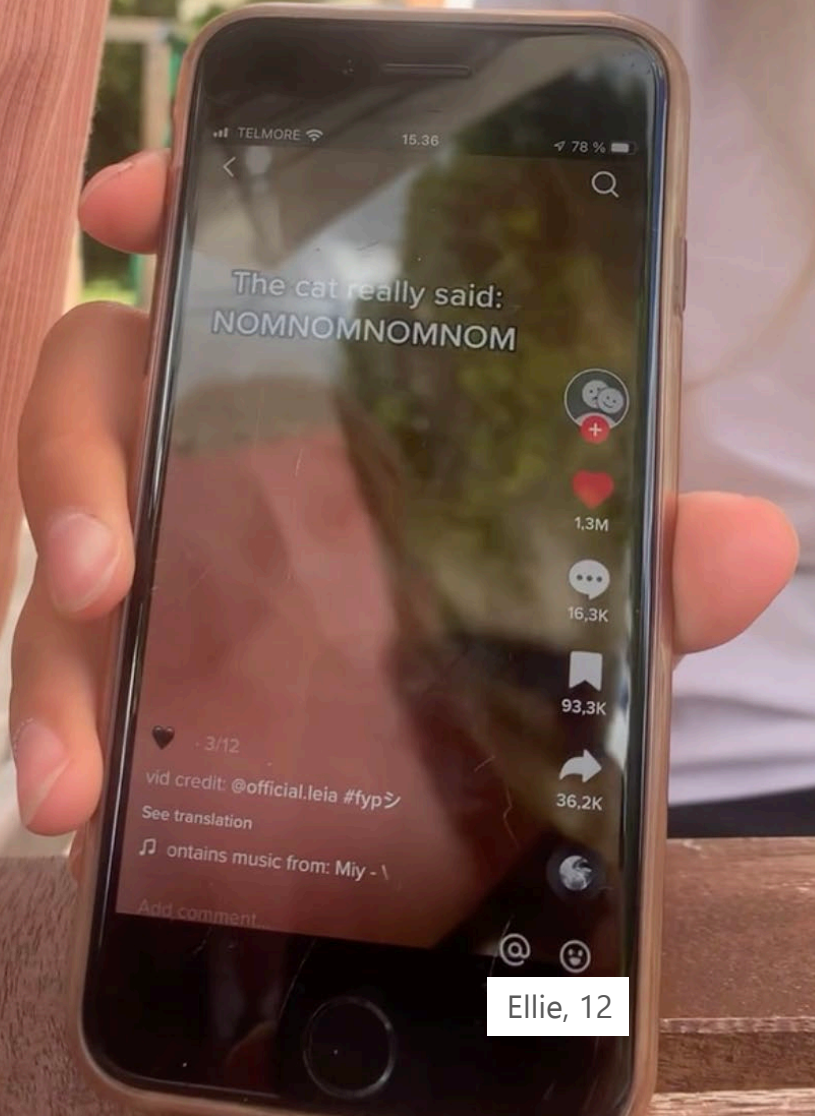
*Krop, køn og digital adfærd', Børns Vilkår, 2020



'You just take a photo of whatever is in front of you, and then you draw an "S". Without a filter'.

Karl, 11

10-14-YEAR-OLDS AND FILM AS A MEDIUM OF EXPRESSION AND EDUCATION



Watch, save, rewatch, approve, share. Repeat

Videos created by the children themselves are not the only things curated from home. The same goes for all the content the group comes across. The 10–14-year-olds are very attentive to what they share with their friends, and some of them describe the selection process. It often starts with their 'For You' page, where they scroll through a long series of videos or clips. They sort through the videos, 'liking' and saving the ones they want to watch again. Whether a video is given a like depends on the perceived entertainment value in the moment. Saved videos are then revisited and watched again. If the videos are deemed funny or good enough the second time, they are fit to be shared with others.

Genuine, exciting, talented, and cool profiles create personal development

As far as the 10–14-year-olds are concerned, films, series, and videos are a window onto what lies ahead. The 10–14-year-olds often look up when it comes to characters and profiles, so they are on their tiptoes, trying to get a glimpse of the next chapter of their lives. It is clear that they are looking for feelings and reactions in which to reflect themselves and to which to aspire. Many of the participants in the study spend a lot of time thinking about who they are, who they want to be, and how others perceive them, and characters from videos, series, and films play an important role in this puzzle piece.

