



**Australian Government**  

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**Office of Film and Literature Classification**

**COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PANELS**

**REPORT**

*Sydney*

*Brisbane*

*Wagga Wagga*

Prepared for:

Office of Film and Literature Classification

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The Community Assessment Panels were principally designed to investigate the degree to which classification decisions of the Classification Board reflect current community standards.

The specific research objectives were to:

- n Assist Censorship Ministers and members of the Classification Board to understand community attitudes to the classification of films;
- n Examine aspects of the films that people find most troubling or about which they express concern;
- n Explore the extent to which decisions of the Classification Board can be considered to represent community standards.

### METHODOLOGY

Between October 1997 and March 1998, three Community Assessment Panels were convened. The Panels were carried out in Sydney, Brisbane and Wagga Wagga and each Panel viewed and discussed three pre-release films over a period of three days.

Comprised of 20 or more members, each Panel was recruited by a specialist agency, in strict adherence to the specifications agreed upon by the OFLC Research Reference Group and the consultant, Keys Young. The specifications were devised so the Panels would represent a broad cross-section of the Australian community.

Prior to the film screenings, each group of Panellists attended a briefing/training session to ensure that they were familiar with the meaning and application of the Classification Guidelines. Immediately after viewing each film, Panel members completed a questionnaire which sought their initial responses to the film, including their choice of classification. Divided into two broad age groups, the Panel then discussed the film, concentrating on any aspects related to classification issues. Panellists then recorded

their *final* classification choice for the film. After the 'post-discussion' classification, the Classification Board's report for the film was distributed among the Panel; participants were given the opportunity to comment on the Board's decision. Until that time, no-one (including the group facilitators) was aware of the Board's classification for the film.

### CLASSIFICATIONS RECEIVED FROM THE PANELS AND THE BOARD

Out of the nine films classified by the Panels, six received the same classification by the Panels and the Board. Thus there were only three cases where the Board and the Panels gave films different classifications. In two of these instances the Board gave the films higher classifications than the Panels and in one instance a lower classification.

*Dangerous Beauty* was rated M by the Board and MA by the majority of the Panel, largely due to confusion over the Guidelines on sex. *Anastasia* was classified PG by the Board and G by a bare majority (one person) of Panellists. *Mrs Dalloway* was voted M by the Board and PG by the majority of the Panel, largely due to the influence of older Panellists who did not find the film's suicide theme to have a significant impact.

This report of the findings on the Panels has focussed on the points of difference which reveals most about the community's attitudes. This emphasis on diversion between Board and Panels should not detract from the overall high levels of agreement between the Panels and the Board.

### CLASSIFIABLE ELEMENTS

#### Violence

The Panels were most articulate and united in their vigorous commentary on violence. They consistently expressed concerns about violence in cinema, video and on television. It was seen as an escalating phenomenon in terms of both the amount and the detail of the violence.

Panellists often assumed there was a direct connection between the amount of violence on our screens and the level of violence in our communities. It was further assumed that young people were prone to mimic the violent behaviour they witnessed on screen.

There was widespread agreement with the violence Guidelines, in terms of definitions, distinctions and terminology. In particular, the Panels were sensitive to the frequency of violence which was said to heighten the impact due to an accumulation of images. Panellists were aware of the use of violence to enhance dramatic effect in the narrative but were opposed to the use of violence merely for its shock value.

Two Panels observed in their selected films which contained violence, comedy was used to diffuse the impact of the violence. While some participants found this device a welcome relief, others objected to the combination of humour and violence.

A clear theme revealed in comment on all three films with violent content was a sensitivity to attacks with knives or cutting instruments, in part because of the immediacy and believability of such attacks. As well though, the sensitivity to cutting and knives may have had less to do with a concern with violence than distaste for the actual sight of cutting or penetration, as might result when viewing a documentary where there is a scene of someone undergoing surgery.

### Language

The Panels expressed definite views about language. There was a division between those who were offended by bad language and those who found swearing to be relatively unimportant and part of normal life.

The *amount* of coarse language was a key concern to the majority of the Panels. Although the Panels would often acknowledge that the language in a film was appropriate in the context, this did not appear sufficient to justify excessive swearing.

Panellists were very sensitive to the impact of coarse language on children (particularly if used by children in a film). They admitted that young

people knew and used bad language regularly, but swearing in films was seen to condone this behaviour and invite imitation.

### Sex

Other than *Dangerous Beauty*, the films viewed tended not to have a sexual focus and most contained little or no sex. In contrast to the topics of violence and language, the Panellists seemed to have had less exposure to sexual films and appeared somewhat uncomfortable when discussing sexual matters. The Panels, however, regarded sex as an element of less concern than violence and some of the adult themes.

The Panel's classification of *Dangerous Beauty* received the broadest range of classifications of any of the films. The classification Guidelines dealing with sex caused confusion because Panellists did not have a clear understanding of the terminology. Questions were asked about the meaning of 'simulated sex' in that many presumed *any* sexual scenes reflected 'simulated' sex. Factors such as the detail of nudity and 'obvious genital contact' were given widely different interpretations. The notion of a continuum where an element could be represented by increasing levels of impact was less evident to the Panellists in relation to sexual matters, whereas it was apparent in relation to violence and language. This issue generated a good deal of discussion about the classification process and Guidelines (rather than the film) as Panellists sought to learn how to use the Guidelines in this area.

### Adult themes

Throughout the sessions, the Panels tended to indicate that younger people's understanding of adult themes was likely to be limited - a judgement which entailed some seemingly contradictory attitudes. Young people were said to be resilient in terms of dealing with strong material, especially in terms of violence and language but the Panels were also inclined to assume that the more mature adult themes would go over the heads of a young audience.

Discussion of adult themes often centred upon the intention of the theme and the moral message it conveyed to young people. The Panellists

constantly investigated whether a theme such as drug abuse, warfare, corruption, adultery etc was being promoted or glorified.

The theme of suicide prompted a good deal of discussion since it arose as a sub theme in four of the films screened for the Panels. The greatest concern about depictions of suicide arose from the younger ie 15 to 34 year old Brisbane Panellists (in relation to the film *Mrs Dalloway*) who acknowledged the influence of the recent suicide of rock star Michael Hutchence. It was clear that single contemporary events could influence the classification decisions of Panellists although youth suicide is of growing social concern generally.

### INTERPRETATION OF THE GUIDELINES

#### G/PG

The Panels seemed to rely heavily on the notion of parental guidance as a mechanism for mediating much film material for young people. There was a sense that a parental presence could make most material acceptable viewing for most age groups, although there was also acknowledgment that not all parents were available to supervise all of their children's viewing.

#### M/MA

In relation to M, the Panel tended to focus more on the parental guidance suggestion than on the recommendation of unsuitability for an audience under 15 years. The legal restriction accompanying the MA level was often interpreted as having less stringency than is intended in the legally restricted category. MA was sometimes discussed as though it sat alongside PG, as both implied parental intervention / guidance.

#### R

The Panels did not deal much with the higher end of the classification scale because only one of the films was classified R<sup>1</sup>. The Sydney Panel largely

agreed with the Board's classification of 187 on the basis of the intensity of the adult themes and the cumulative effect of the violence. However, a significant proportion considered it an MA film because there was no individual scene of extreme violence, while two Panellists would have refused it classification.

### FURTHER COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE BOARD AND THE PANELS

#### Comparison with other films

The Panels sometimes made comparisons between a film they were viewing and recollections of other film ratings and these other classifications were used as a benchmark. Such comparisons could be problematic because of the reliance on memory which was open to error in terms of the level of classifiable elements and even the classification itself. Moreover an earlier rating may have been an accurate reflection of the time but changes in community attitudes could have resulted in a different decision today. Also, changes in the classification system have occurred as with the introduction of MA in 1993.

#### Third person effect

In assessing the impact of a film, the Panels were inclined to emphasise the anticipated response of their own children or children known to them. It was very common for the Panellists to expect a mature understanding from their own child but to assume a potentially detrimental effect on children 'out there' who were felt to be more vulnerable.

#### Young audience appeal

Regular observations were made about classification needing to take account of a film's appeal to children. The Panels' scepticism about how much children comprehended in regard to adult films appeared to be related, in part, to young people's anticipated level of interest. If the young audience was unlikely to be engaged by a film, it was assumed the content would have less effect. This argument was sometimes used to justify a lower classification.

