2004 Community Assessment Panels

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Appendices

Appendix A: Panel responses to individual films and computer games

Appendix B: Research instruments and Panel briefing materials

Executive Summary

The National Classification Scheme is a cooperative arrangement between the Australian and the State and Territory Governments, under which the Australian Government is responsible for the classification of films, computer games and publications. Classification decisions are made by the Classification Board and the Classification Review Board, while the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) provides support services to the Boards and administers the National Classification Scheme.

In making classification decisions, the Boards are required to take into account the '*standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults.*' Since community standards change over time, the OFLC periodically commissions research to understand community sentiment in relation to the classification of films and computer games. To test the degree to which the decisions of the Classification Board are in line with community standards, Commonwealth, State and Territory Censorship Ministers agreed to three Community Assessment Panels being convened in Canberra, Alice Springs and Melbourne in 2004.

The 2004 Panels are an extension of similar investigations commissioned in 1997/8 and 1999/2000 by the OFLC. However, this research represents the first occasion on which the community has been consulted regarding the classification of computer games through the Community Assessment Panel process. The stated objectives of the research are to:

- Assist Censorship Ministers and members of the Classification Board and Classification Review Board to understand community attitudes to the classification of films and computer games;

- Examine aspects of films and computer games that people find most troubling or about which they express concern;

- Explore the extent to which decisions of the Classification Board can be considered to represent community standards.

Each Panel consisted of eighteen to twenty members of the general community, who were asked to watch two films, play two computer games and provide feedback on the most appropriate classification and consumer advice for each.

Key Findings

The classification decisions of the Board generally reflect community standards.

Panellists were able to apply the same rules to the classification of both films and computer games.

Panellists generally identified the same classifiable elements in relation to individual films and games as did the Board in its reports on each of the films and games.

Panellists strongly supported the need for consumer advice, and in many cases argued that to be of maximum benefit the Board's consumer advice needed to be more detailed.

Panellists demonstrated an incomplete understanding of the MA15+ classification and how it differs from the M and R18+ classifications.

Classification assessments

The preferred classifications of the Panels provide an indication of the extent to which the decisions of the Board are in line with community standards. *The Panels agreed with the Board's classification decisions for eight of the twelve films and computer games used in the research.* Of the four films and games with divergent classifications, one film and one game received higher classifications, while one film and one game received lower classifications. *Where the Board's decisions diverged from the Panels', the divergence followed no clear or consistent pattern.*

The table below compares the Panels' assessments with the Board's classifications for each of the films and games.

Panel	Title	Medium	Board Classification	Panel Assessment
Canberra	*Welcome to Mooseport*	Film	PG	PG
Canberra	*Intermission*	Film	MA15+	MA15+
Canberra	*Castlevania*	Game	M	M
Canberra	*Whiplash*	Game	G8+	G8+
Alice Springs	*Bad Santa*	Film	MA15+	MA15+
Alice Springs	*Jersey Girl*	Film	M	PG
Alice Springs	*R:Racing*	Game	G	G8+
Alice Springs	*Kill.Switch*	Game	M	M
Melbourne	*Two Men Went to War*	Film	PG	PG
Melbourne	*Tom White*	Film	M	MA15+
Melbourne	*Tak and the Power of Juju*	Game	G8+	G
Melbourne	*Rogue Ops*	Game	MA15+	MA15+

Other findings

Apart from the key findings (specified above), a number of other significant findings emerged from the 2004 Community Assessment Panels. These findings are reported below in bold type, along with explanatory remarks.

Context

The *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games* stress the importance of context in considering classifiable content. Panellists were asked to consider the context in which classifiable material appeared when making their classification assessments.

Many Panellists took into account the storyline resolution when evaluating the impact of classifiable elements in the films they watched. Upbeat endings, and endings in which the 'good' characters are rewarded and 'bad' characters punished, appeared to influence their assessments of films in particular.

Some Panellists reported that the resolution of a film's storyline influenced their response to the film as a whole; for these people, the ending justified the content.

In assessing the impact of a film or computer game, some Panellists made a distinction between the anticipated response of people *known to them* to particular scenes and the responses of others *unknown to them*.

Some Panellists demonstrated a 'third person effect', believing that the impact of some classifiable content would be lower for people known to them than for 'others'.

Panellists also agreed that the familiar setting of the only Australian film used in the research – *Tom White* – increased its impact. For the Melbourne Panel, the recognizable landmarks and local accents in the film made the film's classifiable elements, and especially its themes, more powerful for viewers.

The classifiable elements

Panellists raised many specific issues in relation to each of the classifiable elements. This feedback is summarised below.

Violence

Of all the classifiable elements, violence prompted the most discussion from Panel members. A broad range of factors was seen to influence the impact of violence on viewers and players.

The motivations for and consequences of violence were regarded as important. Violence accompanied by menacing or threatening behaviour was seen as higher in impact than violence on behalf of a 'worthy' cause. Violence with serious visible consequences (like injury or death) was considered to have greater impact than violence not resulting in injury. In computer games, whether the game character 'dies' or just 'runs out of health' was felt to influence the impact of any violence.

In film, the identities of the perpetrators and victims of violence were also significant, with Panellists commenting on the higher impact of violence committed by authority figures such as policemen. Similarly, violence against 'vulnerable' victims – such as women, children or animals – was viewed in a negative light. Unnecessarily graphic or frequent violence was regarded unfavourably and was seen to push a film or game into a higher classification category, particularly if sudden or overly shocking (to either the victim or the viewer).

Less experienced gamers tended to regard computer game violence as higher in impact than film violence because of the greater degree of involvement on the part of the player. More experienced gamers, on the other hand, tended to see computer game violence as lower in impact, because of the distance that interactivity places between the player and what takes place on-screen.

The quality of computer game animation and the perceived 'reality' of game content were seen to affect the impact of any violence. Games with 'real' humans in believable situations were regarded as having a stronger impact than fantasy-based games or games with poor animation.

There was more widespread concern across the Panels about violence and how it is treated in classification than the other classifiable elements.

Language

Feedback on language was varied. Many Panellists had firm views on the language they heard in the films and games used in the research, feeling that young children in particular need to be protected from strong language.

Panellists regarded words like '*fuck*' and '*cunt*' as stronger in impact, particularly if used frequently or aggressively, even if 'in context.' By contrast, words such as '*turd*' and '*bastard*' were considered to be so ubiquitous in today's culture that their use in films was not a major concern, except perhaps for very young children.

Panellists observed that the impact of the actual words was also affected by such factors as frequency and tone. If coarse language was heard less frequently, or was uttered without menace, Panellists were more likely to assess it at lower classification levels.

There was marked variation in Panellists' responses to language in different films and at different classification levels.

Themes

Themes were discussed in relation to all the films and most of the games used in the research. Some themes were considered to convey a sense of negativity not suitable for younger audiences. These included death, homelessness, breakdown in the family unit, mental illness and stress, suicide, poverty and a sense of hopelessness. Panel members regarded such themes as greater in impact if they dominated the film or game in question. Crime, and particularly crime which remains unpunished, was seen to send the 'wrong message' to younger viewers. Similarly, the use of alcohol and drugs in an excessive or dependent way was regarded as inappropriate for young people, especially if the negative consequences of alcohol or drug abuse are not conveyed. Some Panel members also argued that parents need to be made aware of films or games with 'supernatural' themes, even if milder in impact.

Drug use

Illegal drug use featured prominently in only one of the films used in the research, with Panellists regarding the drug use in this film as unsuitable for viewing by young people, not only because of its explicit nature but also because the film was seen to portray drug use as acceptable behaviour. The need to consider the excessive or dependent use of alcohol in classification decisions was emphasised by many Panellists.

Panellists expressed concern over depictions of the excessive or dependent use of alcohol and emphasised the need for such depictions to be taken into account for classification purposes and in consumer advice.

Sex

Explicit or prolonged sexual scenes were considered to be unsuitable for younger people, and masturbation and homosexual activity were of particular concern for some Panellists. The tone of any sex scenes was seen to affect their impact, with humorous scenes regarded as less confronting than scenes with a more serious or erotic tone.

Panellists thought that the sexual *themes* explored in some of the films would not be understood by younger viewers, but still emphasised the need to protect young children from references to sexual matters.

On a number of occasions, Panel members commented on what they saw as the Board's overemphasis on sexual content in their reports, feeling that other classifiable elements were of more concern in relation to classification.

Panellists identified sex and sexual references as important considerations for classification purposes, but sometimes felt that the Board was more sensitive than necessary to the impact of sexual content in individual films.

Nudity

Nudity did not feature prominently in Panel discussions, with most of the films used in the research having only minor nudity or none at all. However, Panellists did comment on the lower impact of incidental or 'comic' nudity, as compared with nudity of a sexualised nature.

Panel responses to computer games

This research represents the first occasion on which the community has been consulted about the classification of computer games through the Community Assessment Panel process. The three Panels consisted of both experienced computer game players ('gamers') and less experienced game players ('non-gamers'). A number of interesting differences between the groups of 'gamers' and 'non-gamers' emerged through the course of Panel discussions. Nevertheless, no consistent pattern distinguishing these groups was evident in their preferred *classifications* for the games used in the research.

When assessing computer games, less experienced gamers emphasised narrative elements to a greater extent than more experienced gamers.

There were differences in the qualitative feedback on computer games from Panellists allocated to the groups of more and less experienced gamers. However, there was no clear pattern distinguishing these groups with regard to their preferred classifications of computer games.

Although most of the 'non-gamer' Panellists had little or no experience playing computer games, many of these people were impressed with how enjoyable and compelling they found the experience to be. Having expected to find the games distasteful or to be unable to even navigate their way through them, these people were pleasantly surprised at how engaged they became during the gaming sessions.

Consumer advice

Panellists were asked to suggest consumer advice for the films they watched and the games they played, and to evaluate the usefulness of the advice provided by the Board. Some general issues on consumer advice emerged over the course of the project.

Panellists reported finding consumer advice on films and games to be useful in selecting films and computer games for themselves and for children. Consumer advice was regarded as particularly important in selecting material for younger people or for family viewing, but also important for people who wish to avoid, or who seek, films or games with significant amounts of a particular classifiable element. Ideally Panellists wanted consumer advice to give them information on the impact as well as the presence of classifiable elements, and were interested in the words that are used to describe each element, words like '*Mild*', '*Moderate*', '*Medium*', '*Strong*', '*Frequent*' and '*Infrequent*'.

Some confusion was expressed concerning the relationship between the classification of a film or game and its consumer advice. Panellists were not always clear on whether consumer advice is based on the standards operating in each classification category, or whether there is a wider framework that all advice fits into.

Some Panellists believed that consumer advice is not needed for material with a G classification because it should not contain elements that warrant any warning. Similarly, they did not expect to see extensive warnings on PG or G8+ material. Others, however, believed that parents should be as fully informed as possible about film and game content, even if it receives a G classification.

Methodology

The OFLC formed an independent advisory group to guide the research. The Research Reference Group (RRG) selected the research consultancy, decided on the research methods, approved the research instruments and determined the criteria for the selection of the films and computer games.

The Panels were convened between April and June 2004, with participants selected by specialist professional recruitment firms in accordance with the recruitment specifications agreed upon by the RRG. The Panels were divided into two groups at the recruitment stage, with one group consisting of less experienced computer game players and non-players and the other group of more experienced gamers. Other characteristics such as age, gender, socioeconomic status and cultural background varied widely within both groups.

Each Panel took place over three sessions. During the first session, Panellists were briefed by the OFLC on the classification system and then shown a film. Following this, they divided into the two groups, giving feedback on the issues they perceived to be relevant to the film's classification, recording their preferred classifications and consumer advice, and discussing the Board's classification and consumer advice. The second session followed a similar format, without the initial classification briefing. During the third session Panellists were asked to play two computer games, before providing feedback on matters relevant to classification. Panellists received a short demonstration on how to play each game, and video clips of the strongest classifiable material in the games were also shown.

Throughout the three sessions, neither the Panellists nor the research consultants were aware of the classifications for any of the films or games while Panellists were discussing the film or game at hand and recording their preferred classifications. Board reports were only distributed once Panellists had been given the opportunity to respond spontaneously to that film or game.

Conclusion

The results of the research were in a crucial way similar to those of previous Community Assessment Panel projects: they confirmed that the decisions of the Classification Board can be considered to be generally in line with community standards. For most of the films and most of the computer games used in the project, the Board's decisions agreed with the preferred classifications of the majority of Panellists. Where the Board's decisions diverged from the Panels', the divergence followed no clear or consistent pattern.