When the 10–14-year-olds talk about characters or profiles to which they look up, they describe these as 'genuine', 'exciting', 'talented', or 'cool'. There is a tendency for the group to follow profiles with shared interests, as these feel within reach, but they also follow the profiles of people who live vastly different lives. For many, the driving force is the feeling of authenticity. They want to be able to feel the person behind the profile, and the more authentic and genuine the person appears, the more realistic and exciting the children find their behaviour, goals, and approach to life. When they list their idols, they distinguish between **fictional characters from films and series and real people** from vlogs and social media.

'I want to be like Rory ... It's a source of motivation'.

Derya, 13, on Rory from Gilmore Girls

'It's mostly like children's films because they aren't allowed to show us other films'.

Bertil, 11

Films at school are seen as uninteresting children's films and associated with a lack of choice

The 10–14-year-olds are no strangers to watching films at school. Many of them feel that watching a film is more fun than, for example, reading a book, but they still distinguish between the films they watch at home (that interest them) and the films they watch at school (that they are forced to watch). Films watched at school are associated with force rather than interest. A big part of the reason for this is that the participants feel there is no action in the films they watch at school. They are often associated with children's films, where everyone can be involved. This is the result of schools being more tied to age restrictions than the group is used to at home. Numerous participants underscore that they would like to be involved in the choice of film, so films at school are not simply boring learning materials but also conversation starters. The group talks about the films and series they watch at home, but this is not the case for content watched at school.

Generally speaking, the group is more accepting of films than series, as series are not seen as a good teaching format. Series are often perceived as drawn-out and never-ending in the context of school, compared to at home, where they are associated with interest and binge-watching.

Children and young adults want their teachers to be better at film and video production

Many of the 10-14-year-olds have experience making films at school. They describe working together to create informative videos on various themes in Danish, English, and History, or trying their hand at different formats, such as documentaries, diaries, fiction in video editors like CapCut or on their phones.

Although the content or information that the group is asked to transfer into a video format is educational, they do not feel that they learn anything about making videos. The general consensus is that they have more experience making and editing videos on Snapchat, TikTok, or YouTube than their teachers do, so many of the participants feel that their teachers have little to teach them. Instead, they seek learning potential in fellow students who are better at making videos, and they learn from them.

'I made a video about animals in Science. I think we're better at it than the teachers are'.

Afraa, 11

AGES 15-18:

The smallest screen shapes identity, and platforms have surged in popularity

Adolescent identity is closely tied to the little screen—particularly to TikTok

'We agree that it's TikTok, right?'

BOY, 17

'Oh yeah! You know, I was about to say YouTube, but you're right.'

GIRL, 18

At Viborg Gymnasium, 20 students were divided into pairs and interviewed about their generation. The first question was:

'Take a moment to think: Imagine a version of yourselves 20 years from now. Perhaps you have children of your own, and one day, you want to tell them about your generation at this moment in time. You need to explain your generation to your children by telling them exactly what you watched on your screens that you feel best represents this time in history. And by "your screens", I mean ALL the screens: TV screens, phone screens, cinema screens, computer screens, gaming screens—ALL the screens'.

No one mentioned films/series. All 20 students said TikTok.

Adolescent identity is closely tied to the little screen—particularly to TikTok

(3 minutes later during the same interview)

'But what about films?'

INTERVIEWER

'Oh, right—Netflix! I watch that too, there are so many good series'.

GIRL, 18

'Yes, but I asked about *films*, not series'.

INTERVIEWER

'Ah, of course. I watch them with my family sometimes. Other than that, they're just something I put on in the background while I do my homework'.

GIRL, 18

Content traditionally viewed on bigger screens is not the first thing that comes to mind when adolescents are asked to highlight the *important* things. The order of importance tends to be 1) Platforms 2) Series 3) Films. Films are generally seen as less personal than, e.g., series, which one watches alone, as films are often a shared experience that builds on various compromises.