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<sup>1</sup> This is broadly in line with the proportion of films classified R by the Board. For example in 1996/97 some 5% of films were classified R.

### **'Copy-cat' effect**

Where Panels objected to certain material, it tended to be based less on their personal standards and more on a fear that impressionable young people would be prone to imitate undesirable behaviour. The concerns about the copy-cat effect were particularly raised in relation to violence, but encompassed coarse language, sexual activity etc.

There was also a concern that a film might model or make acceptable certain poor or 'ill-mannered' behaviour, eg smoking, rudeness to parents, language etc.

During the research the Panellists often expressed support for the role of the OFLC and acknowledged the need for the Guidelines.

Panellists quickly appreciated that classification could be a complex task which is not always amenable to hard and fast rules which can be exhaustively set out in the Guidelines.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) commissioned the independent social research and planning consultancy Keys Young Pty Ltd, to undertake qualitative research investigating community standards in relation to film classification. Independent media consultant, Catherine Griff, was a member of the Keys Young study team. This research has been conducted through the establishment of Community Assessment Panels which served as an extension of the qualitative research into community standards carried out by the OFLC over past years. The proposal for the Panels was put forward by the Federal Attorney-General, Mr Daryl Williams QC, and later endorsed by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General, the body responsible for censorship and classification matters. The OFLC has published a brochure which explains in some detail the concept and intention of the Panels. A Research Reference Group was established to oversee the scheme.

Research Reference Group members were:

- Kate Aisbett - Head of Research, Australian Film, Television and Radio School
- Peter Sheehan - Pro-Vice Chancellor and Head of Post Graduate Research, University of Queensland
- Norman Reaburn - Deputy Secretary, Federal Attorney-General's Department
- Andree Wright - Deputy Director, Office of Film and Literature Classification, and

State nominees of the respective Attorney-General's included:

- John Dietrich - Classification Officer for NSW (for Sydney and Wagga Wagga Panels)
- Rebecca Aiken - Community Representative (for Brisbane Panel).

The challenging task of developing and continually revising the Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Videotapes requires that the OFLC be well informed about current community attitudes and concerns. Clearly community standards are something of an

intangible and frequently changing phenomenon. The current research project was principally designed to investigate the degree to which classification decisions of the Classification Board reflect current community standards. As planned, Keys Young established Community Assessment Panels in two capital cities and a regional location to view and debate pre-release, classified films. The films viewed and assessed by each Panel are listed in Section 2.2.2. The views and judgements of the Panels were compared with the decisions of the Classification Board and these matters are the subject of this report.

The specific research objectives were to:

- n assist Censorship Ministers and members of the Classification Board to understand community attitudes to the classification of films;
- n examine aspects of films that people find most troubling or about which they express concern;
- n explore the extent to which decisions of the Classification Board can be considered to represent community standards.

The Community Assessment Panels were convened as follows:

- Sydney - 17 to 19 October 1997
- Brisbane - 5 to 7 December 1997
- Wagga Wagga - 13 to 15 March 1998.

Having completed the first year of the program, Keys Young has compiled this overview report as well as individual reports on each of the three Community Assessment Panels. The individual reports contain extensive quotes and detailed responses of the Panels to each of the films. The overview report includes a description of the methodology; a comparison between the responses of the Board and the Panels; the Panels' analyses of the key classifiable elements; and the Panels' general interpretation of the Guidelines and classification levels. The overview report refers to specific films and uses quotes as necessary to illustrate themes.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

The Research Reference Group established a clear methodological framework for the consultant to refine and implement. The research program ran over one year, during which time three Community Assessment Panels were recruited across Sydney, Brisbane and Wagga Wagga.

The methodological issues discussed in this section include: recruitment of the Panels of some 20 people per Panel reflective of the general community; briefing/training of Panel members in the Classification Guidelines used by the OFLC; the viewing of three pre-release films followed by discussion in groups of approximately ten people each.

### 2.1 Panel Recruitment and Specifications

The Research Reference Group determined that the Panels should represent a broad cross-section of the Australian community from diverse backgrounds.

The following specifications were devised by Keys Young in conjunction with the Research Group to determine membership of each Panel.

#### **Total Numbers:**

20 to be split into two separate focus groups of ten each.	Group A to include younger Panellists eg 15 - 34 years
	Group B to include older Panellists eg 35 years plus

#### **Focus Group Experience:**

Ideally people with **no** focus group experience were sought but recruits were accepted if they had not participated in a group in the past year.

#### **Gender:**

Basically a 50:50 split between males and females was sought.

#### **Age:**

	<i>Group A</i>		<i>Group B</i>
* 15 - 17	(3)	35 - 44	(4)
18 - 24	(3)	45 - 54	(3)
25 - 34	(4)	55 plus	(3)

\* In the 15-16 age range one younger person was permitted to bring a friend who also met the specifications. This was the only affinity relationship allowed.

#### **Language:**

All fluent English speakers but people from non-English speaking backgrounds could be included.

#### **Family Status:**

single - never married, no children	(3)
person - married/defacto, no children	(3)
parent - at least one child < 5 years	(4)
parent - at least one child 6 - 11 years	(4)
parent - at least one child 12 - 17 years	(4)
parent - at least one child over 18 years	(2)

#### **Geographical:**

The Panellists were sought from a variety of suburbs in the three locations to enable a spread of socio-economic groups; this is illustrated in the tables presented in the sections relevant to the composition of each Panel, that is, Section 7.2, Section 8.2 and Section 9.2. Each table summarises the characteristics of those participating in each of the three Panels.

#### **Film Viewing Patterns:**

A few additional questions about video/film viewing habits were asked of participants when they were contacted (see Appendix A). This was not a selection criterion but rather used for information purposes. It was intended that those recruited would include a reasonable cross-section of frequent to infrequent viewers of videos/films. Keys Young monitored this to ensure

this was the case. As those recruited showed a spread of viewing patterns, it was not necessary to exclude anyone nor recruit additional Panellists. Panellists were not informed that the research had anything to do with classification matters until the actual groups were convened.

Recruitment of Panel members in all three locations was sub-contracted to specialist recruiting agencies.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.2 Panel Procedure

### 2.2.1 Training and Screenings

The screenings and discussions took place at the OFLC offices in Sydney; the Greater Union Theatre in Brisbane; and the Forum 6 Cinema in Wagga Wagga. It was essential that, when recruited, participants committed themselves to attending *all three* film viewing and discussion sessions. It was expected that each session would run an estimated four hours each (about half in film viewing and half in discussion). The first session needed to allow for an *additional* hour or so for briefing/training in relation to the Classification Guidelines. The sessions were all run over a Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

On arrival people filled out a questionnaire (see Appendix B) which sought demographic data plus confirming information about film viewing habits and attitudes. The results of this questionnaire, in relation to each individual Panel, are presented in Appendix C.

Panel members then took part in a training session led by Keys Young to ensure that participants were familiar with the meaning and application of the Classification Guidelines.

The classification training manual closely replicated the official *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Videotapes*, July 1996. The main difference between the official Guidelines and the material used for training was that definitions used in the Classification system were integrated into the text of the training manual. Thus when a word such as 'gratuitous' appeared in the Classification Guidelines, it was immediately explained or defined within the text rather than requiring the reader to refer to the appended glossary of terms. The training manual also included examples of films that had been given the various classifications.

The selection of the films viewed was determined by the material which was being classified by the OFLC within the time frame. Permission from the distributor was also required for the film to be viewed for research purposes.

The consultants/facilitators were not informed about the classification the films received from the Board to avoid any conscious or unconscious influence by the facilitators on the decision-making of the Panels. (The single exception to this was in relation to the only R rated film to be viewed. Because the under 18 year old Panellists had to be informed not to attend the third meeting, the facilitators were told about this classification.)

One or more observers from the Research Reference Group attended each session.

### 2.2.2 Films Viewed by Each Panel

The films viewed by the Panels were:

#### **Sydney Panel**

- n *Fairytale - A True Story* - period film featuring fairies and fantasy;
- n *A Life Less Ordinary* - contemporary romance and black comedy;
- n *One Eight Seven* - contemporary grim drama set in a tough American school.

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<sup>2</sup> J & S Research, an independent recruitment company recruited in Sydney and Wagga. J & S Research was established as a recruitment company fifteen years ago and has been a member of the Market Research Quality Assurance Scheme since its inception six years ago. Its work is independently audited on a yearly basis. They have a data base of approximately 30,000 people in Sydney and 650 people in Wagga. Recruitment in Brisbane was conducted by NFS Market Research with a data base of 18,000 names, established in 1985 and a founding member of Interviewer Quality Control Australia.

