September 2021

Public attitudes towards offensive language on TV and radio: Summary Report

Ipsos MORI research for Ofcom

Warning: this report contains highly offensive language and discussion of content which may cause offence.

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Foreword

TV and radio are a big part of who we are as a nation – they're central to our culture and collective identity, and never more so than during the last 18 months. With many of us forced to spend long periods at home, with limited opportunities to see friends and family, we've tuned in in record numbers to keep ourselves entertained and informed as a welcome distraction from the challenges of the pandemic.

Our broadcasters provide a huge range of drama, reality, comedy, documentaries and news programmes which can often prompt polarised reactions and emotions from audiences. People rightly expect certain standards on TV and radio – and that means having their say when they come across something that troubles them. That's where we come in.

At Ofcom, one of our primary responsibilities is to set and enforce rules for broadcast television and radio – to protect audiences from harmful and offensive content, while respecting rights to freedom of expression. Viewers and listeners are at the centre of what we do. For our rules to remain relevant and effective, it's important that we listen and understand first-hand what people find offensive and how attitudes change over time. Since our last wave of similar research five years ago, it's been fascinating to see how tastes and tolerances have shifted or, indeed, stayed the same.

This year, we've engaged with a larger and more diverse selection of viewers and listeners than ever before. This included adults of all ages, living throughout the UK, as well as those from a range of minority groups and communities – including Black African and Caribbean people, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi people, disabled people, and the LGBTQ+ and Gypsy and Traveller communities. We also expanded our focus groups to include dedicated sessions with members of the Jewish and Chinese communities for the first time.

Audiences told us that, although they want broadcasters to give careful consideration to when and how offensive language is used on TV and radio, they stressed the important role it can play in broadcasting. Participants mentioned, for example, offensive language being used for dramatic impact, for humour, to reflect real life or to inform and educate. Our content assessors recognise this too, and we always apply our rules in a way that takes into account creative freedom and expression. The research also shows an ongoing trend of increasingly relaxed attitudes about the use of swear words. Viewers and listeners had limited concerns, as long as the strongest language was broadcast after the watershed and parents were given sufficient information to inform their decisions about what their children could watch and listen to.

On the other hand, reflecting heightened societal concern, audiences told us they felt increasingly worried about discriminatory language, particularly around race. Viewers and listeners said they expect broadcasters to take the utmost care to carefully contextualise the strongest forms of discriminatory language to ensure that audiences are protected. We also found, however, that many participants did not want to see all older, programmes containing potentially problematic content disappear from our screens completely. Again, audiences consistently stressed that context, in this respect, is key. What programme and channel was it broadcast on? And at what time? What would audiences of the channel expect? Was there a warning or other information given to viewers about potentially offensive content to help them make informed decisions about whether to switch off?

It's important to remember that there is no absolute right not to be offended by things we see and hear on TV and radio. Consistent with rights to freedom of expression, broadcasters can include material in their programmes that is potentially offensive but, to stay within our rules, they must make sure they provide sufficient context and adequate protection to audiences. These findings will help broadcasters to

make these often finely balanced judgements and better inform their decisions about the broadcasting of offensive language and other content. The report also helps us at Ofcom understand and take account of audience's views when making complex and nuanced decisions about potentially offensive content on TV and radio, while having full regard to freedom of expression.

Adam Baxter
Director, Standards and Audience Protection
September 2021

1 Introduction

Warning: this report contains highly offensive language and discussion of content which may cause offence.

Ofcom commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct research to help them understand public attitudes towards offensive language on TV and radio. The research focused on the use of potentially offensive language on scheduled broadcast TV or radio rather than on-demand programmes as the rules for broadcast and on-demand services are different. This report provides an updated picture of attitudes to offensive language, building on previous research commissioned by Ofcom in 2016. It also examines attitudes to other types of potentially offensive content, namely blackface[1], mimicking of accents, misgendering[2] and deadnaming[3].

The research involved a mixed methods approach. A quantitative survey captured spontaneous responses on the acceptability of 186 words. It ran over five days, between 22nd and 26th February 2021, with 368 respondents being asked about all 186 words. Respondents individually assessed the acceptability of each word before and after the watershed, reviewing around 37 potentially offensive words each day. The watershed only applies to television and is at 9pm. Material unsuitable for children should not, in general, be shown before 9pm or after 5.30am. On radio, Ofcom uses a broadly comparable concept of times "when children are particularly likely to be listening".[4]

The qualitative strand consisted of 37 online discussion groups and 25 depth interviews involving participants from a variety of locations and backgrounds. Fieldwork took place between 15th February and 6th May 2021:

- One pilot and 15 focus groups took place with members of the general public, split by location, age and socioeconomic status ("general groups").

- 21 focus groups were conducted with participants from minority communities: Black African (x2); Black Caribbean (x2); Bangladeshi (x3); Pakistani (x3); Indian (x3)[5]; Chinese (x2); Jewish (x2); and lesbian, gay & bisexual[6] (x4).

- Online depth interviews were conducted with trans participants[7] (x5); and non-binary participants (x5).

- Online depth interviews were conducted with participants with physical or mental disabilities (x5).

- Telephone depth interviews were also conducted with 10 individuals: participants from Traveller communities (x5); and participants aged 66-85 without access to the internet (x5).

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[1] Blackface refers to the act of someone (typically with white skin) painting their face darker to resemble a Black person or someone from an ethnic minority. The practice dates back to the minstrel shows of mid-19th century America, where White performers dressed as caricatured versions of Black slaves as a form of entertainment.

[2] Misgendering refers to the act of using a word or pronoun (typically when describing or talking to a trans person), that does not reflect a person's gender identity.

[3] Deadnaming refers to calling a transgender person by their birth name if they have changed their name as part of their gender transition.

[4] This refers to between 06:00 and 09:00 and 15:00 and 19:00 Monday to Friday during term time; and between 06:00 and 19:00 at weekends all year around, and in addition, during the same times from Monday to Fridays during school holidays. See https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/40541/offensive-language.pdf

[5] Groups with Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian participants were split by generation. First generation participants were also split by gender.

[6] These groups were split by gender: 2 x groups with lesbian and bisexual women and 2 x groups with gay and bisexual men.

[7] Trans participants refers to participants who are transgender.

As part of the qualitative strand, around 25 offensive words were reviewed, discussed and sorted by participants in each online discussion group, with participants asked to rate the strength of each word without any contextual information. Participants in online depth interviews also reviewed around 25 words. Those interviewed over the telephone did not complete a word sort exercise. Each word included in the quantitative survey was reviewed by at least two focus groups. In addition, South Asian participants reviewed, discussed and sorted 11 non-English words.

During the discussions, all participants were shown a range of hypothetical scenarios, developed to stimulate discussions on the acceptability of potentially offensive language and other types of potentially offensive content. Participants taking part online were also asked to watch and listen to a number of audio and visual clips of recently broadcast content before taking part in a discussion group or interview. A selection of clips was described to telephone depth participants to ensure their views could also be explored.

A summary of the clips and scenarios are included in the tables below. These are referred to throughout this report. Appendix A includes a full description of participants' views towards each clip and scenario.

Table 1.1: Clips watched by participants ahead of the research

Carry on Cleo	ITV3	October 2020, 1:10pm	*Carry on Cleo* is a 1964 comedy film and the tenth film in the *Carry On* series. During the film, a White actor plays an Egyptian guard. His **skin is darkened** with very dark make-up. He is unable to speak, using sign language to communicate instead.
Strike it Lucky	Challenge	June 2020, 3:30pm	*Strike it Lucky* is a long-running game show that aired from 1986 to 1999. During the show, the presenter talks to a contestant. When she says she is originally from Hong Kong, he **mimics her accent***, using made up words and sounds, and telling her he can also *"speak Chinese".* This is met with laughter from the audience.
Mannequin	ITV	August 2020, 12:35pm	*Mannequin* is a romantic comedy film from 1987 about a shop mannequin that comes to life. During the film, a character refers to a flamboyantly dressed male character who is crying as "*the* **fairy"**.
The Simpsons	Sky One	October 2020, 7:35pm	*The Simpsons* is a long-running American animated sitcom. In the episode a number of characters are participating in a diversity forum. During this, the Principal of the school is shown to be wearing a skirt and high heels, and a student points and laughs saying: "*Ha ha the Principal's a* **tranny"**. Later on, one of the main characters, Marge Simpson wants her daughter Lisa to be able to attend a boys' school. Marge tries to disguise Lisa as a boy, dressing her in male clothing and a wig. Marge, looking at Lisa, says: "*You are the perfect little* **he-she".**
Live at The Apollo	Dave	January 2020, 9pm	*Live at The Apollo* is a stand-up comedy programme. During one set, the comedian talks about the programme *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* saying that the show should really be called: "*Let's watch* **pikeys** *on the piss*". Later he says the show is an opportunity to "*laugh at* **pikeys**". He also describes how *The Only Way is Essex* is an excuse to "*laugh at* **chavs**" and *Made in Chelsea* is a chance to "laugh at **wankers**".
Secrets of the Sauna	Channel 4	June 2020, 2:40am	*Secrets of the Sauna* is an observational documentary about the staff and patrons of a gay sauna. During one episode, a brother and sister are discussing the brother's upcoming same-sex wedding. She describes her

			brother and his fiancé as "*dirty **bastards**"*, suggesting they bring the "***chinky chonky** takeaway lad in*" for sex.
James O'Brien	LBC	July 2018, 10am	*James O'Brien* is a regular phone-in show on LBC Radio focusing on news and current affairs issues. In this broadcast, the presenter references "***gammons**"* and "*the **gammon** army*", explaining how the term originated from a novel by Charles Dickens and can now be used to describe anyone with a mindset of "*utter, utter ignorance*".
RuPaul's Drag Race UK	BBC One	January 2021, 10:45pm	*RuPaul's Drag Race UK* is a reality show in which drag queens compete to be "*the UK's next drag superstar*". In this episode, a contestant describes how they won the main challenge on last week's episode, saying: "*not only have I survived, but **bitch** I won a badge*".
I'm a Celebrity…Get Me Out of Here	ITV	November 2020, 9:55pm	*I'm a Celebrity…Get Me Out of Here* is a reality show in which celebrities live together and compete in a range of challenges. In the episode, a celebrity is challenged to eat a goat's eye. He visibly struggles to swallow it. He eventually does swallow the eye, saying "***Christ** alive*" as he takes a drink.
Friday Night Kiss	Kiss FM	July 2020, 5:10pm	*Friday Night Kiss* is a music programme on a national radio station that plays a range of dance, hip-hop and pop music. During the broadcast, the presenter begins to announce the next segment of the show, she pauses and says "***fucker***". She then starts to introduce the segment again.
ITV News	ITV	September 2020, 6:30pm	During an *ITV Evening News* programme, a report is shown about a young girl who has recently received treatment for a rare disease. Having previously not been able to walk, the report shows the girl walking and the treatment is described as miraculous. The reporter states that her doctors had believed that the condition "*would leave her **wheelchair bound** for the rest of her life*".
Good Morning Britain	ITV	June 2020, 8:30am	*Good Morning Britain* is a daily news and current affairs programme broadcast on weekday mornings. This episode includes a discussion about whether it was appropriate for England Rugby Fans to sing 'Swing Lo Sweet Chariot' because of the song's apparent connections to slavery. During the discussion, a White male presenter, refers to the abbreviation "***n-word**"* and a Black female guest twice uses the word "***nigger**"* in full.

Table 1.2: Hypothetical scenarios

1		During a live interview featuring a guest who is a transgender woman, the presenter accidentally refers to the guest as "**him**". *Tuesday, 5pm on a mainstream TV channel*
2	a	During a late-night comedy panel show, a Black guest talks about how they like going on skiing holidays and another Black guest jokingly refers to him as a "**coconut**". *Thursday, 10pm on a television channel aimed at young adults.*
	b	During a late-night comedy panel show, an Asian guest talks about how they like fish and chips. Another Asian guest jokingly refers to him as a **"coconut"**. *Thursday, 10pm on a television channel aimed at young adults.*

3	a	During an hour-long radio show dedicated to playing hip-hop music, they play a popular rap song from the 90s by a well-known Black artist. The song includes one use of the **"N-word"**[8]. *Friday, 10pm on a music radio station.*
	b	During a reality show, a lesbian participant is having a light-hearted conversation with her friend, who is also a lesbian. During the conversation they refer to each other as "**dykes**". *Friday, 8pm on a channel dedicated to reality entertainment programmes.*
	c	During a stand-up comedy programme, a Muslim comic refers to himself being a "**muzzie**". *Friday, 10pm on a specialist comedy channel.*
4		During a live breakfast news programme, a well-known journalist calls a younger guest a "**snowflake**" during a debate about climate change. *Monday, 8am on a rolling TV news channel.*
5		In a popular soap opera, a female character confronts the woman who has been having an affair with her husband. As she slaps her, she shouts "You **bitch**!" *Thursday, 7.30pm on a mainstream TV channel.*
6		In the post-match analysis of a live football match in which one team has lost 8-0, a pundit says the team "were absolutely **raped** tonight". Slightly later, the same pundit refers to a player who faked an injury as "a **pussy**". *Sunday, 9.50pm on a sports radio channel.*
7		In an evening Pakistani political discussion programme, the conversation becomes heated between two guests from opposing political viewpoints. The conversation quickly turns abusive as both guests start attacking each other's character. One of the guests calls the other "**uloo ka patha**".[9] The other guest retorts by calling him a "**kutta**".[10] The presenter calls for a cut to ad breaks and the show ends. *Monday, 7pm on a TV news channel.*
8		During a radio music programme in the early morning, the DJ plays a Punjabi rap song. The song contains the words "**machod**"[11] and "**behnchod**"[12] among other swear words in Punjabi. *Wednesday, 9am on a radio service aimed at young adults.*
9		In a comedy show based in Pakistan, one of the actors starts making jokes about another actor's dark skin complexion. The actor says that he resembles the "**chooray**"[13] and "**chamaar**"[14] that stroll around his neighbourhood. This is met with audience laughter. *Sunday, 2pm, TV channel aimed at all audiences.*
10		During a reality competition, contestants give each other affectionate nicknames. A Jewish contestant is nicknamed "the **Jew**" by his fellow contestants. *Friday, 9pm on an entertainment channel aimed at young adults.*
11		During a live football match, a player is sent off for punching another player. The commentator describes their actions as "**mental**". *Sunday, 9.50pm on a subscription sports channel.*
12		During a live radio discussion about the tourism industry, a caller refers to the number of "**Oriental** tourists" visiting London. *Wednesday, 8am on a talk radio station.*

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[8] This scenario described 'one use of the N-word' during a hip-hop song. In this way, participants made their own judgement as to whether "*nigga"* or "*nigger"* had been used in the song.

[9] *Uloo ka patha* in Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, and other South Asian languages literally translates to "son of an owl", used to mean "idiot", "imbecile", or "moron".

[10] *Kutta* in Urdu and various South Asian languages means "dog".

[11] *Machod* in Urdu, Punjabi and other South Asian languages means "motherfucker".

[12] *Behnchod* in Urdu, Punjabi and other South Asian languages means "sisterfucker".

[13] *Chooray* (plural), or *choora* (singular), is a pejorative slur used to describe primarily Christians in Pakistan. It has also been used to describe "lower-castes" and/or darker skinned people.

[14] *Chamaar* is a pejorative term used to describe the Dalit community, who were previously known as "untouchables" and considered at the bottom of the Hindu caste system for centuries. They were kept in subjugation by the higher castes.

This report provides an overview of the key themes from across the research. We refer to 'participants' throughout and provide evidence through verbatim comments, which have not been attributed to protect anonymity. Instead, key characteristics are provided, including location, age range and research activity.

Alongside this report, we have developed a *Quick Reference Guide* summarising views on the acceptability for broadcast of each of the 198 words included in the study.[15]

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[15] This total refers to the 186 words tested as part of the quantitative research, plus 'raped (in a sporting context) which was not included in the quantitative survey, and 11 non-English words tested only in qualitative groups with participants from South Asian communities.

2 Understanding acceptability

Participants were engaged during conversations about offensive language and understood the importance of the research. They were able to consider acceptability based on their personal experience and on how language might affect others, using a number of factors to come to a final judgement. This included discussion of:

- What was broadcast?

- How it was broadcast?

- Why it was broadcast?

This chapter provides a summary of participants' overall attitudes towards offensive language and how they assessed the acceptability of different examples of offensive words being broadcast on TV and radio.

Overall attitudes towards offensive language

There were few reports of being personally offended by TV or radio content.

Participants typically reported that they were not easily offended by scheduled broadcast TV and radio. Most found it difficult to recall instances where they had been offended by something they had seen or heard. They suggested they rarely came across language they found highly offensive and were generally not concerned about accidentally encountering something they found upsetting while watching TV or listening to the radio. Many participants felt that they were particularly unlikely to hear the use of offensive language on radio.

"I don't think I've heard anything that could be deemed offensive ever on the radio." - North West, England, 18-24, ABC1

In some cases, participants noted how they felt they had personally become desensitised to offensive language, particularly swearing, given its wide use in society. They felt this meant it was hard to recall instances where they had been shocked by language on TV or radio as it had become part of everyday life.

"For me, it doesn't draw my attention when it [offensive language] *happens. That's the issue. We've become so desensitised...I can't think of something that shocks me because it doesn't shock me anymore, if that makes sense?"* - South West, England, Black African Group

It was recognised that offensive language included both general swearing and discriminatory words.

Swearing was often the first thing to come to participants' minds when asked about offensive language on TV and radio, particularly among those in the general groups. They often initially described general swear words and words for body parts when thinking about the topic. Participants from minority communities were more likely to bring up discriminatory language initially without prompting.

"I don't really think [offensive language] can just be swearing, it can be anything. Racial abuse, anything like that...Just to have a go at somebody because of where they're from or the colour of their skin or their gender, it's just not on." Cardiff & the surrounds, Wales, 55+, ABC1

In the remainder of this report, swearing refers to general swear words, words for body parts and sexual references. Discriminatory language refers to offensive terms aimed at particular communities, including race, nationality and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, and mental health and physical ability.

There was widespread agreement that most words could be broadcast on TV or radio in the right circumstances.

Participants argued that in the right context, offensive language is an important part of TV and radio programmes. Offensive words can bring emotion and entertainment to programmes and participants argued that without such language TV and radio would be less authentic and entertaining. As such, the vast majority of participants felt that offensive language should continue to be broadcast with sufficient consideration given to contextual factors and justification.

"I think if they took it all away it would be a loss. I know that it's films, TV programmes, but if you took out what happens in real life, it's going to be boring." - Central Scotland, 55+, C2DE

A small number of participants said they would be more comfortable watching or listening to TV and radio if it did not contain discriminatory language aimed at their own, or others' communities. This was often related to personal experience of hearing discriminatory words directed at their community, which offended or upset them. They described how hearing this language could bring back memories of harmful experiences or remind them of the discrimination they face in society.

"[Without offensive language] TV would be more comfortable to watch, I wouldn't have to hold my breath." - Nottingham, England, Trans Depth Interview

Personal choice was a key factor supporting the use of offensive language on TV and radio.

Participants acknowledged that there were a range of attitudes towards potentially offensive language and recognised that personal levels of comfort with specific words varied. However, they also described the importance of individual choice about whether to consume content or not. They argued that adults are largely responsible for deciding what they watch or listen to. Many reflected that they had the choice not to watch or listen to shows with language they found offensive, and therefore did not feel that all potentially offensive language should be removed from broadcast programmes. However, this meant it was important that content met audience expectations so they could make an informed decision.

"Personally, if I don't like it, I turn it off. You don't have to watch or listen to it if you're not happy with what's going on." - Central Scotland, 55+, C2DE

The importance of protecting freedom of expression was acknowledged.

Several participants acknowledged the balance between the need for regulation and ensuring that broadcasters have sufficient editorial freedom without outside interference. They worried that strict rules about offensive language could have an impact on freedom of expression, as well as stifling discussion on important issues and reducing the authenticity of programmes.

"I appreciate that we live in an age of equality and that is the best kind of progress. But the woke warrior movement and equality censorship bodies are taking things too far and it is stifling people." - England, Female, Survey Open Response

A small number of participants were concerned that society had become too sensitive generally, and that people were too easily upset by offensive language. These participants felt that even strong or discriminatory language was often inoffensive, particularly where it was not intended to harm, for example, if it was said as a joke or in a light-hearted way.

"There's a danger. We've come a long way to where we are now but there's a danger of going too far in the PC direction and being over censored." - South West, England, Male LGB Group

There was a recognition that targeted or discriminatory language could harm individuals, groups, and wider society.

Offensive words directed at an individual, including the aggressive use of swear words or discriminatory language targeting a specific person, were seen as having the potential to directly harm the individual targeted. Participants were uncomfortable with offensive language used in this way in non-scripted programmes, such as reality TV shows. They suggested it should not be aired without clear justification due to the potential for hurt to the individual involved, and the resultant potential for offence to the audience. As such, targeted language used with the intention to hurt or offend was less acceptable than more general uses of offensive language. Participants felt that programme makers had some responsibility for the wellbeing of programme participants as well as a responsibility to protect audiences from undue offence.

"In one of the clips there was a swear word, but it wasn't directed at anyone, so it wasn't so bad. For me the issue is when it's a racist remark and it's aimed at somebody. That's clearly meant to hurt." - Midlands, England, Chinese Group

Understanding acceptability on TV and radio

Views towards offensive language on TV and radio were complex, nuanced and involved both instinctive and considered reactions.