1   Introduction

1.1   The National Classification Scheme

The National Classification Scheme is a cooperative arrangement between the Australian and the State and Territory Governments. Under the Scheme, the Australian Government is responsible for the classification of films, computer games and publications, while the States and Territories are responsible for the enforcement of classification decisions.

The *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995* provides for the operation of the Classification Board and the Classification Review Board, which make decisions on the classifications of individual films and computer games. Members of each Board are selected to represent the Australian community. The Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC), an Australian Government statutory agency within the Attorney-General's portfolio of responsibilities, provides administrative support to the Boards.

Distributors submit films and computer games to the OFLC for classification. The Board classifies most films by convening panels of several Board members. These panels view and discuss the film before making a decision about its classification by assigning it a classification category. The Board then submits a report, outlining the reasons for its decision. If a minority of the panel disagree with the majority's decision, the Board's report will also contain the minority's view. The Board also decides on the most appropriate consumer advice for the film or computer game in question, to identify those classifiable elements which contributed to its eventual classification.

The Classification Act allows the Director of the Classification Board[1] to authorise a person to make recommendations on the classification of a computer game. The OFLC trains 'authorised assessors' of computer game classifications, whose reports on individual games can inform Board decisions on the classification of, and consumer advice for, these games. Authorised assessors can submit classification recommendations for games that are likely to be classified G, G8+ or M; if accepted by the Board, these written recommendations form the basis of Board reports on the games. The Board writes its own reports on computer games classified MA15+ or refused classification.

1.2   The classifications

In making classification decisions, the Boards apply Section 11 of the *Classification Act*, the *National Classification Code* and the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games*, which set out a range of classifications based on a hierarchy of impact. The classification categories are:

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[1] Presently the Director of the Classification Board is also the Director of the OFLC.

Film classification	Computer game classification	Impact
G	**G**	Very Mild
PG	**G8+**	Mild
M	**M15+**	Moderate
MA15+	**MA15+**	Strong
R18+	**RC***	High
RC*	**RC***	Very High

* RC = Refused Classification

1.3   Background to this research

The Classification Act states that when making classification decisions, the Boards must use the criteria set out in Section 11 of that Act (criteria which also appear in the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games*). Specifically, Section 11 states that the Boards must take into account the '*standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults.*'

In addition to providing support to the Classification Board and the Classification Review Board, the OFLC also provides services ancillary to the National Classification Scheme, including the commissioning of research. Since community standards change over time and vary among different parts of the population, the OFLC periodically undertakes research to understand how the community would apply the *Guidelines for the Classification Films and Computer Games*.

All significant policy decisions relating to the National Classification Scheme are made by Commonwealth, State and Territory Censorship Ministers through the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General on Censorship. In November 2003, Censorship Ministers agreed to the conduct of three Community Assessment Panels in Melbourne, Canberra and Alice Springs during 2004. The Ministers agreed that the Panel project would test the degree to which the classification decisions of the Board are in line with community standards.

The 2004 Panels are an extension of similar investigations commissioned in 1997/8 and 1999/2000 by the OFLC. However, this research represents the first occasion on which the community has been consulted regarding the classification of computer games through the Community Assessment Panel process.

The stated objectives of this research are to:

- Assist Censorship Ministers and members of the Classification Board and Classification Review Board to understand community attitudes to the classification of films and computer games;

- Examine aspects of films and computer games that people find most troubling or about which they express concern;

- Explore the extent to which decisions of the Classification Board can be considered to represent community standards.

The OFLC is also currently conducting a review of the advice provided to consumers on the content of films and computer games, in consultation with the Board. Part of the review process involves investigating the types of consumer advice phrases that are most meaningful for consumers. This research therefore provided an opportunity to test the community's understanding of and responses to consumer advice.

1.4 The research process

The Office of Film and Literature Classification formed an independent advisory group to guide the research process. The Research Reference Group (RRG) consisted of two Australian academics, two government representatives and one representative of the OFLC.

The RRG selected and the OFLC commissioned the independent social research firm Urbis Keys Young to undertake the 2004 Community Assessment Panel project. The research was carried out in three population centres across Australia, and involved members of the general community viewing and assessing films and computer games, discussing them and volunteering consumer advice.

1.5 This report

This report on the views of the Community Assessment Panels contributes to a greater understanding of community attitudes and, more critically, enables a determination to be made of the extent to which the decisions of the Board are consistent with community standards. The Classification Guidelines *themselves* were not examined by the Community Assessment Panel project. Rather, the research focussed on the 'representativeness' of the Board's decisions in applying the Guidelines, as inferred by the feedback from the Panels.

The methodology used for the research is described in more detail in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the Panels' classification assessments for each film and computer game used in the research, and compares these assessments with the decisions of the Classification Board. Chapter 3 also discusses Panel feedback as it relates to impact and context, and how these two concepts affected Panellists' classification assessments. Chapter 4 considers Panel responses with regard to each of the six classifiable elements, and Chapter 5 reports on feedback in relation to consumer advice. Chapter 6 brings together the results of the research and highlights some of the important issues discussed by the Panels.

More detailed descriptions of each Panel's responses to the films and computer games used in the research are provided in Appendix A. Appendix B reproduces all the instruments used to recruit Panellists and capture their feedback, along with the written material used for briefing Panellists on the application of the Classification Guidelines.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research initiation

A Research Reference Group (RRG) was created by the OFLC to guide the development of an appropriate research methodology. The RRG consisted of two independent experts as well as senior members of government agencies with a stake in the research. The members are:

- Trang Thomas AM, Professor of Psychology, RMIT (Chair)

- Jeffrey Brand, Associate Professor, Centre for New Media Research and Education, Bond University

- Elizabeth Kelly, Deputy Chief Executive, ACT Department of Justice and Community Safety

- Iain Anderson, First Assistant Secretary, Legal Services and Native Title Division, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department

- Patricia Flanagan, Senior Executive, Strategy and Communication, Office of Film and Literature Classification.

The RRG determined that the Community Assessment Panels should represent a broad cross-spectrum of the Australian community, building on the six previous Panels drawn together in 1997/8 and 1999/2000.[2] The RRG selected the research consultancy, decided on the research methods, approved the research instruments (recruitment specifications, focus group discussion guides, questionnaires and Panel briefing materials) and determined the criteria for the selection of the films and computer games used for each Panel.

Censorship Ministers chose Canberra, Melbourne and Alice Springs as venues for the three Panels, since none of these was canvassed in earlier Community Assessment Panel projects. As with the earlier Panels, the present research included Panels in two capital cities and one rural/regional location.

2.2 Overview of methodology

The methodology was multi-layered, with the steps summarised as follows:

- Recruitment of a cross-section of the community as Panellists

- Completion of a demographic and attitudinal questionnaire

- Panel briefing on the tools used to classify films and games, including the Classification Guidelines

- Viewing of selected films and playing of selected games

- Recording of initial responses to each film and game, including preferred classifications and consumer advice

- Exploring through group discussions relevant classification issues arising from the film or game

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[2] Keys Young 1998, *Community Assessment Panels (Sydney, Brisbane, Wagga Wagga)*, prepared for the Office of Film and Literature Classification; Keys Young 2000, *Community Assessment Panels (Perth, Adelaide, Bendigo)*, prepared for the Office of Film and Literature Classification.

- Recording of a final classification assessment
- Responding to the Board's decision on the classification and consumer advice for the film or game.

2.3 Panel recruitment and allocation to groups

Because the research was designed to determine the extent to which the decisions of the Classification Board reflect community standards, the recruitment of Panel members was crucial. Urbis Keys Young worked with specialist professional recruitment firms in each locality to select suitable participants for each Panel. Panel members were paid $250 if they attended all three sessions to offset any expenses they incurred in attending.

Recruiters were instructed to select people with a range of characteristics, across such criteria as age, gender, family status and Aboriginality. The detailed specifications used to recruit Panellists are reproduced in Appendix B to this report.

A significant criterion used to recruit Panellists was their level of game playing expertise. Recruiters were instructed to select an equal number of 'experienced' and 'beginner' computer gameplayers. Although most Australians are filmgoers, a significant proportion of the community is less familiar with computer games. To represent the range of experience with this medium among the community, and to ensure that both 'gamers' and 'non-gamers' were represented on the Panels, each Panel was divided into two focus groups of equal size.

- Group A – 'less experienced gamers' (beginners or non-players, having played very few or no games in the past)
- Group B – 'more experienced gamers' (intermediate gamers, having played a number of computer games recently, and advanced gamers, regularly playing computer games and having easy access to a computer game console, such as a PlayStation or X-Box).

Panel members were asked to assess their own level of expertise so they could be allocated to the most appropriate group.

In the event, the two groups were not as distinct as anticipated; instead, a *continuum* of gaming experience was observed within each group. This may have been due to a range of factors, including the fact that Panellists were assigned to a group based on their own *self-assessments*. Moreover, the way that 'more experienced' and 'less experienced' were defined at the recruitment stage, and the need to recruit Panellists across a large range of ages (18 to 60), may have confounded the attempt to divide the Panels into 'expert' gamers and 'neophytes'.

With this in mind, this report uses 'less experienced gamers' to denote Panel members in Group A, and 'more experienced gamers' to denote Panel members in Group B.

2.4 Panel schedule and briefing

The film screenings and discussions for each Panel took place on a Friday and Saturday, while the computer games session was held on a Sunday. Participants were asked to commit themselves to attending all three sessions when they were recruited. The Friday session was longer (running for around five hours) to accommodate the classification briefing. The second session took about four hours, and the third around four and a half hours.

On arrival at the first session participants filled out a questionnaire which sought more detailed demographic data and confirmed information about film viewing habits and computer game playing experience.[3] Panel members then took part in a one-hour briefing session, run by the OFLC's Education and Communication Manager, to help them become familiar with the meaning and application of the Classification Guidelines. At this stage, they were given a classification briefing manual summarising the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games.* They were also given a one-page table illustrating the classification guidelines for films.[4] After the initial briefing Panellists were shown the first film and then took part in a group discussion.

The second session began with the screening of the second film, after which another group discussion was held.

Upon arrival at the third session, Panellists were given a one-page table illustrating the classification guidelines for computer games. The OFLC's Education and Communication Manager then gave Panel members a 45-minute briefing session on the application of the classification guidelines to computer games. They were also shown a series of video clips from already classified games, to demonstrate how the guidelines have been applied to content in games across the different classification categories. Following this, Urbis Keys Young gave Panellists a demonstration on how to play the first computer game, including an introduction to the PlayStation2 and its controls and an outline of the game's background narrative. Subsequently, Panel members were paired with a participant of a similar skill level and spent fifteen to thirty minutes playing the game. Before reforming into groups to discuss the game, Panellists were shown video clips of scenes from the game that could affect classification, but that would not be seen during their gameplay.[5] The process was repeated for the second computer game.

The researchers from Urbis Keys Young were not informed of the classifications given to any of the films or computer games prior to the actual discussions, to avoid any conscious or unconscious influence over the decision-making of the Panels on the part of the consultants.

At the end of the final session for each Panel, participants were given a copy of the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games* (2003).

2.5   Focus group procedures

Immediately after the film screenings and the game playing, the Panel divided into two groups: one consisting of more experienced game players and one of less experienced gamers. As noted above, game-playing ability was the key characteristic used to divide the Panel for the discussions on computer game classification. The same groups were used throughout the three days to encourage comfortable discussion.[6] The recruitment specifications ensured that there was a diverse range of people across each Panel.[7]

After viewing a film or playing a game, but before any discussion began, participants filled out a questionnaire which asked for an immediate response to the film or game: key themes, areas of concern, a minimum age as an acceptable audience for the film or game, a classification decision, appropriate consumer advice, and reasons behind their decisions.[8] The film or game was then

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[3] The initial Panel questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix B.
[4] The briefing materials are reproduced in Appendix B.
[5] For the Melbourne Panel, participants were shown clips from each game *before* they played the game rather than afterwards.
[6] One Panellist in Canberra was moved from the experienced group to the beginners group when it became apparent during the computer games briefing session that he was an inexperienced computer game player.
[7] The recruitment specifications are reproduced in Appendix B.
[8] The questionnaires completed by Panellists after watching the films and playing the games are reproduced in Appendix B.

discussed in detail for an hour to an hour and a half, with the discussion guided by a focus group facilitator.[9] The questions began with a general exploration of the film or game, and then concentrated on the elements influencing the classification and consumer advice. For half of the films and all the computer games, participants were given a list of possible consumer advice phrases that could be used as consumer advice and asked to select those that they thought were applicable, before a more general discussion took place on the consumer advice the group regarded as suitable. Participants were then given the opportunity to reconsider their original classification assessment in light of the discussion. Throughout the discussion, participants were encouraged to refer to their briefing manuals to clarify their understanding of the Guidelines. After reconsidering the film or computer game, the report on that film or game was distributed and discussed. The facilitators were unaware of the Board's decisions until this time.