### **Brisbane Panel**

- n *Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway* - period film recalling a woman's youthful era;
- n *Tomorrow Never Dies* - spy action movie where James Bond thwarts the outbreak of war;
- n *The Winter Guest* - contemporary melancholy drama set in a Scottish fishing village.

### **Wagga Wagga Panel**

- n *Anastasia* - animated picture built on the fabled survival of the daughter of the last Russian Tsar;
- n *Primary Colors* - confrontational political drama alleged to depict President Clinton's pre-election campaign;
- n *Dangerous Beauty* - period film based on the true story of a 16th century Venetian courtesan.

questionnaire a final classification decision which may or may not have been the same as their initial choice. After 'reclassifying' the film, the decision and comments of the Classification Board (see Appendix F) were distributed and discussed; as noted, the facilitators were unaware of the Board's decision until that time.

From the above description it should be clear that the methodology is fairly complex, having been carefully developed and executed. The steps can be summarised as follows: recruitment of a cross-section of the community as Panellists; application of a demographic and attitudinal questionnaire; Panel training and orientation on the Guidelines; viewing of selected films; recording of the initial response to, and a classification of, each film; exploring through group discussions relevant issues arising from the film; recording of a final classification decision; reading and commenting on the Classification Board's assessment of the film.

### **2.2.3 Focus Group Discussions**

Directly following the screenings, the Panels divided into two groups; one consisting of ages from 15 to 34 years and the other of Panellists aged 35 years or more.

After viewing each film, but before the focus group discussions began, participants filled out a questionnaire (see Appendix D) which asked for immediate responses to the film, key themes, areas of concern, a classification decision and reasons behind the classification. The film just viewed was then discussed in much detail for an average of one and a half hours. The proforma guiding the focus group discussion is reproduced as Appendix E. The questions began with a general exploration of the film, then increasingly concentrated on the elements which determined classification. Throughout the discussion participants were encouraged to refer to their classification manual to check the Guidelines. Once these matters had been fully discussed, participants were asked to record on their

### 3.0 CLASSIFICATION DECISIONS BY THE PANELS AND BY THE BOARD

This section of the report attempts to draw together the results of the individual Panels to answer the basic questions posed in the research - to what extent can the decisions of the Classification Board be considered representative of community attitudes and what aspects of films do people find most troubling.

#### 3.1 Films Where the Classifications Differed

Out of the nine films classified by the Panels, there were only three cases where the majority of a Panel gave a film a different classification to that of the Board. In two of these instances the Board gave the films *higher* classifications than the Panels and in one instance a *lower* classification.

*Anastasia* was a case of very minor difference, where the Panel was almost equally divided between PG and G, but received a G classification by a bare majority of one person. The division of the Panel appeared to reflect a similar difference in opinion within the Board with the Board ultimately giving the film a PG classification. The Board's hesitation about awarding a G classification focussed on a particular dream sequence where the evil Rasputin gets inside Anastasia's mind. The Panel did not place quite the same importance on this particular scene and supported the minority Board opinion that it was scary but not beyond a G. The information that a subsequent decision had been made to release the film as G (accompanied by consumer advice) with the dream sequence *modified*, met with the approval of the Panel.

*Mrs Dalloway* prompted considerable differences of opinion amongst the Panellists and between them and the Board. A majority of the Panel classified it PG, whereas the Board classified it M. The younger Panellists largely agreed with the Board's report which focussed on the centrality of the 'severe mental disturbance and suicide' themes. While the younger (ie 15 - 34 year olds) members ranged in their classification of this film from G to MA, the older group (35 and older) was

most consistent in their selection of PG hence the majority classification of PG by the Panel. The pivotal issue here was the emphasis which the Board and younger Panellists placed on the adult theme of suicide, compared to the attitude of the older Panellists who found this theme less of a concern.

*Dangerous Beauty* was the film which revealed the greatest discrepancy between Panel and Board with the majority of the Panel classifying it MA, and the Board M. Unlike the case of *Mrs Dalloway* where the different opinions derived from the varying impact of the suicide theme, the issue with *Dangerous Beauty* appeared to be differing interpretations of the Guidelines. The specific problems experienced by the Panel in relation to the Guidelines on this matter are discussed in Section 4.3.1.

The Panels seemed to have limited experience of viewing films with sexual content. Other than *Dangerous Beauty*, the selected research films contained minimal reference to sex<sup>3</sup>. Generally the Wagga Panel was not offended by any of the sexual content of *Dangerous Beauty* but the terminology of the Guidelines appeared to be confusing to a number of Panellists.

#### 3.2 Comparison of All Classifications by the Panels and the Board

The tables below set out in detail the classification decisions of the Panels for each film in total and then shows the decisions of the two age groups. They show the Board's classification and the Panels' final decisions, that is, *after* the group discussion.

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<sup>3</sup> References to sex in films generally, are limited. In 1996/97, for example, some 9% of films classified MA and classified M received this classification on the basis of sexual content.

**SYDNEY PANEL (20 PANELLISTS)**

**FAIRYTALE - A TRUE STORY (PG)**

	TOTAL PANEL	UNDER 35 YEARS	35+ YEARS
G	9	5	4
<b>PG</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>
M	-	-	-
MA	-	-	-
R	-	-	-

**ONE EIGHT SEVEN (R)**

	TOTAL PANEL	UNDER 35 YEARS	35+ YEARS
G	-	-	-
PG	-	-	-
M	-	-	-
MA	7	4	3
<b>R</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
Refused classification	2	-	2

**A LIFE LESS ORDINARY (M)**

	TOTAL PANEL	UNDER 35 YEARS	35+ YEARS
G	-	-	-
PG	-	-	-
<b>M</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>
MA	8	4	4
R	-	-	-

**BRISBANE PANEL - (23 PANELLISTS)**

**VIRGINIA WOOLF'S MRS DALLOWAY (M)**

	TOTAL PANEL	UNDER 35 YEARS	35+ YEARS
G	2	1	1
<b>PG</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>
M	6	6	-
MA	1	1	-
R	-	-	-

**THE WINTER GUEST (M)**

	TOTAL PANEL	UNDER 35 YEARS	35+ YEARS
G	-	-	-
PG	2	2	-
<b>M</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
MA	9	4	5
R	-	-	-

**TOMORROW NEVER DIES (M)**

	TOTAL PANEL	UNDER 35 YEARS	35+ YEARS
G	-	-	-
PG	1	-	1
<b>M</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>
MA	6	1	5
R	-	-	-

**WAGGA WAGGA PANEL - (21 PANELLISTS)**

**ANASTASIA (PG)**

	TOTAL PANEL	UNDER 35 YEARS	35+ YEARS
<b>G</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>
PG	10	4	6
M	-	-	-
MA	-	-	-
R	-	-	-

<b>MA</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>
R	-	-	-

**DANGEROUS BEAUTY (M)**

	TOTAL PANEL	UNDER 35 YEARS	35+ YEARS
G	-	-	-
PG	1	-	1
M	5	-	5
<b>MA</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>
R	2	2	-

**PRIMARY COLOURS (MA)**

	TOTAL PANEL	UNDER 35 YEARS	35+ YEARS
G	-	-	-
PG	-	-	-
<b>M</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>

### 4.0 CLASSIFIABLE ELEMENTS

Those aspects of the films viewed where Panellists expressed varying degrees of concern are discussed here.

#### 4.1 Violence

The Panels were most articulate and united in their commentary about violence. The fact that the topic has been debated and exposed in print and broadcast media over such a long period was evident throughout the Panels' discussions. Participants were comfortable and forthright in their analyses of violent screen content. Almost all had clear views on violence and appeared to have given some prior thought to the subject. Violence in the films was vigorously debated and many Panellists appeared to relish the chance to express strongly held opinions.

The Panels consistently expressed concerns about violence in films and on television and saw it as an escalating phenomenon whereby both the amount and the explicitness of the violence was increasing. Sociologists, media analysts, criminologists and an array of other researchers have not reached a consensus about the impact of screen violence and in particular, the link between violence on the screen and violence in society, despite decades of studying this field. By contrast, the Community Assessment Panels were quite clear in their beliefs as to the existence of such a link with Panellists assuming there was a direct connection between the amount of violence on our screens and the level of violence in our communities. The Panels further assumed that young people were prone to mimic the violent behaviour they witnessed on screen.