Participants recognised the importance of this research and were highly engaged in the process of thinking through their opinions. Offensive language on TV and radio was often not a topic they had consciously thought much about before. Instead, participants frequently had strong instinctive views or emotional reactions towards the acceptability of the words, clips and scenarios discussed. There were also situations where participants did not feel personally offended but weighed up a range of factors to reach a considered view, including both individual views and expectations for offence on behalf of others.

Although participants did not work through a linear process, they tended to think about three broad questions when considering acceptability:

- **What was broadcast?** Including the perceived strength of the word, and any historical or cultural norms around the language.

- **How was it broadcast?** Including expectations based on contextual factors such as the timing, type of programme (including genre and style of show), channel or station, who was involved (including the person using the language and the person/people being spoken to), and any mitigating actions such as warnings or apologies.

- **Why was it broadcast?** Including the perceived purpose or intention behind the language used. Participants considered the possible motivations of broadcasters, programme makers, presenters, and contributors to assess whether the use of language was reasonable within the context.

Responses to these questions interacted as participants reached a conclusion about the overall acceptability of an example. They assessed whether it was reasonable for potentially offensive language to be used given the strength of the word or content, the wider context, and their views about the reasons why something was broadcast.

What was broadcast?

The strength of the word or content was taken into account when assessing acceptability.

Participants thought about specific words and phrases when considering offensive language on TV and radio. The strength of the language or content was assessed by participants based on common uses of a word or phrase, its historical context and wider social norms. There was a widespread acceptance that certain words and phrases were inherently stronger than others and this influenced participants' feelings about how they could be used on TV or radio.

Swear words were considered generally acceptable at times when children would be less likely to be watching or listening.

General swearing was seen to have become increasingly commonplace in society over recent decades and participants felt this was reflected on TV and radio. This was a source of concern for some, who found swearing unpleasant or who worried about children being exposed to swear words. However, most considered swear words generally acceptable with limited context or justification on TV after the watershed and on radio outside of times when children are particularly likely to be listening.[16] They recognised that swear words are used as part of wider language, often to express strong emotions, surprise or as part of a joke. As such, they saw a place for this kind of language to authentically reflect real life.

"[Programme makers are] taking real life things and putting them on TV. If there wasn't offensive words it wouldn't be clear as real life, it would be kind of boring." - Belfast, Northern Ireland, 25-35, ABC1

Discriminatory words tended to be judged as stronger than general insults or swearing.

Most participants, from both the general groups and minority communities, had more serious concerns about broadcasting discriminatory language than they did about broadcasting swearing. They felt that discriminatory language had become less acceptable in society as well as on broadcast TV and radio. Overall, participants felt the use of discriminatory language should be more carefully considered due to the potential for offence and harm, with greater emphasis placed on the wider contextual factors associated with how and why these words were broadcast.

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[16] "Times when children are particularly likely to be listening" to radio is defined as between 06:00 and 09:00 and 15:00 and 19:00 Monday to Friday during term time; and between 06:00 and 19:00 at weekends all year around, and in addition, during the same times from Monday to Fridays during school holidays. See https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/40541/offensive-language.pdf

"I don't find swearing offensive as it's just for entertainment. But I do find racism offensive. You hear swearing all the time, but racism is what I think is more offensive, when you hear that on TV, that is more offensive." - West Midlands, England, Bangladeshi, Male 1st Generation Group

How was it broadcast?

Although participants could assess the strength of a word in isolation, they often wanted greater detail about how and why a word was used. This further contextual information, including the time, genre and nature of the programme, was needed before participants could make definitive judgements about the acceptability of language on TV or radio.

"It's such a complex area to judge what is acceptable and what isn't...It all does depend on the context of the word." - England, Male, Survey Open Response

Individual contextual factors worked together to influence views of acceptability.

Participants considered various contextual factors associated with a specific example of potentially offensive language. This included the time of broadcast, genre, tone, nature of the programme, who was involved, and any mitigating factors, such as warnings, bleeping or apologies. In isolation, each contextual factor influenced participants' views. However, they struggled to make a final decision on acceptability without considering all the contextual factors together as a way of judging whether they would expect to come across certain potentially offensive terms in a specific programme.

"When it comes to things being broadcast after the watershed, although some words feel more acceptable than others, the context and the type of programme in which the words are used is highly important. For example, some programmes seem to use offensive language when it is not necessary or authentic to the storyline, narrative, or development of the plot/show." – England, Male, Survey Open Response

Protecting children from offensive language on TV and radio was often a primary concern.

Both parents and those without children wanted children to be protected from offensive language. Those with and without children argued that parents should have sufficient information to make decisions about what their children watch and listen to on TV and radio. Participants therefore highlighted the importance of parents being able to rely on their expectations for a programme at a given time or on a specific channel. For many, the strongest swear words were never acceptable for broadcast before the watershed or when children were particularly likely to be listening, even if they were potentially acceptable for broadcast late at night. They were concerned that children could be influenced by the language they heard on TV and radio, for example, using words without understanding the potential for offence.

"It's about not exposing children to it. Partly because if they used it in school or whatever it's language that will get them into trouble." - East of England, 36-54, C2DE

Those with and without children argued that parents should have sufficient information to make decisions about what their children consume on TV and radio. Participants therefore highlighted the importance of parents being able to rely on their expectations for a programme at a given time or on a specific channel. The watershed on TV was particularly important as an indicator of whether a programme might include offensive language that they would not want their children to hear, especially in the case of general swearing. Spontaneous reactions to swear words collected through the quantitative survey, also

highlighted the importance of the watershed on TV, with swear words rated as more acceptable after the watershed than before.

"Swearing doesn't offend me too much unless it's before the watershed. I don't want my children hearing it." - South West, England, Black African Group

Discussions tended to focus on the TV watershed as a specific time, with participants having less familiarity with the concept on radio of times when children are particularly likely to be listening.[17]

The acceptability of discriminatory language was not as directly linked to the watershed as in the case of swearing.

Participants often viewed other contextual factors as more important in judging the acceptability of discriminatory language than the time of broadcast. For example, if there was a clear justification for using the word or the context made it clear to audiences, including children, that it would not be acceptable to use in everyday life. The quantitative results also highlighted how the watershed played a less important role in judging the acceptability of language related to race, nationality and ethnicity, with a smaller difference in the rating of each word before and after the watershed. However, this view was not shared by all participants, with some wanting to avoid the use of discriminatory language, even for educational purposes, before the watershed. They suggested this would help to protect children as well as those from minority groups. For example, there were concerns about audiences misunderstanding why discriminatory words had been used in the context of a programme, leading to words being normalised or spoken in everyday life.

Why it was broadcast?

Often assumptions were made about the reasons for using offensive language on TV and radio.

When considering specific examples, discussions often centred on assessments of why participants thought offensive language had been used. Participants often distinguished between offensive language that they felt had a purpose on the one hand, and gratuitous language on the other. Many argued that potentially offensive language, even very strong words or phrases, could be acceptable in the right circumstances, for example, if it was used to educate, raise awareness of issues or reflect reality.

"It is acceptable in my opinion to use very unacceptable [discriminatory] language only in the context of education. Things that make it clear that this language is not acceptable, but show you how it is used in the context of society, educate people in terms of history...I don't think it is ever okay to use offensive words in a humorous context or passing by." - North Wales, 18-24, C2DE

In contrast, participants thought it was less acceptable to broadcast language they felt served no purpose other than to shock. As noted above, they had similar concerns about targeted or discriminatory language that was perceived to be designed to offend or hurt individuals or groups.

Participants also thought that broadcasters had a duty to be aware of the effect of including potentially offensive language in their programmes and make appropriate adjustments or introduce mitigations to avoid or reduce any potential offence. They emphasised the need to be clear about the reasons for using offensive language in a programme, so audiences understood why it had been broadcast.

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[17] See footnote 4.

"I think the editor should have the hat on of 'Is this necessary?' If it's there to get a laugh or to emphasise a point, or whatever, then the editor and director should vocalise that and think, 'Does it need to be broadcast?' They're making it acceptable to people." – North West & London, England, Chinese Group

Reaching a view on acceptability

Views about the what, how and why all influenced judgements of acceptability.

Participants considered what, how and why offensive language was broadcast in weighing up the acceptability of different examples. Their assessment of each factor informed views of the others, and they weighed them together to reach a conclusion about whether there was a reasonable justification for using a word in the given context.

The remainder of this report explores these three questions in more detail, setting out how different factors influenced views on acceptability.

3 What was broadcast?

Warning: this chapter contains highly offensive language and discussion of content which may cause offence.

Participants typically had clear views about how offensive different words were, but often struggled to rate the acceptability of broadcasting them on TV and radio without additional contextual information. This was particularly difficult for respondents in the quantitative survey, who were asked for their spontaneous views on the acceptability of all 186 English words before and after the watershed in isolation, without any further information or discussion with others.

"It was often difficult to judge [acceptability] for either before or after the watershed without knowing the context in which the word was used." - England, Female, Survey Open Response

This section summarises attitudes towards 198 words in nine categories of potentially offensive language: general swear words, words for body parts, sexual references, racial words, sexual orientation and gender identity, mental and physical health conditions, religious, political and non-English words.

In assessing specific words, participants made a clear distinction between swear words and discriminatory language. The watershed played a key role in determining the acceptability of general swear words, words for body parts and sexual references on TV and radio. For example, the strongest swear words, *cunt* and *motherfucker,* were deemed by many to be completely unacceptable for broadcast before the watershed on TV or at times when children were particularly likely to be listening on radio, and participants wanted to protect children from hearing these words. In contrast, the watershed was one of a number of contextual factors considered when assessing the broadcast of discriminatory language. Participants treated these words differently to general swear words, wanting to have a wider discussion about the meaning of a word, who it was being used by and for what reason before reaching a judgement.

The following analysis brings together the findings from the quantitative survey with findings from the qualitative groups, in which participants discussed the strength of around 25 words. The words discussed in each group differed to ensure all English words were covered at least twice across the qualitative research. In this section, we have categorised each word into one of three broad groupings:

- **Mild:** Words in this category are unlikely to concern audiences in most circumstances and require limited context.

- **Moderate:** These words have a greater potential for offence than mild words, and a higher level of context should be considered based on what audiences would reasonably expect.

- **Strong:** These words are perceived as highly offensive and need to have a clear and strong contextual justification for broadcast.

Below we have provided a summary table for each category of offensive language. This is based on the overall pattern of views seen in the ratings for each word assessed in the survey, alongside findings from the qualitative discussions. Survey respondents were asked to rate the acceptability of each word being broadcast on TV or radio both before and after the watershed, and this provided a starting point for the categorisation. We have brought these findings together with insights from the qualitative research

where it was possible to have further discussion about the strength and meaning of each word in different contexts. This means some words have been assigned to categories based on insights from the qualitative research with the general groups and minority audiences. **Words which were familiar to fewer than 40% of quantitative respondents are highlighted with an asterisk (*) and these findings should be treated with additional caution.**

Our approach means that qualitative participants spent more time discussing certain words than others, particularly those related to discriminatory language and the words used in the clips and scenarios. It should also be noted that participants **were not provided with definitions** of the words included in the research in either the qualitative or quantitative data collection. Familiarity with the words was therefore self-reported, and the extent to which participants knew how words or phrases might be used in an offensive way is likely to have varied. The research did not seek to validate participants' interpretations of the meaning of each word.

As discussed elsewhere in this report, it is also important to emphasise that across the quantitative and qualitative research **participants stressed the importance of context when deciding on the acceptability** of potentially offensive language. While there was consensus about the acceptability of some words in specific contexts, there were also different views and significant debate. This is reflected in the qualitative findings that follow the word categorisations.

For further information on each word, please see the *Quick Reference Guide* developed alongside this report. This summarises the acceptability of each of the words included in this study.

Views of participants on swear words, words for body parts and sexual references

How research participants generally rated swear words		
Mild Unlikely to concern in most circumstances and requiring limited context	**Moderate** Greater potential for offence than mild words and a higher level of context should be considered	**Strong** Perceived as highly offensive and requiring clear and strong contextual justification
Warning: this research table contains language that readers may find offensive.		
Bint Bitch Bloody Bugger Chav Cow Crap Damn Douchebag Effing Feck Ginger Git Minger Pissed Pissed Off Sod Off Uppity	Bastard Bellend Bloodclaat* Bumberclat* Dickhead Shit Shite Son of a Bitch Twat	Fuck Motherfucker

How research participants generally rated words for body parts		
Mild Unlikely to concern in most circumstances and requiring limited context	**Moderate** Greater potential for offence than mild words and a higher level of context should be considered	**Strong** Perceived as highly offensive and requiring clear and strong contextual justification
Warning: this research table contains language that readers may find offensive.		
Arse Balls Bawbag* Choad*	Arsehole Beaver Bollocks Clunge Cock Dick Fanny Knob Minge Prick Pussy Snatch Tits	Cunt Gash Japs Eye Punani Pussy Hole

How research participants generally rated sexual references		
Mild Unlikely to concern in most circumstances and requiring limited context	**Moderate** Greater potential for offence than mild words and a higher level of context should be considered	**Strong** Perceived as highly offensive and requiring clear and strong contextual justification
Warning: this research table contains language that readers may find offensive.		
Bang Bonk Frigging Ho Tart	Jizz MILF Shag Skank Slag Slapper Spunk Tosser Wanker Whore	Cocksucker Cum Nonce Prickteaser Raped (in a sporting context) Slut

Swear words were widely recognised by participants across the research.

Recognition of general swear words, words for body parts and sexual references was high among both qualitative and quantitative participants. This was particularly true of sexual references, with all the words in this category recognised by more than 60% of survey respondents.

Many considered general swear words to be acceptable for broadcast after the watershed or outside of times when children are particularly likely to be listening on radio, without the need for further contextual justification.

Spontaneous reactions collected in the quantitative survey suggest that most general swear words, words for body parts, and sexual references were rated as unacceptable before the watershed but acceptable after it by respondents. These ratings were based on an assessment of each word on its own, without further discussion about the wider context. In the qualitative research, participants were also more comfortable with swear words, words for body parts and sexual references being broadcast after the watershed. These words were often seen as mild or moderate by participants. They were not particularly concerned about adults coming across these words but wanted to protect children from this type of language. This meant acceptability was often based on the time of broadcast, with participants having limited concern about the use of this language after the TV watershed or outside of times when children were particularly likely to be listening on radio.

"If it's a generic swear word, I'm not offended, but put it after the watershed so kids don't hear it."
- North West, England, 18-24, ABC1

Cunt and *motherfucker* were generally regarded as the strongest swear words.

In the quantitative survey, *cunt* and *motherfucker* were spontaneously rated as the least acceptable words of all the words tested in the study, for use before the watershed or during times when children were particularly likely to be listening on radio. Some also felt that they were generally not acceptable to use after the watershed, illustrating the perceived strength of the words to survey respondents.

During qualitative discussions, *cunt* was viewed as the strongest swear word, and participants described how they would be offended if it was used towards them. The word often generated strong personal reactions, and participants had mixed views about its acceptability for broadcast, even late at night. Some felt it was acceptable for broadcast after the watershed, particularly if used in a general rather than a targeted way. For example, they felt that *cunt* could be used if reflecting reality or when trying to portray strong negative emotion, particularly in programmes where such language would be expected.

"[Cunt] does seem to be the one that half the group said is a word they find offensive. My wife and other people I know also think that word stands out as a worse swear word. There's no other word that stands out like that, but for me I don't think it's offensive." - North East, England, 36-54, ABC1

Some participants, particularly those in younger age groups, also felt the word could be used affectionately or in a comedy setting. A number of Scottish participants explained how *cunt* can be used colloquially as an affectionate or endearing term, such as calling someone a 'clever cunt'. Although they recognised it would still be unacceptable to use before the watershed or during times when children are particularly likely to be listening on radio in order to protect children.

"[Cunt] is strongest given society nowadays. It's developed to become a strong word. In our day, it could be used as everyday language and not used offensively. You can be a clever cunt… I don't think where we live it's seen as serious." - Central Scotland, 55+, C2DE

There was greater diversity in views towards *fuck*.

Although *fuck* was categorised variously as strong, moderate and mild by different groups of qualitative participants, they largely agreed, on a precautionary basis, that they did not want children to be exposed to this word. Older participants from the general groups were more likely to rate *fuck* as strong, while middle-aged participants consistently saw it as moderate. Younger participants held more mixed views, with different groups rating it from mild to strong.

"Just saying fuck, yes, it's offensive to some, but you're not directly trying to offend someone." - Highlands, Scotland, 25-35, ABC1

Those who felt *fuck* was not strongly offensive suggested that it tended to be used in a more general way rather than targeting an individual or group. This was commonly the case with swear words, although some words were regarded as more vulgar or requiring more justification than others.

Certain swear words were of limited concern both before and after the watershed.

Certain words such as *crap* or *cow* were seen as mild or not offensive, as they were perceived as unlikely to cause significant harm, even if directed towards an individual. They were often seen as less offensive alternatives to stronger language.

"I think cow [would be more acceptable] because it's common language. Bitch is a female dog, but again, I think if my kids hear it, I don't want them to repeat it. I wouldn't mind them saying cow." - South West, England, Black African Group

Women had more spontaneous concerns over the use of words related to body parts than men.

Like general swear words, words referring to body parts were generally regarded as less acceptable before the watershed but acceptable afterwards by quantitative respondents rating the words spontaneously. Women were more concerned about the use of words related to body parts on TV after the watershed and on radio during times when children are particularly likely to be listening, tending to score these words as less acceptable than male respondents. Words describing typically female anatomy also tended to be regarded as less acceptable than those referring to typically male body parts. Participants from the qualitative groups shared similar views, suggesting that words relating to the vagina such as *pussy* were often used as insults to infer weakness. They felt this had the potential to add an additional level of offence due to the misogynistic connotations of these words.

"I think ['pussy' is] more acceptable to use as a body part, because using it [as an insult] it can be seen as offensive towards women." - Antrim, Northern Ireland, 25-54, ABC1

Using *raped* in a sporting context was widely seen as unacceptable.

A hypothetical scenario in which a sports commentator refers to a team that has lost as being "absolutely *raped*" generated a strong reaction from qualitative participants. They consistently argued that it was never acceptable to use the word *raped* in this context, as it was seen to trivialise sexual assault and could be harmful for victims who may be upset by the comparison to losing a sports match. The word was regarded as strong and unnecessary in any circumstance apart from referring to a crime. When discussing the scenario, younger participants, LGBTQ+ participants and women were more likely to have referred to rape culture and expressed concerns over 'lad banter' being aired on either TV or radio.

"That's bad. Rape isn't a joke, it's not an easy thing. Raped and the N-word is the same, it's painful and will stay with you all your life." - Yorkshire and the Humber, England, Black African Group

Views of participants on words related to race, nationality and ethnicity

How research participants generally rated words related to race, nationality and ethnicity		
Mild Unlikely to concern in most circumstances and requiring limited context	**Moderate** Greater potential for offence than mild words and a higher level of context should be considered	**Strong** Perceived as highly offensive and requiring clear and strong contextual justification
Warning: this research table contains language that readers may find offensive.		
Cracker Freshy* Jew Jock Nazi Oriental Taff	Bud Bud* Chinaman Coconut Coloured Curry Muncher Honky Jap Kraut Monkey Paddy Sheep Shagger Slope Tinker	Ching Chong Chinky Coon Darky Gippo Golliwog Golly Half-caste Jungle Bunny Kike* Negro Nigger Nig-nog Paki Pikey Raghead Sambo Spade Spic Uncle Tom Wog Yid

Strong words associated with race, nationality and ethnicity were considered particularly offensive and generally require substantial contextual justification for broadcast.

This category saw the largest number of words spontaneously rated as unacceptable before and after the watershed (or at any time on radio) by survey respondents. Participants in the qualitative workshops also tended to rate racist words as strong, reflecting on the potential for both harm and general offence.

The time of broadcast was one of many contextual factors considered when judging the acceptability of language related to race, nationality and ethnicity.

The quantitative results highlight how the watershed or times when children are particularly likely to be listening played a less important role in judging the acceptability of language related to race, nationality and ethnicity. For this category, there was a smaller difference in the rating of each word before and after the watershed compared to general swear words.

Participants across the qualitative research discussed the origins and history of words related to race, ethnicity and nationality and felt they were often used in a way intended to harm minority groups. There was a widespread belief that these words should not be broadcast on TV or radio unless there was a clear justification. It was emphasised that they should be used carefully, with consideration of the wider

context and likely audience. For many, including participants from minority communities, this meant that such language did have a place on TV and radio, for example, in documentaries or dramas reflecting real life or raising awareness of discrimination. However, for a small number of participants, particularly from minority communities, racist language was never acceptable on TV or radio irrespective of the context including the time of broadcast.

"None are acceptable before the watershed; the curse words are acceptable after. Any of the racial slurs, or ignorant or homophobic words I would complain if I heard them at any hour of night." - Belfast, Northern Ireland, 25-35, ABC1

Black participants reflected on the historical context and their personal experiences of racist language.

Participants in the general groups tended to view *nigger* as a particularly strong word and unacceptable for broadcast without very strong contextual justification, for example, if the programme made it clear that the word was offensive, or the history and racist connotations of the word were explored or discussed. Black participants also viewed this word as very strong. For some Black participants, the racist connotations and historical context of the word *nigger* meant they felt it was never acceptable for broadcast, even if used by a Black person in a reclaimed way.