Adolescents view adult concerns about social media as overstated

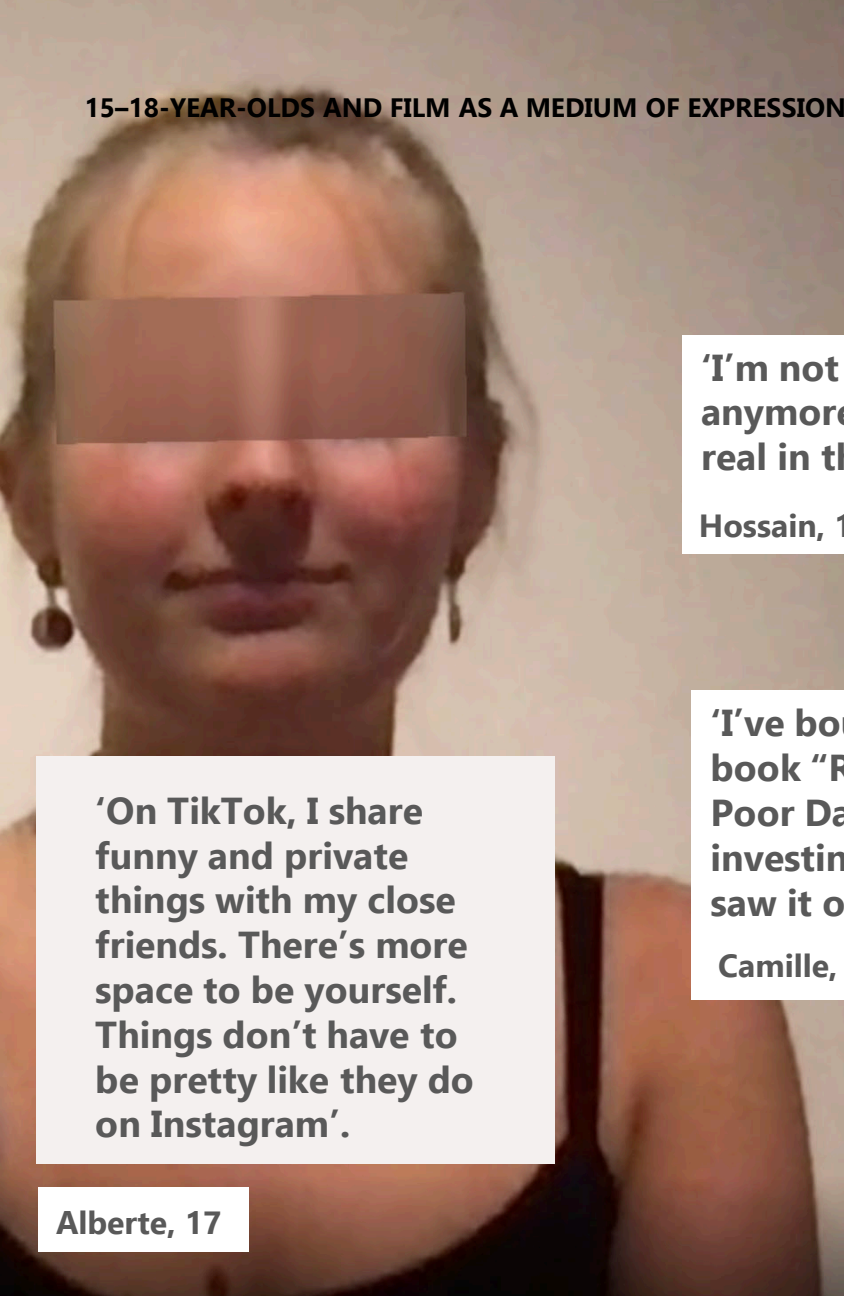
The 15–18-year-olds might be more united across platforms than shared stories, but that does not mean that adolescents are not interested in the wider community, i.e. the world and the things that happen in it. They just get their content from different sources than the generations before them.

Up close with the adolescents, it quickly becomes clear that adults look at young people's online habits and expect the worst. According to the adolescents, the older generation does not understand what they do online, and they feel that the adults do not have the ability to understand their digital habits and lives. The adults obsess over the power of algorithms and the dangers of the polished reality presented on Instagram, and this creates a chasm between the adults and the 15–18-year-olds, who feel misunderstood. Unlike many adults, most of the adolescents do not see TikTok as empty and scary, nor do they see it as superficial and unhealthy self-portrayal like Instagram.