There was widespread agreement with the treatment of violence in the Guidelines, in terms of definitions, distinctions and terminology. In particular, the Panels were sensitive to the frequency of violence which was said to heighten the impact due to an accumulated effect. Panellists were aware of the use of violence to enhance dramatic effect in the narrative but were opposed to the use of violence merely for its

shock value; as an audience they apparently wanted to know what to expect in terms of levels of violence. No-one condoned violence depicting graphic attacks on people nor copious amounts of blood.

Although there was a great deal of debate about the impact of violence, only three of the films screened for the Panels were seen as containing significant levels of violence. The Wagga Panel did not view any violent films but the film *Anastasia* prompted much debate about the potential for young children to be frightened by evil characters. Whereas animation traditionally distances the young viewer from reality, Panellists observed that modern animation was so extraordinary that it could heighten reality and in the case of *Anastasia*, often conveyed a sense of vast scale. *To me the size of everything was as frightening as the content. It was quite overwhelming at times ... it would make a small child feel even smaller.*

#### 4.1.2 Violence, Comedy and Genre

The Wagga Panel commented about the Jewish bat character in *Anastasia* who acted as a foil against the more troubling aspects of Rasputin. *The little guy is making funny quips in the background but is bashing his head against the wall. It made me crack up - it wasn't violent, it was funny.* This device of countering violence with comedy was raised by the Brisbane Panel in relation to the James Bone film and by the Sydney Panel about *A Life Less Ordinary*.

The Brisbane Panel cheered *Tomorrow Never Dies* at the recognisable opening theme music. Much of their enjoyment of the film derived from the predicability of the genre. An important aspect of the film's popularity was the combination of the violent action with Bond's wit and cool humour in the face of disaster. *You don't think of the gruesome part. Comedy is at the forefront. I think it's great ... it's the only way violence should be shown.*

In *A Life Less Ordinary*, the incompetent angels were recognised as a vehicle of comedy and the victims of violent misadventure. Despite an expectation that the angels would somehow re-

appear, the Panel was disturbed by the repeated close-ups after they had been shot. It was evident to the Panel that the violent episodes were quickly followed by 'comic relief'. Although the comedy was said to diffuse the impact of the violence, some participants found such juxtaposition to be inappropriate. *In a serious movie it (the violence) would probably have had less impact because you're expecting it, whereas in a comedy you're not expecting it, it's out of character to a certain degree.*

Panellists who objected to the stylistic leaps from comedy to violence exhibited a preference for films with thematic consistency. The Sydney Panel commented:

*If it's a comedy, which it basically was, then I don't think you need that shot of the blood ... it wasn't a funny scene; it was just a shock scene.*

*The violence is not humorous but you know it's not going too far in this context.*

Panellists enjoyed the predicability of *Tomorrow Never Dies*, including the violence which was said to be unrealistic, stylised and not gratuitous. There was protest where the boundaries of the Bond genre film were seen to be extended. The following comments relate to a scene where Bond transgressed the manners of a gentlemanly hero:

*It's almost ruined for me, almost pushing it into the Bruce Willis genre, it's almost Nineties Hollywood action, not classic James Bond.*

*The scene when Bond had the pistol at his head, I've never seen that in a Bond film before ... it was an assassination, I was very surprised.*

*I don't know if you can justify a close-up gunshot to a person's head just because he is a good guy ... it's brutal.*

### 4.1.3 Knives and Cutting

A clear theme revealed in comment on all three films with violent content was a repugnance to attacks with knives or cutting instruments.

The Sydney Panellists discussing of *A Life Less Ordinary* made comparisons between the impact of knives to that of guns. The issue was partly related to the fact that the response to a knife attack was more likely to be filmed at close quarters; gun fire could be well removed from the victim. The penetration of a blade seemed within the realm of the viewers' imagination, whereas a gun wound was less imaginable to the majority. *Teenagers would have seen so many scenes with guns. I would have more of a problem with knife related violence ... because guns are so detached.*

Strong revulsion was expressed at a scene in which a dentist operates on the hero's gun wound, explicitly cutting the flesh with a scalpel. In relation to a scene where the heroine cuts herself with a razor blade, several Panellists insisted that the actual cutting had been shown on screen, which was not the case. *What about that scene when she razored her arm to get some blood? That horrified me, I don't think that would be good for young people to see.* This reaction may have less to do with a concern with violence than distaste for the actual sight of cutting or penetration, as might occur when viewing a documentary where there is a scene of someone undergoing surgery.

In *Tomorrow Never Dies* there was a similarly strong reaction to a few scenes involving attacks with a ninja star and knife. *The violence was graphic - the star, stabbing in the chest, the reaction when pulling it out. When things blew up it was over and done with, but the knife and the star, it was there ...*

The Sydney Panel claimed to be exhausted by the accumulation of fear and violence in *187*. One scene which prompted particular objection was that of the school teacher being repeatedly stabbed by a student. However a few Panellists expressed their relief that the attack focussed on faces rather than on the knife.

### 4.2 Language

The Panels expressed definite views about language but (unlike the issue of violence) there

was a marked division between those who were offended by bad language and those who found swearing to be relatively unimportant. The opponents of bad language argued that such usage violates notions of social 'manners' and reinforces behaviour that they are striving to contain or reverse.

Aside from the main issue of the impact of coarse language on children, several Panellists emphasised that the elderly and people from other cultures were often highly offended by language commonly used in films. There was agreement with this comment by a Wagga woman: *Older people too are just as vulnerable as the kids ... my mother sometimes walks out because of the over-the-top language. They haven't got it in their face all the time like we have.*

Language was considered to be a major issue in classification terms in only two of the selected films - *The Winter Guest* and *Primary Colors*. Although the language was very strong in *187*, its importance was subsumed by the overall force of the violence, thus it attracted little comment.

### 4.2.1 Language and Young People

Language used by two pre-adolescent boys in *The Winter Guest* (particularly the use of the word 'fuck') was a significant topic of discussion. A majority of the Brisbane Panel objected to the swearing, both because of its frequency and more importantly, because of the age of the characters. Many Panellists acknowledged that this language was probably characteristic of how these boys would have spoken in the circumstances and, while the Panel agreed with the Board that the language was appropriate in the context, this did not appear sufficient to justify what many considered to be excessive swearing.

*In a movie the language should be toned down - it was a bit too much.*

*The language I didn't like. There are quite a number who don't know that it is inappropriate ... the audience laughing reinforces that it's OK. We're getting to the stage where there are no standards ... they go into the workforce using it and it's young people.*

Differing opinions on language influenced the classifications selected for *The Winter Guest*. *I gave it an MA. I felt the language was the primary factor. I felt it was gratuitous - every second word ... and there was no real need for that and according to the Guidelines, that's where it belongs.*

A significant proportion of the Panel was not at all bothered by the language in *The Winter Guest*. A few of the younger Panellists wanted to classify the film PG but realised that this would contravene the Guidelines on language.

A key reason behind the objection to language was a fear that young people would consider it acceptable and imitate the swearing. *Don't you think you're condoning bad language by saying 'yes, everyone's doing that, we'll say that in a movie'. Then the kids will think nothing wrong of it.* However there was considerable agreement with one of the older Panellists, who observed that the boys seemed aware of social standards because they did not swear in the presence of the adult women on the beach.

### 4.2.2 Language in *Primary Colors*

The Wagga Panel had lengthy discussions about the impact of the language in *Primary Colors* and the majority concurred with the Board's decision to award it MA on the grounds of language. Nevertheless, this film demonstrated the clear divide between those who were completely opposed to coarse language and those who considered it a relatively minor element to be judged only in relation to context. In contrast to what might be expected, this divide did not seem to be necessarily related to age nor gender. Possibly it was more connected to cultural background and upbringing.

The main objection to language in *Primary Colors* was definitely the frequency of the swearing. Several participants reacted so strongly against the language that they maintained that it had spoilt the film. Many of the Panellists who acknowledged that the language was appropriate to the stress of the political setting, still complained that the use of 'fuck' was excessive.

*I'm quite happy to have heard 90 per cent of it, but it was the extra ten per cent.*

*They could have halved it and it still would have had an effect, but not be so monotonous.*

*It was getting over the top, there's no dialogue, just swear words.*

*To me it was the quantity, the quantity took away from the quality.*

A significant proportion, especially in the older group, defended the use of language, arguing it was crucial to *Primary Color's* authenticity, the aggression of the campaign and the darker aspects of the characters. The younger group was more inclined to take offence at the single use of 'cunt' but there was relatively little comment about this expletive and the use of 'motherfucker' was raised by the Board, but not by the Panel.