"It comes down to not being able to erase the history of the word. A lot of Black people have tried to bring a positive from the word. Words like coconut and monkey, these words were not specifically created as derogatory words. The N-word was specifically created to dehumanise a group of people to substantiate enslaving, killing and brutalising them. It's very difficult to detach it away from the original of the word. History always remains." - South West, England, Black African Group

In some cases, Black participants distinguished *nigger* from the word *nigga,* which they felt could be used as a term of endearment within certain Black communities. This contrasted with views from other participants who were less clear on the acceptability of people from the Black community using *nigga/er* in a reclaimed way on TV or radio. These participants often felt less familiar with how the word is used by Black people and in some cases did not feel able to comment on its acceptability in this context.

"This is one of the words that some people may dislike, but it's very dependent on who is saying the word...The -a ending is a term of endearment, but you'll still offend people. For me, the two spellings have a different intention. The -er, I know what the intention is." - South West, England, Black African Group

***Paki* was seen as strong by participants from across South Asian groups.**

Qualitative participants from both general groups and South Asian communities widely rated *Paki* as strong and felt it was generally unacceptable for broadcast on TV or radio without significant contextual justification. Both first and second generation South Asian participants described how they had experience of the word being used towards them as a form of abuse. A small number of second-generation participants were aware of the use of *Paki* endearingly between friends, but the use of the word by a non-Asian person was seen as highly offensive.

"I find it really offensive, but my son says it's a term of endearment when they use it to each other, I find it strange when Asian people call other Asian people Pakis." - North West, England, Bangladeshi Female 1st Generation Group

Participants reflected on how the word is used towards all Asian communities not just those of Pakistani origin, exacerbating the offence. They argued that there should never be a reason to use *Paki* instead of Pakistani to describe someone from Pakistan. This meant they did not believe *Paki* would be used in a documentary or in the news unless there was an educational purpose. Their strong feelings were linked to their personal experience of racism in the UK.

South Asian participants tended to see *coconut* as less offensive than Black participants.

Coconut was generally perceived as mild or not offensive among participants from South Asian communities, although opinions were mixed. They suggested it was a jokingly descriptive word for people of South Asian heritage that did not like or do things typically associated with South Asian culture. Participants gave examples of using it to describe their partners or children who were born in the UK and enjoyed British food or did not like spicy food. However, they emphasised the importance of their relationship and the intent behind saying it in a light-hearted, humorous way.

"I don't think I would find that offensive, just because you are referring to an individual who you feel might not identify with a culture. We use the term quite openly in our house to refer to the children." - Strathclyde, Scotland, Pakistani 2nd Generation Group

In contrast, those who saw *coconut* as offensive felt it was a derogatory term for South Asians and broadcasting it on TV or radio would make use of the word more acceptable. Participants highlighted that there was no equivalent term for their White British counterparts who enjoyed Asian cuisine or culture and suggested it was a racist stereotype rather than a joke. Black participants generally regarded the term as offensive and perpetuating racial stereotypes. They felt it was only used when a Black person did not fit society's stereotypical view of how they should be.

"It's a racial stereotype. If a Black person doesn't fit the society stereotypes, they're deemed a coconut...It's offensive but would have been worse coming from a White person calling a Black person a coconut." - South West, England, Black African Group

Similar words such as *Oreo* and *choc ice* to describe Black people, and *banana* to describe Chinese people were also mentioned and tended to be viewed in a similar way to *coconut*.

Participants from Gypsy and Traveller communities felt words such as *pikey* and *gippo* perpetuated negative stereotypes.

Participants from Gypsy and Traveller communities described *pikey* as an offensive term for Travellers, similar to *gippo*. They generally did not think it should be used on TV or radio, explaining that it is often said to make fun of their community. Other participants also rated these terms as strong.

"As soon as [people] get upset at you, they call you a dirty pikey. In their heads they are calling us a bad name...I think if it stopped on TV, we wouldn't get called so many bad names." - Norwich, England, Welsh Traveller Depth Interview

Participants from Traveller communities had the impression that *pikey* was heard on TV more frequently than other racial terms. They reflected on how it was uncommon to use the term *pikey* between themselves or others in the community. Although they saw it as a racist slur, these participants felt their

community was not afforded the same protection against offensive language as other minority groups. For example, they felt that *pikey* and *gippo* were used on TV and radio in a way that would not be acceptable for other racist words, trivialising the stereotyping of Traveller communities. There was a perception that this had encouraged casual racism towards the community and not broadcasting these words on TV or radio could help to prevent their wider use.

"People use gippo and pikey like it's normal but it's very hurtful to us...I would find this extremely uncomfortable and offensive to watch. Pikey and gippo are highly offensive and it's made worse by the way we're being put down as a community." - Norwich, England, Romany Gypsy, Traveller Depth Interview

Tinker was also considered to be offensive among Traveller participants. This word was less well-known amongst other participants, with many qualitative participants unaware of its connection to the Traveller community. Those outside of the community who were aware of its meaning viewed the word as moderately offensive.

Jewish participants felt the use of the term Jewish was more appropriate than *Jew*.

While the word *Jew* was not seen as inherently offensive, unlike words such as *Yid* or *Kike*, Jewish participants preferred the term *Jewish*.

"Jew is the most interesting word for me because I'm Jewish. It's not a bad word but you have to be careful with how you use it on TV or radio." - Enfield, England, Non-binary Depth Interview

They emphasised how *Jew* felt like a label, implying that a person was solely defined by their religion or race, rather than as a rounded individual who is Jewish. Moreover, participants noted that *Jew* could and has been used historically to 'other' Jewish people. Participants also reflected that the use of the word *Jew* by a Jewish person was more likely to be acceptable than by someone who was not Jewish.

"You're labelling someone and its sounds like it's all you are if you say "a Jew" when you're an all rounded individual." - South East, England, Jewish Group

The tone of voice and the relationship between the people using the word *Jew* mattered to Jewish participants. They reflected on a hypothetical scenario where a contestant on a reality competition show was affectionately named "*the Jew*" by non-Jewish contestants. In this case, some participants felt that the use of this language between friends could be acceptable if the light-hearted nature of the programme was obvious and the Jewish participant seemed comfortable. However, many noted concerns about broadcasting this on TV and radio over fears that the language could become normalised and contribute to antisemitism in wider society.

"Being a young person I'm quite worried about the rise of antisemitism and singling out someone as [the Jew] does raise antisemitism and it's not acceptable." - South East, England, Jewish Group

Yid was seen as particularly offensive by Jewish participants who felt it should only be used with strong contextual justification on TV and radio. Some participants from Jewish groups discussed the use of *Yid* in relation to Tottenham Hotspur Football Club and views were divided as to the acceptability of this. While some found the word offensive in this context, others suggested this was a positive use of the word as it had been reclaimed by Jewish football fans. However, most participants who were familiar with this use among football fans, felt that it would be unlikely to be broadcast on TV and radio in this context.

Participants from the Chinese community were generally not offended by the word *Oriental*.

Qualitative participants, from both the Chinese community and other groups, generally rated *Oriental* as either not offensive or mild, seeing it as a descriptive word. However, they reflected that there were better ways to describe someone's ethnicity and acknowledged that some people do find it offensive. The use of the phrase "*Oriental tourists*" by a radio caller in a hypothetical scenario was viewed as generalising and potentially ignorant, but not necessarily offensive. Participants tended to think it was more acceptable to use *Oriental* when describing food or art and that it was better to be more specific when referring to a person's ethnicity (e.g. Chinese or Japanese). In contrast, words such as *chinky* and *ching chong* were considered strong by Chinese participants, as well as by other participants.

"For me, Oriental is vague. Do they mean Chinese or Asian and they don't know what to call them?" - North West and London, England, Chinese Group

Views of participants on words related to sexual orientation and gender identity

How research participants generally rated words related to sexual orientation and gender identity		
Mild Unlikely to concern in most circumstances and requiring limited context	**Moderate** Greater potential for offence than mild words and a higher level of context should be considered	**Strong** Perceived as highly offensive and requiring clear and strong contextual justification
Warning: this research table contains language that readers may find offensive.		
Fairy Mincing Nancy Pansy Queen Transsexual	Bender Bent Bummer Fag Homo Lezza Ponce Poof Queer That's Gay	Batty Boy Butt Bandit Chick with a Dick Dyke Faggot Fudge Packer Gender Bender He-She Muff Diver Rugmuncher Shemale Shirt Lifter Tranny

Words related to gender identity were usually seen as less acceptable after the watershed than swear words.

Most of the words related to sexual orientation and gender identity were seen as generally unacceptable before the watershed or during times when children were particularly likely to be listening, but more likely to be acceptable outside these times by quantitative respondents rating each word individually. Words in this category were less likely to be spontaneously viewed as acceptable after the watershed than words for body parts, sexual references or general swear words during the survey. Qualitative participants also often rated these words as strong or moderate.

LGBTQ+ participants recognised the reclaimed use of certain words such as *queer* and *dyke* but wanted to avoid audiences misunderstanding their acceptability.

Participants in the general groups felt discussions about the acceptability of the word *queer* were complex. On the one hand, participants understood it had been used in a derogatory way in the past and felt it could be used to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people, for example by describing an individual as 'a queer'. Using the word as an insult was widely seen as unacceptable for broadcast on TV or radio, without clear contextual justification such as in a drama or documentary about homophobia.

However, participants in the general groups also noted that *queer* is included within the acronym LGBTQ+ and can therefore be used in a way that is not offensive to describe sexual identity and a broader community. They noted the use of the word in programmes such as *Queer Eye* and *Queer as Folk,* arguing that this word is now being used more widely within society including on TV and radio.

"I wouldn't feel comfortable calling a gay person a queer, but a gay person calling one of their friends that might not be offensive. If that were on TV, I wouldn't find that offensive. But, as a term of abuse, it is offensive. So, it depends how they're used." - North East, England, 36-54, ABC1

Both participants in the general groups and LGBTQ+ groups emphasised the importance of the context surrounding the use of *queer*. Although it was largely seen as acceptable for people from the LGBTQ+ community to use, there were mixed views as to whether it could be used by others. Straight participants did not always feel comfortable using the word themselves, and some LGBTQ+ participants saw *queer* as an inclusive word to describe their community while also recognising its historic use as a slur. Both sets of participants emphasised the importance of tone and whether the word was being used as an insult or as an inclusive term, with the latter seen as acceptable for broadcast on TV or radio.

LGBTQ+ participants tended to agree that *dyke* could be used in a reclaimed way by lesbians to self-identify or among friends. In this context, the word was not seen as offensive and participants were familiar with it being used in this way. They emphasised the reaction of the person the word was being directed at – if they seemed comfortable it would be more acceptable to broadcast. However, these participants were also concerned about giving the impression that *dyke* could be used in wider society, with some arguing that the word should not be used on TV or radio for this reason.

"The only thing that would be a problem is whether you want the word dyke picked up with who you're watching TV with. For me, dyke isn't offensive unless used in the wrong way." - North East, England, Female LGB Group

Views on the use of *fag* and *faggot* were mixed, even when used in a reclaimed way.

Queer tended to be regarded as a milder word than *faggot* which was seen as strong by qualitative participants, including those from the LGBTQ+ community. They emphasised how *faggot* was more likely to be used as an insult compared to *queer* which could be used descriptively. In some cases, a distinction was made between *fag* and *faggot*, with participants arguing the former is more acceptable than the latter and was used by some LGBTQ+ participants among their friends. However, this view was not shared by all LGBTQ+ participants, with some considering both words as strong and unacceptable to broadcast given the strength and discriminatory connotations. A number of participants were comfortable with the use of *fag* or *faggot* in a reclaimed way or in particular phrases such as *fag hag*.

"Fag and faggot, I hadn't really heard about somebody reclaiming that. The main context in the community is fag hags. That's been used in quite an affectionate or banter way. It's an anomaly. Sometimes even the same person would find fag on its own offensive but is happy to use it in fag hag." - Lothian, Scotland, Female LGB Group

The phrase *that's gay* was distinguished from more general use of the word *gay.*

The word *gay* was not seen as offensive by participants but use of *that's gay* was typically considered derogatory. It was felt that the phrase suggested being gay is negative and would normally be inappropriate to use on TV or radio without strong contextual justification. LGBTQ+ participants felt it was largely not acceptable to air before the watershed over concerns that children could use the term.

"'That's gay' has been turned into a derogatory term." - Essex, England, Trans Depth Interview

Participants across the research generally regarded terms such as *tranny*, *he-she* and *chick with a dick* as strongly offensive.

Tranny, he-she and *chick with a dick* were repeatedly seen as strongly offensive by qualitative participants, particularly among trans, non-binary and LGB participants. These terms were widely considered to be outdated and not acceptable to air before the watershed. Trans participants described their experience of watching programmes where trans characters were often the target of transphobic jokes. They often found these programmes too uncomfortable to watch due to the use of *tranny*, which they sometimes referred to as the 'T-slur' and explained how they would avoid certain programmes altogether.

Trans participants reported that it is also widely considered unacceptable to use derogatory terms such as *tranny* or *he-she* towards transvestites.[18] This was perceived as attacking and degrading to the individual concerned as well as the wider trans community regardless of whether the person identified as trans.

"[The clip] just showed an archaic joke that is still prevalent in how trans people are treated today, especially in the UK. This encourages children and young people to laugh at trans people. Adults might be able to realise this isn't acceptable, but kids won't." - Brighton, England, Trans Depth Interview

Views of participants on words related to mental health and physical ability

How research participants generally rated words related to mental health and physical ability		
Mild Unlikely to concern in most circumstances and requiring limited context	**Moderate** Greater potential for offence than mild words and a higher level of context should be considered	**Strong** Perceived as highly offensive and requiring clear and strong contextual justification
Warning: this research table contains language that readers may find offensive.		
Cretin Div Handicapped Looney Mental Mentally Challenged Nutter Special Tone Deaf Wheelchair Bound	Deaf and Dumb Dwarf Flid* Midget Moron Psycho	Cripple Invalid Mong Retard Schizo Spastic Window Licker

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[18] The word 'transvestite' refers to someone who dresses in or acts in the style of a different gender to the one they identify as. This is also referred to as 'cross-dressing'. This is different from being 'transgender', which refers to those whose gender is different from their assigned sex at birth.

There was large variation in opinions towards words related to mental and physical health.

Unlike other categories, there was no clear pattern in how quantitative respondents rated these words, and they each often received a spread of low, medium and high ratings. This suggests there is less understanding of the potential for offence through the use of this language compared with other categories of words tested during the research.

Participants in qualitative groups generally did not find the phrase *wheelchair bound* offensive, seeing it as a descriptive term for someone's medical condition. For example, when discussing an *ITV News* clip where a girl is described as *wheelchair bound,* participants saw the news report as inspiring and most did not recognise the potential for offence. Recognition of *wheelchair user* as a preferable term was low among general group participants, though they were receptive to the idea after discussing the phrase.

"Personally I don't find [wheelchair bound] offensive but maybe someone who is in that position may think differently." - South East, England, Jewish Group

Phrases such as *handicapped* and *deaf and dumb* were sometimes perceived as the preferred terms for medical conditions, and consequently rated as not offensive or mild in the general groups. During these groups, participants more familiar with this terminology tended to rate these words as moderate or strong, highlighting the potential for offence on behalf of those with physical or mental disabilities.

Some words associated with mental and physical health were seen as strong by those with a mental or physical disability.

Participants with a mental or physical disability felt that certain words should only be broadcast on TV or radio to reflect the historic use of language or for educational purposes. Words more typically associated with physical conditions, like *cripple, invalid* and *mong*, were considered to have derogatory connotations and suggested a person was damaged or not whole. They emphasised how alternative words could be used to describe a disability, given the potential for offence.

"The words in the strong category have harder connotations, like cripple means someone's all mangled up and in bits. You can use another word for that." - Northern Ireland, Depth Interview with a disabled participant

Spastic, schizo, psycho and *retard*, were also seen as derogatory and their use was associated with the stigma surrounding mental health. Participants with a mental or physical disability felt that m*ental* was less offensive than these other words as it tended to be used in a general way, for example to describe an experience rather than directed at an individual. However, a hypothetical scenario in which *mental* was used to describe a player sent off in a football match for punching another player was typically regarded as unacceptable by these participants due to the targeted nature and violent context. This was seen as a derogatory use of the word which they felt was strongly offensive despite it being used spontaneously and without meaning to cause offence. Concerns were expressed over normalising the use of words like *mental* in relation to physical violence.

"Mental can be used to describe something exciting or crazy, like a roller coaster for example. But you shouldn't use it to describe someone." - Northern Ireland, Depth Interview with a disabled participant

Views of participants on religious references

How research participants generally rated religious references		
Mild Unlikely to concern in most circumstances and requiring limited context	**Moderate** Greater potential for offence than mild words and a higher level of context should be considered	**Strong** Perceived as highly offensive and requiring clear and strong contextual justification
Warning: this research table contains language that readers may find offensive.		
God Goddamn Jesus Christ Jew[19]	Bible Basher Fenian* Hun Muzzie* Papist Prod* Taig* Tarrier*	Kike* Yid

Participants across the research saw some religious words as being of limited concern.

Some words in the religious category were spontaneously rated as the most acceptable words tested during the quantitative survey. *God* and *Jesus Christ* were seen as acceptable on TV and radio both before and after the watershed. *God* was rated the most acceptable word of all those tested before the watershed or at times when children were particularly likely to be listening by quantitative respondents. Similarly, both words were regarded as not offensive or mild by participants in the qualitative research. They reflected on how terms such as *God* or *Jesus Christ* were often used in place of more offensive swear words and tended to feel they were acceptable on TV or radio at any time.

"You don't have to be Christian to use it [Christ], everyone's using it, it's normalised it...[As a Christian] I don't take it as offensive anymore, it's just like a normal word, it's been normalised." - Wales, 18-24, C2DE

In some cases, non-religious participants acknowledged that they were not Christian and therefore felt they could not comment on the offensive nature of the words for Christian groups. There was some acknowledgement that Christians might find the use of religious words offensive. However, these words were still seen as being of limited or no concern and acceptable for broadcast.

"I could understand this from a Christian perspective that it would be offensive, [but] it's just something you say when something isn't going the right way." - South West, England, Black African Group

Sectarian[20] religious words were often seen as strong by those particularly familiar with them.

Although common religious words were judged as acceptable, several words in this category were not familiar to most respondents. *Tarrier, Fenian, Prod* and *Taig* were recognised by fewer than 40% of quantitative respondents overall. These words were more familiar to Scottish and Northern Irish participants during the qualitative workshops, who referred to their use in football or in a historical context. Most of these words, as well as *Hun,* tended to be seen as strong by qualitative participants

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[19] *Jew, Kike & Yid* have been included in both the *race, ethnicity and nationality* category and the *religious references* category.

[20] "Sectarian" in this context relates to the historic religious divide between the Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland and parts of Scotland.

familiar with their use. There were more mixed views towards *Prod,* with one Scottish group describing this as strong, while another saw it as moderate.

Some Northern Irish participants viewed sectarian language as being similar to racist language in its intent to offend or harm certain groups, as well as the potential to incite hate towards particular communities. These participants viewed this language as generally unacceptable without strong contextualisation but did acknowledge there might be contexts where it could be broadcast on TV or radio, for example to discuss the history of these words.

"Racist and sectarian ones should go into strong because of how they would offend others." - Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland, 55+, C2DE

Muzzie was often not familiar to participants and views towards it were divided.

Muzzie was not familiar to all participants from the general or South Asian groups. Once the term was explained, some South Asian participants felt it would be acceptable as it was simply describing someone's religion, though they did question why 'Muslim' would be shortened.

"I've never heard the term muzzie before so I don't find it offensive, it's just an abbreviation for Muslim. But if it were another word like Paki, because it is known as a derogatory term, I think people would find it more offensive even if [someone was] saying it about [themselves]." - North West, England, Bangladeshi Female 1st Generation Group

Those that did recognise the word were more likely to view it as offensive, although some felt it could be acceptable if used by Muslims to describe themselves, for example when they reflected on a hypothetical scenario where a stand-up comedian described himself as *muzzie* as part of a comedy set or routine.

Views of participants on political references

How research participants generally rated political references		
Mild Unlikely to concern in most circumstances and requiring limited context	**Moderate** Greater potential for offence than mild words and a higher level of context should be considered	**Strong** Perceived as highly offensive and requiring clear and strong contextual justification
Warning: this research table contains language that readers may find offensive.		
A Karen Boomer Gammon Libtard* Nat* Remoaner Snowflake TERF*	Femi-nazi Yoon*	

Political words were the least familiar category to quantitative respondents.

Political words were the least likely to be recognised compared to other categories of words. None of the ten words in this category were recognised by more than 90% of quantitative respondents, while over 60% stated they had never seen or heard the words *Nat, TERF, libtard* and *yoon* before. The

acceptability of political words varied in respondents' spontaneous ratings. Some of the more familiar words such as *remoaner* and *boomer* were individually rated as acceptable before and after the watershed by quantitative respondents. In contrast, *femi-nazi* and *yoon* were seen as less acceptable with greater contextual justification required. In qualitative groups, political words were often unfamiliar to participants or generally not seen as offensive.

Targeted language based on political attitudes was seen as less problematic than language based on identity.

Many participants in the qualitative groups were not aware of *snowflake* and *gammon* as potentially offensive terms, although levels of recognition were higher among younger participants. Both terms were seen as less offensive compared to other derogatory words because they focus on people's attitudes rather than their identity. They were generally seen as descriptive words that related to a person's behaviour or views rather than targeting an individual or particular group based on their inherent characteristics.