Often, the adolescents respond with indulgent shrugs when the adults express concern about social media, even though the adolescents agree that there is a certain level of danger. However, they also feel that the older generation's scepticism is largely rooted in ignorance. The 15–18-year-olds struggle to see why films, series, reality series, and TV entertainment is better and 'healthier' than content on, e.g., TikTok, where the group also seeks constructive and educational content. The adolescents look for news and personal stories with which they identify, not to mention short documentaries, explainers, tips, and tricks—combined with lots of other content with far less important messages, of course.

'I like talking about films with people on TikTok. It creates a sense of community'.

Thea, 15



'I'm not on BeReal anymore. It wasn't real in the end'.

Hossain, 18

'I've bought the book "Rich Dad, Poor Dad" about investing because I saw it on TikTok'.

Camille, 18

'On TikTok, I share funny and private things with my close friends. There's more space to be yourself. Things don't have to be pretty like they do on Instagram'.

Alberte, 17

TikTok is seen as the safest place to be open and together

TikTok has a mixed public reputation, and the reasons for this range from security to algorithms. But when asking the 15-18-year-olds, it becomes clear that they have a different take on the matter. Many of the adolescents interviewed feel more safe, secure, and honest on TikTok than they do on other social media platforms—especially Instagram. However, the aesthetic is very different. Whereas content and behaviour on TikTok is often silly, self-deprecating, and relaxed, Instagram is much more curated, staged, and idealised.

Many of the adolescents feel that they can use TikTok to find niche communities, where they can be themselves and explore their interests. Their FYP (For You Page) is made specifically for them, and they feel that the platform takes their interests seriously. Some of them describe using TikTok to discuss films, while others explain that BookTok is a good place to find book recommendations. The 15-18-year-olds are particularly enamoured with TikTok's ability to be 'genuine', which is in sharp contrast to their perception of other platforms. Instagram is seen as too polished, and BeReal does not manage to feel real, so most of them end up on TikTok, where they, in other words, have more space to be themselves.

A study conducted by Nielsen for TikTok* shows that out of 8,000 global followers, 64% feel that they can be completely themselves on TikTok, and 59% feel a sense of community when they are on the platform.

[*https://www.tiktok.com/business/en/blog/nielsen-study-tiktok-discovery-content-authentic](https://www.tiktok.com/business/en/blog/nielsen-study-tiktok-discovery-content-authentic)

Adolescents are at the heart of the Creator Economy and have strict rules about what is shared and how

With help from YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Twitch, Spotify, OnlyFans, and various other platforms, not to mention the technological developments in user-friendliness of AV equipment, making content has not only become easy—it has become a realistic potential source of income. A new economy has emerged in this 'Democratisation of Content Creation', which draws parallels to the Low-Code/No-Code developments in the software industry, where tech has become less of a limiting factor when it comes to using software that once required extensive technical skills.

And while the number of adolescents who earn money through their content is low, this democratisation has also shaken up preconceived notions. This is reflected in the use of personal video features and the ability to judge content in general, where adolescents have uncharacteristically high demands for authenticity and originality.

This is reflected in the perception of self, as adolescents see themselves as creators or at least as people with significant insight into the creation of live images. Everyone creates and shares, but all the participants in the study have very strict rules concerning what, and with whom they share.

KEEN AWARENESS OF HOW TO SHARE:

Publicly: Nice photos of friends, self, and events: Recognition.

'Pretty things and when I go somewhere nice'.

Jasmin, 18

Privately: Various circles of close relationships: Fun, problems, updates on what I am doing.

'We do silly things, but we also talk about the things that matter to

Carla, 18

Completely privately: Created but not shared.

'I have more than 26,000 photos and videos on my phone. In many of them, I'm emotional, sad, or sharing something deep. It's just a way for me to get things off my chest. I don't share them'.