In comparison with the Brisbane Panel who viewed *Winter Guest* (cited above), the Wagga Panellists were less inclined to refer to the impact of language on young people, until queried by the facilitator. (The swearing by children in *The Winter Guest* may be sufficient to explain this difference.) There was widespread recognition that young people knew and used the language in *Primary Colors* yet the Wagga Panel objected by commenting that such films promoted coarse language by presenting it as normal practice. *That's the only problem I have with the amount the word 'fuck' was used ... so consistently that it becomes part of normal language and the kids take that away from the movie.*

A few of the younger Panellists were worried that a Presidential candidate using such language might be a role model for young people. One of the women emphasised that the swearing by Stanton (the White House candidate in *Primary Colors*) and his staff condoned the language. *We should never accept it, otherwise it will go further.* Another of the younger women predicted that the use of language would become more extreme over time. *If we said 'shit', that was a really bad word and now 'shit' is normal, just like 'fuck' is to the kids now, and probably the 'c' word will be OK in ten years time.*

Others were more circumspect about whether young people could be protected from coarse language in film.

*We can do as much as we can by saying '13 year olds shouldn't see this movie, there's too much swearing in it', but I just know that 13 year olds know every swear word and will use them anyway.*

*I have a problem with inappropriate use of language ... but I think that kids are pretty intelligent and they can learn what is socially acceptable.*

### 4.3 Sex

The films selected for viewing by the Panels tended not to have a sexual focus and most contained only fleeting portrayals of sexual interaction, if any at all. The exception was *Dangerous Beauty*, thus the analysis of classifiable sexual material is based on commentary about that one film only. The Wagga Panel, who had offered lengthy and profound observations on all other of the classifiable elements, tended to be 'lost for words' when it came to discussing sex. In contrast to the topics of violence and language, the Panellists seemed either to have had little exposure to sexual films or could not easily describe their responses.

The Panel's discussion and classification of *Dangerous Beauty* revealed wide divisions and extremes of classification decisions (spanning from PG to R). Such diversity was not evident in any of the other films viewed. At times it was difficult for the moderators to elicit reactions to the sexual content because discussion would be deflected onto another aspect of the film. The resistance to tackling the topic of sex appeared to be partly related to embarrassment in talking about sexual matters (normally considered personal and private) in a group situation. In fact, a number of members of various Panels reported that both they and their children were embarrassed to be in each others' presence when sexual scenes were viewed on television or on a video.

However, the Panel's widely varying response to the sexual content seemed partly related to sex being seen as a less controversial issue than violence and some of the adult themes. In contrast to the other elements, Panellists had not thought about sex as an objectionable or injurious topic and been less exposed to sexual content which had caused offence. Moreover participants acknowledged that they had seen fewer films which dealt with sex to a large extent and had less developed positions or attitudes on the place of sex within films/videos.

### 4.3.1 Application of Sex Guidelines

The classification Guidelines dealing with sex caused more confusion than any of the others because Panellists did not have a clear understanding of the terminology. Questions were asked about the meaning of 'simulated sex' and concepts such as the detail of nudity and 'obvious genital contact' were given widely differing interpretations. The Panel judged that interpreting the classification levels for sex was highly subjective. Participants had difficulty relating to the Guidelines' distinctions in terms of sex and were more inclined to debate the context, morality and relationships depicted in a sexual scene than its explicitness.

The Panel was influenced by the presentation of the courtesan at the centre of *Dangerous Beauty* as a strong and positive character. A few Panellists suggested that the lack of exploitative sexual content led them to assess the film's classification in a more liberal light. The fact that it was historical and based on a true story were further factors said to 'soften the impact' of the sexual content. Also the message that women in this social circumstance had very limited opportunities open to them resulted in the role of courtesan being seen in a more sympathetic light.

The scenes in *Dangerous Beauty* which portrayed the lovers in bed were inoffensive to the Panel. The majority found these sexual scenes to be artistic, tasteful and appropriate especially as the couple was in love. Nevertheless there was wide variation in perceptions of the level of the sex and the relevant classification.

One brief sequence where a naked Veronica sat on top of a naked Marco in bed attracted considerable attention as to what level of sexual activity this constituted. The Guidelines state, in relation to an R classification that *sexual activity may be realistically simulated*, whereas for MA *sexual activity may be implied* and for M *may be discreetly implied*. Many, particularly in the younger group, thought that this image was clearly intended to show or be understood as a couple having sexual intercourse. A couple of imaginative viewers were adamant that they glimpsed the hero's penis and testicles. *This is the problem with this film. We can argue artistic merit ... and then we look at the Guidelines. For MA it says 'sexual activity may be implied or suggested'. Part of that seemed pretty close to actual sex ... it certainly wasn't debasing or abusive ... I wouldn't want to go to an R, it just depends on how you interpret the sex.*

### 4.3.2 Sexual References

Much of the discussion on *Dangerous Beauty* centred on the message conveyed about the adult theme of prostitution rather than on the bedroom scenes. Some Panellists were inclined to allocate a higher classification on the basis that the film appeared to condone prostitution, regardless of whether the heroine was an educated and talented courtesan. One controversial scene depicted the heroine's mother pointing to a naked male in demonstrating how to please a man. One Panellist protested that *the mother basically told her what to do with the guy's penis ... that's not discreet*. Another controversial scene featured Veronica in bed with the King of France who holds a knife at her throat. The Panel seemed unconcerned about Veronica satisfying her client's rumoured sexual perversion but were concerned by the threat of the knife.

*Tomorrow Never Dies* was the only other film viewed where sexual references appeared in the Board's classification. The Board's report noted the sexual innuendo in Bond's verbal exchanges with Money Penny, but this was scarcely mentioned by the Panel. Bond in bed with a Danish linguist was of similar insignificance to the

Panel. *The sheets were always covering but a little less these days.*

A tentative sexual encounter between two teenagers in the *Winter Guest* also drew little comment.

### 4.4 Adult Themes

The concept of adult themes encompasses such a broad array of issues that it is not surprising that the Panels exhibited a correspondingly wide range of responses to the relevant topics. Individual responses often depended on the salience of the subject matter to the respondent's personal experience. Specific subjects made a great impact on those who had had direct experience with, for example, drugs, divorce, death, racism, illness and so on.

The Panels fully appreciated that the adult themes often formed the dramatic basis of film drama. When asked about possible modification of adult themes to alter the classification of specific films, Panellists would tend to resist such modification on the grounds that the treatment of adult themes was the crux of the film.

Throughout the sessions, the different Panels tended to indicate that younger people's understanding of adult themes was likely to be limited; a judgement which entailed some seemingly contradictory attitudes. Young people were generally said to be resilient in terms of dealing with strong material, especially in terms of violence and language, but the Panels were also inclined to assume that the more mature adult themes would go over the heads of a young audience.

The Brisbane Panel was convinced that the film *Mrs Dalloway* would be too complex for young people to grasp (and too boring for them to watch). The fact of it being a period film was said to further remove it from their experience and interest. *If a younger person saw it they wouldn't get half of it, the period, the themes, looking back on younger years.* A similar argument was advanced in Wagga about the period film *Dangerous Beauty*. The Panel judged that the

level of classification was less important because it was not a film which would be either comprehensible or appealing to young people.

Some Panellists countered the above arguments by suggesting that children absorbed far more than we might expect. However the reference here was often to visual material which was thought to have an impact whether or not the meaning was understood. The films that were thought to be more appealing to young people were those which virtually lacked adult themes such as *A Life Less Ordinary* and *Tomorrow Never Dies*.

#### 4.4.1 The Moral Message

Acceptance of adult themes was closely connected to context and narrative. Discussion of adult themes among the Panellists often centred upon the intention of the theme and the message it conveyed to young people about the reality or nature of life. The Panellists constantly explored whether a theme such as drug abuse, warfare, corruption, adultery etc was being promoted or glorified. The Panels did not recoil from bleak topics nor insist upon happy endings but they objected to difficult themes that were not resolved and to completely negative resolutions.

In keeping with the Board's commentary on several occasions, the Panels were particularly aware of the heightened effect of accumulated references to adult themes. In the case of *187*, the Sydney Panel was inclined towards an R rating because of the overall bleak and negative picture of society conveyed through the crimes, corruption, drug use and suicides.