"Snowflake isn't a slur, it's a dismissive way of talking about someone's political position. I would be disappointed at this word being used but I wouldn't be offended." - Oxford, England, Non-binary Depth Interview

A number of participants noted that the use of these words could be indicative of problematic behaviour, such as bullying or targeting individuals. In this way, the use of this language was deemed less acceptable if used in an aggressive or demeaning way, with participants emphasising who said the word and how it was used.

Non-English words

A number of non-English words were tested as part of the research with South Asian participants. The words and definitions are included in the table below. These words were selected to reflect complaints previously received by Ofcom and the significant number of services broadcasting in South Asian languages that it regulates.

Behnchod	"Sisterfucker" in Urdu, Punjabi and other South Asian languages.
Chamaar	A pejorative term in Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi, meaning "lower-caste" and used to describe the Dalit community, who were previously known as "untouchables" and considered at the bottom of the Hindu caste system for centuries. They were kept in subjugation by the higher castes.
Choora	*Chooray* (plural), or *choora* (singular), is a pejorative slur in Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi, used to describe primarily Christians in Pakistan. It has also been used to describe "lower-castes" and/or darker skinned people.
Fitnah	An Arabic word, meaning "sedition, treachery, civil strife, discord". In modern Islamic usage, Fitnah is used to describe the act of spreading discord among the Muslim community. As such, for Muslim sects or individual Muslims to be accused of spreading "fitnah" is a serious allegation.
Habshi/Habshan	*Habshi* ("male"), *habshan* ("female") are antiquated/old fashioned words in the subcontinent used in Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi to refer to Black people. The origin of this word comes from *habesha* (English cognate: "Abyssinia") which was used as a

	pan-ethnic identifier for all Semitic language speakers of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Over time, this came to be used for all African migrants in South Asia who came as merchants, mercenaries, slaves and indentured servants. The closest equivalent of *habshi* in English might be "negro".
Kaafir	*Kaafir* is an Arabic term which means "infidel", "pagan", "denier" or "disbeliever". This term refers to a person who rejects or disbelieves in God as per Islam, or the tenets of Islam. In contemporaneous usage, *Kaafir* can be used to describe non-Muslims as well as perceived "self-professed Muslims".
Kaala/Kaali	*Kaala* ("male"), *kaali* ("female") are slang words used to refer to Black people. While used neutrally to refer to the colour black in Hindi and Urdu "kaala rang" (black colour), can also be used to describe Black people, depending on the context.
Kutta	"Dog" in Urdu and various South Asian languages.
Machod	*"*Motherfucker" in Urdu, Punjabi and other South Asian languages.
Murtad	An Arabic word, which translates to someone who is an apostate from Islam. In certain Muslim-majority countries where Sharia Law prevails, apostasy is punishable by death or imprisonment and might also result in ostracization from one's community.
Uloo Ka Patha	*Uloo ka patha* in Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, and other South Asian languages literally translates to "son of an owl", used to mean "idiot", "imbecile", or "moron".

Views of participants on Non-English Words

How research participants generally rated Non-English words		
Mild Unlikely to concern in most circumstances and requiring limited context	**Moderate** Greater potential for offence than mild words and a higher level of context should be considered	**Strong** Perceived as highly offensive and requiring clear and strong contextual justification
Warning: this research table contains language that readers may find offensive.		
Fitnah* Kutta Uloo Ka Patha	Kaafir Kaala/Kaali Murtad*	Behnchod Chamaar Chooray Habshi/Habshan* Machod

First generation South Asian participants were typically more familiar with non-English words, including those related to religion, than second generation participants.

Words such as *fitnah* and *murtad* were often unfamiliar to South Asian participants, although those who did recognise *fitnah* all saw it as not offensive. Those familiar with *murtad* were divided between seeing it as strongly offensive or not offensive. They suggested the word refers to someone who is no longer a Muslim and is generally not offensive as a term. However, they argued the intent behind its use can

impact how it is seen. One participant described how they would feel their faith was being attacked and would take offence if it was used towards them.

Kaafir was the most contentious of the non-English words. The word itself was not seen as offensive as a descriptive term for someone who is not Muslim. However, Bangladeshi and Pakistani participants felt it could become highly offensive if it was used to question someone's faith. They expressed how the news media had created different connotations around the word, making it more offensive.

"I wouldn't want to be called that [kaafir] because I am a believer. If it is used with intention to offend someone it is bad - because you are digging into their religion, that would hurt someone who is very religious." - West Midlands, England, Bangladeshi, Male 1st Generation Group

Although not always recognised, racial words tended to be seen as strong.

Habshi/habshan were not always recognised by South Asian participants. Those that were familiar with the terms saw these as strong and understood them to translate to *nigger*. Participants' views of *kaala/kaali* differed across groups. Pakistani participants predominantly viewed the word as mild, Indian groups as moderate and Bangladeshi groups perceived it to be strongly offensive. Pakistani groups tended to be more relaxed about the word as it is commonly used in conversations in Pakistan but not as an insult. Participants from the Indian and Bangladeshi groups, particularly younger participants, felt the word was a racist and discriminatory term when used to describe a Black person.

Recognition of the terms *chooray* and *chamaar* varied among South Asian participants but they were generally considered unacceptable and problematic in reinforcing Asian cultural stereotypes around light skin. Some participants recognised the humorous intent in how the words were used in a hypothetical scenario involving a comedy show but were concerned about children hearing this sort of language given the suggestion that darker skin signified a lower caste.

"Our culture and society, this is a major problem and affects daily life... You don't grow out of this mentality, when it's in comedy or not. This thing will always exist as long as there are people who laugh at it. I'm sure there are other ways of adding some humour to your life." - Yorkshire and the Humber, England, Pakistani, Female 1st Generation Group

Some non-English swear words such as *behnchod* and *machod* were perceived as strongly offensive, while others were seen as mild.

Behnchod and *machod* were typically considered strongly offensive by participants, especially first-generation groups. Second generation participants were generally less familiar with what non-English words were acceptable. Participants from the Indian qualitative groups explained that the use of *behnchod* and *machod* were reasonably common in certain aspects of Punjabi culture, for example in rap songs, and subsequently perceived the words as more acceptable. However, they still acknowledged they would not want them aired on TV before the watershed or at times when children were particularly likely to be listening, on radio.

"Early in the morning, I find it very offensive because the children are listening, the family are getting ready." - North West, England, Bangladeshi Female 1st Generation Group

Kutta and *uloo ka patha*, where recognised, were widely seen to be mildly offensive words by South Asian participants. A hypothetical scenario in which a discussion between two guests on a Pakistani political show gets heated and they call one another *kutta* and *uloo ka patha* was seen as being

unprofessional. It was generally regarded as unacceptable to use the words on TV in this context, although the situation was also regarded as comical due to the way the politicians were behaving.

"It's very unprofessional, especially for politicians… It becomes like a comedy… It's amusing but it's also embarrassing. Doing stuff like that and not being professional about things, it can be damaging to us as Pakistanis as well. But then, it's quite entertaining as well. You're thinking, 'Are they for real?'" - Yorkshire & the Humber, England, Pakistani Female 1st Generation Group

4 How was it broadcast?

Contextual factors played a crucial role in forming attitudes towards the acceptability of offensive language on TV and radio. Participants considered how a programme had been broadcast, focusing on: whether they would expect this kind of content in a particular programme, who was involved and whether any mitigating actions had been taken to limit the potential for offence.

Is this what I expect?

Overall, participants described offensive language as being generally more acceptable if it matched the expectations for a programme based on a range of factors including the time, type and reputation of the programme, and channel. These markers gave audiences an informed choice about whether to watch or listen to something. In contrast, participants saw content as less acceptable if the audience was likely to be surprised by the language used.

"It's worse when it catches you off guard and is unexpected, when you choose to watch a programme that you can anticipate has offensive language it's not as bad." - Northern Ireland, Disability Depth Interview

The time of broadcast played an important role in judging acceptability, with the watershed seen as a key marker.

Generally, participants felt that offensive language on TV and radio was more acceptable the later it was broadcast. They expected stronger content later in the evening, with the audience less likely to come across it by accident. The distinction provided by the watershed on broadcast TV was particularly important for informing participants' expectations, especially with regards to swear words. It was valued for giving the audience a clearer idea about what programmes might include, with a widespread acceptance that audiences may come across stronger language after the watershed.

Even after the watershed, strong language was more acceptable the later at night it was broadcast. For example, when considering a hypothetical scenario of a comedy panel show, participants felt that the use of the word *coconut* was more acceptable as the show was broadcast at 10pm after the watershed. Similarly, the *Secrets of the Sauna* clip was deemed by many participants to be more acceptable as it was shown at 2.40am. Participants reflected that children were unlikely to be awake at these times and therefore come across the programme. They felt that those watching late night TV would not be surprised by offensive language, given the nature and timing.

"At that time, it will have a select audience who want to watch something like that." - East Midlands, England, Indian Male 1st Generation Group

The type of programme, including the genre and storyline, was a key factor in setting expectations.

Participants considered the type of programme including the genre and storyline when assessing the use of potentially offensive language. They expected offensive language to be more likely in a comedy show or certain types of dramas, and less likely in genres such as news or lighter family entertainment. Participants often reflected that certain channels, programmes and presenters have a reputation for using offensive language, which regular audiences would know about and thus be prepared for. For

example, many participants felt that the hypothetical use of the word *nigger/nigga*[21] in a song on a hip-hop radio station was acceptable as listeners would expect this sort of language in this context whereas audiences would not expect to hear offensive language on radio stations playing classical music.

"I think using the reference to the hip-hop programme, after 10pm, I think I kind of expect to hear that. That's the music, that's the terminology they use. I wouldn't be upset to hear that if I were listening to that programme." - West Midlands, England, 55+, C2DE

One genre where the use of offensive language divided opinion was comedy. For stand-up comedy, strong language was largely seen as acceptable if the programme was broadcast after the watershed. However, a few participants felt uncomfortable with the use of discriminatory language in this context. They were concerned about the potential for harm to groups or individuals hearing discriminatory words, and that this would be exacerbated by the accompanying audience laughter. A number of participants from across the research reflected on how they personally avoided stand-up comedy programmes, having been upset by watching or listening to a similar show in the past.

"It's awful, because it's comedy, you not only have him saying it, but you have to watch hundreds of other people laugh at it which is not ok." - Brighton, England, Trans Depth Interview

Participants were divided over whether older content containing outdated or discriminatory language should be aired on TV or radio today, but many felt warnings were important in such cases.

On the one hand, some participants, particularly from older age groups, felt that older content should be judged in the context of the time it was made even if the same content would be unacceptable in modern programming. They argued that audiences would be aware of the age of the programme and understand the context in which the offensive language was being used. They had concerns about sanitising or removing history and worried about censoring older programmes.

Many participants, however, still suggested that a warning prior to broadcast to inform viewers or listeners of potentially offensive language would be appropriate. Most felt that warnings should be clear and specific, indicating the specific type of language or content that might cause offence. They felt this would help the audience to make an informed choice as to whether to watch or listen.

"I don't see the problem. It wasn't offensive at the time. To complain about it now, if we did that about this type of programme, we'd have to do that for all of history. We'll never learn if we delete history." - Central Scotland, 55+, C2DE

On the other hand, some participants suggested that broadcasting older programmes containing outdated views could cause unnecessary harm and reinforce stereotypes. They felt that audiences might be harmed by coming across programmes by accident, for example if it reminded them of negative experiences. There were also concerns that some audiences, particularly children, may not appreciate the offensiveness of certain words and could unknowingly use them in everyday life.

"I don't think they should broadcast it now as you'll have a load of people taking offence to it." - North West, England, 18-24, ABC1

A distinction was made between older programmes that had a perceived cultural value and those that did not. Award-winning or critically acclaimed films and programmes – along with content that had been

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[21] The scenario described 'one use of the N-word' during a hip-hop song. In this way, participants made their own judgement as to whether *nigga* or *nigger* had been used in the song.

especially popular when first shown – was more likely to be seen as acceptable to broadcast. Similarly, participants reflected on the value of an episode to the wider storyline of a series including whether this was required to make sense of the overall plot, thus making it more difficult to remove. For example, participants were more likely to find the *Carry on Cleo* film, which included an actor in blackface, as more acceptable than a re-run of a historic episode of the *Strike it Lucky* quiz show, which involved the mimicking of a contestant's accent. Participants felt that the latter was not part of a specific storyline and other episodes could be aired whereas *Carry on Cleo*, whilst a standalone narrative, was part of the history of *Carry On* films and had greater perceived cultural value.

"If it's an award-winning film, fair enough. But we're talking about a programme that there's loads of, so why bother putting yourself through the hassle." - North East, England, 36-54, ABC1

Who was involved?

The person using the language, and whether it was directed towards an individual was considered when judging acceptability.

There were greater concerns about language targeted at an individual, particularly in unscripted or reality programmes, because of the increased likelihood that it could negatively impact the person involved. Aggression exacerbated the potential for harm in these circumstances, with participants arguing that words said aggressively were more offensive than the same words said in a light-hearted way.

"It depends how you're using language, if you use it with aggression it can be different. If you're using it with banter, I don't find it offensive, it's all about how aggressive they are saying it." - East Midlands, England, 25-35, C2DE

Participants reflected on their expectations for aggressive language in dramas such as soap operas that aim to reflect reality. In these cases, they recognised that language was being used to heighten the emotions involved and effectively portray the situation. For example, participants suggested that using the phrase "*You bitch"* in a soap opera during a confrontation between two characters would be an accurate reflection of real life. They argued that scriptwriters were right to include this word, even accompanied by an aggressive action such as a slap as it added to the drama.

"I've got no problem with that in the context it's used at all. It wouldn't be much of a soap opera if she slapped her and said 'deary me'." - North East, England, 36-54, ABC1

Using discriminatory language to describe yourself was seen as more acceptable than using it towards someone else.

Participants from across the qualitative research argued that there should be more freedom for individuals to choose the words they want to use to describe themselves, even if they might have discriminatory connotations. In contrast, using this language to describe someone else could cause offence, even if this was not intentional. For example, some participants, including those from minority communities, reflected that language could be used self-deprecatingly by comedians in an acceptable way.

"When he calls himself Paki, he is acknowledging the fact, he is owning what he is, what he has been called. Whereas when someone else uses it, it is offensive." - London, England, Indian Female 1st Generation Group

There was recognition of the reclaimed use of discriminatory language in everyday life.

Participants widely acknowledged that some offensive terms had been 'reclaimed' by the groups which the words were originally intended to insult, although not all participants in general groups were familiar with the terminology of 'reclaimed language'. Many felt it was acceptable for someone from a minority community to use words in a reclaimed way, seeing this as potentially empowering and a source of strength or solidarity for that community. For example, as discussed under "what was broadcast", both lesbian women and gay men described how the word *queer* had been reclaimed as an inclusive word, although it was recognised that this view was not held by everyone identifying as LGBTQ+.

"I've used those, but it's part of our culture. We've reclaimed that language." - South Wales, Male LGB Group

It was recognised by many that using words in a reclaimed way was acceptable within the relevant minority communities, such as in peer-to-peer discussions or between friends. In contrast, participants found it less acceptable for those outside of specific minority communities to use discriminatory language in this way. Participants from the general groups often described how they would not be offended by a word being used in everyday life such as *nigger* or *queer* if it was used by someone from the relevant community. However, participants recognised that a distinction should be made between using language in everyday life and broadcasting it on TV and radio, with the former generally being deemed as more acceptable.

Participants outside of the relevant communities were generally uncomfortable making final judgements as to the acceptability of broadcasting reclaimed language.

In some cases, those outside the relevant community felt unable to comment on the acceptability of reclaimed language and felt members of minority communities were better equipped to make these judgements. This resulted in a degree of uncertainty for those who did not feel able, or thought they did not have a right, to comment.

"I would not use any of these words but it's not for me to tell minority groups what they can and can't say about themselves, how that translates to TV I'm not sure." - Highlands, Scotland, 25-35, ABC1

In a small number of cases, participants from the general groups disagreed with the idea that certain groups should be able to use words that are not acceptable for use within society. They suggested that either everyone should be able to use offensive words, or no one should.

"It's confusing, as a White person he can't say the n-word but then if someone's Black they can. It shouldn't be like that, everyone has equal rights." - East Midlands, England, 28-35, C2DE

There were concerns - particularly held by those from minority communities - that broadcasting reclaimed language could normalise the use of discriminatory words.

Some participants argued that using discriminatory language on TV or radio risked normalising discriminatory words and could encourage their use in inappropriate contexts. They worried about the implications of broadcasting this language, even when they felt that individuals from a minority community should have the right to use words in a reclaimed way more generally. In particular, participants from minority communities had concerns that the wider public could misunderstand terms and be given the impression that certain words were acceptable after hearing them on TV or radio, keeping them alive in society.

"It's thrown around too much. Other races, the comeback is, 'Well, you say it, so we'll say it too.' I just don't like it." - South West, England, Black African Group

The relationship between the individuals involved was also important, especially if there was an obvious imbalance of power.

Power imbalances between individuals were clear in some uses of offensive language, for example based on celebrity status, role on TV or radio, or other demographic factors, such as age, race or gender. In a hypothetical scenario of a breakfast TV interview, the use of the word *snowflake* was deemed less acceptable when said by a well-known journalist to a younger guest. Although the word *snowflake* was generally viewed as mild, participants were concerned about the potential impact on the younger guest and argued the journalist should act more professionally. In some cases, participants felt it would have been more acceptable if the younger guest had used political language to describe the journalist.

"I think a younger person dismissing a very established journalist's views are going to have less effect… Because the older person already has power, an established following." - North Wales, 18-24, C2DE

Participants widely felt that these power imbalances could lead to bullying behaviours. In unscripted programmes, as opposed to dramas, behaviour that could be perceived as bullying was seen as unacceptable and often exacerbated the offence of the word due to the potential to hurt or harm. The *Strike it Lucky* clip was seen as particularly serious by participants as the host singled out a contestant from an ethnic minority community. The host was seen to be in a position of power as a famous White male presenter leading the discussion compared to the female contestant, who many participants felt was visibly uncomfortable at times.

"I wouldn't like anyone to take the mick out of me in front of all the audience, you'd feel embarrassed. That's what gets me, he's targeting her personally… I can't imagine how she felt." - Snowdonia, Wales, 36-54, C2DE

Participants considered the relationship between those involved, even where an imbalance was not obvious. They felt that the use of offensive language in interactions between friends was more acceptable if it was clear that those involved were comfortable. For example, LGBTQ+ participants felt that the use of the word *dyke* in a hypothetical scenario involving two reality TV contestants was more acceptable between friends than strangers. In this case, participants believed it was clear that the language was not intended to cause offence. Similarly, participants from the general groups and minority communities felt the relationship between those involved in the use of this language could make this more acceptable, if seen as friendly. For example, when considering a hypothetical scenario where a Black guest jokingly calls another Black guest a *coconut,* the use of the term was viewed as more acceptable if viewers perceived a friendly relationship between the two guests.

"She's talking to her friend, so she didn't mean to cause offence. If it was to someone who isn't her friend that might be more wrong." - South West, England, Male LGB Group

There was an expectation for presenters and journalists to be held to higher standards with regards to discriminatory or vulgar language.

Professionalism was important to participants, who expected those in presenter, journalist or commentator roles to control what they said on TV and radio. They described how it would not be appropriate in most jobs to use potentially offensive language and this was more serious when broadcast

on TV or radio as it could act as an endorsement of the word, especially if said by an 'authority figure'. For example, when considering a hypothetical scenario, participants reflected that the lack of professionalism on the part of the commentator exacerbated the offence caused by the use of the word *raped* in the post-match analysis of a football match. They expected that in this case there would be consequences, such as disciplinary action for the pundit, as well as an apology.

"You just would know it was offensive when it came out of your mouth. I'd assume they wouldn't last long in the job... The worst thing about this is that these are the people paid to present." - Yorkshire & the Humber, England, Jewish Group

Were any mitigating actions taken?

A distinction was made between live and pre-recorded programmes.

It was acknowledged that broadcasters had limited control over the use of offensive language on live programmes. There was an expectation that if shows were pre-recorded, mitigating actions, such as warnings, bleeping or editing, could be taken, whereas this was not possible on live TV or radio. Instead, an apology was deemed important in most cases when offensive language had been used accidentally.

"On live events... I don't think there is any way that they can control what is going to be said... It is acceptable because you don't know what that person is going to say." - London, England, Indian Female 1st Generation Group

Timely, genuine apologies were important in accidental cases of offensive language.

Participants appreciated quick apologies perceived to be genuine, often basing this judgement on the speed and tone of the apology. Many participants felt a timely apology made a hypothetical scenario where a presenter misgenders a guest more acceptable if it was clear that the misgendering was accidental. On the other hand, a small number of participants noted that in some instances an apology could worsen the potential for offence by drawing attention to the incident, which the wider audience might have otherwise missed.

Specific, clear warnings could give viewers more information and help to set expectations.

Warnings were seen as a way to give audiences more information about a programme, helping them to make an informed choice whether to watch or listen. Participants wanted warnings to be clear and specific, for example explicitly saying that discriminatory language against a particular group would be included. Although they noted that audiences switching to a programme could miss the warning, participants still welcomed this as a way of providing information, even if it was not always enough to entirely mitigate the offence.