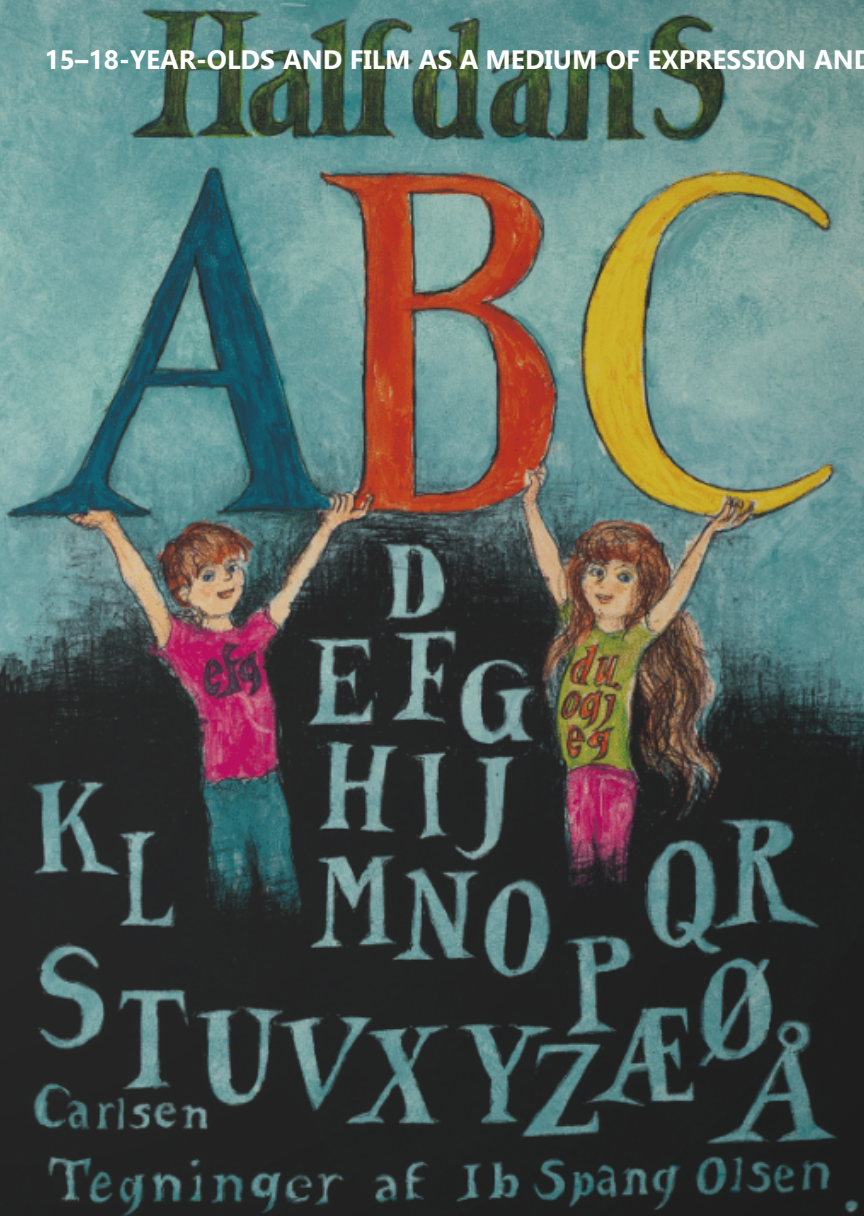
Ida, 16

Films and series with peer-to-peer feelings make a bigger impression than big productions

It is impossible to listen to the 15-18-year-olds talk about relatable Danish content without hearing the name 'Jonas Risvig'. In fact, there are *no* other examples in the interviews, which centre on 'Salsa', 'Drenge', 'Centrum', etc.

Risvig's content on DR is a good example that films and series with peer-to-peer emotions can be successful online and offline. The content gives the adolescents a safe space to consider scenarios in the life and time to come. It is all about recognisable surroundings, actors their own age, scenarios, and characters. It is about **small recognisable glimpses** of the adolescents' lives, but the stories have an edge, so it does not feel like a carbon copy. The success lies in recognisability with a feeling of potential for personal development, not a carbon copy with a moral.