All Panel sessions – including briefings, film screenings, game playing and group discussions – were attended by several observers, including members of the RRG, OFLC staff and Board members.

2.6   How films and games were selected

2.6.1   Film selection

The films selected for the research were designated for public (cinema) exhibition. Each film had been classified by the Classification Board but not yet released, to ensure that Panellists were not aware of the applicable classifications. Under the Advertising Exemption Scheme, certain cinema films may be advertised in advance of being classified. The OFLC ensured that the films used in the research had received no advertising exemptions, to minimise the possibility of Panellists being exposed to any information that might indicate a particular classification. It was necessary that 35mm prints of the films be available, and permission needed to be gained from distributors to use them for research purposes.

Only a small number of films met these criteria at the time each Panel was held. From a limited selection, films were chosen that, when considered over the course of the three Panels (Canberra, Alice Springs, Melbourne), would represent:

- a broad range of classifications and consumer advice (although during the research period there were no R18+ films available)

- a broad range of classifiable elements (sex, violence, themes, drug use, nudity, language)

- a range of genres (for example, comedy, drama)

- titles from both small and large film distributors

- a mixture of 'clear-cut' and less straightforward classification issues

- at least one film with an Australian perspective (to investigate whether an Australian setting has an effect on a film's impact).

2.6.2   Computer game selection

In Australia, computer games (especially those imported from overseas) are available in their classifiable form only a few days before becoming available in retail stores. Consequently, there were a very limited number of titles that had been classified but not yet released at the times the Panels were convened. This problem was exacerbated by the time of year that the research took

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[9] The proformas guiding the focus group discussion are reproduced in Appendix B.

place, since a lower number of games are released onto the Australian market during the April to June period.

To reduce the chance that Panellists might be familiar with their classifications, the games selected for the research had been released for only a short time prior to the conduct of the Panels. Urbis Keys Young also asked Panellists if they were familiar with any of the games or their classifications prior to the gameplay session. No Panellists reported being aware of the classifications for any of the computer games used in the research.

The OFLC decided to use Playstation 2 consoles for the research, since this was the format most likely to be compatible with the largest range of game titles and to be familiar to those Panellists with gaming experience. As a result, all the games used in the research needed to be available in Playstation 2 format.

Since Panellists had between 15 and 30 minutes to play each game, the chosen games had to be straightforward enough for players to be able to play in the time allotted. A broad range of game types was sought, with third-person shooter, action/adventure and racing games all used in the research.

In some cases, the OFLC sought assistance from game distributors to acquire multiple copies of the computer games played by Panellists.

2.7   Board reports

When the Board accepts a classification recommendation from an authorised assessor of computer games, the assessor's report forms the basis of the Board report for that game. *Whiplash, Castlevania, R:Racing, Kill.Switch* and *Tak and the Power of Juju* were all classified under the authorised assessor scheme, with the reports for these games written by assessors and submitted to the Board for consideration. For a description of the authorised assessor scheme, please see Section 1.1.

The Board reports on *R:Racing*, *Kill.Switch*, *Tak and the Power of Juju* and *Rogue Ops* were modified slightly to minimise any confusion for Panellists in reading the reports. Such modifications included removing redundant information which might hinder Panellists' understanding of the Board's decisions and the reasons for those decisions.

The Board reports on all the films and games used in the research are reproduced in Appendix B.

3 Classification Assessments

This chapter provides information on the classification assessments made by the Panels in relation to each film and computer game used in the research, and compares these to the actual classifications made by the Board. It includes summaries of Panel feedback for each film and game.

The *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games* emphasise the importance of impact and context in classification, and this chapter also discusses what effect the concepts of impact and context had on the classification assessments of the Panels. In addition, it considers the 'third-person effect' and Panellists' understanding of the MA15+ classification.

3.1 Comparison between Board classifications and Panel assessments

In the context of this research, the extent of agreement or divergence between the Board's classification decisions and the preferred classifications of Panel members is an indication of the degree to which Board classifications are in line with the sentiments of the community generally. The information reported below addresses some of the fundamental research questions in numerical terms, and represents an encapsulation of the 'community standards', which were brought to bear on each film or game.

Nevertheless, it should be stressed that this study was *qualitative* in nature, and that the 'votes' of each Panel cannot be said to be definitive quantitative 'proof' of the appropriateness of a Board decision or otherwise. Although every effort was made to ensure each Panel was made up of a broad cross section of the community – with regard to age, gender, cultural background, socio-economic status, family type, Aboriginality and computer game playing experience – they do not represent a statistically 'significant' sample in *quantitative* terms. The *qualitative* data collected in the course of the project, on the other hand, provide valuable insight into community sentiments in relation to film and game classification, and are analysed in this and subsequent chapters.

3.1.1 Overall comparison

The majority of Panellists agreed with the Board's classifications for four of the six films and four of the six games used in the research. Panel classification assessments were higher than the Board's classifications for one film and one game (*Tom White* and *R:Racing*) and lower than the Board's classifications for one film and one game (*Jersey Girl* and *Tak and the Power of Juju*). In other words, the Board's decisions were consistent with community standards – as represented by the three Panels – for most films and games. In those instances where this was not the case, no consistent pattern either 'higher' or 'lower' than the Panels' assessments was discernable.

Key finding: The classification decisions of the Board generally reflect community standards.

The following table summarises the final classification assessments of Panellists for each film and game and compares them with the Board classifications.

Final Panel Assessments vs Board Classifications

Panel	Title	Medium	Board Classification	Panel Assessment
Canberra	*Welcome to Mooseport*	Film	PG	PG
Canberra	*Intermission*	Film	MA15+	MA15+
Canberra	*Castlevania*	Game	M	M
Canberra	*Whiplash*	Game	G8+	G8+
Alice Springs	*Bad Santa*	Film	MA15+	MA15+
Alice Springs	*Jersey Girl*	Film	M	PG
Alice Springs	*R:Racing*	Game	G	G8+
Alice Springs	*Kill.Switch*	Game	M	M
Melbourne	*Two Men Went to War*	Film	PG	PG
Melbourne	*Tom White*	Film	M	MA15+
Melbourne	*Tak and the Power of Juju*	Game	G8+	G
Melbourne	*Rogue Ops*	Game	MA15+	MA15+

3.1.2   Computer game assessments

The decision to split Panellists into groups of 'less experienced gamers' (Group A) and 'more experienced gamers' (Group B) was made at the research design stage, and reflected the OFLC's interest in the effects of computer game playing experience on the responses of the community to classifiable content in computer games. As the tables below bear out, there *were* some differences between the preferred classifications of Group A and Group B Panellists for some of the computer games used in the research – namely, *Whiplash*, *Kill.Switch*, and *R:Racing*. However, no clear pattern – either higher or lower than the Board's decisions – is identifiable. As discussed in Chapter 2, this might be a result of the way in which 'gaming experience' was defined at the recruitment stage and the subsequent makeup of the different groups; alternatively, it might be explained by the minimal or inconsistent effect that computer game playing experience has on the community's responses to computer game content.

Although there was no clear pattern in how less and more experienced gamers classified computer games, there were a number of differences in the *qualitative* feedback of the two groups of Panellists.

Finding: There were differences in the qualitative feedback on computer games from Panellists allocated to the groups of more and less experienced gamers. However, there was no clear pattern distinguishing these groups with regard to their preferred classifications of computer games.

While the feedback on computer games reported below has in many instances been attributed to less or more experienced gamers or to the whole Panel, it should be remembered that Panellists in

both groups expressed a range of different opinions, and that in many cases the majority or consensus view among one group was challenged by a smaller number of Panel members. The present research was qualitative rather than quantitative in focus, and it would be premature to assign certain views to *all* experienced or inexperienced gamers without more extensive investigation.

3.2   Divergent classifications

The tables on the following pages compare the preferred classifications of both groups in each Panel with the official decisions of the Board. Preferred Panel 'classifications' refer to their *final* assessments, i.e. their preferred classifications after discussing the film or game. As explained in Chapter 2, *Group A* consisted of less experienced computer game players or non-players, while *Group B* was made up of more experienced gamers.

Of the six films viewed and six computer games played by the three Panels, there were four cases in which the preferred classifications of the majority of Panellists differed from the Board classifications. Panellists assessed one film and one game at a higher classification than the Board's decision, and assessed and one film and one game at a lower classification than the Board. The issues raised in the discussions about these four films and games, and the reactions of Panel members to the Board classifications, are summarised below.

3.2.1   *Jersey Girl* (Film, Alice Springs Panel)

Board classification: M

	Group A	Group B	Total
PG	7	11	18
M	1	-	1

Jersey Girl was given an M classification by the Board, while all but one Panellist preferred a PG rating. Panellists generally had a very positive reaction to the film, and regarded the Board's decision as overly cautious. They expressed concern that an M classification automatically made the film an 'adult' movie, whereas teenagers would easily be able to understand and cope with its classifiable elements.

The themes in the film prompted the most discussion, and were largely seen to be 'true to life' and not overly confronting. Although the film's death scene was regarded as somewhat traumatic and therefore not suitable for very young children, Panel members viewed *Jersey Girl* as a 'family film' and appropriate for people under fifteen with parental guidance. The language in the movie was considered to be mild, infrequent and justified by context; similarly, Panellists thought that sex scenes and sexual references were handled tastefully and discreetly.

> *I don't think it's quite worth an M.*

Panellists commented that the Board's classification was misleading and implied stronger content than was actually in *Jersey Girl*. In particular, they argued that Board had dwelt too heavily on the sexual aspects of the movie in its report, and had not taken into account its tactful treatment of sexual matters.

3.2.2 *R:Racing* (Computer game, Alice Springs Panel)

Board classification: G

	Group A ('less exp')	Group B ('more exp')	Total
G	-	1	1
G8+	5	10	15
M	3	-	3

The authorised assessor recommended, and the Board accepted, a G classification for *R:Racing*, whereas the majority of Alice Springs Panel members thought the game warranted a G8+ rating, with a few even arguing for an M classification. They felt that the mild language in the game, as well as the themes in the animated narrative to the game, meant that guidance from parents would be necessary for very young children.

> *You don't want someone under eight hearing the word 'bastard' if you can help it, even though they would probably just skip over it.*

A small number of people also argued that the idea of speeding without realistic consequences was a dangerous one for young people, and had the potential to influence their driving behaviour in real life.

While the assessor recommended (and the Board accepted) a G classification, the Panel (and the OFLC representatives observing their discussions) agreed that the language in *R:Racing* – language such as the word 'bastard' – would in fact be more appropriate at a G8+ level under the current classification system, and that the assessor had not applied the guidelines correctly. In other words, the Panel's preferred classifications *were* in fact in line with the Classification Guidelines, although they did not correspond with the assessor's recommendations.

3.2.3 *Tom White* (Film, Melbourne Panel)

Board Classification: M

	Group A	Group B	Total
MA15+	6	9	15
R18+	3	-	3

Tom White was given an M classification by the Board, whereas no Panellists in Melbourne thought an M rating to be appropriate. Fifteen gave the film an MA15+ rating, while three gave it an R18+ rating. Panellists did not agree with the reasons the Board gave for the M classification and challenged its application of the Classification Guidelines, particularly with regard to the impact of the coarse language and drug use in the film. The Board regarded these elements as '*infrequent*

and justified by context,' whereas most Panellists thought these elements in the film were frequent and strong. They made particular mention of the use of 'fuck' and 'cunt' by characters and noted that the use of drugs, both legal and illegal, was present throughout the film. Panellists maintained that the impact of these elements alone was sufficient reason to push the film out of an M classification.

> *It's a strong topic. Tom's got a normal life and then goes to the other side, and for kids under fifteen, there needs to be some guidance on what happened in the film. I don't think they have that perception or the experience to understand it.*

The Panellists who agreed with the Board that the language, drugs and violence in *Tom White* were largely in context did not agree that this justified a lower classification. It was widely observed that if context justified frequent and strong elements, almost all films could be classified as M.

Panellists also regarded the impact of the themes in the film as warranting a higher classification than M. The Board's report argued that these themes 'have a moderate sense of threat or menace and are justified by context'. Panellists thought the adult themes, which they identified as homelessness and poverty, the breakdown of the family unit, mental illness and stress, alcoholism and drug use and sexuality, were unsuitable for people aged under fifteen without parental accompaniment. Many Panellists also thought that some of the sex scenes in *Tom White* merited a higher classification, but overall the Panel was less concerned about this element. Panel members mostly agreed that the familiar setting of the film – the city of Melbourne – increased its overall impact.