"Sometimes I think warnings don't go far enough. I've been sat here halfway through a programme and turned over. It needs to tell you what is in that programme that's going to be offensive. That gives every person the opportunity to not watch it." - Snowdonia, Wales, 36-54, C2DE

Editing older programmes could make them more acceptable for broadcast.

Participants noted that small edits to older programmes could be used to mitigate the risk of offence, for example, where discriminatory or outdated language was not integral to the plot and could be removed easily. In these cases, many participants expected broadcasters to edit the content as leaving strong discriminatory language in the programme could lead to unnecessary offence or harm.

"If you had taken out that last tiny bit with that term, it wouldn't have affected anybody's enjoyment of the film." - North East, England, 36-54, ABC1

However, there were concerns about editing older programmes as some participants worried that doing so would erase the past and remove educational opportunities. In these cases, it was felt that a warning or an explanation was needed to provide context.

Abbreviations were generally seen as more acceptable than the full word to which they referred.

Participants were familiar with the use of abbreviations to refer to some offensive language, particularly the 'f-word', the 'n-word' and the 'c-word'. There was less familiarity with the use of the 'p-word' as referring to *Paki* among the wider public, although it was familiar to South Asian participants.

Participants thought that these abbreviations were used when reporting on something that had been said rather than as part of a storyline or comedy sketch. As such, they did not think these phrases would be used in a targeted or aggressive way but instead could be used in factual reporting or conversations around discriminatory language. This made abbreviations more acceptable than the full word, with these participants often suggesting that this was the 'correct' way to talk about offensive language.

"They're born out of necessity, because it's the only way you can refer to them that's deemed acceptable." - Belfast, Northern Ireland, 25-35, ABC1

However, others had some concerns over the use of abbreviations and questioned the need to use them at all. For example, some participants from minority communities who were particularly concerned about the use of discriminatory language on TV and radio, suggested that discussing the use of 'a racial slur' might be sufficient in a news report about the use of the word *nigger*. In contrast, it was felt that *nigger* was stronger than other racial slurs and audiences would need information about the specific word used, denoted by the 'n-word', to properly judge the severity of the incident and get a full picture of what had happened. There was also a concern that children might hear an abbreviation and ask what it meant, leading to conversations some participants felt uncomfortable with.

5 Why do I think this was broadcast?

Participants questioned the reasons why they thought offensive language had been broadcast before coming to a judgement about acceptability. Their views were influenced by what had been said and by who, as well as assumptions about the wider factors involved in broadcasting a programme. This included decisions about the time, channel, any mitigations put in place and other contextual considerations discussed in Chapter 4. In assessing the possible intentions for using offensive language, participants considered a range of factors such as:

- Whether they felt there was a strong enough reason for broadcasting offensive content.

- Whether those involved in broadcasting a programme should have known the language used had the potential to cause upset or harm.

- The extent to which a situation could have been prevented, for example, if offensive language was used on a live programme accidentally or by a guest.

These factors informed whether participants felt there was a justification for using offensive language in a specific context. They discussed the role of those involved in creating a programme, including presenters, guests and programme makers, as well as the broadcasters who decide what to air.

It was widely seen as unacceptable to broadcast strong language or offensive content intended to cause offence without a clear contextual justification.

Participants considered tone, repetition and the presence or absence of mitigating actions to make judgements on whether they felt those involved in a programme intended to cause offence. For example, participants found the hypothetical scenario of a presenter repeatedly misgendering a transgender guest less acceptable than if it had only happened once. They felt the repeated nature of the language suggested that the actions were deliberate.

"I think if it's accidental then it's not deliberately offensive, but if it's repeated then it becomes abusive and therefore it's not acceptable." - North East, England, 36-54, ABC1

Similarly, participants described language they viewed as unnecessary or gratuitous as less acceptable. In these cases, they could not see a justification or purpose for using the words other than to shock or offend. Some participants felt that the *Live at The Apollo* clip involving discriminatory words such as *pikey* was unnecessary and offensive as it was intended to make fun of certain groups. Repeated use of swearing without a clear justification was also seen as gratuitous and designed to generate attention rather than adding value to a programme, with participants preferring offensive language was not overly used in these situations.

"The stand-up comedy, people call me old-fashioned, and I've got a very dry sense of humour apparently, but I don't see why every other word has to be a swear word to be funny." - Snowdonia, Wales, 36-54, C2DE

Participants also considered whether a discriminatory word or phrase was used aggressively or directed towards an individual. This was seen as suggesting the intention was to cause offence or harm, making its use less acceptable.

A distinction was made when considering the intentions behind scripted versus unscripted programmes.

Participants had different expectations for scripted and unscripted programmes, reflecting on the possible intentions of those involved in each. In discussing scripted programmes such as dramas, soap operas or films, they reflected on the role of the programme maker in ensuring offensive language is used appropriately with the right contextual factors. They felt programme makers have a responsibility to avoid unnecessary harm or offence and a duty to make clear the reasons why they are using discriminatory language, for example, to educate or raise awareness of an issue, or to accurately reflect real life. This could involve using mitigations such as warnings, as well as decisions about the storyline and character portrayal which illustrate why words have been used.

In contrast, participants highlighted the responsibility of the individuals featured in unscripted, live programmes to avoid gratuitous uses of offensive language. They described the role of presenters, reality TV personalities and panellists in using language in an appropriate way. While the role of the broadcaster was still seen as important, participants noted that in live programmes, broadcasters may not always be able to pre-empt and prevent the use of offensive language themselves. In these cases, a timely apology was often seen as the most appropriate response.

Participants considered whether those involved in making and broadcasting content should have been aware that it was likely to cause offence without adequate contextualisation.

There was an expectation that broadcasters should be particularly aware of issues surrounding discrimination and they were seen to have a responsibility to reduce the potential for offence and harm to audiences. Participants reflected that if broadcasters were aware content could cause offence to individuals, certain groups or wider society, they should not show it without a clear justification. For example, when discussing the *Strike it Lucky* clip, many participants felt that the inclusion of a warning alerting viewers that the show contained outdated views indicated that the broadcaster was aware the content was offensive, but still chose to show the programme. For many, the warning in this instance did not mitigate the risk of offence and participants questioned why the broadcaster had chosen to show the episode instead of airing an alternative.

"[The Strike it Lucky clip] is way worse [with a warning], if someone knows already and they still insist on showing it, why? They have loads of episodes they could choose, why show this episode?"
- Midlands, England, Chinese Group

Participants recognised mistakes can happen, and accidental swearing was not a major concern.

In general, participants were not particularly concerned about accidental cases of swearing on live programmes, especially if an apology was broadcast shortly after the mistake. The lack of intent to offend was an important consideration in coming to this view. Although swearing was seen as unprofessional and there was some concern about children hearing offensive words or phrases, it was largely not regarded as serious by participants. An accidental use of the word *fucker* in the *Friday Night Kiss* clip was seen as largely acceptable, despite the language itself being considered as strong. Participants noted the tone that was used and what participants assumed to be the live nature[22] of the programme, arguing this made it difficult to edit out the language.

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[22] The content was in fact pre-recorded and broadcast "as live".

"[Kiss Radio] was quite acceptable because it was just a slip up, it wasn't directed at anyone. I didn't even notice it." – South West, England, 18-24, C2DE

Although participants were generally understanding about accidental swearing, they were much less open to the idea that discriminatory language could be broadcast by mistake or used in error. The use of this language was therefore seen as more likely to be unacceptable. They pointed to the underlying attitudes discriminatory language reflects and had higher expectations about this being avoided, including during live broadcasts.

"Depends on the offensive language. Swearing by accident is different to accidentally being racist or discriminating towards anyone, I don't think you can be accidentally racist." - East Midlands, England, Black Caribbean Group

Informing an audience, or accurately reflecting reality were considered more acceptable reasons for broadcasting offensive language on TV and radio.

There was broad agreement that broadcasting offensive language with the intention to educate or raise awareness about a topic could be acceptable in the right circumstances, even for strong discriminatory language. Participants highlighted the potential role TV and radio can play in shaping attitudes and argued it could be important to use these platforms for educational purposes. As such, there was a degree of acceptance that discriminatory language could be broadcast on TV and radio as a way to raise awareness of discrimination or highlight the negative effects of stereotypes. For some, this was acceptable at any time, particularly if the purpose to inform was clear.

"It is acceptable in my opinion to use very unacceptable language only in the context of education. Things that make it clear that this language is not acceptable but show you how it is used in the context of society, educate people in terms of history." - North Wales, 18-24, C2DE

Participants thought this could apply to documentaries, but also to dramas or comedy programmes designed with an educational purpose or message. For example, some mentioned that satirical comedies could include offensive words if it was clear the language was being used to make a broader point about society. They noted that satire is a form of social criticism and programme makers were showing the ways in which it might be inappropriate to use certain words. This was also true of narratives aimed at reflecting reality and highlighting social issues, such as in soap operas. In these cases, discriminatory language was acceptable as a way of portraying the reality faced by a group.

"If you're talking about historically accurate films, like about slavery, without the N-word, it wouldn't have the same impact. There's a time where, as much as it is offensive, you need it." - South West, England, Black African Group

Participants felt it was important that programme makers made it clear why discriminatory language was being used in addition to having sufficient contextual justification.

Although participants saw the potential value of using racist or homophobic words to highlight the mistreatment of minority groups, they did not want audiences to get the wrong impression about the acceptability of using this language. This was particularly important for words used before the watershed, or at times when children were particularly likely to be listening, as children may not fully understand the context of a programme. As such, programme makers were seen as having a responsibility to clearly communicate that the language used in a programme was not acceptable in daily life. This could be achieved through warnings, the storyline and other contextual information provided during the show.

"I think the broadcaster has a responsibility to the public. Putting it in the documentary, viewers may think it's acceptable. Broadcasters have a responsibility to say it's not acceptable and it shouldn't be broadcast as if it's normal." - North West & London, Chinese Group

In dramas, the storyline and characters using offensive language informed attitudes towards the perceived intent.

The nature of the character using offensive language was considered by participants when making judgements on the intention of including strong or discriminatory words in a drama. For example, whether the character was perceived as 'good' or 'bad' influenced how they felt the programme maker wanted the word to be interpreted. Offensive language used by a 'villain' demonstrated the negative connotations of the word and gave the message that it was not acceptable for wider use. In contrast, participants felt it would be less acceptable for a 'hero' to use offensive language, as viewers might then see this as acceptable.

"If the person using the slur is a bad guy and is ridiculed, that's one thing. But if they're the hero and you want people to look up to, that's a different thing. If it's saying this really bad person is using this, it's different." - North East, England, 36-54, ABC1

In some cases, participants reflected on the use of 'explainer' characters to give moral lessons in TV and radio programmes. If offensive language was accompanied by an explanation from a character that was seen to have a strong moral compass, participants argued that the programme was able to educate the audience. For example, they described the role the character Lisa plays in *The Simpsons* to highlight the reasons why certain behaviours are unacceptable.

"The way [The Simpsons] treats so many topics is quite good. I love the way Lisa explains. She's the informant to her misinformed parents." - Lothian, Scotland, Female LGB Group

6 Attitudes towards other types of content

As part of the qualitative strand of the research, participants were asked to consider the acceptability of certain types of potentially offensive content on TV and radio including: blackface, mimicking accents, misgendering or deadnaming. In line with their overall approach to reviewing content, they weighed up their views on what, how and why content was broadcast to make an assessment of the overall acceptability of each example.

Blackface[23]

It was generally agreed that blackface would not be included in recently made broadcast content, and that its inclusion would be unacceptable without strong contextual justification.

Participants described how they felt it was often more acceptable to show blackface in older content, as opposed to a contemporary programme or film, as well as circumstances where blackface was shown for educational purposes.

"We shouldn't be doing those things today, but I don't think we are. I can't think of any recent programme which has had anyone in black makeup." - North East, England, 36-54, ABC1

For blackface to be shown as part of a contemporary, non-educational programme today, participants felt it needed to come alongside explanations for why the content is offensive and unacceptable. For example, participants mentioned films such as *Tropic Thunder*, where they felt that the use of blackface was included to make a satirical point. This was seen as more acceptable than the use of blackface in comedy programmes simply as a joke without a wider societal message about how this behaviour is inappropriate.

"Tropic Thunder, it was appropriate, it was showing a White actor who thinks he can do everything, they know it's not acceptable and they were showing what White people think of themselves. I thought that was appropriate. It's a very fine line of doing it right and wrong." - Highlands, Scotland, 25-35, ABC1

Some, particularly older participants, felt that older programmes or films depicting blackface still had a place on TV, but felt a warning was necessary.

Participants who had grown up watching the *Carry On* films, and remembered them fondly, suggested that *Carry on Cleo* could still be shown, despite the inclusion of blackface. These participants argued that blackface was socially acceptable when the film was made. In some cases, they suggested that it was included out of necessity due to a lack of non-White actors in the *Carry On* troupe. They felt that the use of blackface was not intended to offend and that the removal of scenes with blackface would interrupt the narrative of the film.

"It weren't offensive, but times have changed and they can't do now what they did then." - Manchester, England, Offline Depth Interview

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[23] See footnote 1.

Many participants acknowledged that they would find this kind of content more comfortable after the watershed or on specialist channels, such as those focused on historic films, rather than on mainstream TV. They felt that this would give viewers more control and be better able to protect children from accidentally coming across blackface. These participants also wanted programmes to include a warning to advise potential viewers that it contained scenes of blackface.

Others argued that blackface was highly offensive regardless of the age of the programme.

Some, particularly younger and Black participants, had very strong negative views towards blackface and considered it to be highly offensive. They reflected on the origins of blackface and Minstrel shows, recounting how the portrayal of those in blackface often implied a lack of intellect through their inability to speak or certain mannerisms. These participants generally felt that it was never acceptable to show blackface on TV, as it perpetuated outdated racist views without giving context around why it is offensive, meaning not all audiences who saw it would understand why it was wrong.

"It's really offensive. It fell into the narrative at the time that Black people are less intelligent than White people." - South West, England Black African Group

Mimicking accents

The targeted mimicking of accents associated with ethnic minorities was perceived as bullying and regarded as highly offensive in some circumstances.

Broadcasting programmes that include the mimicking of accents associated with minority ethnic groups was generally regarded as unacceptable, particularly when targeted at an individual. Participants felt that it could constitute bullying, perpetuate stereotypes and cause offence to individuals of the particular nationality or region.

Whilst it was felt to be especially offensive to mimic an accent of someone from a minority ethnic group as this was perceived to have racist undertones, views were divided on whether it was acceptable to mimic other accents not typically associated with minority ethnic groups. Participants who felt it was more acceptable to mock French or American accents reasoned that people with these accents do not have the same history of oppression as other cultures. They argued that if mimicking was done in a light-hearted manner, without malice, it would not be offensive. On the other hand, some participants believed that it was not acceptable to mimic any accent as they maintained that nobody would enjoy being mocked, regardless of nationality or ethnicity. Moreover, participants noted that it could still promote insulting stereotypes.

"It comes back to the racist aspect of it, to the colour. You're saying American accents, French accents, they're [predominantly] White. To imitate Chinese, African, ethnic variations is very offensive nowadays. There would be a line between imitating French and Chinese." - Central Scotland, 55+, C2DE

Contextual factors such as the power imbalance between a TV host and contestant, as well as the tone of voice, amplified perceptions of harm.

The tone and aggression of the person mimicking the accent shaped attitudes towards acceptability, as well as the ethnicity of the person who was being mimicked. The *Strike It Lucky* clip involving a presenter mimicking a Chinese accent directed at a contestant from Hong Kong received one of the strongest responses during the qualitative research and was widely seen as unacceptable by participants across the general and minority community groups. In this case, the mimicking was directed at a specific

individual and was seen as tantamount to bullying. Participants expressed concern for the wellbeing of the person involved. They highlighted the targeted nature of this mimicking and that the 'humour' lay in making fun of someone at their expense.

"If you're watching something where you can see a real person getting hurt, and you can see she must have felt so uncomfortable, that feels worse to me than an actor getting abused as part of a script." - North East, England, 36-54, ABC1

It was also considered more difficult for members of the public to stand up for themselves on TV or radio, and participants maintained that individuals may laugh along out of awkwardness, even if they were uncomfortable. Participants from the Chinese community echoed this, reflecting on their experience of having to go along with racist jokes made at their expense. In this way, it was generally determined that the individual's reaction, even if seemingly positive, would not mitigate the offence.

"[He] doesn't have a right [to mock her]. I just felt that these people [the contestants] are very vulnerable, they can't talk back to him which was not a very nice feeling. They just had to laugh it off. I definitely found it offensive." - London, England, Indian Female 1st Generation Group

Participants from the Chinese community reflected on their own experiences of accent mimicking and the mocking of their culture. They reflected that broadcasting this content on TV may have contributed to their own experiences of being mocked and having their accents mimicked, as it was perceived to normalise this behaviour and could give the impression it was socially acceptable. Chinese participants emphasised their experiences of discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic and felt that broadcasting a programme mimicking a Chinese accent at this time was especially irresponsible.

"It had a knock-on effect, maybe that programme and why it was found funny might be part of the reason why kids would bully me and shout those words at school, it was really quite cruel… It's not right. If I were a kid then, and didn't know any better, I would just watch that and think its fine, because they're all laughing and it seems fine, she's just taking it." - North West & London, England, Chinese Group

Misgendering and deadnaming

Accidental misgendering was typically seen as something that can happen but should not be normalised on TV and radio.

The terms 'misgendering'[24] and 'deadnaming'[25] were not widely used among participants, although there was greater familiarity among younger and LGBTQ+ participants. Participants generally acknowledged that attitudes in society are changing quickly. They noted that not everyone would be familiar with or aware of the most appropriate ways of describing trans people. Some participants reflected on their own uncertainty and concerns over using the wrong language. Despite acknowledging these challenges, participants were concerned about normalising misgendering, even if this was accidental. They worried about the offence or harm this could cause wider trans and non-binary communities.

Participants widely agreed that deliberate misgendering was not acceptable. If accidental, most participants felt the response following the mistake played an important role in determining offence, with wide agreement that an apology was crucial. Less prevalent was the concern that an apology could make things more offensive by highlighting the error, although it was commonly felt that the apology

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[24] See footnote 2.
[25] See footnote 3.

should be done in a way as to not draw further focus to the mistake.

Among trans participants, views were mixed as to whether accidental misgendering should be seen as acceptable. For some trans participants, accidental misgendering was viewed as offensive by revealing unconscious transphobia. They reasoned there was no excuse to make this kind of mistake as the presenter had a responsibility to use the correct pronouns for their guest. However, other trans participants noted that accidents do happen and highlighted that they themselves could accidentally misgender someone. For these participants, accidental cases should not be viewed as offensive if genuinely a slip of the tongue.

"There's no context where it's OK to misgender someone. It's a serious concern for the trans person's welfare to be misgendered on TV, this is a safeguarding issue, too. It's important to not normalise misgendering people even if the trans person said it's OK." - Brighton, England, Trans Depth Interview

It was generally felt there was less room for mistakes when it came to deadnaming, and participants viewed this as more deliberate than misgendering.

It was considered offensive to call someone by the wrong name, regardless of the individual's gender identity. Participants saw this as rude and lacking common courtesy. Deadnaming was generally seen as more offensive than misgendering, as participants felt that the former was more likely to be deliberate and transphobic. An apology was therefore considered to be mandatory in this situation. For many, a timely genuine apology mitigated the offence, if they perceived the use of the wrong name to be genuinely accidental.

However, participants also widely maintained that it was the responsibility of presenters and reporters to know who they are speaking to and to use the correct name. Many felt that presenters should not make these mistakes or make similar mistakes more than once and should ensure that they are adequately prepared to conduct interviews, even if on a live show. As a result, some suggested that if the presenter or reporter deadnamed a guest, they should face consequences for their actions.

"If the presenter referred to the guest by their name before they transitioned, it would be concerning because that would be a conscious decision on the part of the presenter. It is much harder to accidentally call someone by their old name." - Oxford, England, Non-Binary Depth Interview

Appendix A: Summary of attitudes towards the clips and scenarios

Hypothetical scenarios and key contextual factors discussed by participants

Scenario	What was broadcast?	How was it broadcast?	Why was it broadcast?
1. During a live interview featuring a guest who is a transgender woman, the presenter accidentally refers to the guest as "**him**". **Tuesday, 5pm on a mainstream TV channel** *Discussed with general groups, Black, Jewish, Chinese, LGB, disabled, Trans, Non-Binary, Traveller, and offline participants.*	• Seen as potentially offensive, and concerns raised about how the guest might feel. • Recognition that this could cause offence to the wider trans community. • Deadnaming was generally seen as more offensive than misgendering due to the perception it was less likely to be an accident.	• Recognition it was a live interview where mistakes can happen and cannot be edited out. • However, at a time and on a mainstream channel when anyone could be watching. Concerns about the impression this could give audiences. • A timely, genuine apology would make the incident more acceptable for most participants.	• Emphasis placed on the interviewer having a responsibility to know the name and pronoun of the guest but acceptance that accidents do happen. • Repeated misgendering or deadnaming was seen as more likely to be deliberate rather than accidental. • References were made to transphobia if the presenter acted deliberately, and this was widely seen as unacceptable.
2a) During a late-night comedy panel show, a Black guest talks about how they like going on skiing holidays and another Black guest jokingly refers to him as a "**coconut**". **Thursday, 10pm on a television channel aimed at young adults.** *Discussed with general groups, Black, Jewish, Chinese, LGB, Trans and Non-Binary participants.* 2b) During a late-night comedy panel show, an Asian guest talks about how they like fish and chips. Another Asian guest jokingly refers to him as a "**coconut**".	• The word "**coconut**" was not deemed strongly offensive. It was seen as light-hearted for some but perpetuating harmful stereotypes for others. • Much less acceptable if used by a White person or someone from a different ethnicity.	• Live show meaning broadcasters cannot predict what will be said and therefore offensive language cannot be edited out. • Aired late-night on a show aimed at young adults meaning the broadcast was seen as more acceptable as children would be less likely to be watching. • Acknowledgement that the guest using the language is also Black/South Asian - which was deemed to be more acceptable than if a White guest had used the same language. • Acknowledgement that the guests could be friends and the nature of the discussion meant it was more	• Relationship between two guests, if made clear to the audience, could heighten acceptability- for example, if they were friends and appeared comfortable using the word. • Not perceived as intending to cause offence given the programme is a comedy show, and the word was used jokingly.