As a result of the pronounced creator democratisation, the expectations for actions, creativity, and aesthetic have changed. If it is intended to seem like something the adolescents could make themselves, it has to look like something they could (almost) make themselves. But there is more to it than just the **democratised creation process** with a reduction in the number of gatekeepers. It is also about the **flat hierarchies between creators and recipients**, where the adolescents can relate to and communicate directly with their favourite creators. This makes the relationship between creators and recipients less intimidating, which is perfect for this age group that seeks to experience the polar opposites of authenticity and escapism on the small as well as the big screen.



Everyone should learn to read, write, and make films – in that order

Across the 7–18 age range, films are seen as a good tool for receiving and sharing knowledge. The 15–18-year-olds use image-borne narratives to share their lives with their friends and network, and creating videos, films, photos, and clips comes naturally to them.

In a focus group of 20 gymnasium students, there was a lot of talk about image-borne narratives in education and school in general. They were divided with regards to the use of films in teaching, with only a few finding the idea of a film replacing the teacher appealing. Instead, most of them pointed out that it could be interesting to include more documentaries and works of fiction, provided they had a say in the choice of content, with a view to discussing them as a group afterwards. Films are good conversation starters for 15–18-year-olds in their digital communities, families, friend groups, and classrooms. But the conversation is off to a better start if the film is interesting, relevant, and concerns the adolescents, which is not the case today.

Adding film to the curriculum is one thing. Adding film to the schedule is another, and many of the students agree that there is great potential in introducing Film as a subject. Not quite as early as they learn to read and write, but shortly after. They all agree that film creation is not only an important skill that they will need in life but that school would be more interesting if they could turn in projects in the form of a film—including in subjects that have nothing to do with media.

Summary: From challenges to engagement

From the ages of 7–18, image-borne narratives in the forms of films and videos play a big part in how children experience the world. The image-borne narratives are used as a playful tool that allows the 7–18-year-olds to challenge themselves and discover their tastes and identities. Whereas the youngest segment uses films, videos, and series for play—and imitation plays a central role—the risks are higher for the 10–14-year-olds, who have moved part of their identity online. For the oldest segment, videos are a way to seek the 'genuine' and position themselves in exciting and engaging communities.

The 7–9-year-olds are focused on playfulness in the way they use videos to express themselves. The group is getting to grips with many things—they have become good at school, they do things in their spare time, and they look for tips and tricks. Films in their spare time are associated with entertainment, and films at school present a vastly different experience, as teaching and messages often outweigh the entertainment value. The use of their own films is a good learning tool, as it bridges the gap between school and the group's more playful approach to films.

The 10–14-year-olds are focused on identity, and content on big and small screens alike have an impact on their identity development. The group seeks new communities, new trends, and inspiration for how they want to be, look, and act: right now and in the future. The group is focused on what they themselves take away from films and series as well as what school is trying to teach them. Films at school are associated with childish and boring themes, and the teachers struggle to keep up when it comes to creating films in the classroom.

The 15–18-year-olds want to engage with the world at large, and they find society interesting. However, they feel that adults do not recognise the channels and platforms they use to create their opinions and through which they find their sub and niche communities. The group seeks peer-to-peer formats that give them genuine perspectives on everyday life. Films as part of the curriculum and Film as a subject garner interest from the group, as the adolescents feel there is potential for captivating discussions, provided that they get to have a say.

Games and gaming

From the ages of 7–18, games and gaming are a natural part of the content they consume. This section maps out how the 7–18-year-olds use games for entertainment in their daily lives.

AGES 7-9:

Playing games comes naturally to children in this age group, making it an ideal activity for their daily routines

The youngest children think about their games a lot, even when they are not playing

'I think about my Fortnite a lot because I've spent more than 2,000 kroner on it, so in my opinion it's very valuable'.

Sigurd, 9

Games activate and bring together in a way films cannot

All the 7–9-year-olds interviewed play one or more games. Children in this age group highlight games as a good activity for their spare time, highlighting the word 'activity', as they feel that they actively participate in the development of the story. They indicate that playing a game is considered an active event, where they physically use their hands and brain. This stands in sharp contrast to films, which are sometimes perceived as boring, as they 'following along lazily' as passive recipients.