In general terms, Panellists were particularly concerned that the Board's classification allows young children (particularly those under twelve years) to view *Tom White* without adult guidance.

3.2.4 *Tak and the Power of Juju* (Computer game, Melbourne Panel)

Board classification: G8+

	Group A ('less exp')	Group B ('more exp')	Total
G	8	8	16
G8+	1	1	2

This game was given G8+ classification, but most Melbourne Panellists thought a G classification to be fitting given the very mild nature of the violence in the game.

> *It's not like you shouldn't sell it because there's a little bit of violence like that. It's cute and nice and the colours are nice. And you're fighting for a good cause.*

The light-hearted tone of the gameplay and the very mild consequences of the violence, it was argued, made the game suitable for children of all ages. Interestingly, these arguments appear to challenge those made by the Alice Springs Panel in relation to *R:Racing*, where the presence of even very low impact classifiable elements was deemed to make a G classification inappropriate. These matters are discussed further in Chapter 4.

Panellists made the point that young children in today's society have access to much stronger content than that in *Tak and the Power of Juju*, and that any negative consequences of playing the game would therefore be negligible. Several people argued that parental guidance might be necessary to stop very young kids imitating some of the behaviour in the game, but still preferred a G classification because of the very mild nature of its classifiable elements.

Although they regarded the game as suitable for all ages, some Panellists believed that consumer advice was still necessary to keep parents as informed as possible, even though the current classification system means that consumer advice is generally not given for films or games classified G.

3.3 Convergent classifications

This section provides more details on those films and computer games whose classifications are consistent with the assessment of Panellists.

3.3.1 *Welcome to Mooseport* (Film, Canberra Panel)

Board classification: PG

	Group A	Group B	Total
G	4	1	5
PG	5	7	12
M	-	1	1

The majority of Panellists agreed with the PG classification that the Board gave *Welcome to Mooseport*. They generally found the film to be inoffensive, amusing and easy to watch. Most people felt that the film promoted 'good' values, although some expressed concern at what they perceived to be the film's cynical take on romance and politics.

The one nudity scene in the film was generally held to be relatively low in impact. Most Panellists regarded the sexual references in the film as discretely implied, although some were worried about the portrayal of sexual relationships outside of marriage. The language in *Welcome to Mooseport*, meanwhile, was considered to be infrequent and mild in impact. Panellists noted that the few violent scenes in the film were lacking in menace and mainly humorous in tone, not adding to the film's impact; the few who noticed drug references did not feel that they needed to be taken into account for classification purposes.

> *The themes had a mild impact and the sexual references were subtly implied.*

3.3.2 *Intermission* (Film, Canberra Panel)

Board classification: MA15+

	Group A	Group B	Total
MA15+	5	6	11
R18+	3	3	6

Although most Canberra Panellists initially opted for an R18+ classification for *Intermission*, their preferred classifications *after* discussing the film agreed with the Board's MA15+ classification. Many described their assessments as 'borderline', and identified violence, language, themes and sex as the major factors in their responses to the film. Of those who preferred an R18+ classification, most said they could understand the Board's rationale for its decision when they read its report on the film.

Panellists spoke at length about the violence in *Intermission*, being concerned about the impact that it might have on younger viewers. They found the violent scenes to be confronting, and were particularly struck by the pervasiveness of violence in the culture portrayed in the film. Panel members noted that the language in the film was used with menace and appeared to be regarded as normal by the characters. There were a variety of reactions to the film's themes, with some concerned about the lack of consequences for criminal acts, and others feeling that most of the characters got their 'just desserts'. Panellists also expressed a range of views about the sex scenes in *Intermission*. Some regarded these scenes as humorous, while others were worried about the possibility of younger viewers being exposed to scenes depicting sexual intercourse and masturbation.

3.3.3 *Castlevania* (Computer game, Canberra Panel)

Board classification: M

	Group A ('less exp')	Group B ('more exp')	Total
M	10	8	18

The Canberra Panel unanimously concurred with the Board's M classification for *Castlevania*. They agreed that violence was the strongest classifiable element in the game, describing it as frequent and repetitive. Some Panellists thought that the regularity of the violence increased its impact, while others felt that the repetitiveness made the violence routine rather than shocking. Most Panellists believed that the relatively low degree of graphic realism in the game diminished its impact on the player, as did its third-person rather than first-person perspective.

Themes were also discussed in relation to *Castlevania*, with Panellists in disagreement over whether the story behind the game should be considered for classification purposes. Less experienced gamers generally felt that the overall objective of the game – to rescue a captured

relative – reduced the menace of the violence, while more experienced gamers believed that the underlying narrative had little effect on the game's impact.

> *It wasn't so menacing because he's actually trying to rescue someone.*

3.3.4 *Whiplash* (Computer game, Canberra Panel)

Board classification: G8+

	Group A ('less exp')	Group B ('more exp')	Total
G8+	4	8	12
M	6	-	6

The majority of Panellists agreed with the Board's G8+ classification for *Whiplash*, although most people in the group of less experienced gamers thought an M classification more appropriate. Many reported enjoying the game's comedic tone, arguing that the humour lowered the impact of the violence in the game. The stylized, cartoon-like graphics were also seen to reduce the game's impact.

> *If you attacked someone there was no blood, they only fell asleep. The player didn't die, and the characters didn't die, they just got up again.*

Numbers of Panellists were concerned about younger players encountering the concept of animal cruelty while playing in *Whiplash*; the game's depictions of property damage and vandalism were also identified as issues of concern. Some Panellists expressed anxiety about the game's portrayals of activity that might be dangerous for children to imitate, citing a game character throwing a toaster in water as an example. For these reasons, Panellists found the game to be inappropriate for very young children to play.

3.3.5 *Bad Santa* (Film, Alice Springs Panel)

Board classification: MA15+

	Group A	Group B	Total
M	4	3	7
MA15+	4	8	12

The majority of Alice Springs Panellists agreed with the Board's MA15+ classification for *Bad Santa*, identifying language and themes as the major concerns for classification purposes.

> *I think substance misuse is one of the strongest themes, because he is drinking at the start and just doesn't stop, and he doesn't seek help.*

Some Panellists commented on what they thought to be an overly cautious classification decision, arguing that the sex appeared to play a greater role in the Board's assessment of the film than was necessary. Despite these reservations, most Panellists agreed that the Board's decision was appropriate.

Many Panel members referred to the frequency of the coarse language in the film, finding it especially noticeable when adult characters swore in the presence of child characters. Some people believed that the language was justified by the film's plot and tone, and would not be unfamiliar or shocking for most teenagers. Panellists took a number of different themes into account in their assessments, including suicide, alcoholism, crime and discrimination. The Panel also discussed violence and sex in relation to *Bad Santa*, but these elements were not seen to play as great a part in the film's impact.

3.3.6 *Kill.Switch* (Computer game, Alice Springs Panel)

Board classification: M

	Group A ('less exp')	Group B ('more exp')	Total
M	7	6	13
MA15+	-	5	5
RC	1	-	1

Most Alice Springs Panellists agreed with the Board that M was the most appropriate classification for *Kill.Switch*. However, almost half of those in the group of more experienced gamers regarded an MA15+ classification as more appropriate. The Panel found violence to be the only element needing consideration for classification purposes.

Those who preferred an M classification regarded the impact of the violence in the game as moderate rather than strong, and pointed to the lack of explicit visual detail in the scenes of violence.

> I thought it was moderate. I wouldn't call it strong – it didn't have severed heads and spurting blood. Yes, it's bad, but I wouldn't call it strong.

The fact that the player is usually at a visual distance from his 'enemy' in the game was also seen as reducing the impact of the violence. Those Panellists who favoured an MA15+ classification for *Kill.Switch* cited to the frequency of the violence in the gameplay; these people also felt that there was little narrative justification for the violence committed by the game character.

3.3.7 *Two Men Went to War* (Film, Melbourne Panel)

Board classification: PG

	Group A	Group B	Total
G	4	2	6
PG	5	7	12

The majority of Panellists concurred with the Board's PG classification for *Two Men Went to War*. In assessing the film they discussed violence, themes and language, generally finding the impact of each of these to be quite low.

With regard to the violence in *Two Men Went to War*, Panellists emphasised its relatively mild consequences and the lack of explicit detail. The war theme was regarded as relevant to classification, if only because of the need to explain it to young viewers. A number of Panellists regarded the language in the film as so mild as to not merit consideration in classification, and believed that the Board's assessment of the film's language as 'coarse' to be somewhat excessive.

3.3.8 *Rogue Ops* (Computer game, Melbourne Panel)

Board classification: MA15+

	Group A ('less exp')	Group B ('more exp')	Total
M	4	3	7
MA15+	5	6	11

The majority of Panellists agreed with the Board's MA15+ classification for *Rogue Ops*, discussing violence, themes and language in their classification assessments. Those who preferred a M classification argued that the game's depictions of violence were not explicit enough for the higher rating when considered alongside other games classified at the MA15+ level.

Panellists commented that the degree of animated realism contributed to the impact of the violence in the game, regarding the animation as especially realistic in the close combat scenes and in the clips between game levels. 'Normal' gameplay, by contrast, was felt to be lower in impact because of the lesser detail of the violence in these parts of the game. Panellists also remarked that the repetitiveness of the violence, and in particular the need to repeat violent acts repeatedly to achieve objectives, heightened the game's impact. The danger of younger players imitating the violent behaviour depicted in the game was a cause for concern for a number of Panel members.

Panellists also felt that that some of the themes in *Rogue Ops* required a certain level of maturity in the player. Such themes included torture, calculated killing, revenge and terrorism. Panel members

also remarked on the coarse language in the game, but found the language to have a much lower impact than the violence because of its relative infrequency.

> *It was the pre-meditated murder that made the impact of the violence stronger.*

3.4 Use of the Classification Guidelines

As explained in Chapter 2, Panellists were briefed by the OFLC's Education and Communication Manager on the application of the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games*. They were provided with written materials explaining the Guidelines, and were asked to refer to these materials as appropriate during their discussions on the films and games.[10] Because the community members are generally less familiar with computer games than films, Panellists were also briefed separately on the classification of computer games prior to the gameplay session.

Panellists generally demonstrated the ability to apply the Guidelines to both films and computer games, and in many instances compared the content of the different media when making their classification assessments.

Key finding: Panellists were able to apply the same rules to the classification of both films and computer games.

A number of further observations can be made about how Panellists used the Guidelines.

3.4.1 Technical terminology

The Guidelines sometimes use terminology in very specific ways. Examples of expressions with very technical meanings in the Guidelines include *impact*, *high*, *strong*, *moderate*, *mild* and *very mild*. Although Panellists generally demonstrated an ability to apply the Guidelines effectively, they did not always use the correct terminology as defined in the Guidelines. In this report, quotes which are attributed to Panel members are reported *as Panellists made them*. In some cases, their use of such 'technical' terms may be at odds with the definitions of these terms in the Guidelines.

3.4.2 Global classification assessment

On many occasions, Panellists remarked that their preferred classifications were based on a global assessment of the film or game in question. Rather than relying on a scene-by-scene analysis of the classifiable elements, their judgements of the appropriate classification appeared to be based on a holistic appraisal of the film or game and its overall effect on them as viewers or players.

3.5 Context

The *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games* stress the importance of context in considering classifiable content. Specifically, the Guidelines emphasise that '*context is crucial in determining whether a classifiable element is justified by the storyline or themes in a film or computer game.*' Therefore, material that falls into a particular classification category in one context may fall outside it in another. The initial briefing on the classification system drew Panellists' attention to the importance of context in making their classification assessments.

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[10] These written materials are based on the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games*, and are reproduced in Appendix B.

Context appeared to be particularly important to Panellists through what might be called the 'happy ending effect.' A number of interesting observations can also be made about context specifically in relation to computer games.

3.5.1 The happy ending effect

Many Panellists took into account the storyline resolution when evaluating the impact of classifiable elements in the films they watched. Upbeat endings, and endings in which the 'good' characters are rewarded and 'bad' characters punished, appeared to influence their assessments of films in particular, with a few Panellists even revising their preferred classifications to allow for the 'moral' perspective embodied in a satisfactory outcome to the plot. This was the case even where Panellists found a film's ending to be unrealistic or overly sentimental.

Finding: Panellists reported that the resolution of a film's storyline influenced their response to the film as a whole; for these people, the 'ending' justified the means.