Thursday, 10pm on a television channel aimed at young adults. *Discussed with South Asian participants.*		acceptable, particularly as both guests were Black.	
3a) During an hour-long radio show dedicated to playing hip-hop music, they play a popular rap song from the 90s by a well-known Black artist. The song includes one use of the N-word. **Friday, 10pm on a music radio station.** *Discussed with general groups, Black, Chinese, disabled, Traveller and offline participants.*	• **"Nigger"** perceived as very strong, but acknowledgement that acceptability might vary based on how the word is used and who is using it. • Discussions reflected the reclaimed use of the word "**nigga"** by Black people. Generally seen as expected language for this genre of music from the 90s.	• The radio show was dedicated to hip-hop music and participants felt this language would be more expected than on other stations (e.g. playing classical music). • Aired late-night so less chance of children listening. • Some felt it should have either a warning before the song or bleep out the word especially if broadcast pre-watershed.	• The artist's ethnicity was seen as important given the history of the word. It was seen as unacceptable for a non-Black artist to use this language. • Acknowledgment that use of this language in hip-hop is not likely to be used with the intention to offend.
3b) During a reality show, a lesbian participant is having a light-hearted conversation with her friend, who is also a lesbian. During the conversation they refer to each other as "**dykes**". **Friday, 8pm on a channel dedicated to reality entertainment programmes.** *Discussed with LGB, Trans and Non-Binary participants.*	• **"Dyke"** generally regarded as strongly offensive, but discussions reflected the reclaimed use of the word by LGBTQ+ women.	• Generally only seen as acceptable to use between people from the LGBTQ+ community who were friends and only if the individuals were comfortable with its use. • This language might be more expected in reality shows as opposed to other genres, reflecting real life conversations. • However, given the time, children could still be watching, which made it less acceptable for many.	• Making the audience aware of the sexuality of the two guests and their relationship as friends was seen as important for communicating why the word was being used in this situation. • If the word was said affectionately and without malice it was seen as more acceptable.
3c) During a stand-up comedy programme, a Muslim comic refers to himself being a "**muzzie**". **Friday, 10pm on a specialist TV comedy channel.** *Discussed with South Asian participants.*	• The word "**muzzie"** was not widely recognised but was generally understood to be offensive once explained or by those familiar with it.	• Stand-up comedians often seen as using language in a self-deprecating way. Seen as more acceptable for Muslims to use the word about themselves than if a non-Muslim had used it. • Expectation that stand-up comedy may include offensive language. • Late-night so less chance of children hearing it.	• More acceptable to use this language about oneself than others as intent is not likely to be to offend, and the word is not being used to target someone based on their religion. • However, there was some concern it could normalise use of the word.

		• A clear and specific warning before the programme would have been helpful for giving audiences the chance to not watch it.	• Discussions reflected that the Muslim community regularly receive offensive remarks. Some Muslim participants did not think it was appropriate for a Muslim to perpetuate this by using the word **"muzzie"**.
4. During a live breakfast news programme, a well-known journalist calls a younger guest a **"snowflake"** during a debate about climate change. **Monday, 8am on a rolling TV news channel.** *Discussed with general groups, Black, Chinese, LGB, disabled, Trans, Non-Binary, Traveller and offline participants.*	• The term "**snowflake"** was not widely recognised as offensive. • Some reference to 'the snowflake generation' and younger people being more sensitive.	• Time of show when children are likely to be watching before school made it less acceptable for some. • Nature of the debate on climate change should be taken seriously. Although, there was a recognition that the topic could lead to more heated conversations. • Live programme so less opportunity for mitigations such as a warning, but expectation for the programme to moderate discussions.	• Guests should be professional and respectful of opinions, especially when discussing a topic as serious as climate change. • Most found this scenario acceptable, however, some perceived this as bullying towards a younger person and therefore, not acceptable for some on TV or radio. • There is a role for the presenter to challenge the guest in this situation.
5. In a popular soap opera, a female character confronts the woman who has been having an affair with her husband. As she slaps her, she shouts "You **bitch**!". **Thursday, 7.30pm on a mainstream TV channel.** *Discussed with general groups, South Asian, Black, Jewish, LGB, disabled, Trans, Non-Binary, Traveller and offline participants.*	• **"Bitch"** generally regarded as a mild swear word.	• This kind of language was generally expected for a soap opera. The nature of the storyline reflecting real life meant many considered it acceptable. • Some concern about the timing pre-watershed but the word was not seen as overly offensive. • Aggression made the situation worse and the violence of the slap was often seen as more unacceptable than use of the word **"bitch"**. • A warning before the programme would be beneficial, particularly as the scene could be upsetting for some.	• Recognition that soap operas play an important role in reflecting real life and raising awareness of issues. • Would be less acceptable if used by a man against a woman due to the gendered power imbalance.
6. In the post-match analysis of a live football match in which one team has lost 8-0, a pundit says the team "were absolutely **raped** tonight". Slightly later, the same pundit refers to a	• The word **"raped"** was widely seen as unacceptable to be used in any circumstance unrelated to sexual assault. It was perceived	• Generally felt an apology was required and there should be consequences for the pundit.	• Pundits should set an example and use appropriate, professional language, regardless of the time aired. The language used was

player who faked an injury as "a **pussy**". **Sunday, 9.50pm on a sports radio channel.** *Discussed with general groups, Black, Jewish, Chinese, LGB, disabled, trans, Non-Binary, Traveller and offline participants.*	as highly offensive for sexual assault victims and their families. • **"Pussy"** seen as less offensive but connotations of weakness and faking an injury considered misogynistic.	• Sports commentary should be factual without using this kind of language, which would not be expected by audiences.	seen to be particularly unprofessional, heightening the offence. • Responsibility to show awareness of violence against women and set professional standards.
7. In an evening Pakistani political discussion programme, the conversation becomes heated between two guests from opposing political viewpoints. The conversation quickly turns abusive as both guests start attacking each other's character. One of the guests calls the other "**uloo ka patha**"[26]. The other guest retorts by calling him a "**kutta**" [27]. The presenter calls for a cut to ad breaks and the show ends. **Monday, 7pm on a TV news channel.** *Discussed with South Asian participants.*	• Recognition of the language used varied, with second generation groups often less familiar with non-English words. • **"Kutta"** perceived to be more offensive than "**uloo ka patha**", but both words were generally seen as mild, and similar to referring to someone as a dog and stupid. • Similar views across South Asian Groups. Pakistani groups tended to find it more amusing that others.	• Live programme so recognition that audiences are more likely to see heated conversations that are less controllable for broadcasters. • Felt it would have been beneficial if the presenter had apologised. • A warning would make the scenario more acceptable, though it was generally felt that children would not be watching a political discussion. This meant a warning was potentially less important than in other contexts where children might be watching.	• Politicians should be more professional and not resort to using this language. • Many found the situation comical but appreciated how it might be considered unacceptable on TV. • Context of aggression between the guests made the situation more unacceptable than the words themselves which were seen as mild.
8. During a radio music programme in the early morning, the DJ plays a Punjabi rap song. The song contains the words "**machod**"[28] and **behnchod**"[29] among other swear words in Punjabi.	• **"Machod"** and "**behncod"** were widely regarded as strong and highly offensive. • Second generation participants were less familiar with the words than first generation participants.	• It would be more acceptable to broadcast at a later time, when there is less chance of children listening. • Many felt these words should have been bleeped out	• Words more commonly used as part of Punjabi culture (e.g. in rap songs) than other South Asian communities. South Asian participants therefore found this more in line with expectations and contextually more understandable

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[26] *Uloo ka patha* in Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi, literally translates to "son of an owl", used to mean "idiot, imbecile, moron".

[27] *Kutta* in Urdu and various South Asian languages means "dog".

[28] *Machod* in Urdu, Punjabi and other South Asian languages means "motherfucker".

[29] *Behnchod* in Urdu, Punjabi and other South Asian languages means "sisterfucker".

Wednesday, 9am on a radio service aimed at young adults. *Discussed with South Asian participants.*		completely, or a clean version played. • A warning at this time in the morning was not seen as enough to mitigate the offence.	as they can be used without the intention to offend. However, still perceived as unacceptable on TV and radio at this time.
9. In a comedy show based in Pakistan, one of the actors starts making jokes about another actor's dark skin complexion. The actor says that he resembles the "**chooray**" [30] and "**chamaar**"[31] that stroll around his neighbourhood. This is met with audience laughter. **Sunday, 2pm, TV channel aimed at all audiences.** *Discussed with South Asian participants.*	• Recognition of words varied but once explained generally considered to be offensive across groups. • Concerns over children hearing this sort of language and rhetoric around dark skin colour.	• Airing the show after the watershed to protect children from hearing this was seen as more acceptable. • A warning would also allow audiences to choose not to watch the programme.	• Suggestion the programme was perpetuating cultural stereotypes around light skin being better than darker skin. • Some recognised the humorous intent but felt this was more harmful for children who may take it personally and not understand the humour.
10. During a reality competition, contestants give each other affectionate nicknames. A Jewish contestant is nicknamed "the **Jew**" by his fellow contestants. **Friday, 9pm on an entertainment TV channel aimed at young adults.** *Discussed with Jewish participants.*	• Participants felt "Jewish" was the preferred way to refer to someone who is Jewish rather than "**Jew**". • "**Jew**" generally considered to be offensive, particularly if the person saying it wasn't Jewish.	• Time of broadcast made the use of **"Jew"** more acceptable as children would be less likely to be watching and adults could choose to turn over. Children also less likely to watch this genre of programme and adults would have specific expectations when choosing to tune in. • Some agreement that the relationship between the people involved played a role in whether it was offensive.	• Reflections on the term being used affectionately among friends, without intending to offend. • The individual's comfort was also felt to determine offence. If they appeared not be offended, then it was deemed to be more acceptable.
11. During a live football match, a player is sent off for punching another	• **"Mental"** to describe an experience was seen as more	• Live nature of the programme makes it understandable as things	• Generally regarded as offensive as perceived to be derogatory to

[30] *Chooray* (plural), or "*Choora*" (singular), is a pejorative slur used to describe primarily Christians in Pakistan, it has also been used to describe "lower-castes" and/or darker skinned people.

[31] *Chamaar* is a pejorative term used to describe the Dalit community, who were previously known as "untouchables" and considered at the bottom of the Hindu caste system for centuries. They were kept in subjugation by the higher castes.

player. The commentator describes their actions as "**mental**". **Sunday, 9.50pm on a subscription sports TV channel.** *Discussed with participants with a physical or mental disability.*	acceptable than when used to describe someone or their actions. • Concerns over the use of "**mental**" to refer to the aggression of a punch. It was widely felt that other words could and should have been used.	can get said in the heat of the moment. • An apology was commonly expected and would make it more acceptable.	those with mental health conditions. • Expectations for commentators to be more professional.
12. During a live radio discussion about the tourism industry, a caller refers to the number of "**Oriental tourists**" visiting London. **Wednesday, 8am on a talk radio station** *Discussed with Chinese participants.*	• "**Oriental**" used to describe something, particularly cuisine or art, was not seen as offensive. • Describing people as "**Oriental**" was more contentious among Chinese participants with some having preference for "Asian" rather than "**Oriental**". • Generally perceived that descriptions of a person's ethnicity should be more specific, e.g. "Chinese".	• Suggestions that the radio host could have corrected the caller. • Use of the word generally considered to come from ignorance. Discussions around what was meant could help to mitigate the potential offence.	• The intent of the caller was seen as ambiguous, meaning offence was harder to decipher, as it was unclear whether they were making a negative or positive remark. Although, using the term was felt to be generalising regardless.

Clips

All participants who took part in the qualitative research online through a depth interview or focus group reviewed all twelve clips in advance of the discussion.

Programme Description	What was broadcast?	How was it broadcast?	Why was it broadcast?
Good Morning Britain, 08.30, June 2020, ITV *Good Morning Britain* is a daily news and current affairs programme broadcast weekday mornings. This clip took place during a discussion about whether it was appropriate for England Rugby Fans to sing 'Swing Lo Sweet Chariot' because of the song's apparent connections to slavery. During the discussion, a White male	• "**Nigger**" was widely regarded as strongly offensive due to its racist origin and connotations. • Widely regarded as more acceptable for a Black person to say the word than a White person.	• Time of broadcast caused some concerns around children hearing the word or people not understanding the nuances around when it is acceptable to use. • Participants noted that this was a mainstream channel that many people watch regularly every morning, sometimes with children present.	• Educational purposes typically recognised as an acceptable reason for using the word "**nigger**" in full, if the speaker is Black. • The nature of the discussion - a serious debate about racism - meant that the use of language was perceived as justifiable to many.

presenter, uses the abbreviation **"n-word"**. A Black female guest, states that the **"n-word"** means **"nigger"**.			
Live at The Apollo, 21.00, January 2020, Dave *Live at The Apollo* is a stand-up comedy programme. During one set, the comedian talks about the programme *'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding'* saying that the show should really be called "Let's watch **pikeys** on the piss". Later he says the show is an opportunity to "laugh at **pikeys**". He also describes how '*The Only Way is Essex'* is an excuse to "laugh at **chavs**" and '*Made in Chelsea'* is a chance to "laugh at **wankers**".	• Terms such as "**pikey**" were typically perceived to be strongly offensive. • Participants from Traveller and Gypsy communities referred to "**pikey**" as one of the worst words to describe Travellers.	• Programme aired just after the watershed and participants felt it should come with a warning as children may still be watching. • A warning was also seen as important for adults so they could choose not to watch the programme. • Recognition that stand-up comedy often contains offensive or strong language, meaning audiences are more likely to expect this kind of content.	• Using offensive or derogatory language in stand-up comedy was perceived as trying to get a 'cheap laugh' by some. They felt that comedians should not have to resort to this level of humour to be funny and should avoid targeting specific communities. • Others felt the intention was for entertainment rather than to offend.
Secrets of the Sauna, 02:40, June 2020, Channel 4 *Secrets of the Sauna* is an observational documentary about the staff and patrons of a gay sauna. During one episode, a brother and sister are discussing the brother's upcoming same-sex wedding. She describes her brother and his fiancé as "dirty **bastards"**, suggesting they bring the "**chinky chonky** takeaway lad in" for sex.	• The language used around having 'male' and 'female' roles in a same sex relationship tended to receive more criticism than the use of the term "**chinky",** although both were widely regarded as unacceptable and offensive.	• The time of broadcast reduced concerns over children hearing these words and it was felt that audiences would know to expect strong language given the time. • Recognition a warning helps audiences further prepare for the content or choose not to watch. • As a reality TV show about a sauna, audiences are likely to expect the programme to reflect reality, further managing audience expectations.	• The conversation was had between two siblings and many felt it was clear that they were likely to be comfortable using this language between themselves. • Some participants questioned why programme makers had chosen to use this clip, containing offensive language when it could have been cut or edited.
Mannequin, 12:35, August 2020, ITV *Mannequin* is a romantic comedy film from 1987 about a shop mannequin who comes	• **"Fairy"** was viewed as a relatively mild word by many participants. • There was general agreement that participants would not want	• The age of the film impacted the acceptability of the word, as it was regarded as of its time and reflecting life in New York in the 80s.	• The intent was not perceived to be malicious and some LGB participants recalled the film fondly.

to life. During the film, a character refers to a flamboyantly dressed male character who is crying as "the **fairy"**.	children hearing the word used to describe a gay man.	• The use of a warning or only broadcasting the film after the watershed was seen by some as ways to mitigate any potential offence.	• In some cases, the portrayal of gay men as effeminate or over-the-top was considered more offensive than the language used.
James O'Brien, 10:00, July 2018, LBC *James O'Brien* is a regular phone-in show on LBC radio focusing on news and current affairs issues. In this broadcast, the presenter references "**gammons**" and "the **gammon** army", explaining how the term originated from a novel by Charles Dickens and can now be used to describe anyone with a mindset of "utter, utter ignorance".	• Recognition of the word "**gammon"** being used in this context was low. • It was not generally considered to be offensive as participants viewed it as describing an ideology rather than a protected characteristic.	• Programme aired on a radio channel known for controversial conversations and political discussions, so the audience is likely to know what to expect. • Time of broadcast not felt to impact acceptability as the term was not deemed offensive.	• Presenter was not using the term towards an individual but instead to inform people about the meaning of the word and its origins. Some found this informative and did not identify any offence. • Presenter also described the term as referencing an ideology and behaviour rather than an ethnicity or nationality, which was seen as more acceptable.
Strike It Lucky, 15:30, June 2020, Challenge *Strike it Lucky* is a long-running game show that aired from 1986 to 1999. During the show, the White male presenter, talks to a contestant. When she says she is originally from Hong Kong he **mimics her accent**, using made up words and sounds, and telling her he can also "speak Chinese". This is met by laughter from the audience.	• The direct mimicking of an accent associated with a contestant from Hong Kong was generally seen as bullying due to the host's position of power. • Seen to perpetuate offensive stereotypes and cause offence to the individual. • It was commonly felt that it was more offensive as the person being mimicked was from a minority ethnic group, and this was perceived to have racist undertones.	• Time of broadcast caused concerns as anyone could be watching including children. • Some participants felt it was more acceptable to air on a channel dedicated to older programmes rather than a mainstream channel. • Warning was seen to highlight the offensive nature of the programme rather than mitigate the possible offence.	• Participants questioned the need to broadcast this episode showing offensive behaviour as there were many other episodes to choose from. • Warning shown before the programme meant many felt the broadcaster was aware of the strong potential offence. • Airing the programme during the COVID-19 pandemic when there had been an increased instances of hate crimes against East Asian communities was further seen as irresponsible.
Carry On Cleo, 13:10, October 2020, ITV 3 *Carry On Cleo* is a 1964 comedy film and the tenth film in the *Carry On* series. During the film, a White actor plays an Egyptian guard. His **skin is darkened** with very dark	• Recognition of blackface in this clip was low. • Perceptions of the offence varied as some felt the age of the film made it more acceptable. • Others had very strong negative views towards blackface and considered it to be highly	• Time of broadcast and channel caused concerns as anyone could be watching, including children. • Airing after the watershed, on a specialist channel or with a warning would have been more acceptable as it	• For some, the film was perceived to have cultural value as it was part of a popular older film series and therefore was seen as more acceptable to broadcast.

make-up. He is unable to speak, using sign language to communicate instead.	offensive, especially as the character was portrayed as being unintelligent.	would allow audiences to make a more informed choice whether to watch.	
RuPaul's Drag Race UK, 22:45, January 2021, BBC One *RuPaul's Drag Race UK* is a reality show in which Drag Queens compete to be "the UK's next drag superstar". In this episode, a contestant describes how they won the main challenge on last week's episode, saying "not only have I survived, but **bitch** I won a badge".	• The term "**bitch**" was considered to be mild. • It was generally felt to be a colloquial term commonly used by those in the drag community and therefore less offensive.	• Broadcast after the watershed so less concern about children hearing. • Participants felt this language was to be expected in this show.	• Intent perceived not to be malicious or aggressive with no intention to offend. • The term was not directed towards another individual but rather the person was speaking to camera and was therefore not viewed as offensive.
The Simpsons, 19:35, October 2020, Sky 1 *The Simpsons* is a long-running American animated sitcom. In the episode a number of characters are participating in a diversity forum. During this, one character, the Principal of the school, is shown to be wearing a skirt and high heels, another character points and laughs saying "Ha ha the Principal's a **tranny**". Later on, one of the main characters, Marge Simpson wants her daughter Lisa to be able to attend a boy's school. Marge tries to disguise Lisa as a boy, dressing her in male clothing and a wig. Marge, looking at Lisa, says "You are the perfect little **he-she".**	• Use of the terms **"tranny"** and **"he-she"** was generally considered to be offensive and unacceptable.	• The time of broadcast, type of programme and channel were causes of concern as children likely to be watching. • Airing after the watershed and with a warning would mean audiences could make a more informed choice whether to watch.	• Views on the acceptability of airing an old episode in a series such as this varied. • Those in favour felt that it was part of a popular comedy series which typically mocks and makes fun of society, and therefore the intent was not to offend. • Others felt that removing an episode that perpetuated harmful messages would not take away from the overall series as episodes did not follow a set plot. • Some felt that if Lisa, as an 'explainer' character with a strong moral compass, highlighted the discriminatory nature of the content, the language would have been more acceptable.
I'm A Celebrity…Get Me Out of Here, 21:55, November 2020, ITV	• The use of "**Christ"** in this context was generally not considered to be offensive.	• Aired after the watershed and generally perceived to be in keeping with the genre of the programme.	• Intent generally not perceived to be malicious and not directed towards anyone, making it more acceptable.