*It was a very powerful movie; a lot of social and racial issues were in there. It wasn't just about the school - it was also what was happening outside ...*

*I would rather not anyone see it quite frankly ... The teacher got attacked, there was no support system for him. In the end, the only solution was for him to die. To me it's not a good message.*

The Wagga Panel responded strongly to the adult themes in *Primary Colors*. *They were getting as*

*many things in as they could; make her a lesbian, make him gay, make him a drug user. The whole movie was themes. The younger group in particular mentioned the film's 'moral judgements' as the key element in their classification decisions. The dispensability of human beings, even people's emotions were expendable - so I hurt my wife but that's OK, so I look someone in the eye and lie but that's OK ... then I can fire this one, then that one ... .*

Since adult themes deal by their nature with the more controversial elements of human life, Panellists observed that this was an area where young people could either learn well from films or be dangerously misguided. As one of the older Brisbane Panellists said about *The Winter Guest*: *It almost could be used as instructions on life ... it's either pessimism or optimism; the optimists would say everything's going to be alright.* Another of the Brisbane participants commented similarly about the educational value of *Mrs Dalloway*. *I thought the mental disturbance was very clear ... but to me that's part of life so I wouldn't consider my children not seeing it ... the portrayal was so accurate of someone who was shell-shocked.*

#### 4.4.2 Suicide

The theme of suicide prompted a lot of discussion since it arose as a sub theme in four of the films screened for the Panels. Although suicide was of varying significance in each of the films, it offered an opportunity to compare the Panels' responses to the same theme. The greatest concern about depictions of suicide arose from the younger members of the Brisbane Panel who acknowledged that they were influenced by the recent suicide of rock star Michael Hutchence. It was clear that single contemporary events could have a major influence on the classification decisions of Panellists. However, it is also true that youth suicide is a growing social concern that is becoming more widely discussed and one of obvious immediate relevance to young people.

In reference to *Mrs Dalloway*, the Brisbane Panel agreed that the impact of the suicide of the shell-shocked ex-soldier was reduced by the death being off-screen, the character being mentally

disturbed and the film being historical. Nevertheless the younger group were particularly concerned by the pervasiveness of the suicide theme and were convinced that the lead character was also going to commit suicide. *You don't want children to see that scene of him preparing to jump; with teenage children, they seem to focus on those things. You could distance yourself from a lot of it but suicide is a major theme now.* The older Panellists were comparatively unconcerned about the suicide theme.

Attitudinal differences were evident again in Brisbane in relation to *The Winter Guest*. One of the final scenes features one boy hesitantly following another disappearing in the mist on a frozen sea. Everyone found the meaning ambiguous but the younger group was more inclined to fear that the first boy was bent on self destruction, given earlier speeches about their bleak family life and prospects etc. The older group had mixed views on the likelihood that the boys' actions implied suicidal intentions.

The Sydney Panel's concern about the final suicide scene in *187* was based on the perceived potential for a young person to copy the act. An earlier scene featured the lead character responding to the 'Russian roulette' sequence in *The Deer Hunter*, which he re-enacts. The Panel's concerns centred on the potential 'copy-cat' effect, whereas the Board's report focussed more on the content, thus the impact of the scene itself.

The suicide in *Primary Colors* was described as mild in impact by most of the Wagga Panel. There was much sympathy for the victim's character and predicament. A few of the female Panellists in both the younger and older groups mentioned the possibly dangerous message to young viewers and suggested that even the brief shot of the dead woman was unnecessary.

## 5.0 INTERPRETATION BY THE PANELS OF THE GUIDELINES

### 5.1 G / PG Classifications

The Panels seemed to rely heavily on the notion of parental guidance as a mechanism for mediating much film material for young people. There was a sense that a parental presence could make most material acceptable viewing for most age groups. Panels did not appear to have difficulty understanding the meaning of the Guidelines at the lower levels. However there was evidence of distinct interpretations depending on how people judged the maturity of children. (It should be noted that Panellists frequently made reference to 'children' and/or 'young people' without necessarily having a particular age group in mind, unless pressed to nominate or specify ages.)

There was a tendency for the Panels to express caution about the G classification because seemingly harmless films were still felt to be open to misinterpretation by young people. Ideally, it was felt that an adult should always be on hand to offer comment to a child on any film. Some respondents, especially on the Wagga Panel, believed that children would rarely be left to watch a film on their own. *I wouldn't send any five or six year old to a movie on their own just because there is a big 'G' up there.*

Two of the selected films were clearly made for a younger audience, *Fairytale - A True Story* and the animated feature *Anastasia*. Although the Panels did not view any films of a G classification, *Anastasia* was a useful case for exploring the borderline between G and PG. The Panel saw a PG version of *Anastasia* which was to be slightly modified in order to be released as G with consumer advice. As it was, the Wagga Panel was virtually equally divided between G and PG, with one extra Panellist favouring G.

The Wagga Panellists who were unsure about which classification to select argued that it was 'safer to go higher'. *If you're not sure which way to go, it's better to go up to PG, rather than have*

*little children really frightened.* The Panel stressed that it was particularly difficult to generalise to all children of a particular age group when judging the degree of impact of some scenes. *The younger kids could be a little traumatised by it, but when classifying we can't satisfy everyone.*

Several of those who nominated PG for *Anastasia* referred directly to the Guidelines. *I thought the Guidelines on violence were a fairly good description of the film. There was mild horror - it was supernatural basically.* Panellists who selected G were influenced by the happy ending and the balance between good and evil. They also made reference to other G rated films which they thought were stronger than *Anastasia*, such as *Aladdin* and *101 Dalmatians*.

The Sydney Panel's classification of *Fairytale* revealed a similar pattern to that found in Wagga. The Panel, in both younger and older groups, was about equally divided between G and PG on the basis of what children would make of the adult themes. The greatest discrepancies around the PG rating arose in the Sydney Panel's classification of *Mrs Dalloway*. The older group classified lower than both the Board and the younger group. This was because they were less sensitive to the adult theme of suicide and moreover they were adamant that the film would not draw a young audience. *I don't think it should be restricted to mature audiences. I just feel it's not a movie for children but I don't think there's anything wrong with children seeing it.*

### 5.2 M / MA Classifications

While the Panels were aware of the distinction between M and MA, it was seen as a fairly fine line between the two. Respondents often used films they had seen as a benchmark for judging the classification, making comparisons with other films which they believed to have similar classifiable elements to the one selected for the research screenings. Sometimes these comparisons were misconceived, for instance when their recollected film preceded the introduction of the MA classification (but which would most likely have received an MA today).

In relation to MA, the Panels still tended to focus on a notion of parental intervention than on the recommendation of unsuitability for an audience under 15 years. The Guidelines' recommendation at M/MA seemed to equate with the lower PG level in the general belief, as mentioned earlier, that the majority of films were acceptable as long as an adult accompanied a young viewer. The legal restriction accompanying the MA level was often interpreted as having less stringency than intended in the Guidelines. Rather than being seen as the 'top' (ie strongest segment) of the M classification, MA was sometimes discussed as though it sat closer to PG. In other words, the Panels did not appear to absorb fully the serious intention of MA.

An example of Panellists disregarding the intention of the M and MA classification arose in relation to the Bond film. While the majority of the Panel agreed with the Board that *Tomorrow Never Dies* should be M, four of the older male Panellists rated it MA. Yet, these fathers expressed willingness (and even intention) for their under-12 year old children to see the film. Despite their classification decisions, the group as a whole did not take seriously the warning about the potential intrinsic unsuitability of the material. *I'd take my eight year old son to see it but I know he's not the kind of person to do karate kicks, but he'll enjoy the escapism and the action ... but I'm aware that other kids do try to emulate that in the playground.*

There was generally a good understanding of the Guidelines at the middle levels, although there was sometimes difficulty in discerning the degree of difference between the two. Several Panellists did not grasp the fact that M entailed an age *recommendation*, rather than a *restriction* and expressed surprise that pre-teenagers could gain access. There was an occasional call for a category that prevented entry of under fifteen year olds, regardless of an adult escort.

### 5.3 R / Refused Classification

The Panels did not deal much with the highest end of the classification scale because only one

of the films was an R classified film. The Sydney Panel largely agreed with the Board's classification of 187 on the basis of the intensity of the adult themes and the cumulative effect of the violence. However, a significant proportion considered it an MA rated film because there was no individual scene of extreme violence. The final suicide scene did not elicit enormous attention because the deaths were off-screen.