3.5.2 Context and computer games

The order in which Panellists played the computer games and viewed video clips of the strongest classifiable content in those games appeared to have an effect on their subsequent feedback. For the first two Panels (Canberra and Alice Springs), video clips of the games were shown *after* Panellists had played the games, whereas in Melbourne they were shown *before* gameplay. The weight that Panellists gave to the video clips in their classification assessments appeared to be greater when shown *after* the gameplay, when the clips were fresher in their minds.

There also appeared to be differences between the responses of more experienced and less experienced gamers to the narrative elements in the computer games they played. Less experienced gamers tended to refer to the narrative 'justification' for computer game violence – its context – in making their classification assessments. More experienced gamers, on the other hand, appeared to regard the storyline behind the games as merely a pretext for the gameplay, and did not place as much weight on whether such narratives were plausible or morally acceptable.

Finding: When assessing computer games, less experienced gamers emphasised narrative elements to a greater extent than more experienced gamers.

3.5.3 Familiar film setting

Panellists agreed that the familiar setting of the only Australian film used in the research – *Tom White* – increased its impact. For the Melbourne Panel, the recognizable landmarks and local accents in the film made the film's classifiable elements, and especially its themes, more powerful for viewers.

3.6 Impact

The *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games* make a number of statements about the impact of classifiable elements. They use a hierarchy of impact across the various classifications, and describe situations in which the impact of a classifiable element may be higher or lower. The Guidelines also address the issue of interactivity and the relationship between interactivity and impact.

Panellists were asked to consider the impact of the classifiable elements when assessing the most appropriate classifications for the films and games used in the research. The following sections

address a number of aspects of impact that appeared to be important in the Panels' classification assessments. The different *types* of impact discussed by Panellists are considered; Panel feedback on how *interactivity* influences the impact of computer games is also presented.

3.6.1 Kinds of impact

Three different kinds of impact were identified in Panellists' feedback on the films and games. This 'typology' was not tested on Panel members, and emerged only through analysis of qualitative data collected in the course of the project. As such, the relative strengths and features of each kind of impact were not explored in depth, and further investigation of these issues would undoubtedly shed light on their subtleties.

The first and primary kind of impact was the *immediate* and instinctive reaction to scenes of violence, sex and other elements. In higher impact material, this kind of impact might arouse responses such as fear, disgust or aversion, and was seen to arise principally from sudden, gratuitous and/or graphic portrayals. The idea of 'immediate' impact appeared to be common to most Panellists, and was a major basis on which classification decisions were made (although there were disagreements about the *strength* of impact of any given scene). Assessments of some films or games as 'low impact' appeared to be related to the *absence* of this kind of impact on viewers.

The second kind of impact was *desensitisation*. This impact was described as changing the reactions of the viewer or player to *subsequent* material (in any media) through repeated exposure, allowing them to tolerate stronger content, especially violence. Many Panellists had very strong concerns about this kind of impact and saw it as contributing to a more violent culture, and were particularly anxious that children not be desensitised at an early age.

The third kind of impact came from film or game content which was considered to have the potential to influence the *behaviour* of audiences. Less experienced gamers in particular raised concerns about the possibility of children imitating the behaviour they saw in games, although all three Panels discussed the possibility of viewers imitating actions witnessed in films – most notably drug and alcohol use. Such behaviour did not need to be 'high' in impact to carry the danger of copycatting; indeed, some of the more benign films or games – such as *Whiplash* – were seen to have just as much potential to influence kids' behaviour as more violent material.

3.6.2 Interactivity

Panellists were asked to provide feedback on how the interactive nature of computer games influences the impact of the classifiable elements, especially violence, when compared to film. The range of opinion on interactivity was diverse across each Panel, but a number of themes emerged from the discussions. The views expressed were often distinctive to either more or less experienced gamers, although there was disagreement among people in both groups on this issue.

The primary focus of the present study was to determine the extent to which the decisions of the Classification Board can be said to reflect community standards. However, the substantial range of opinions that Panel members expressed on computer games, and in particular on how interactivity influences their impact, indicates the value of further exploration in this important area.

The player as perpetrator

In all three Panels, many of the less experienced gamers expressed the view that the impact of computer games is heightened through the player being in effect the 'perpetrator' of the violence in the game. By acting out the violent behaviour of the game's characters through the controller, the

player was seen to 'commit' the violence they are witnessing. Less experienced gamers also talked of the possibility of gamers acting out their violent fantasies through computer games.

The distancing effect

In contrast to those who regarded the player as the 'perpetrator' of any violence, most of the more experienced gamers felt that interactivity tends to lower the impact of computer games. These Panel members argued that computer games invariably create a distance between the player and the game's classifiable content, because players tend to concentrate on the gameplay and the challenge it presents rather than the action on-screen. For the more experienced gamers, the very nature of computer games, and in particular their interactive quality, dampens their impact on the player.

> *You are too busy looking at your level of skill to concentrate on the themes.*

Degree of realism

More experienced gamers also pointed to the obvious unreality of computer games and computer game animation in discussing the distancing effect. The less computer games actually resemble real life and real human beings, it was felt, the less impact any classifiable content – especially violence – has on the player. However, more experienced and less experienced gamers largely agreed that games which are closer to reality (or whose representation is closer to that of film) have a stronger impact. Games with narratives set in modern western society and featuring 'real' as opposed to fantasy-based characters – like *Kill.Switch* and *Rogue Ops* – were regarded by many Panellists as greater in impact.

For more discussion on computer game realism, see Section 4.1.5.

Desensitisation versus distraction

All three Panels discussed whether computer game players become desensitised to strong content by gaming continuously or performing the same 'actions' repetitively. Most Panellists concurred that constant game playing has an effect on the player, but there was disagreement over the nature of this effect.

Many of the less experienced gamers believed that the impact of computer games was stronger than that of films because of the greater amount of time players spent on a game, compared to the two or so hours they might take to watch a film. For these people, acquiring competency in a game requires a considerable amount of practice and, in the case of a violent game, means 'carrying out' the same violent acts repetitively and continuously. As the player becomes more skilled and advances through the game, these people argued, players are exposed to more classifiable content and become desensitised to the real 'meaning' of the violence they are witnessing (if it is a violent game). This process of desensitisation, for less experienced gamers, constituted one of the principal ways in which interactivity contributes to the impact of computer games.

Meanwhile, more experienced gamers did not express the same level of concern about desensitisation, regarding it simply as another aspect of the distance that computer games generate between the player and the game. They regarded the ability to tolerate graphic content – described as 'desensitisation' by many less experienced gamers – as coming more from the challenges presented by the gameplay than from 'committing' acts of violence repetitively. The imperatives of problem solving were said to *distract* the player from what they are witnessing rather than *desensitising* them to it. Nevertheless, some of the more experienced gamers did believe that prolonged playing of games with overly graphic or realistic scenes of violence could have a negative

impact on the player; one such Panel member used the phrase '*dreaming the game*' to describe these effects.

Less experienced gamers generally thought that the dangers of desensitisation were greater in relation to younger players and those more vulnerable to the effects of virtual violence (such as the mentally ill). For people unable to distinguish fantasy from reality, violent games were believed to be potentially harmful, in that they might condition players into thinking or behaving in certain ways. The perceived dangers of children imitating what they see or hear in computer games was a recurring theme in all three Panels, and the associated need to protect young people from these hazards was reinforced by people with varying levels of experience with computer games.

Positive aspects of 'control'

Panellists also identified a number of positive features of the interactivity inherent to computer games. In particular, the ability to control the game character and the outcome of events was viewed by more and less experienced gamers alike as having benign consequences.

A number of people who had never before played a computer game were impressed with how enjoyable and compelling they found the experience to be. Having expected to find the games distasteful or to be unable to even navigate their way through them, these people were pleasantly surprised at how engaged they became during the gaming sessions. Some of these people also remarked that the challenges of the gameplay distracted them somewhat from any classifiable content they were seeing or hearing, thereby mitigating its impact to a certain degree. A few even found their gaming experience to be somewhat cathartic, dedicating themselves to achieving the game's objectives enthusiastically.

Some less experienced gamers also reported that the control they possessed over the outcome of events differentiated gaming from the act of watching a movie. Whereas the filmgoer is a passive spectator, the influence that the computer game player has over how the game progresses was said to lower the impact in certain ways. For example, sudden or frequent violence was regarded as less confronting in computer games because it was expected, whereas in a film the shock of abrupt or repeated depictions of violence was said to raise its impact. In addition, the ability to 'fight back' against aggressors – to determine one's fate – was believed to be a fundamental difference between the games Panellists played and the films they saw. Many of the more experienced gamers also made remarks to the same effect.

Likewise, the ability of the game character to defeat opponents made the violence in computer games lower in impact than if *opponents* were consistently able to overcome the player. In one instance, the Canberra Panel was shown a clip of the game character in *Castlevania* being attacked but not fighting back. Panel members regarded this clip as having a greater impact than the scenes they saw during gameplay, in which the character attacks his opponents to achieve his objectives.

Some Panellists also thought that the educational benefits of games with greater content might outweigh any negative effects. These people suggested that some games would be beneficial for children in building up their ability to solve mental challenges. This was seen to be the case particularly in relation to *Whiplash* and *Tak and the Power of Juju.*

3.7   The third-person effect

In assessing the impact of a film or computer game, some Panellists made a distinction between the anticipated response of people *known to them* to particular scenes and the responses of others *unknown to them*. These people appeared to believe that their own children – or other children

known to them – would be less susceptible to any negative effects of classifiable content than other, more vulnerable children. While the third-person effect was evident across films and games with different classifiable elements, it was particularly noticeable in relation to computer game violence.

Finding: Some Panellists demonstrated a 'third person effect', believing that the impact of some classifiable content would be lower for people known to them than for 'others'.

3.8   Panellists' understanding of the MA15+ classification

Panellists were asked about their understanding of the MA15+ classification for films. Many Panellists were surprised to learn that the MA15+ classification means that people under fifteen years can legally view a film if accompanied by a parent or adult guardian. These people had assumed that an MA15+ classification restricted a film's audience to those over fifteen, in the same way that R18+-classified films are restricted to those eighteen and over. Panellists also manifested similar confusion regarding the MA15+ classification for computer games.

Some Panellists were particularly concerned that parental accompaniment meant that some parents might expose their children to inappropriate material. In fact, the need to protect minors was a reason given by some Panel members for preferring an R18+ classification.

Other Panellists, by contrast, felt that the MA15+ classification allowed parents to make more informed choices, especially on behalf of more mature children under the age of fifteen. These people appeared to be more familiar with the meaning of the classification, and said that it was useful in providing guidance on the suitability of a film.

> *I am sure parents would have enough sense not to let a 10 year old go. MA gives you the flexibility – it doesn't say it is suitable for everyone under 15.*

A number of Panel members expressed concern that the MA15+ classification allowed very young children (under the age of 8) to see a film in the company of their parents. These Panellists were generally supportive of an age restriction for younger children in such circumstances.

Key finding: Panellists demonstrated an incomplete understanding of the MA15+ classification and how it differs from the M and R18+ classifications.

4   The Classifiable Elements

The *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games* identify six classifiable elements in a film or computer game: themes, violence, sex, language, drug use and nudity. This Chapter discusses the responses of Panellists to each of the classifiable elements. The amount of feedback on each element varied, mainly in response to how prominently they figured in the individual films and computer games used in the research. Thus, a great deal of information was collected on violence, which was present in most of the titles to some degree, whereas nudity was discussed only in relation to two films and one game, and then only briefly.

4.1   Violence

Violence was a major concern for many people on the three Panels. Their responses to the violence they saw in the films and computer games were wide ranging and influenced by a broad range of factors.

Many people commented on the widespread depiction of violence in popular culture, and were particularly worried about its immediate or eventual effect on children. In addition to television violence, Panellists thought that the kinds of violence often seen in films and computer games would contribute to a desensitisation of young people towards violent behaviour. People on all three Panels mentioned the 'six o'clock news' as proof of the ineluctable presence of violence in today's society. Films and computer games that were seen to 'promote' or tacitly approve of violent behaviour were viewed in an especially negative light, because of their potential to influence impressionable young minds. Some Panellists also saw the depiction of violence in popular culture as contributing to a more violent society generally, i.e. leading to 'copycat' behaviour.

4.1.1   Motivations for and consequences of violence

A variety of issues was seen to have a bearing on the impact of on-screen violence. The motivations behind violence were considered important, with menacing violence and threatening behaviour regarded as adding to the impact. The Canberra Panel, for instance, regarded the violence in *Welcome to Mooseport* as having very low impact because of its lack of menace, but were shocked by *Intermission* and the menacing behaviour of its violent characters.

Panellists also considered the portrayal of the consequences of film violence in assessing its impact. Blood, injury or death were all deemed to add to the impact of violent scenes and regarded as inappropriate for children to witness. Scenes in which the depiction of the consequences of violence are prolonged or graphic were viewed as having a greater impact (factors addressed in the Guidelines).