I'm a Celebrity…Get Me Out of Here is a reality show in which celebrities live together and compete in a range of challenges. In the episode, a celebrity is challenged to eat a Goat's eye. He visibly struggles to swallow it. He eventually does swallow the eye, saying "**Christ** alive" as he takes a drink.	• Participants suggested terms associated with God were used commonly and seen as acceptable ways of expressing emotion or surprise. • Some concern that Christians may be offended, but overall of limited concern.		• Some suggested the term used was mild in comparison to other words or phrases the person could have used in the situation to express emotion.
Friday Night Kiss, 17:50, July 2020, Kiss FM *Friday Night Kiss* is a music programme on a national radio station that plays a range of dance, hip-hop and pop music. During the broadcast, the presenter begins to announce the next segment of the show, she pauses and says "**fucker**", she then starts to introduce the segment again, repeating what she has previously said.	• The language used was generally deemed as strong.	• Time of broadcast and the channel were a source of concern as it was considered to be a family radio channel and broadcast at a time when children could be listening. • However, the live nature of the programme and accidental use of the word heightened the acceptability and mitigated the offence for most participants. • It was felt that an apology would have mitigated the offence.	• Generally perceived to be unintentional. Not directed at anyone but rather viewed as a slip of the tongue, making it more acceptable particularly with an apology.
ITV News, 18:30, September 2020, ITV During an *ITV Evening News* programme, a report was shown about a young girl who has recently received treatment for a rare disease. Having previously not been able to walk, the report shows the young girl walking and the treatment is described as miraculous. The reporter states that her doctors had believed that the condition "would leave her **wheelchair bound** for the rest of her life".	• Low recognition of "**wheelchair bound**" as offensive. Generally seen as a descriptive term for someone's medical condition. • The positive news story of a girl learning to walk overshadowed any negative connotations associated with the term. • When discussed, participants were receptive to the phrase 'wheelchair user' as a more acceptable alternative.	• As the term was not deemed to be offensive, the time of broadcast and the mainstream nature of the channel were not of concern.	• Aired as part of an inspiring news story and was not viewed as being intentionally offensive.

Appendix B: Methodology

Overall design

Ofcom commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct research to help them understand public attitudes towards offensive language on TV and radio. A mixed methods approach was developed with quantitative and qualitative strands. The rationale for this was that the survey would indicate the general public's attitudes towards offensive words and the qualitative work would provide additional depth and insight into the nuances and trade-offs involved in deciding on the acceptability of broadcasting a word in different contexts.

Fieldwork was conducted in all four UK nations between 22nd February and 6th May 2021. This consisted of:

- Five-day online survey between 22nd and 26th February 2021

- 37 x focus groups each lasting 2.5 hours (incl. 1 x pilot group)

- 25 x depth interviews each lasting 90 minutes and either taking place online or over the telephone
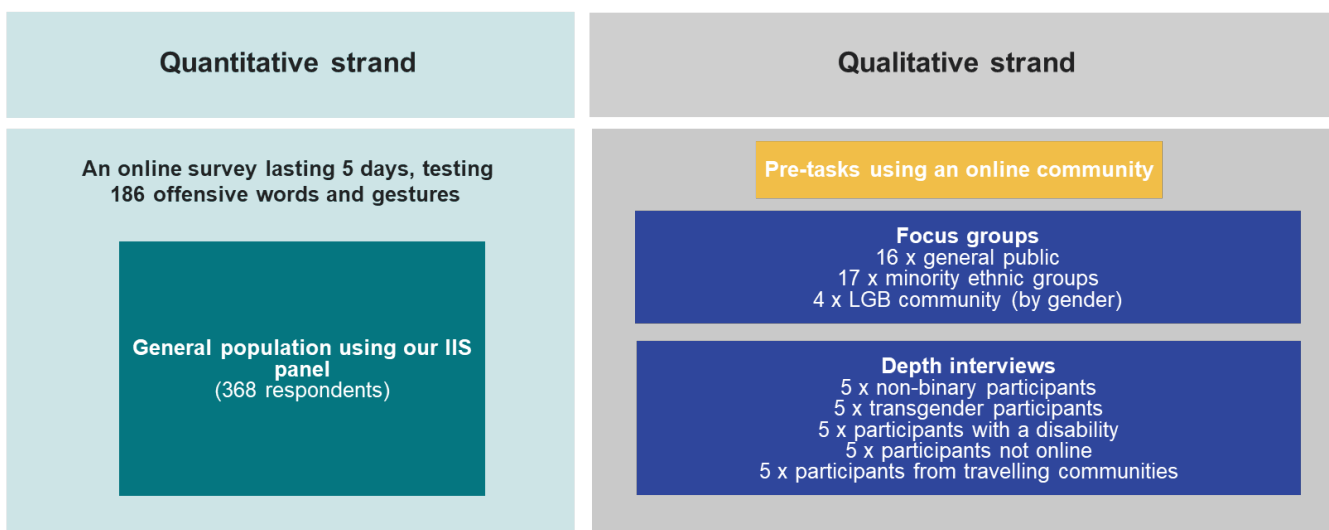
Overview of our approach

Quantitative strand	Qualitative strand
An online survey lasting 5 days, testing 186 offensive words and gestures	Pre-tasks using an online community
General population using our IIS panel (368 respondents)	**Focus groups** 16 x general public 17 x minority ethnic groups 4 x LGB community (by gender)
	Depth interviews 5 x non-binary participants 5 x transgender participants 5 x participants with a disability 5 x participants not online 5 x participants from travelling communities

Figure 1: Methods summary

Quantitative strand

The quantitative survey ran over five days and tested the spontaneous responses of 368 respondents on the acceptability of 186 English words, between 22nd and 26th February 2021.

Respondents individually assessed the acceptability of each word they were familiar with before and after the watershed on a scale of one to ten, where one is totally unacceptable and ten is totally acceptable. Those who stated they had never seen or heard a specific word before were not asked to rank the acceptability of that word. Respondents reviewed around 37 potentially offensive words each

day. On the final day, they were asked for their reflections on taking part in the survey and the report reflects these open-ended comments.

The survey was administered using our Ipsos Interactive Services (IIS) online panel. Respondents were recruited via the panel through a longitudinal 'diary' sample. Around 800 respondents were recruited to ensure a minimum of 300 final completions were achieved. Nationally representative quotas were set by ages, gender, region and working status for the initial sample recruited. However, due to respondent attrition over the five days, we were unable to set quotas on the final achieved sample rating all 186 English words.

Qualitative strand

The qualitative approach was developed to understand participants' views of potentially offensive language and content in changing contexts. By discussing specific clips and scenarios, participants were encouraged to contend with the contextual factors that could affect views including the time of broadcast, type of content or genre, channel and use of warnings. This also provided space to discuss Ofcom's additional areas of interest including the mimicking of accents, use of blackface, misgendering, deadnaming, abbreviations for offensive words and the reclaimed use of offensive words.

The qualitative strand comprised of focus groups with the general public, minority ethnic communities, LGB participants as well as individual depth interviews with transgender and non-binary participants, people with mental and physical disabilities, and those from communities less likely to be online, such as those over 66 and people from the Traveller community.

Pre-task

All participants taking part online were asked to watch or listen to 12 clips ahead of their focus group or interview. Participants were asked to rate each clip from 1 to 10, based on their perception of the acceptability of the language used. They were also given the option of providing additional feedback via an open question response, capturing spontaneous reactions. The pre-task clips were hosted on an online community platform, designed specifically for this study by Ipsos MORI. Participants were able to access the clips a week in advance of the focus group or interview and were not able to see other participants' responses.

Participants who were not online were unable to review the clips ahead of the interviews due to a lack of internet access. Researchers instead described the clips to participants during the interview.

Focus groups and depth interviews

Focus groups were conducted over Zoom and depth interviews held over Zoom, Microsoft Teams or over the phone for those without internet. Focus groups lasted 2.5 hours and were held over evenings and weekends to enable participation. Each group had either 5 or 6 participants, one moderator and a notetaker. Ofcom colleagues joined focus groups as observers, with a maximum of one observer per group. Interviews lasted for 1.5 hours.

Method	Groups of participants	Length
Focus groups *5-6 participants per group*	• 16 x general public (incl. 1 x pilot) • 17 x minority ethnic groups • 4 x LGB community (split by gender)	2.5 hours
Interviews *1 participant per interview*	• 5 x aged 66-85 who do not use the internet	1.5 hours

	• 5 x Trans participants • 5 x non-binary participants • 5 x participants with a disability • 5 x participants from the travelling community	

Structure of discussions

Focus groups and interviews followed a similar structure to ensure a consistent approach to capturing attitudes towards offensive language. The structure was also adapted so that it could be conducted over the phone with participants unable to join online. All groups and interviews followed a similar structure with relevant stimulus that was tailored to allow specific words or scenarios to be tested with different groups.

- **A warm up discussion.** Participants were asked general questions about their attitudes towards offensive language. This helped participants feel comfortable sharing views and introduced the research as being focused on scheduled broadcast programming on TV and radio.

- **A word sort exercise with 25 words.** All words from the quantitative survey were grouped into bundles of 25, which were then rotated across groups. Each bundle of words was used twice with the general groups and participants were asked to rate the strength of each word without any contextual information. Words targeted towards specific communities were prioritised to be tested in the relevant focus groups or depth interviews with participants from those communities.

- **Discussion around types of words, i.e. abbreviations and reclaimed language.** Participants were asked about their views towards the acceptability of abbreviated offensive terms, compared to the use of the terms in full. Discussions also focused on reclaimed language and the contextual factors that impact the offence of the word, i.e., who is saying it and to whom.

- **Reviewing the clips from the pre-task.** Participants were asked to discuss which clips stood out to them to capture spontaneous responses, followed by specific questions relating to the clips. Participants were probed on contextual factors that made the clip more or less offensive and whether they would expect to see or hear this language on TV or radio before the watershed, as well as perceived justifications for airing strongly offensive language.

- **Hypothetical scenario discussions.** These discussions focused on more difficult situations or content that required further probing into the contextual factors that shaped participants' views. Scenarios were rotated between groups to prioritise scenarios relating to specific communities with the relevant focus group or depth participant. Up to six scenarios were discussed during each focus group.

- **Wrap up discussion focused on overarching principles.** This brought together discussions from the whole session, with participants debating the key criteria that govern what makes language offensive or not.

Qualitative sampling structure

It was essential for this research to include a broad range of participants to reflect both the wider demographics of the general population across the UK and the diversity of specific communities. Six participants were recruited for focus groups to ensure all had at least four participants on the day.

Research with the general public

We set minimum quotas on several key characteristics including gender, age, socio-demographic group, ethnicity, and household type to ensure a broad range of attitudes and backgrounds were reflected in the general focus groups. We also recruited regular TV viewers and/or radio listeners, as well as those using other media platforms (Freeview, Pay TV, Video on Demand (including both subscription and non-subscription services)). Online research provided the opportunity to recruit participants from a wide geographical pool and therefore it was easier for those living in more rural locations to be involved. We recruited a mix of rural, suburban and urban participants, with minimum quotas set for each UK nation.

Table 1: Achieved general public participant sample

Nation	Gender	Age	Socio-economic group	Ethnicity
1 pilot group 5 x participants	2 x M 3 x F	35-54	2 x C1s/ C2s 3 x DEs	Mix
England: 6 groups 35 x participants	16 x M 19 x F	6 x 18-24 5 x 25-34 6 x 35-54 6 x 55-64 6 x 65+	7 x ABs 24 x C1s/ C2s 4 x DEs	7 x from minority ethnic groups
Scotland: 3 groups 17 x participants	8 x M 9 x F	6 x 25-34 5 x 35-54 6 x 55-64	5 x ABs 8 x C1s/ C2s 4 x DEs	White
Wales: 3 groups 17 x participants	9 x M 8 x F	5 x 18-24 6 x 35-54 3 x 55-64 3 x 65+	3 x ABs 6 x C1s/ C2s 8 x DEs	1 x from minority ethnic groups
Northern Ireland: 3 groups 15 x participants	7 x M 7 x F 1 x NB	6 x 25-34 5 x 35-54 3 x 55-64 1 x 65+	5 x ABs 8 x C1s/ C2s 2 x DEs	White

Research with minority audiences

We used a similar set of criteria to recruit groups and interviews with minority audiences. For the focus groups, we wanted to ensure we spoke with participants from the following communities: Black African, Black Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, Chinese, LGB and the Jewish community. The Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi participants were split between first-generation women, first-generation men and mixed gender second-generation groups. The South Asian groups were split in this way to allow discussions around cultural perceptions and understandings that may not have been possible if first and second generations had been in the same group. Separating first generation men and women also helped to make participants feel able to share their opinions around potentially offensive language that may have been uncomfortable for them to do so in mixed groups. For the individual depths, we wanted to ensure we spoke with trans participants, non-binary participants, participants with a disability, those aged 66-85 who were offline and participants from the Traveller community.

Table 2: Achieved minority communities participant sample

Group	Method	Gender	Age	Socio-economic group
Black African **11 x participants**	Focus group	5 x M 6 x F	2 x 18-24 3 x 25-34 3 x 35-54	Mix

			3 x 55+	
Black Caribbean **11 x participants**	Focus group	5 x M 6 x F	3 x 18-24 2 x 25-34 2 x 35-54 4 x 55+	Mix
Indian **18 x participants**	Focus group	9 x M 9 x F	1 x 18-24 1 x 25-34 9 x 35-54 7 x 55+	Mix
Pakistani **16 x participants**	Focus group	8 x M 8 x F	1 x 18-24 3 x 25-34 8 x 35-54 4 x 55+	Mix
Bangladeshi **18 x participants**	Focus group	9 x M 9 x F	2 x 18-24 6 x 25-34 9 x 35-54 3 x 55+	Mix
LGB **22 x participants**	Focus group	12 x M 10 x F	2 x 18-24 9 x 25-34 8 x 35-54 3 x 55+	Mix
Jewish **12 x participants**	Focus group	6 x M 6 x F	2 x 18-24 2 x 25-34 5 x 35-54 3 x 55+	Mix
Chinese **12 x participants**	Focus group	4 x M 8 x F	4 x 25-34 8 x 35-54	Mix
Aged 66-85 who do **not use the internet** **5 x participants**	Interview	2 x M 3 x F	N/A	Mix
People with a **disability** **5 x participants**	Interview	3 x M 2 x F	4 x 35-54 1 x 55+	Mix
Travellers **5 x participants**	Interview	2 x M 3 x F	1 x 25-34 2 x 35-54 2 x 55+	Mix
Transgender **5 x participants**	Interview	3 x M 1 x F 1 x NB	3 x 18-24 1 x 25-34 1 x 35-54	Mix
Non-binary **5 x participants**	Interview	5 x NB	3 x 18-24 1 x 25-34 1 x 35-54	Mix

Appendix C: Research materials

6.1   Questionnaire

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research.

This research is on behalf of Ofcom. Ofcom is the organisation that regulates television, radio, telecommunications and post in the UK. Ofcom has a responsibility for ensuring that television and radio programmes comply with certain standards, including rules on the use of offensive language. Ofcom wants to understand what people think about the acceptability of potentially offensive language on broadcast television and radio that is watched or listened to at the time of broadcast.

Between 22nd – 26th February you will be asked for your views on different words. Ofcom will use this research to inform its decisions about the use of potentially offensive language on broadcast television and radio. Each day you will be shown about 40 words. It is likely that you will be shown some words you personally find offensive. We need to make you aware of this in advance. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can leave at any time.

We will be asking about broadcast television or radio. This means programmes you watch/listen to at a pre-arranged time according to a schedule, and not programmes that you watch/listen to via on-demand services at a time of your choosing (e.g. BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub). This is because the rules for broadcast and on-demand services are different.

For each word that you are familiar with, you will be asked a small set of questions relating to the acceptability of the word being broadcast both before and after the watershed on broadcast television or radio. Please take your time over each word and reflect on your thoughts, feelings, and associations. This should take you between 15-20 minutes each day. There are no right or wrong answers, we are just interested in your views to help inform Ofcom's decisions about potentially offensive language.

Do you consent to proceeding on this basis?

Yes	1	**CONTINUE**
No	2	**SCREEN OUT**

Questions for Survey

ASK ALL
1. To what extent are you familiar with these words or phrases?

List of 40 words per day set out in a table format, randomised for each participant.

---

1. I've seen or heard it before today and I'm familiar with it / I know what it means in an offensive context
2. I've seen or heard it before today but I don't really know what it means in an offensive context
3. I've never seen or heard it before today

ASK FOR EACH WORD CODED 1 OR 2 IN Q1

The watershed on broadcast television is 9pm. Radio does not have a strict 9pm watershed like television. However, when making judgements about the use of offensive language on radio, Ofcom uses a similar concept of "times when children are particularly likely to be listening."

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is totally unacceptable and 10 is totally acceptable, how would you rate this word or phrase? Please think about its acceptability on broadcast TV and radio.
   a. …for broadcast before the watershed
   b. …for broadcast after the watershed

Each word was shown individually in a random order.

ASK ALL
ASK ONLY ON DAY 5
3. Thank you for completing all five days of this research – we really appreciate your help in the study.

   Now that you have had a chance to review all the words, were there any you would like to say more about? And is there anything else you would like to share or reflect on?

Exit page

Thank you for participating in our survey today.

We understand that some of the words or phrases you will have read today may mean you want to talk about this further, or look for information and support. Please see our information sheet here for more detail on this.

6.2   Example discussion guide

The following discussion guide is based on the version used in focus groups with the general public, with additional probes for each of the scenarios used across the research. The full list of the scenarios used with each group is provided in Appendix A. Tailored discussion guides, following the same structure were used for each of the minority audience focus groups. Similarly, the interviews were conducted using a guide following the same structure, with group activities altered to be appropriate for a single participant. During telephone interviews, a small number of the clips were described to participants over the phone, as they had not been able to watch these prior to the research activity.

Focus group objectives

- Understand the meaning and nature of offence to participants (for instance, personal offence vs. offence on behalf of others), and the role of context in causing offence relating to language on TV and radio.

- Explore the nuance of the drivers of acceptability. For example, the role of apologies, channel, the likely audience, prior expectations of a programme, genre, intent of usage, and frequency of usage among others.

Timings	Discussion
20 mins	**Introduction and overview**
15 mins	**Participants join the group/ check tech is working.**
5.30-5.35pm **5 mins**	Moderator to **introduce** self and observers. **Explain the role of Ipsos MORI** – we are an independent research agency, aiming to help you share your views, ensuring we hear from everyone. Ipsos MORI is working with Ofcom, the communications regulator, on a research study which aims to **understand public attitudes towards offensive language on TV and radio.** Today we're keen to understand your views on the acceptability of potentially offensive language on scheduled broadcast TV and radio. This means programmes you watch/listen to at a pre-arranged time according to a schedule, and not programmes that you watch/listen to via on-demand services at a time of your choosing (e.g. BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub). This is because the rules for broadcast and on-demand services are different.

We are going to talk for about 2.5 hours, with a break about halfway through. **We will be discussing potentially offensive language which some people may find unpleasant or upsetting.** Please feel free to take breaks or step away from the discussion as required – you can just switch off your microphone and camera. You can re-join or end your participation completely without giving a reason. If possible, please ensure you are somewhere quiet where you can be on your own and won't be interrupted.

- Explain that we will start the recording after we have done introductions. This is to help us fairly reflect your views in the final report. All findings will be anonymous - may use quotes but no detailed attribution.

Housekeeping/ground rules:

- Explain that we will be talking about what is/ isn't acceptable for broadcasting on TV/ radio and we will be discussing specific words and content during the session. Honesty is especially important for this research as we will sometimes be discussing issues that may make some people uncomfortable. It is important to note that some people may find some language offensive while others may not. What is important is to be respectful of each other and disagree with ideas rather than individuals. We know this is a sensitive topic, but we want to encourage you to share your views, there are no right or wrong answers.

- There may be times when you feel it is necessary to use specific words to help distinguish or confirm your views, or I may feel it is necessary to use a term to help clarify what is being said. **Are you okay with the option of using swear words or discriminatory language in this way?**

- **Agree with the group whether (or not) people can use swear words or discriminatory language** if that's easier to distinguish or clarify what you are trying to say so that any words don't come out of the blue.

- Please keep your videos on throughout the group. If your Wi-Fi stops working/you disconnect from the call, please try your best to re-join. If the moderator's Wi-Fi breaks/they are disconnected, they will try and re-join. The note-taker will be in contact with the moderator and keep participants updated. Please continue the conversation until the moderator re-enters the session.

- There will be a lot to cover so we may need to move people on. This is not personal, but only to ensure we fit everything in.

- Reiterate that we will be discussing potentially sensitive issues, and they are free to leave at any time.

	• Any questions before we begin?
5.35-5.45pm 10 mins	**Warm up: changing attitudes towards offensive language?**

3 mins
 	
7 mins
	<u>Participant introductions (3 mins)</u>
	
	Participants to say their name, where they're from and something they watched/listened to last night.
	
	MODERATOR TO TELL PARTICIPANTS **<u>RECORDING WILL START NOW</u>**. CAPTURE RECORDING HAS BEGUN ON TAPE AND CONSENT TO TAKE PART.
	
	<u>Initial warm up (7 mins)</u>
	
	What comes to mind when you think generally about offensive language?
	