Many of the 7–9-year-olds highlight creative games like 'Roblox', 'Minecraft', and 'Sims' as game activities that they like to spend lots of time on, where the game situation can be both social and individual. At this age, playing a game is considered an activity that is fun alone and with others, which makes games a great fit for the children's day-to-day lives. The group has various strategies for turning games into a communal experience, but in most cases—if the children are playing separately at the same time—the communication takes place outside the game platforms, such as on FaceTime or Google Meet.

When the 7–9-year-olds talk about finding new games, many of them highlight 'Roblox' as an important source for new opportunities. This is where they see adverts for new games, and if they look exciting, the children download and try them. Another important source of inspiration is famous YouTubers, who talk about or recommend new games.

'With films, you just have to sit—and not to criticise, sit and follow along lazily—and when you play games, you have to think and press some buttons'.

Storm, 8



'And other times, I FaceTime my friends who also play "Sims".'

Anna, 8

Games hone creativity, and (co-)creation is essential

Amongst the 7–9-year-olds, the level of engagement is largely driven by the desire to create, build, and develop. Games are about honing creativity—ideally, over an extended period of time. For this reason, many of the children highlight that games are at their best when the experience can be shared and they can develop and create as part of a community.

The desire to compete and win on their own is much less pronounced than the desire to create something together.

For this age group, games are also a good way of developing connections with their friends, and games become a tool for honing and developing social skills and improving relationship building. The 7–9-year-olds primarily play with friends from school or after-school activities rather than with people they meet online.

Games are the preferred activity during alone time

When asked what they prefer to do when tired after school and resting on the sofa, most participants choose playing games. To the 7-9-year-olds, games seem to be closely associated with relaxation. Followed closely by series and short videos, games are also the activity on which the 7-9-year-olds would spend most of their time if they were free to choose.

'Playing games, or if I'm watching something, YouTube. I lie down with a pillow, and I'm comfortable while I play my games'.

Quentin, 8, on what he thinks is most fun on his iPad

'I would say that I play games. But if I got some gaming gear: a big computer, a big screen, a big mousepad, a keyboard with rainbow colours, and a gaming chair, I would definitely say I think I'm more of a gamer'.

Frederic, 9

Everyone plays games, but gaming calls for gear

The 7-9-year-olds interviewed all have experience playing games in one format or the other, but they feel there is a difference between playing games and gaming. Especially the boys are focused on the idea that they need special equipment in order to game or to call themselves gamers. Some of the boys in this age group have started decorating their rooms based on an interest in gaming, and their gameplay interest moves from the small screen onto a real computer screen.

AGES 10-14:

Games are still the common denominator, but the way games are played has changed

Existing friends are no longer a prerequisite for trying new games

Digital games are a big part of everyday life from 10–14. Statistics from the Media Council for Children and Young Adults* show that two out of three children (from 1–15) play with other people and that digital games are an important source of socialising. More than half of the children who play games do so to meet their friends.

In the case of the 10–14-year-olds, the study shows that games are played alone and with others but that the social aspect is important. Multiple respondents prefer to play games with others and coordinate their schedules with their friends, so they can play together. Games with multiplayer features and online features are highlighted, as these allow players to interact with their friends simultaneously—or to create new friendships through the game. The conversations that unfold during gameplay usually take place in the players' own chats or on Discord.

Whereas the 7–9-year-olds prefer to play with people they already know, the 10–14-year-olds have started making new friends through games or just playing games with strangers. Sometimes, this is brought on by necessity, such as if a child does not have friends who play a particular game. This behaviour illustrates that the 10–14-year-olds have started to build preferences and stand by them. Many children also seek interest communities and sources of inspiration on social media, where they highlight numerous Danish YouTubers. These channels are highlighted as key sources of inspiration when it comes to finding new games to try. At this age, the primary drivers for trying a new game are that 'it looks fun' and that it is free.

'I play a little PlayStation, where I play Epic Legends for about an hour and 30 minutes with random people because I don't have many friends who play it'.

Noah, 11

*Børns spillevaner 2020', Media Council for Children and Young People, 2020

From 10–14, there are clear differences in gaming behaviour for the different genders

Regardless of gender, children in this age range have more time to play games as Mum and Dad's screen rules get more lax, and many of the 10–14-year-olds seek and try new games.