Two of the oldest female Panellists maintained that 187 should be refused classification. Their decision seemed to relate partly to a scene where the lead character demonstrates to his class how to administer a morphine derivative into a sugar cube in a precise quantity to effect a coma, interpreted as detailed instruction in the use of a prescribed drug. However, their ultimate decision, that the film should be refused classification was largely the result of a more general rejection of the films overall bleak, violence-ridden nature.

Two of the younger male Wagga Panellists stood out by selecting an R classification for *Dangerous Beauty*. They interpreted the sexual activity between the courtesan and her lover to be 'realistically simulated' even though there was little observable detail in these scenes. The same two Panellists thought that the training of the daughter by the mother in sexual matters - 'just enough to make him want more' - constituted a detailed verbal reference, as described in the Guidelines on sex under R.

## **6.0 FURTHER COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE BOARD AND THE PANELS**

Since the objectives of the research required a thorough comparison between the responses of the Board and those of the Panels, such comparisons have been made regularly in the body of the report. It should be noted that the research revealed a high level of agreement between the Board and the Panel. To describe all the specific areas where the Panels supported and reiterated the Board's analyses would fill the report with observations which paraphrased the various Board reports. The focus in reporting instead has been on the points of difference which have most to reveal about the community's attitudes. This emphasis on the diversions between Board and Panels should not detract from the overall fact of similarity between the two perspectives.

Prior to the research, the respondents did not have a great awareness of the OFLC nor of the Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Videotapes. During the research the Panellists often expressed support for the role of the OFLC and acknowledged the need for the Guidelines.

Panellists appeared to come to the view that classification could be a subjective and difficult task which did not accommodate 'hard and fast' rules. (Some Panellists gave two classifications to a film, accompanied by an explanation of their indecisions. Only when pressed did they decide a single classification.) The Panels exhibited a great tolerance for the variety of opinions expressed and appeared to thoroughly enjoy the research task. OFLC observers commented that the Panels' deliberations sounded very like the Board's dialogue.

### **6.1 Panel Training**

The methodology for establishing and conducting the Community Assessment Panel worked effectively. It appeared to reflect the intent of the Panels which was to take a group of ordinary members of the community, train or brief them on

the classification system and then have them apply the classification system to the films they viewed. Panellists' capacity to understand and to apply the Classification Guidelines was an unknown at the outset. In the event, participants undertook the task with diligence and appeared to orientate themselves fairly well to the principles of the Guidelines, even though they had started with only a consumer or lay person's knowledge of the classification system.

The Panellists were not necessarily regular film viewers and their training was brief; Board members actually train for approximately six weeks before formally classifying films. (One of the older men in Wagga admitted that prior to the film viewings, he had never discussed a film in his life.) Despite the great difference in classifying experience between the Panels and the Board, their insights on the films were often remarkably similar.

This training process, coupled with the in-depth discussion about levels of violence, sex, language etc appeared to sensitise the viewers to these issues in a way that they may not have been in the course of their usual film/video viewing. For example, a number of Panellists indicated that they may have been less conscious of the classifiable elements in some of the films they viewed had it not been for the discussion that followed. This phenomenon of being alerted to the classification elements, however, is likely to be quite similar to the experience of the Board in its deliberations.

### **6.2 Comparison with Other Films**

While the Board draws on extensive viewing experience, it is obliged to classify a film on its own merits albeit within consistently applied Guidelines. The Panels sometimes made comparisons between the film being viewed and recollections of other film ratings. Such comparisons could be problematic because of the reliance on memory which was open to error in terms of the level of classifiable elements and even the classification itself. Moreover an earlier rating may have been an accurate reflection of the

time but changes in community attitudes could have resulted in a different decision today.

Comparisons were also made quite frequently between films and television.

In Brisbane, the older Panellists made comparisons between *The Winter Guest* and *Mrs Dalloway*, defining the latter as less controversial and deserving a lower rating. It was clear that the Panel used other films as benchmarks; in classifying *Dangerous Beauty* as MA, one young Wagga woman claimed to be influenced by the sex in *The Piano* and seemed to be registering a complaint that it had been rated only M.

### 6.3 Third Person Effect

In assessing the impact of a film, the Panels were inclined to attempt to judge the anticipated response of their own children or children known to them. It was also very common for Panellists to expect a mature understanding from their own child and to assume a potentially detrimental effect on children 'out there' who were felt to be more vulnerable.

As mentioned in relation to adult themes, there appeared to be an overall attitude that children lacked an interest in adult themes and/or failed to understand much material judged to be unsuitable for minors. It was not a case of adults questioning the intelligence of children for there were many positive remarks about the perception of young people and particularly their ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality.

### 6.4 Young Audience Appeal

A caveat that was frequently added to the Panels' classifications was the issue of interest or taste and whether a film was likely to appeal to a young audience. Typical observations were that classifications need not be so stringent for films with limited appeal to children. This argument was sometimes used to justify a lower classification. The Panels' scepticism about how much children comprehended of adult films appeared to be related to the young people's likely level of

interest. If a young audience was not expected to be engaged by the film, it was assumed the content would have less effect (or that they would not even be viewing it).

Where the subject matter was directly relevant to young people, many argued for classifications open to a young audience in the belief that there was often much to learn from a film dealing with youth issues. In contrast, others stressed that particular diligence was needed in classifying films which contained themes relevant to young people, as such material was most likely to have an impact on them.

### 6.5 'Copy-cat' Effect

The issue of a direct link between real life behaviour and that witnessed on the screen is extremely controversial and has been endlessly debated by researchers, especially in relation to violence. A vast amount of the Panellists' objections to certain material was based not on their personal standards but on a fear that impressionable young people would be prone to imitate undesirable behaviour. The concerns about the copy-cat effect were particularly raised in relation to violence but encompassed coarse language, sexual activity and a whole array of dubious behaviour.

## 7.0 SYDNEY COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PANEL

### 7.1 Sydney Panel Procedure

The Sydney Community Assessment Panel was the first Panel conducted and took place 17 to 19 October 1997, over a Friday night, Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon. Viewing and discussion took place at the Office of Film and Literature Classifications office in downtown Sydney. The methodology used was as described earlier in Section 2 of the report.

The films viewed by the Sydney Panel were:

- n *Fairytale - A True Story* - period film featuring fairies and fantasy.
- n *A Life Less Ordinary* - contemporary romance and black comedy.
- n *One Eight Seven* - contemporary grim drama set in a tough American school.

As noted elsewhere, the consultants were not informed about the classification the films received from the Board to avoid any conscious or unconscious influence by the consultants on the decision-making of the Panel. The only exception was in relation to the last film viewed in the Sydney Panel which received an R Classification. The consultants were informed of this so that the three under 18 year-old Panellists could be directed not to attend the third session.

### 7.2 Sydney Panel Composition

Recruitment of Panel members in Sydney was sub-contracted to J & S Research, an independent company specialising in such recruitment. J & S Research was established as a recruitment company fifteen years ago and has been a member of the Market Research Quality Assurance Scheme since its inception six years ago. Its work is independently audited on a yearly basis. The company holds a data base of approximately 30,000 people, developed by referrals, leaflet drops and advertising.

The table over page summarises the key characteristics of the 20 Panel members actually participating in the Sydney Panel.

Appendix C sets out the results of the questionnaire which sought further information on the background of Panellists, their film viewing habits and preferences, knowledge of classification categories etc.



### 7.3 SYDNEY PANEL'S RESPONSES TO FAIRYTALE - A TRUE STORY

The Board's synopsis of the film is as follows:

*Based on actual events, two young girls, Frances and Elsie caused a storm of controversy when they produced allegedly real photographs of fairies living in their garden.*

The Board Classified the film PG and its Consumer Advice was 'adult themes'.

#### 7.3.1 General Response

The Panel, both the younger and the older focus groups, responded enthusiastically to the film - generally describing it as 'heart warming', 'family entertainment', etc. The initial comments from both groups which are set out below indicate that issues related to classification were not uppermost in the Panel members' early responses. A few remarks were made about an occasionally dark or foreboding atmosphere but most feedback concerned the enchantment, high quality and entertaining fantasy. The themes were consistently described in terms of 'make-believe' and 'childhood magic'.