The consequences of violence were seen to be particularly important in relation to computer games, in which characters often 'die' only to return to life. Panellists believed that the manner of 'death' of computer game characters – i.e. whether 'actual death' is shown, whether there are visible injuries, and how the return to 'life' is depicted – can affect the impact of the game significantly. Similarly, if a film ended 'happily,' and the eventual consequences of violence were less serious, Panellists appeared to be more lenient in their assessments.

4.1.2   Perpetrators and victims of violence

The identity, gender, character and status of the perpetrators and the victims of violence were regarded by Panellists as relevant to classification decisions. They commented on the higher impact of violence committed by figures of authority, particularly that carried out by policemen in both *Intermission* and *Tom White*. Meanwhile, violence perpetrated by women was generally regarded as more mild in impact than male violence, although Panellists did observe that female violence was usually less graphic and harmful – the '*handbag swinging kind*'.

Panellists also viewed violence against vulnerable victims as more serious. The violence by men against women in *Intermission*, against animals in *Whiplash* and *Tom White*, and against children in *Bad Santa* was all regarded as having relatively high impact.

> *The violence had the strongest impact, especially the gratuitous violence where the woman was punched in the face and then it was repeated later.*

Animal cruelty was seen to be especially troublesome because of the danger of children copycatting such behaviour. By contrast, violence against more 'worthy' opponents was felt to be more acceptable. Violence 'between equals' was believed to carry a reduced risk of injury – i.e. a lower threat of serious consequences – which tended to lower its impact. Panellists found this to be the case in *Castlevania* and *Welcome to Mooseport*.

Panellists thought the depiction of and even references to sexual violence to be highly confronting. Sexual violence was also generally thought to be an 'adult' theme and not suitable for younger people, even if only hinted at and not explicitly shown.

In addition to violence against vulnerable victims, violence against film characters who were not perceived to 'deserve it' was believed to have a greater impact. In this way, violence against 'good' characters was regarded as more alarming than violence against 'bad' characters, especially if the bad characters had themselves committed acts of violence against 'innocent' characters.

4.1.3   Gratuitous violence

People on all three Panels objected to scenes in films and computer games with violence they perceived as gratuitous or excessive. Older Panellists in particular commented on the amount of unnecessary violence depicted in popular culture, and some invoked a connection between fictional violence and the more violent nature of society generally. When shown films or games with little or no violent content, many Panellists expressed relief that they were not subjected to displays of 'gratuitous' or 'disturbing' violence.

Along with frequent and unnecessary violence, Panellists observed that violent scenes with 'shock' value had a greater impact on the viewer. The ability to shock was seen to derive from both the *explicitness* of a particular scene (blood, distress, etc) and the *unexpected* depiction of violence.

4.1.4   Context

In contrast to perceived gratuitous violence, Panellists were more willing to accept violence that they saw to be in context and significant to the plot of a movie. Observations of this nature were made in relation to *Welcome to Mooseport*, *Bad Santa* and *Jersey Girl*. The war setting in *Two Men Went to War*, similarly, made the violence in that movie understandable and acceptable for Panellists. That said, Panel members also appeared to be more likely to describe violence as 'in context' if it was of a milder nature rather than frequent, sudden or explicit.

The impact of violence was also thought to be affected by the tone of the scenes in which it appeared. In general terms, violence in movies and games with a humorous tone was regarded by Panellists as less confronting than violence in more serious contexts. Violent scenes in the comedies *Bad Santa* and *Two Men Went to War* and in the comedic games *Whiplash* and *Tak and the Power of Juju* were generally considered to have a low impact, whereas Panel members described the violence in *Tom White*, *Kill.Switch* and *Rogue Ops* as more realistic and disturbing. *Intermission*, a movie with both comedic and dramatic elements, was especially troubling for some Panellists because of its mix of humorous and menacing violence.

4.1.5   Violence in films and computer games

During the course of Panel discussions, a number of differences emerged between Panellists' responses to violence in computer games and their responses to film violence. These differences often manifested themselves in distinct ways among the groups of more experienced and less experienced gamers.

The anxieties of less experienced gamers tended to be much stronger in relation to computer game violence than film violence, with many arguing that the greater degree of involvement that the player has in the gameplay heightens the impact of any violence. Several less experienced gamers on different Panels described the player as the '*perpetrator*' of any violence carried out by the game character being controlled, and were worried about the immediate and long-term effects this might have on the minds of young gamers and those more vulnerable to its negative consequences (such as the mentally ill).

More experienced gamers, on the other hand, maintained that the challenge of playing the game generates a certain distance between players and what is shown on-screen, reducing the impact of the violence that they are witnessing compared to film. For these Panellists, the sense of distance generated by computer gaming is amplified by unrealistic graphics, a lack of character development, the absence of an engaging storyline and the utterly predictable nature of much gameplay. For these reasons, more experienced gamers tended to regard computer game violence as having a lower impact than violence in a film context.

Panellists made a number of other observations supporting a distinction between violence in films and violence in computer games. These observations are discussed below.

Imitability

Many Panellists, particularly those with little or no experience playing computer games, appeared to be more concerned about computer game violence than film violence because of their perception that computer games are primarily targeted at younger audiences. Concerns were consistently voiced, by less experienced gamers in particular, about the possible harmful effects on children and young teenagers of playing computer games with violent content. Indeed, the dangers of children imitating the behaviour that they 'perform' through gaming were raised in relation to virtually every computer game used for the research. Panellists were especially concerned about games that appeared to promote or condone violence or the use of weapons such as guns and knives, like *Kill.Switch* and *Rogue Ops.* However, these Panellists were also worried about children mimicking the milder violence in games like *Whiplash* and *Tak and the Power of Juju*, because of the assumed inability of some children to distinguish fantasy from reality.

Although Panellists also acknowledged the dangers of children imitating *film* violence, they did not consider these dangers to be as pressing as those presented by imitable activity in *computer games*.[11]

Realism

Panellists generally agreed that the impact of computer game violence is higher for games with a greater degree of realism. Realism was seen to derive from a number of factors; in general terms, however, the closer a computer game came to a naturalistic 'filmic' representation (as opposed to an 'animated' representation), the more it was considered to be 'realistic'. Other features that Panellists identified as contributing to a sense of realism in computer games are discussed below.

The quality of animation was seen as a significant factor, with more visual detail adding to the impact of any violence by displaying its consequences more explicitly. More experienced gamers compared the 'blood and gore' in the games they played during the gameplay session with the more graphic detail of other games they had experienced.

Conversely, less experienced gamers emphasised the graphic detail they observed in the games they played rather than what they *didn't* see. The immediate reaction of some of these people to realistic game violence was the 'shock of the new,' having never before witnessed computer game violence of the kind they experienced during the computer game sessions.

Discussing the difference between first-person and third-person perspective in computer games, Panellists agreed that first-person perspective can add to a game's impact on the player. It was also thought that violence 'at a distance' – using a sniper gun compared to hand-to-hand combat, for instance – is often less disturbing than violence close at hand, from the player's perspective.

Panellists also believed that games with perceptibly 'real' humans in 'real' situations had a higher degree of realism compared to games with animal or fantasy characters (as in *Whiplash* and *Castlevania*) or stylised representations of people (as in *Tak and the Power of Juju*). In this way, the violence in *Rogue Ops* and *Kill.Switch* was regarded as higher in impact because of their human characters.

Other non-visual elements were also noted as contributing to the degree of realism in the computer games played by Panellists. Gruesome sound effects alongside depictions of violence were mentioned by many people in relation to *Rogue Ops* and *Kill.Switch*. Some also felt that the vibrating controller made playing the game more 'real.'

Morality

Along with the gameplay, Panellists paid attention to the narratives of the computer games they played in considering their classifications. Comments were made about the moral values informing the narratives of a number of games, particularly by those less experienced with computer games.

In *Whiplash*, the fact that the main characters were rescuing their fellow animals from an evil animal testing laboratory was seen as an honourable cause, and in the minds of some less experienced gamers actually mitigated the negative effects of the violence in the game to a certain extent. Meanwhile, some less experienced gamers objected to what they regarded as the promotion of racially and politically based killing in the narrative of *Kill.Switch*, and pointed to the fact that the

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[11] Some Panellists also raised concerns about young people imitating certain *non-violent* behaviour depicted in films; drinking alcohol was one example of this.

'enemies' in this game were invariably from countries commonly associated with militant anti-Americanism.

These kinds of comments appear to signify an association in the minds of some people (particularly less experienced gamers) between the moral dynamic embodied in a game's narrative and the act of playing the game. Whereas film viewing was thought to be more or less a passive activity, with the audience free to make judgements about the moral framework presented in any particular movie, some Panellists seemed to regard active engagement with a computer game as *tacit approval* of the game's narrative and the assumptions behind it. Just as gamers were described as the 'perpetrators' of violence in the games they play, so these Panellists held themselves to be 'responsible' for the narrative setting the scene for the violence.

4.1.6   General comments

Of all the classifiable elements, violence generated the most discussion and was the subject of the most concern from Panellists. While feedback on the other elements was highly variable, Panellists generally agreed that violence – and particularly graphic or prolonged violence – was inappropriate for viewing by younger people. Many felt that violence in films and computer games was part of a more widespread tendency in popular culture to tolerate more and more explicit depictions of violence. This trend, it was often argued, could have a detrimental effect on young people by desensitising them to the 'real meaning' of virtual violence.

Finding: There was more widespread concern across the Panels about violence and how it is treated in classification than the other classifiable elements.

4.2   Language

Language was a particularly important element in the classification of three of the films watched by the Panels: *Intermission, Bad Santa* and *Tom White.* The impact of language was also considered in relation to the classification of *Jersey Girl, Welcome to Mooseport, Two Men Went to War* and *Rogue Ops*, but was regarded as much milder in these titles.

In those films with language that Panellists described as '*strong', 'coarse*' or '*high level'*, several believed the language to be as strong as it could get, being particularly concerned with the words '*fuck'* and '*cunt'.*

Panellists were also struck by the frequency of the strong language in *Intermission, Bad Santa* and *Tom White*, and the way it was used in an everyday manner. They strongly believed that the frequency of language increases its impact, and that frequency should be a consideration in the classification process. Tone was also a consideration, with Panel members noting that in those films in which coarse language was a major feature the language was often used aggressively.

Just as violence perpetrated by authority figures was regarded as higher in impact, Panellists reported being affected by their own views on the film characters using coarse language. This was particularly the case in relation to *Intermission*, where one of the central characters is a policeman, but similar comments were also made in the discussion on *Tom White.* In the same way, scenes from *Bad Santa* in which Santa swears were regarded as greater in impact, especially when the coarse language was used in the presence of child characters in the film.

The language in the other films and games assessed by Panellists was generally considered to have a lower impact, either because of the actual words used (or not used) or because of the tone with which they were used. The words uttered in these other films and games were regarded as more

acceptable to younger audiences, and as justified by context in most cases. In fact, Panellists said that sometimes their awareness of the language they heard was so low that they did not even notice it – for example in *Two Men Went to War*. Interestingly, however, the use of the word *'bastard'* in the game *R:Racing* was deemed to be troublesome at a G classification, with most Panel members preferring G8+.

While Panellists generally agreed that stronger coarse language pushes material into a higher classification category, many also believed that young people in today's society are exposed to coarse language on a daily basis, and therefore have a higher tolerance for such language than young people may have had in the past. Despite this, many Panellists were adamant that language should still be carefully assessed as part of the classification process, believing that younger viewers should not be exposed to '*strong'* language.

> *You can have swearing in a movie, but that just went beyond what was acceptable. What was he trying to prove? When they have a kid in the movie it changes the whole thing. When you have adults that's fine, but put a kid in there and it's wrong.*

Words such as *'turd'*, '*bum*' and '*bastard*' were regarded as acceptable within the PG category, providing they are used in context and not aggressively. The Board's rulings on language in this category were generally thought to be reasonable or even a little conservative. Meanwhile, the Panel was not greatly concerned with the impact of language at the MA15+ category, and did not think that coarse language, in itself, should push a film into an R18+ Classification.

Finding: There was marked variation in Panellists' responses to language in different films and at different classification levels.

4.3   Themes

The Panels considered themes to be an important part of classification assessment, with themes affecting their classifications of all films and most games. The exceptions were *Tak and the Power of Juju, Whiplash* and *Kill.Switch,* although many still thought the themes in these games needed mentioning in the consumer advice. The themes in *Kill.Switch* in particular were regarded as a concern, but were assessed as part of the consideration of violence in the game.