The interviews with the 10–14-year-olds reveal that these years are characterised by changing gaming behaviour. Many of the boys are more committed to gameplay, and they tend to play games that take up a lot of time and require focus. These games are often competition-driven. Meanwhile, most of the girls prefer less demanding games that pose logical and creative challenges. They mostly play games for fun and to relax, but they like the social element, and many of them chat with or talk to friends while they play games.

‘There are 32 players, but only 16 of them continue, and then the next time, only 8 continue. I’ve only won it twice’.

Arthur, 11

AGES 15-18:

The focus has shifted from games to platforms like TikTok, and their gaming habits have changed



Game over?

DISCLAIMER: Statistics show that 12.4% of Danish 15–19-year-olds spend more than 40 hours a week playing games. This qualitative study does not reflect this behaviour.

In the group of 15–18-year-olds, multiple interviewees state they no longer think it is cool to spend time playing games. Many participants used to play games, with girls particularly mentioning having spent significant time on games like The Sims, Roblox, and Hay Day. They explain their lack of interest in games by stating that it can be hard to find the time in their busy lives, and at the same time, they have new interests. While some boys continue to play games like FIFA or Counter-Strike with friends, they emphasise the social component more than the gameplay.

However, these replies cannot be considered representative of this age group. Statistics on adolescents' gaming habits show that 96% of Danish boys aged 13–19 play computer games. 10% of the young adults aged 15–29 who regularly play computer games spend more than 40 hours a week behind the screen. A study from DR Medieforskning also shows that 70% of all girls aged 13–19 play computer games.

Games and gaming.

Summary: From creativity to competition

Just like films and videos, games are a key part of how the 7–18-year-olds relate to entertainment. The common denominator across the three age groups is the perception that games are more immersive than films. They feel closer to the content and the story, and they have a say in how the events unfold. The story feels more engaging because it calls for the use of their hands and brains. For the 7–9-year-olds, playing games is an activity equal part activating and entertaining. For the 10–14-year-olds, they are more about the social aspect, and for the boys, competition becomes more of a factor. The 15–18-year-olds interviewed for this report are more focused on TikTok and similar channels, but quantitative studies show that this age group still actively plays games.

For the 7–9-year-olds, games are another part of everyday entertainment. Many of the children consider playing games their favourite activity, as games activate their brains and hands while their bodies relax on the sofa. They feel that games engage and include them in a way films and series cannot, and the 7–9-year-olds appreciate the feeling of being co-creators. They like creating things on their own and with others, and they love to share their creations, and as a result, games—whether played alone or with others—are a good activity.

For the 10–14-year-olds, playing games is still a common activity, but this group emphasises the social aspect. They maintain existing friendships and create new relationships through games, and they establish interest communities centred on specific games through which they make friends. The differences between genders are more distinct. Whereas girls mostly seek a cosy way to relax and entertain themselves, boys are more focused on the competition aspect.

The interview **15–18-year-olds'** gaming habits have evolved from their earlier years. The Sims have been swapped for less demanding games, mostly with the aim to kill time, and competitive games are more about spending time with friends. A significant portion of the time previously dedicated to gaming has shifted to platforms like TikTok. It is worth noting that a quantitative survey has shown that many of the individuals in this age group still actively play games.

About the methodology

'Close-up' builds on qualitative data collected in late autumn 2022, including:

- 41 mobile ethnographic diary studies of children ages 7–18, who answered daily questions on their phones over the course of 7 days;
- 15 in-depth at-home interviews with 7–14-year-olds;
- Three focus groups and two-day observation of three classes (Year 6, Year 9, and second year of gymnasium).

122 children and adolescents from all over Denmark contributed to the insights of the study.

The design of the study was adapted to young audiences to account for differences in levels of abstract thinking and background.

To organise the study, the Film Institute contributed existing knowledge, and background interviews were carried out with experts from the University of Copenhagen, the University of Southern Denmark, Nordisk Film, and experts in media and youth.

Will & Agency is wholly responsible for the presented text and analysis. The Danish Film Institute has conducted the translation.

CONTACT: The Danish Film Institute

Sanne Juncker Pedersen / Strategic Head of 'Closer to the audience' / sannep@dfi.dk
Charlotte Giese / Special Advisor, Children and Youth / charlotg@dfi.dk

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