	    • Associations or feelings?
	
	    • Words?
	
	    • Images?
	
	    • Experiences?
	
	IF NOT COVERED, MODERATOR IS TO EXPLAIN THAT WE ARE INTERESTED IN SWEARING WORDS <u>AND</u> OTHER TYPES OF OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE, INCLUDING DISCRIMINATORY LANGUAGE AGAINST SPECIFIC GROUPS (E.G. BASED ON ETHNICITY, SEXUALITY, DISABILITY ETC).
	
	Does offensive language on TV concern you at all?
	
	    • Is it something you notice?
	
	    • Is it something that you are concerned about hearing? Or your family hearing?
	
	    • Before watching the clips, can you remember that last time you heard swearing or offensive language on TV?

- When was the last time something stood out/shocked you – for what reasons?

What about offensive language on radio? Is this the same or different to how you feel about offensive language on TV?

- Before listening to the clips, can you remember the last time you heard swearing or offensive language on radio?

- When was the last time something stood out/shocked you – for what reasons?

Looking back, have your personal views towards offensive language changed over recent years at all?

- If YES: In what ways?

- PROBE: types of offensive language e.g. general 'swear' words, discriminatory language

- Does this depend on how you are viewing/ listening to programmes? ALLOW FOR SPONTANEOUS DISCUSSION / MENTIONS OF CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Thinking about the expectations of <u>wider society</u>, how do you think attitudes towards offensive language have changed over recent years – if at all?

- PROBE: any specific examples of changes?
- Does this depend on where it is broadcast? Or how old the content is?

MODERATOR TO REMIND PARTICIPANTS: *We all consume lots of content in different ways including using online platforms much more than in the past. Today, we would like to focus on broadcast scheduled television and radio. We would like you to think about your attitudes towards programmes you might see or hear on these platforms in particular. Our discussion today is going to cover attitudes towards offensive language. Reminder that it is okay to use 'swear' words or offensive terms if this helps to explain your thinking and has been agreed by the group.*

5.45-6.25pm 40 mins	**The use of language**
28 mins	<u>WORD SORT EXERCISE</u> *MODERATOR: We'd now like to discuss some specific words together. I'd like you to sort these words into the following categories: not offensive, mild, moderate, strong. You are going to complete this exercise as a group, working together to decide where each word should go – I'm not going to be asking you questions.*

Instead, I'd like you to tell me where to move each word. It's fine to agree or disagree with each other, but please sort each word – and we can come back to any differences after the exercise.

MODERATOR TO SHOW SLIDE WITH WORDS, WHICH WILL BE NUMBERED. ALLOW PARTICIPANTS TO DISCUSS, BEFORE MOVING EACH WORD INTO ONE OF THE BOXES. AFTER ALL WORDS HAVE BEEN SORTED PROBE ON PARTICIPANTS' REASONS FOR PLACING WORDS IN EACH BOX. EACH GROUP WILL TEST c.25 WORDS.

(For South Asian groups only) NON-ENGLISH WORDS SHOULD **NOT** BE TRANSLATED IF PARTICIPANTS ARE NOT FAMILIAR WITH THEIR MEANINGS. INSTEAD THIS SHOULD BE NOTED AND MODERATOR SHOULD ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS TO MOVE ON TO THE OTHER WORDS IN THE EXERCISE.

IF PARTICIPANTS BEGIN TO DISCUSS AN INNOCUOUS MEANING OF A WORD THAT HAS AN OFFENSIVE DOUBLE-MEANING, MODERATOR TO ASK WHETHER THEY HAVE HEARD OF THAT WORD IN AN OFFENSIVE CONTEXT (E.G. BANG IN A SEXUAL CONTEXT). IF NOT, MODERATOR TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS TO LEAVE THE WORD AS ONE THEY DON'T RECOGNISE AND MOVE ON.

Why did you put these words in this box?

What do these words (in each box) have in common, if anything?

- Did anyone disagree about putting any of these words in this box? Where would you have put the word?
- Within the box, do you think that some words are stronger or milder than others? Which words? [MODERATOR TO UNPICK THE HIERARCHY WITHIN A BOX WHERE RELEVANT]

Do you think the words in this box are acceptable before/ after the watershed? Never acceptable?
[IF NEEDED: The watershed is 9pm on TV. Radio does not have a strict 9pm watershed like television. Instead, Ofcom uses a similar concept of "times when children are particularly likely to be listening" on radio.]

- Would this change at all depending on the context? In what ways?
- Radio vs. TV?
- Would there be any instances where these words could be moved to a different box? In what circumstances/ for what reasons?

IF NOT COVERED ABOVE:

Are the strongest swear words ever acceptable before the watershed? For what reasons? In what circumstances?

To what extent do you expect the watershed to apply in the same way to discriminatory language?

- **Is discriminatory language ever acceptable before or after the watershed? For what reasons? In what circumstances?**

7 mins	*MODERATOR: Now we'd like to discuss several types of words.*
	ABBREVIATIONS
	Sometimes people or broadcasters may use abbreviations of words instead of using the full word. How familiar are you with abbreviations of offensive words? Could you give any examples?
	• IF NECESSARY, SHOW ON SCREEN: For example, a broadcaster may use the phrase "the f-word" instead of saying "fuck".
	• IF NOT MENTIONED: PROBE on awareness of: "f", "n", "p" and "c" words.
	How acceptable is the use of abbreviations in this way on television or radio?
	Is it different from using the full word? Is it more or less acceptable?
	• For what reasons?
	• Does this differ depending on . . . CONTEXT PROBES
	RECLAIMED LANGUAGE
5 mins	**I'm now going to show you several words on my screen. How acceptable do you think it is to use these words on TV or radio?** [WORDS TO APPEAR ON SCREEN]
	Are any more or less acceptable? For what reasons?
	• Briefly explore why participants feel this way/any contextual factors that affect their opinion
	• Does it make a difference who is using the word?
	• What about the genre of programme? For example, does it make a difference if the word is used in a documentary or a drama?
	Have you seen any of these words used by people about themselves or about their community?
	• Do you have any examples?

	• What do you think about this? • Is it more acceptable for someone from the relevant community to use this kind of word compared to someone not from that community? For example, is it more acceptable for a gay person to use the word 'queer' than a straight person?
6.25-6.50pm **25 mins**	**Reviewing the clips**
25 mins	*MODERATOR: Thank you for all your contributions so far. We're now going to spend some time talking about the clips you watched in advance – many thanks for taking the time to review these.* **Overall, what did you think about the clips in general? Was anything surprising or unexpected?** **Did any of the clips stand out to you? For what reasons?** MODERATOR TO SHOW STIMULUS SLIDE WITH STILL/ NAME OF CLIP AND DESCRIPTION AS A REMINDER OF WHAT THEY REVIEWED. MODERATOR TO ALLOW PARTICIPANTS TO COVER WHICHEVER CLIPS/SLIDES THEY CHOOSE. HOWEVER, MODERATORS SHOULD ENSURE THAT ALL GROUPS COVER THE 'CARRY ON CLEO' AND 'STRIKE IT LUCKY' CLIPS (SEE SPECIFIC PROBES BELOW). MODERATOR TO ALLOW FOR SPONTANEOUS CONVERSATION, BUT FOLLOW UP WITH PROBES: • Which clips did you feel were **less acceptable?** For what reasons? • Which clips did you feel were **more acceptable?** For what reasons? • Do you think this would be the case for all viewers / listeners? Why / why not? ○ PROBE: older/ younger people, children, parents, specific groups or communities etc. • CONTEXTUAL PROBES: time, intent, programme, channel etc. **[IF NEEDED] What difference, if any, does it make…?** • If this was on TV vs. radio? • The time the content is broadcast? • Genre of content? • Content information tools used (e.g. warnings)? • Which channel/broadcaster (e.g. BBC vs Sky Arts)?

- Who can access the content and how they do so (e.g. if children are likely to come across it)?

MODERATOR TO FOLLOW UP ON ANY SPECIFIC CLIPS/ DISCUSSION FROM THE COMMUNITY.

CLIP SPECIFIC PROBES

Carry On Cleo - TV - Blackface

- Did you notice that one of the actors is wearing dark make-up? What do you think about this?
- Are there any situations where it is acceptable for a television programme to show someone in blackface?
    - In what circumstances? For what reasons?
    - Would a warning make it more acceptable?
    - Is it more acceptable in a comedy context?
- Does the fact this is an old programme impact its acceptability?
- What difference does the channel make? How would you feel if this was shown on a mainstream channel like the BBC, ITV or Channel 4? Is this more or less acceptable than it being broadcast on a channel specialising in old programmes or films?
- What difference does the genre/purpose of the programme make? For example, would this be more acceptable if it was shown as part of a documentary about old television programmes? What if the documentary was about the history of racism?

Strike it Lucky - TV - Mimicking of Accents

- Does the fact this is an old programme impact its acceptability?
- Does it make a difference the contestant is from a minority ethnic background? What if she had an American or French accent, for example?
- What difference, if any, does it make that the programme is shown on a specialist quiz channel?
- Does the warning before the programme make a difference to its acceptability?
    - What else would you want a warning to include?

Mannequin (to be prioritised if necessary)
- Does the age of the film make a difference to the acceptability of broadcasting terms like "fairy"?
- The programme was broadcast at lunchtime. Would you expect a warning at the start of the programme?
    - What do you think the warning should say?
    - What if the programme was broadcast after the watershed? Would you still expect a warning?

The Simpsons (to be prioritised if necessary)
- What do you think about the use of offensive language in programmes that might appeal to children, such as The Simpsons? Does this change your views towards the acceptability of the language?
- Does the age of the programme make a difference?

- Are words such as "tranny" and "he/she" more or less acceptable when included in a comedy programme?

Live at The Apollo
- Do you expect to hear potentially offensive language in stand-up comedy programmes such as this?
- Are words such as "pikey" and "midget" more or less acceptable in comedy programmes?
- The programme was broadcast late at night. Would you expect a warning before a programme that included language like this?
    - What would you want the warning to include?

Secrets of the Sauna
- Do you think racially offensive language is more or less acceptable when included in documentary programmes compared to dramas or comedies?
- Is discriminatory language more or less acceptable when broadcast late at night?
    - Is it acceptable for discriminatory language to be broadcast before the 9pm watershed? For what reasons? In what circumstances?
- Does the light-hearted nature of the conversation make a difference?

James O'Brien
- Were you familiar with the term "gammon"? If so, do you think its potentially offensive?
- Is language like this more or less acceptable when broadcast on talk radio services, where there might be a greater expectation for strong or controversial views?

RuPaul's Drag Race
- Are words like "bitch" more or less acceptable when used in a non-aggressive way? Would it make a difference if the word was used towards an individual?
- Are words like "shite" and "crap" acceptable before the watershed? In what circumstances?
- The programme was broadcast late at night. Would you expect a warning before a programme that included language like this?
    - What would you want the warning to include?

I'm A Celebrity….
- Are words like "Christ" potentially offensive? For what reasons? For which groups?
- Did the light-hearted tone make a difference to the acceptability of the language?
- The programme was broadcast after the watershed. How would you feel if it had been broadcast before the watershed?

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<u>Friday Night Kiss</u>
- Does it make a difference that the word was used by accident?
- How important is the apology? How would you feel if no apology was broadcast?
- Are accidental uses of offensive language more or less acceptable than intentional uses, even if no apology is broadcast?

<u>ITV News</u>
- Some people consider describing someone as being "wheelchair bound" as offensive. Was this something you were familiar with? What do you think about this?
- Does the fact the phrase was used by a news reporter impact on whether the language is potentially more or less acceptable? What difference does this make?

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<tr><td>**6.50-7.05pm**
15 mins</td><td>BREAK</td></tr>
<tr><td>**7.05-7.50pm**
45 mins</td><td>**Scenario discussions**</td></tr>
<tr><td>c. 9 mins per scenario</td><td>

MODERATORS SHARES SCREEN TO SHOW PARTICIPANTS EACH SCENARIO, AS WELL AS READING OUT THE TEXT SO EVERYONE CAN FOLLOW DISCUSSIONS.

MODERATOR: *Now I'm going to show you some examples for us to talk through together. I'd like us to discuss how acceptable this scenario is, and what factors might make it more or less acceptable. These are areas Ofcom is thinking about in relation to TV and radio.*

General probes for each scenario:

- What do you think about this scenario?
- How acceptable or unacceptable do you find it? For what reasons? USE CONTEXTUAL PROBES
- Do you think others would feel the same or differently? Who might find this unpleasant or upsetting?
- Is this scenario about personal offence or offence on behalf of others?
- What would make it more acceptable than it is now?

[IF NEEDED] What difference, if any, does it make…?

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- If this was on TV vs. radio?
- The time the content is broadcast?
- Genre of content?
- Content information tools used (e.g. warnings)?
- Which channel/broadcaster (e.g. BBC vs Sky Arts)?
- Who can access the content and how they do so (e.g. if children are likely to come across it)?

Probes for specific scenarios

Scenario 1 – live interview
If participants do not seem to understand the scenario, moderators to suggest the interview is with Caitlyn Jenner.
- What difference does it make that the interview takes place live? What if it was pre-recorded?
- Would it make a difference if the presenter apologised?
- Would it make a difference if the presenter's comments were deliberate? For example, if the guest asked to be referred to as "her" but the presenter persisted in referring to the guest as "him".
- What if the presenter referred to the guest by the name they used before they transitioned?

If participants do not seem to understand the scenario, moderators to suggest that the presenter refers to Caitlyn Jenner as Bruce Jenner.
- Does it make a difference that this happened to a specific individual? What if the individual is a well-known figure?
- Is there a role for a presenter to prepare in advance of a live interview?
- Is there potential for offence to the wider trans community here?

Scenario 2a – late-night comedy show

- Are you familiar with this word [coconut] and its meaning? Do you know any other words that might be used in this context?
If participants aren't familiar with this use of the word, after capturing initial reactions, explain the word "a word used to describe someone who is from a minority ethnic background (typically Black or Asian) but is perceived to act like a white person" including examples of other similar words e.g. Oreo.
- What difference does it make that the language is used as part of a comedy show?
- Would it make a difference if it had been used by a guest who was not black?

Scenario 2b - late-night comedy show (revised for S. Asian audiences)

- Are you familiar with this word [coconut] and its meaning? Do you know any other words that might be used in this context?

If participants aren't familiar with this use of the word, after capturing initial reactions, explain the word "a word used to describe someone who is from a minority ethnic background (typically Black or Asian) but is perceived to act like a white person" including examples of other similar words e.g. Oreo.

- What difference does it make that the language is used as part of a comedy show?
- Would it make a difference if it had been used by a guest who was not Asian?

Scenario 3a - hip hop song (radio)

- Is it acceptable for the N-word to be included in songs and music videos after the watershed in this way? What about before the watershed?
- Does it matter that this is on a channel dedicated to hip-hop music?
- Would a warning before the song make a difference?
  - If so, what should the warning say?
  - Would you want a warning to specifically mention racial or racist language?
- What if the N-word was used in a historical film from the 1940s? How acceptable would this be to broadcast on TV today?
- In both these examples, does the person using the word make a difference? Is it more acceptable for a black person to use the N word on broadcast TV or radio than a white person? For what reasons?
- (If participants think use of the N word is never acceptable) are there ever circumstances where it would be justified to use the N word on television or radio? What about in an educational context, e.g. in a programme challenging racism?

Scenario 3b – reality dating show (revised for LGB groups)

- This word ("Dyke") is potentially used as an insult towards lesbians. What do you think of its use in this scenario?
- Would a warning beforehand make a difference?
- Would you think differently about the word's acceptability if this was broadcast after the watershed?
- What about if a straight contestant in the programme used this word?
- What about other similar examples - e.g. is it acceptable for a black person to refer to themselves or a black friend as the N-word?

Scenario 3c - stand-up comedy (revised for S. Asian groups)

- Is it acceptable for this word to be used after the watershed in this way? What about before the watershed?
- This is on a particular channel dedicated to comedy, does this matter?
- Would a warning before the programme make a difference?
  - If so, what should the warning say?
  - Would you want a warning to specifically mention racial or racist language?
- What if the comedian used a different word to describe himself? What if he called himself a "paki"?

- What about in historical films, say from the 1940s and 1950s, where such language was generally more acceptable – is it ok to broadcast films like this containing the "P word" today?
- In all these examples, does the person using the word make a difference? Why/why not?
- *(If participants think use of the P word is never acceptable)* Are there ever circumstances where it would be justified to use the P word on television/radio – what about in an educational context, e.g. in a programme challenging racism?

Scenario 4 – breakfast news programme

- What difference does the tone of the discussion make?
- What difference would it make if the presenter challenged the journalist about using this kind of language?
- Would your views change at all if the young guest had used a political word to describe the journalist? For example, what if they used the word "boomer"? Or "gammon"?

Scenario 5 – soap opera

- Would you expect a warning before this programme? What would you want this to say?
- What other words might be suitable/unsuitable for use in this scenario other than bitch?
- Does the aggression impact on the acceptability of the language?
- What if the programme was a reality TV show rather than a fictional drama?

Scenario 6 – sports commentary

- Would it make a difference if this was an American commentator talking about an American Football match?
- Is the word "pussy" less offensive here than when used to refer to a body part?
- SHOW BODY PART WORDS - Are words that refer to specific body parts more or less offensive when used in the context of a general insult, instead of referring to a part of the body? What makes you say that?

Scenarios 7 - Pakistani political discussion

- Would it make a difference if the presenter apologised for the language used?
- Would this kind of language be more or less acceptable if it was used by the presenter rather than a guest?
- Is language like this more or less acceptable when broadcast as part of a political discussion programme compared to a drama?
- Would a warning before the programme make the language any more acceptable?

Scenario 8 - Punjabi rap song

- Would it make a difference if the word "chod" was censored in the song, but you could still hear "Maa" and "Behn" preceding that?
- What if the song was broadcast late at night?
- What if the song was broadcast with a warning beforehand?
- What if this kind of language was used in a TV series? Would it be more or less acceptable?
- What if you heard one of these words during a live sports broadcast by one of the team players? Would that be more or less acceptable than hearing it in a song on the radio?

Scenario 9 - Pakistani situation comedy show

- Would it be different if a character was made fun of for their light skin?
- What if the actor did not use the words "choora" and "chamaar", but instead used the word "kaala" disparagingly to the other character?
- Would it make a difference if that character was called "kaala" repeatedly?
- Would it make a difference if this show was broadcast late at night?
- Would it be more or less offensive, if the dark-skinned character used the word "choora" or "chamaar" to describe themselves?
- Would a warning before the programme make a difference to the acceptability of this content?
- If so, what should the warning say?

Scenario 10 - Reality competition

- Is the use of the word "Jew" acceptable in this context?
- Are there any situations where the use of this word is more or less acceptable?
- Is there a difference between describing someone as 'Jewish' and describing them as 'a Jew'?
- What difference does the tone make?
- Is there a difference when a non-Jewish person uses this word?
- What difference does it make that this is a reality programme?
- Does the timing of the broadcast make a difference here?

Scenario 11 – sports commentary ('mental')

- Are there similar words that the commentator may have used here that you think may have been more or less acceptable? (e.g. "nutter")
- Would it make a difference if a second commentator apologised?
- Would it be less acceptable if this content was broadcast before the watershed?

	Scenario 12 – tourism discussion • How do you feel about the word "Oriental" in this context? • Would it make a difference if the caller was making a positive comment about tourism in London? • Would it make a difference if the caller was criticising the number of tourists in London? • How would you feel if the word was used to describe something like art or food rather than people? • Would a warning beforehand make a difference? • Does the person using the word make a difference?
7.50-7.57pm 7 mins	**Wrap up discussion**
	MODERATOR: Before we finish up, I'd like for us to quickly summarise some key themes we've discussed today. **Thinking back over all the things we've talked about this evening, when do you think it is acceptable to use potentially offensive language on TV/radio?** Probe on timing (e.g. watershed), AND other contextual factors raised throughout the session (intent, genre, channel, etc.). **Are there any words you feel should <u>never</u> be broadcast before the watershed on TV? What about on radio, at times when children are more likely to be listening?** **What about very strong swear words (such as the F or C words)? Or very strong discriminatory language?** • For example, in the Good Morning Britain clip, strong racist language was used pre-watershed but in a serious discussion about racism – what do you think about this? **How important do you think warnings are before programmes that use offensive language? What does a warning need to cover?** • Does this change depending on the language or content being shown? • Probe on content, tone etc. • How specific do you think warnings should be? E.g. mentioning a specific type of language / content or a general warning about offence?

	• Are there any circumstances where a warning isn't enough to mitigate offence?
	
	Do you think there are differences between language which is directed at an individual compared with language used more generally? What about language that targets a specific group?
	
	What do you think TV/radio would look like with no offensive language?
	
	    • What would be lost/ gained?
	
	    • Do you think its desirable overall? Why/why not?

7.57-8pm 3 mins	**Thank you and close**
	MODERATOR: Thank you all for taking part in the discussion tonight. We've covered a lot in a short amount of time, and it's been really interesting to hear your views and we've covered a lot. Do get in touch if you have any questions going forward. You will all receive £70 as a thank you for your involvement this evening and for completing the pre-task. Remind participants that they can refer to the information sheet provided at recruitment/on the online community, with support contacts if needed, especially if the discussion has covered sensitive ground or had the potential to cause distress. IF NEEDED, PROVIDE 5 MINUTES TO DECOMPRESS / SHARE.