Many of the themes that the Panels believed to be unsuitable for children and younger people can be grouped into the following categories.

4.3.1   Sense of negativity

Panellists thought that certain kinds of themes conveyed a sense of negativity not appropriate for younger viewers. These included: homelessness and breakdown in the family unit, mental illness and stress (portrayed in *Tom White*), suicide (*Bad Santa*), poverty and a sense of hopelessness (*Intermission*) and death (*Jersey Girl*). With the exception of suicide and death, the impact of such themes was regarded as high or strong by most Panellists, partly because they were present throughout the respective films in most cases. The impact of the suicide theme in *Bad Santa* was regarded as more moderate, because the suicide attempt was unsuccessful and did not dominate the film's narrative. The death of the mother in *Jersey Girl*, meanwhile, was regarded as a reflection of 'real life' and an issue that many young people will have to face at some point in their lives.

4.3.2 Crime

The portrayal of criminal activity was regarded in most cases as unsuitable for younger viewers, particularly where the perpetrators remain unpunished. The impact of criminal activity was considered particularly great in *Intermission*, in which crime was seen to be portrayed as a normal way of life.

There was some concern from less experienced gamers that *R:Racing* might encourage younger players to drive dangerously and gamble, but these concerns did not appear to have a significant effect on Panellists' eventual assessments, suggesting that they were unsure about the impact of material of this nature on younger players.

4.3.3 Alcohol and drug use

Panellists did not think that material featuring prolonged alcohol and (legal and illicit) drug use were suitable themes for younger viewers. Many were very concerned when alcohol and drug use was presented as acceptable and without negative consequences, and they were worried that the use of alcohol and drugs in *Bad Santa* and *Tom White* sent the 'wrong' message to younger people, particularly when characters drank alone rather than socially. They also felt that the Board had underestimated the impact of drug use in its report on *Tom White*.

4.3.4 Sexual themes

Panellists discussed the impact of sexual references and themes, although their feedback was slightly inconsistent. Many Panellists thought that some of the sexual themes in *Jersey Girl* and *Welcome to Mooseport* would not be understood by younger people, but at the same time they talked of the need to protect younger viewers from such material. Some Panellists were quite concerned about the homosexuality theme in *Tom White*, yet also remarked that its impact on younger viewers might be mild or negligible, since they might not even notice these references.

> *Things like masturbation and homosexuality, they're part of real life but you don't often see them depicted in the movies. That's why they had a high impact – they weren't glamourised or stylised, there was no music behind it or anything.*

4.3.5 The supernatural

Some Panellists believed supernatural themes to be inappropriate for younger children, and that such themes should therefore be taken into account when making classification decisions. In considering *Castlevania* and *Tak and the Power of Juju*, however, some Panellists decided that the supernatural aspects of these games did not have sufficient impact to affect their classification assessments, but should nonetheless be noted in any consumer advice.

4.3.6 Other observations

The kinds of themes Panellists appeared to regard as more appropriate for younger viewers included romance and the 'family' values espoused in *Jersey Girl*. The war theme in *Two Men Went to War*, meanwhile, was thought to have a lower impact because of its gentle treatment, but many Panellists remained wary of exposing children to war themes in more realistic portrayals.

Noble intentions and 'moral' outcomes often appeared to soften the impact of 'adult' or 'mature' themes. As noted in the section on violence (above), less experienced gamers felt that a computer game's storyline can potentially mitigate the impact of any violence in the game. In the same way,

the impact of the 'negativity' in *Tom White* and *Intermission* was lessened for many Panellists because of the slightly upbeat endings in both films.

4.4 Drug use

The use of both legal and illegal drugs in *Tom White* was discussed at length, with most Panellists regarding its impact as strong. Panellists were concerned about the constant use of alcohol throughout the film, in addition to the illicit drug use. Panellists also felt that the film's depiction of drug use was explicit rather than implied (as argued in the Board's report) and inappropriate for younger viewers, because it portrayed drug use as normal behaviour. Similar concerns were voiced in relation to the alcohol use in *Bad Santa*, which some Panellists thought should be considered as 'drug use'.

Finding: Panellists expressed concern over depictions of the excessive or dependent use of alcohol and emphasised the need for such depictions to be taken into account for classification purposes and in consumer advice.

The impact of drug use in other films and games considered by the Panels was not regarded as significant and did not affect any other Panel assessments.

4.5 Sex

Tom White, Intermission and *Bad Santa* generated the most discussion about the impact of sex on classification assessments. Sexual references were also considered in relation to *Welcome to Mooseport.*

The sex scenes in *Tom White* were regarded as inappropriate for younger viewers, and Panellists disagreed with the Board's comments on how viewers would interpret a scene in which the camera focuses on a character's face as he orgasms and then cries. They believed the intensity of this scene to be totally unsuitable for younger viewers, who would be able to see the film unaccompanied by an adult under an M classification.

Some Panellists also found the references to homosexual activity and a masturbation scene in *Tom White* to be improper for viewing by younger people, and felt that these scenes should have been given greater weight in the Board's classification decision. These comments reflected a wider division across all the Panels, with some Panellists appearing to have a higher tolerance for references to normative heterosexuality than what they saw as 'deviant' sex: homosexuality, masturbation and even pre-marital intercourse. Other Panellists were much less concerned about sex generally (regardless of the 'type' of sex), and commented on what they perceived to be the Board's overemphasis on sex in a number of classification decisions.

Sex was regarded as less important in the discussion on *Intermission*, with Panellists more concerned about the impact of the violence and language in the film. The sex scenes that were seen to have the strongest impact depicted a male character's sexual frustration and masturbation. While these scenes did not show sexual activity explicitly, Panellists felt that the tone of the sexual references and the implied sexual activity would have an impact unsuitable for younger people. The impact of the other sex scenes in *Intermission* was considered to be less pronounced.

The sex scenes in *Bad Santa* were of relatively little concern to Panellists, who thought their impact was alleviated by the comedic tone. Panellists generally believed the Board overemphasised these scenes in its classification decision.

Panellists were also less concerned about the sexual references in *Welcome to* Mooseport, because they thought most of the references were verbal and would be missed by younger viewers.

Finding: Panellists identified sex and sexual references as important considerations for classification purposes, but sometimes felt that the Board was more sensitive than necessary to the impact of sexual content in individual films.

4.6 Nudity

Nudity was discussed in relation to two films: *Tom White* and *Welcome to Mooseport*. Most Panellists regarded the nudity in both films as having a low impact, but some acknowledged that it still had some influence on their classification assessments. Nevertheless, Panel members argued that inadvertent or, as in the case of *Welcome to Mooseport*, comic nudity often has a lower impact on viewers of all ages, and should be treated as such in assessing a film's classification.

> *The nudity was really low impact and it was funny.*

By contrast, 'sexualised' nudity was considered to be higher in impact, with the young female body being more likely to represent sexuality than older and/or male bodies.

4.7 Overview

Generally speaking, the Panels identified the same classifiable elements in their classification assessments as did the Board in their classification decisions. The only exception to this was *Two Men Went to War*, in which some Panellists did not actually notice some of the classifiable content, such as language. There were, however, a number of instances in which the Panels disagreed with the *emphasis* the Board placed on particular elements in their decisions. For example, in the case of *Tom White*, Panellists agreed that the Board did not give enough weight to the overt drug use and adult themes in the film; in Bad Santa, on the other hand, Panellists argued that the Board had placed *too much* emphasis on the film's sexual content.

Key finding: Panellists generally identified the same classifiable elements in relation to individual films and games as did the Board in its reports on each of the films and games.

5   Consumer Advice

Panellists were asked to suggest consumer advice for the films they watched and the games they played and to evaluate the usefulness of the advice provided by the Board. In most sessions they were also asked to consider a list of possible consumer advice phrases and select any they felt were better than their own advice. Panellists also discussed the meaning of particular words used in consumer advice.

This section brings together Panellists' overall views on consumer advice, while their detailed responses to advice on particular films and games can be found in Appendix A.

5.1   Perceived need for consumer advice

Panellists generally found consumer advice on films and games to be useful in selecting films and computer games for themselves and for children. They believed that the purpose of the advice is to inform people about the presence and nature of classifiable elements.

Consumer advice was regarded as particularly important in selecting material for younger people or for family viewing, but also important for people who wish to avoid, *or who seek*, films or games with significant amounts of a particular classifiable element such as violence or sexual activity. However, most Panellists noted that when choosing films or games for their personal use, their selection is often based on reviews and the plot outline. A few Panellists were unaware that films and games come with consumer advice.

Overall, Panellists regarded consumer advice as useful, and many expressed a desire for it to be more detailed and descriptive. Some suggested that there should be an Internet resource with extended consumer advice, perhaps on the OFLC's website.

5.2   Relationship between classification and consumer advice

Some confusion was expressed concerning the relationship between classification and consumer advice. Panellists were not always clear on whether consumer advice is based on the standards operating in each classification category, or whether there is a wider framework that all advice fits into. To illustrate, some people did not know that '*Medium Level*' depends on the acceptable standards within each classification range, and that the impact of '*Medium Level Violence*' varies according to the classification of the film or game in question. Despite such confusion, Panellists generally considered their preferred consumer advice in the context of their preferred classification, and understood that the same content might correspond to differing consumer advice if assessed at different classification levels.

An example of the discussion around this issue was seen in the assessment of the Board's consumer advice for *Tak and the Power of Juju.* Panellists thought the advice - '*Low Level Animated Violence*' - was more appropriate alongside a G classification than G8+. At G8+ level, it was argued, even '*Low Level*' might risk overstating the impact of the violence, but at G level the recommended consumer advice gave a better indication of the actual content of the game. Indeed, some Panel members thought that no consumer advice at all was needed if the game was classified G8+, because parents would assume that a game with this rating would contain some classifiable elements of a mild nature.

Many Panellists believed that consumer advice is not needed for material with a G classification, because such material should not contain elements that warrant any warning. Similarly, they did not expect to see extensive warnings on PG or G8+ material. However, it was suggested that films and games assessed at these levels could carry descriptions such as '*Suitable For All Ages'* or '*General Audience'*.

Other Panel members believed that parents should be as fully informed as possible about film and game content, even if it receives a G classification. These Panellists emphasised the need for all material to contain consumer advice whenever a classifiable element was present, even if it is assessed as having minimal impact.

Reflecting the concern some Panellists had about people under 15 years accessing MA15+ material, there was some support among Panellists for including '*Not Suitable For Those Under 15'* in consumer advice for MA15+-rated films and games.

5.3 The role of consumer advice in describing the impact of classifiable elements

5.3.1 Descriptions for the classifiable elements

Ideally, Panellists wanted consumer advice to give them information on the impact as well as the presence of the classifiable elements. They were interested in the words that are used to describe each element, words like '*Moderate*', '*Medium*' and '*Strong*'. This section looks at these terms more broadly, before examining Panellists' views on the words used to describe each element.

Moderate/Medium

Panellists saw little difference between these terms and believed they should be used in relation to all the classifiable elements, except themes, when applicable.

Strong/High Level

Panellists regarded these terms as useful for indicating that the impact of an element is very marked. They assumed that these terms carried information about the degree of explicitness, but not about frequency.

Frequent/Infrequent

Many Panellists wanted to know if a classifiable element occurs frequently or infrequently in films and games. That said, some Panellists reported that the presence of a certain element is sometimes sufficient to discourage them from accessing a film or game, and noted that if an element was described as '*Strong*' or '*High Level*' then they would assume that it had a greater impact, and would not need '*Frequent*' also.

'*Frequent*' and '*Infrequent*' were regarded as more useful when combined with other words to describe the elements at hand. An example of this was seen in the discussions about the games *Castlevania* and *Kill.Switch,* where the Board's consumer advice was *'Medium Level Animated Violence'*. Many Panellists felt that the advice for both games should have been '*Frequent Medium Level Animated Violence'*.

5.3.2 Violence

Panellists expressed a desire to be advised if material contains violence, with the advice to include descriptions of the intensity and frequency of violence. They did not, however, need to be told what sort of violence is in a film or game, i.e. whether it involves hand to hand fighting, shooting, knives and so on.

When asked to suggest consumer advice for violent films or games, Panellists most often used the terms '*Low Level*', '*Mild*' or '*Moderate*' and '*High Level*' or '*Strong*'. '*Mild*' was regarded as having less impact than '*Moderate,*' but '*High Level*' and 'S*trong*' were seen to denote similar impact. The term that Panellists said implied the greatest impact in relation to violence was '*Graphic*'.

A few Panellists believed that consumer advice should indicate if violence is realistic, arguing that realism greatly increases the impact of any violence, particularly in the context of computer games.

While it was not raised in all discussions, there was some support from Panellists for advice that warns consumers that material contains sexual violence or domestic violence. This issue was discussed in connection with some of the scenes in *Intermission,* in which female characters were hit by a male character and a story was recounted about another woman who was robbed, tied to a bed and defecated on.

Some Panellists believed that consumer advice should incorporate a consideration of the menace behind any violence, where the impact of the violence is medium or high. An example of this was given in the discussion about *Intermission*. The Board's consumer advice included *'Infrequent Violence'*, but many Panellists felt it should have been '*Frequent Strong Violence'* because the feeling of menace was strong throughout the film, even if the violence was not frequent.

5.3.3 Themes

Panellists agreed that it is important to advise consumers on strong thematic content, but many found the term '*Adult Themes'* unhelpful and needed more of an indication of exactly what these themes are. Some Panellists saw a difference between '*Mature'* themes and '*Adult Themes*', believing that the latter term includes themes not suitable for children, whereas '*Mature Themes*' can cover aspects of life that younger children might not be used to, but which would give less cause for concern to parents. Those that made this distinction provided the examples of domestic violence as an '*Adult Theme*', and divorce as a '*Mature Themes'*. Although most Panellists viewed '*Mature Themes'* and '*Adult Themes'* as largely interchangeable, it was felt that '*Adult Themes*' connoted material of a sexual nature more readily than '*Mature Themes*'.

There were also a number of *types* of themes that Panellists wanted specified in consumer advice; some examples are provided below.

Tone or spirit of the material

Some Panellists wanted consumer advice that would alert them to the tone of the film. If the film was depressing or depicted sad events Panellists expressed a desire to be alerted to this, at least if the tone was not clear from the storyline. The homelessness and despair depicted in the film *Tom White* was an example of the kind of tone about which Panellists preferred to be forewarned.

Panellists said they would like to see consumer advice on themes in all classifications, if consumer advice is applicable. For example many suggested that '*War Themes'* should have been included in the consumer advice for *Two Men Went to War.*

Supernatural themes

The terms '*Supernatural*', '*Horror*' and '*Fantasy*' were seen as useful, especially for parents who may be concerned about children being exposed to this kind of material. '*Supernatural*' was seen as a stronger term than '*Fantasy,* while '*Horror*' was regarded as more gruesome than either term. Some Panellists were particularly eager for supernatural and horror themes to be included in consumer advice, because such content might challenge a young person's belief system. Some felt that '*Fantasy Themes*' should have been included in the advice for *Tak and the Power of Juju* to cover the supernatural references in the game.

5.3.4   Language

For material in the G, PG or G8+ categories, Panellists wished to be informed of '*Mild*' or '*Very Mild*' language, whether or not the language is justified by context. They also wanted to be advised if the language is frequent or infrequent.

In material containing potentially offensive language, Panellists commonly prefaced their consumer advice on language with '*Coarse*' or '*Strong*' as well as a description of the frequency of the language. Examples of suggested phrases included '*Infrequent Low Level Coarse Language*', '*Incidental Coarse Language*' and '*Frequent Coarse Language*'.

'*Strong*' was regarded as an acceptable alternative to '*Coarse*'. '*Strong*' was also interpreted as a indication of *how* coarse language is – i.e. its level of *coarseness*. Thus many Panellists regarded '*Strong Coarse Language*' as appropriate advice for films or games containing language with strong or high impact.

Panellists had mixed responses to the Board's advice on language. They felt the advice was too strong for milder films like *Welcome to Mooseport* and *Two Men Went to War* but too weak for films classified at higher levels like *Tom White* and *Intermission*. Many Panellists agreed that the language warnings for PG movies were a bit '*heavy handed for words* like "*turd*".' Meanwhile, most of the Panellists felt that *Tom White* contained language that was too strong for an M classification, and that the film should have carried firmer advice about the nature and frequency of the language.

5.3.5   Drug use

Generally, Panellists appeared to require less detail in the consumer advice on drug use and drug references than on some of the other elements. Although some people wanted to know if the drug use was frequent or infrequent, most were satisfied with the advice that a film or game contains drug use or drug references. However, if Panellists regarded the drug use as explicit rather than implied, even if the actual moment of consumption was not shown, they believed that the advice should be '*Drug Use,*' not '*Drug References*'.

In discussing consumer advice for *Bad Santa* and *Tom White*, some Panellists argued that advice on drug use should also cover the use of legal drugs, at least when this is a prominent feature in a film. Suggested phrases included '*Frequent Alcohol Usage*' and '*Alcohol Dependency Theme*'.

5.3.6   Nudity

While some Panellists felt that consumer advice on nudity during sex scenes is unnecessary if there is already advice on sex, overall they believed that nudity should always be mentioned in the consumer advice. In addition, the Panellists were keen to see more explanatory descriptions of

nudity, and regarded the impact of some nude scenes as low and not necessarily making a film unsuitable for younger viewers. For example, the elderly man's nude bottom in *Welcome to Mooseport* was seen as having very low impact, and Panellists thought that the Board's advice (*'Nudity'*) would have wrongly steered them away from choosing the film for young people. '*Sexual References'* in the Board's consumer advice for this film, they said, would have compounded this response. Panellists could not agree on alternative advice for the film, but did agree that the Board's advice was stronger than their experience of the film.

Suggestions for describing '*Nudity'* more usefully included '*Full Frontal Nudity'* and '*Partial, Incidental Nudity'*.

5.3.7 Sex

Consumer advice on sex caused Panellists some confusion. While they generally agreed that advice on sexual content is necessary, they did not agree on the appropriateness or clarity of the words used in the consumer advice.

For instance, '*Sexual References'* was said to be so broad that it is difficult to use as a guide in deciding whether material is suitable for younger viewers. Panellists observed that many '*Sexual References'* are not noticed by younger viewers, but that they would still be concerned about taking a child to a film which was given this advice. These people said that more guidance is needed on the impact or strength of any sexual references.

Other areas of confusion were the points of differentiation between '*Sexual References'*, '*Sexual Activity'* and '*Sex Scenes'*. Some Panellists thought such terms had been used inappropriately by the Board in some cases. For example, Panellists argued that the sex in *Intermission* should have been described as '*Sexual Activity'* not '*Sexual References'*.

In suggesting consumer advice for the films they saw, Panellists used '*Mild'* or '*Low Level'* to indicate low impact sexual references or sexual activity. Although they could not always agree on what was mild, Panellists did agree that these terms were useful for denoting a low impact.

5.4 Consumer advice for computer games

The main consumer advice issue specific to games was the use of '*Animated'* to describe violence. The word was used by both the Board and by some Panellists when asked to provide consumer advice, but many Panellists found it redundant, pointing out that all computer games are animated.

There was some support from the panel for the use of the word '*Cartoon'* rather than '*Animated'* as a description of violence in computer games. '*Cartoon'* had resonance with people who recalled violent television cartoons, and they compared these to violent computer games. Most Panellists, however, regarded '*Cartoon'* as an inappropriate description for games with realistic graphics, since a fundamental feature of cartoons is a highly stylised representation. Ultimately there was no resolution on this issue. Some Panellists found the inclusion of '*Animated'* in consumer advice helpful, some preferred '*Cartoon'*, while others did not think that either word was necessary given the computer-generated graphics in computer games.

5.5 Additional consumer advice terms

At the conclusion of the games and films and before discussion, Panellists were asked to provide unprompted consumer advice. The most frequently used responses were reflective of terms that currently appear in consumer advice. Some suggestions were common to both films and games,

particularly those describing '*Violence*'. '*Adult Themes*' was also common to both films and games, as was '*Language*', but this was more frequently mentioned in relation to films.

Panellists' responses to films typically contained more consumer advice than their responses to games, reflecting the more widespread presence of classifiable elements in films. The most common responses to films after '*Violence*' and '*Language*' were '*Adult Themes*', '*Sex Scenes*' and '*Sexual References*', '*Nudity*' and '*Drug use*'. Additional terms provided for films included '*War/War Themes*', '*Sexual Violence*' and some references to alcohol use, including '*Alcohol Abuse*', '*Alcohol Dependency*', '*High Alcohol Consumption*' and '*Frequent Alcohol Use*'. Responses to games were for the most part restricted to advice regarding violence. Additional themes highlighted in games included '*Menace*', '*Threat*', '*Animated Violence*', '*Supernatural Themes*', '*Animal Cruelty*', '*Vandalism*' and '*Property Damage*'.

Towards the conclusion of most discussions, Panellists were provided with a list of possible consumer advice terms and asked to select any that would better describe the material they had classified. Details of the phrases they chose are provided in Appendix A, and many are covered in the discussion above. Commonly selected phrases included, '*Mature Themes*', '*Incidental Coarse Language*', '*Fantasy*', '*Supernatural Themes*' '*Drug References*', '*Some Scenes May Frighten Young Children*', '*Comedic Violence*' and '*Domestic Violence*'.

5.6   Overview

Generally speaking, Panellists agreed with the need to provide the public with consumer advice on films and computer games in addition to classifications. They found consumer advice to be useful in selecting films and computer games for themselves and for children. However, they sometimes found the Board's consumer advice to be imprecise or not detailed enough, and made numerous suggestions on what consumer advice might be appropriate in different contexts.

Key finding: Panellists strongly supported the need for consumer advice, and in many cases argued that to be of maximum benefit the Board's consumer advice needed to be more detailed.

6   Conclusion

This research represents the third time that the OFLC has consulted the Australian public about the classification of films through the Community Assessment Panel process. It was also the first time that Panels provided feedback on the classification of computer games, and an innovative methodology was employed to collect this feedback in the most effective way.

Panels of between eighteen and twenty members of the general community were successfully convened in Canberra, Alice Springs and Melbourne. Panel members for the most part offered their views enthusiastically and in good faith, and a vast amount of valuable data was collected for analysis. Panellists were also very positive about the Panel process, commenting on how well the film screenings and gameplay sessions generated constructive discussion. As well, the Panels actively engaged with the initial briefings on the classification system, and gave informed, considered feedback drawing on the concepts conveyed in those briefings.

Five key findings emerged from the conduct of the 2004 Community Assessment Panel research:

- The classification decisions of the Board generally reflect community standards

- Panellists were able to apply the same rules to the classification of both films and computer games

- Panellists generally identified the same classifiable elements in relation to individual films and games as did the Board in its reports on each of the films and games

- Panellists strongly supported the need for consumer advice, and in many cases argued that to be of maximum benefit the Board's consumer advice needed to be more detailed

- Panellists demonstrated an incomplete understanding of the MA15+ classification and how it differs from the M and R18+ classifications.

In conclusion, the results of the research were in a crucial way similar to those of previous Community Assessment Panel projects: they confirmed that the decisions of the Classification Board can be considered to be generally in line with community standards. For most of the films and most of the computer games used in the project, the Board's decisions agreed with the preferred classifications of the majority of Panellists. Where the Board's decisions diverged from the Panels', the divergence followed no clear or consistent pattern.

The Board's decisions were also in line with community standards in another sense. In their reports on the individual films and games, the Board generally identified the same *range* of classifiable elements as did Panellists in their feedback about those films and games. However, Panellists did not always agree with the *emphasis* that the Board placed on particular elements in their classification decisions (for instance, some Panellists were concerned that the Board had concentrated too heavily on sexual content in films). Of all the classifiable elements, Panellists found violence to be the most troubling.

Appendices

Appendix A: Panel responses to individual films and games

This appendix provides information on the responses of the Canberra, Alice Springs and Melbourne Community Assessment Panels to each of the films and computer games used in the research. It also describes the demographic characteristics of each Panel.

In reporting the responses of the Panels to each film and game, some quotes have been attributed to either Group A (more experienced computer game players) or Group B (less experienced computer game players), but only when there was a noticeable distinction between the feedback of the two groups. In cases where there was commonality - or no distinction – between the groups, attributions to either group have in general not been made.

Appendices

Appendix B: Research instruments and Panel briefing materials

The research instruments used in the Community Assessment Panel research are reproduced in this appendix. They include:

- The specifications used by recruiters to select appropriate participants.

- The questionnaire used by recruiters to determine whether potential applicants fit the recruitment specifications.

- The questionnaire used to capture demographic and attitudinal information from Panellists upon their arrival at the first Panel session.

- The questionnaires used to collect Panellists' preferred classifications and consumer advice before and during their discussions on individual films and computer games.

- The list of possible consumer advice phrases given to Panellists during discussions.

- The discussion guides used by facilitators to direct Panel discussions on films and computer games.

Appendix B also reproduces the written materials that Panellists were given in their briefings on the classification system, as well as the Board's reports on each of the films and games used in the research.