The following quotes are from the younger focus group:

*I thought it was great. It worked on a number of levels for the different age groups watching it. It had developed characters and explored important issues of fantasy and protection of that faculty. Not saccharine given backdrop against World War I which was what made it worth watching.*

*I enjoyed the warm family quality of this delightful film. It displayed a firm belief in fairies which created much joy within the audience.*

*I liked it a lot. Even though the scenes were a little dark it made the movie seem mystical.*

*I thoroughly enjoyed it. It was a real 'little girl's' movie. I felt the story was great - a bit of 'escapism' to childhood.*

The following quotes are from the older focus group:

*Beautifully filmed, great music but I found it rather disjointed. A dark film with a sense of foreboding with a strong implication of violence when discussing fairies.*

*Excellent; the film held my interest, I found it very enjoyable, I love the way my children can fantasise, there was even some suspense.*

*Simplistic, producing a reality of belief yet questioning our logic. Allowing for hidden attitudes to life to be revised through both adult's and children's eyes. A refreshing experience.*

*A lovely film for young children and young at heart which makes you relive your childhood.*

#### 7.3.2 Violence

There was general agreement that violence was not a central element of this film. However some participants pointed to an atmosphere of foreboding that seemed occasionally threatening.

One of the older women on the Panel was unique in her view that this film was not intended as family entertainment. *I found the movie quite dark; I didn't think of it as a family movie at all, I thought it was mainly catering for an older group of people looking back on their childhood ... It was 'dark' in mood.*

Another mature aged mother found that the music had contributed a sense of threat. *The music at times was quite disturbing ... as if something awful was going to happen but it didn't ... it was sort of Alfred Hitchcock music ... because of the music I anticipated that something terrible was going to happen.*

The opening scene featuring a stunt by Houdini was, at first, mistaken by some to be depicting a public execution. A few mentions were made of the theme of stalking. The fairies themselves were being stalked and were depicted as endangered and the aggressive reporter was stalking the heroines for a story. While some found the reporter a frightening character, most felt he was just a typical journalist. In any case a chase by the

stream seemed to be the only scene that the audience thought might trouble younger viewers.

*There was a violent element when you just saw the feet ... they were walking across the river ... it was a fearful feeling.*

*When the reporter sneaked upon the little girl ... he was violent (shaking the girl) but he didn't go to the extent of extreme violence.*

One of the men observed that shaking children was quite common practice, especially in that era. *That's what he (the reporter) was doing, and I can relate to that: To me it was perfectly normal.*

### 7.3.3 Adult Themes

In general the group agreed with the Board's comments about the existence of adult themes, although the Panel tended to view the themes as more benign and as having less impact than sometimes suggested by the Board.

#### **Death**

Neither of the focus groups placed great importance on the context of World War I nor on the issue of death in the film. The older participants were more likely to raise these subjects in discussion even though they were largely unconcerned by their treatment in the film.

*Death was central to the storyline and I thought that it was handled quite well.*

*General positive message. Themes such as death were dealt within a discreet manner and were very close to the centre of the plot.*

The positive reaction of the girl Frances to the disfigured soldier she meets on the train was well received by the audience.

*The element of accepting people as they are which is a quality of children.*

#### **Grieving families**

The theme of Frances' missing father was not considered problematic by the focus groups. It was seen that these days families are split up in many ways and it was felt that children would not be distressed by the fatherless girl in the story.

The theme of Elsie's family mourning the dead child Joseph was considered to be well handled in

the film. The younger focus group thought it was an overstatement for the Board to describe Polly as an 'emotionally traumatised mother'. They maintained that the character was dealing appropriately with her loss and was therefore a positive role model.

#### **Supernatural and the after-life**

A minority of the participants questioned whether the whole topic of belief in fairies could inspire young children with false expectations and inappropriate fantasies, eg *Possibly some children getting scared and having strange dreams re the supernatural.*

However the Panel generally felt the topic would be fascinating and harmless for a very young audience. The ghostly apparition of the dead Joseph and the special effect of him gliding through the journalist was judged to be clever and not at all frightening.

### 7.3.4 Classification Debate

Both focus groups nominated very young ages as an acceptable audience for *Fairytale*. Three people (two younger and one older) thought it would be fine for any age. A further three respondents (again two younger and one older) effectively agreed with 'any age' by suggesting an age as young as two years. The oldest age group mentioned was eight years. Others in the groups suggested ages between two and eight years.

*I just thought this was a lovely movie especially for young girls and boys.*

*I feel it is a movie all ages could understand.*

*A magic little film that kids would really love and you could revert back to your childhood so parents could get something out of it too.*

*There was no sex, violence or coarse language and the war theme seemed to be in context.*

*Absolute lack of violence, sex, etc. Gentle family type story.*

Others made reference to some elements they thought might trouble young children.

*When I take my grandchildren to see things (movies) you think they're (some scenes)*

*horrible but the kids are just so conditioned to it ... with this movie ... I feel they'd just take it in their stride.*

*The injured man at the beginning, the general death within the family, positive gambling.*

*There wasn't any element of threat with this movie except just for the dark scenes sometimes.*

**Justification of PG**

*The tone of the opening, the setting against WWI with elements of serious illness (an adult theme), death, etc rule out G classification.*

*I really feel it needs parental guidance for children, and I put the age group as seven onwards because I feel that before that I don't think children would understand enough about the film. Children that age don't know a lot about those times or even really a lot about fairies ... and I think probably because of what I thought was a hanging scene at the beginning, the death element and the music I really feel you need some sort of parental guidance.*

*I certainly wouldn't take my youngest grandchild (three years old); I don't think it's something I'd like him to see. Five (years) onwards because of the mild horror themes such as the fellow with the eye missing and the supernatural that the kids may not be able to grasp.*

*... given the Houdini, when they were hanging in the beginning, when he was underwater - my kids would have freaked out at that.*

*The one thing that makes me think that it could be PG or even higher was the reporter and his violent acts.*

**Justification of G**

*G family film, dreams, imagination, love, contrasting to cynicism.*

*There weren't any strong elements which would rate a classification other than G.*

*It was a real family show. I agree that some of the parts perhaps were scary, but overall I'd give it a G.*

*There wasn't anything too scary other than the fellow with the wound on his face. I don't think there was anything in there that would really upset the children.*

*The only thing that really could have been a problem was the theme of death but that was dealt with from a childhood perspective in a way that kids would understand; it wasn't a final thing ... there was a positive, happy ending.*

*It's a family film ... with dreams, imagination, love, a contrast from cynicism ... Young children would be accompanied by an adult and any questions could be explained to them.*

**7.3.5 Panel Classification**

Shown below are the classification decisions of the Panel. Immediately after viewing *Fairytale*, a slight majority of individuals gave it a G classification. Then, after discussion and debating the elements of the film, a number of the Panel changed their views, leaving a slight majority in favour of a PG classification (that given by the Board). Thus the discussion had the effect of leading the Panel to place a higher classification on the film. It should be remembered that both Classifications were recorded before the Board's decision was revealed to the Panel.

	Pre-Discussion	Post-Discussion
G	12	9
PG	8	11
M	-	-
MA	-	-
R	-	-
Refused classification	-	-

### 7.4 SYDNEY PANEL'S RESPONSES TO A LIFE LESS ORDINARY

The Board's synopsis of the film read as follows:

*Robert, an unemployed cleaner, accidentally kidnaps his former boss's daughter Celine. Seeking independence from her father, Celine goes along with the plan and helps Robert stage the kidnapping. Her father employs two people from a collection agency to retrieve his daughter, not knowing that they are angels sent to Earth to help the pair fall in love. Aided and abetted by the angels Robert and Celine fall in love and elude Celine's father.*

The Board classified the film M and the Consumer Advice was 'medium level violence, medium level coarse language'.

#### 7.4.1 General Response

The Panel stated, on the whole, that they very much enjoyed the film. The majority of responses from both focus groups referred to the comedy and the romance. They commented on the fast action, light hearted tone and happy ending.

*It's like a fairy tale, a Cinderella story.*

*I thought it was very funny, pleasantly tongue in cheek, stylised violence, took the piss out of the genre generally. Light 'feel good' movie with intelligence.*

*A really good mix of humour and drama and happy ending.*

*For me it was a film that you could just go and enjoy and you don't have to have deep and meaningful conversations about it.*

A common theme raised by the focus groups suggested that while the film was generally appreciated, it covered such a mixture of styles that an audience could find it hard to 'read' and respond to. Two males, one in the younger group and one in the older group were particularly critical of the constant 'change of tone' and of 'the jumping from mood to mood'. Others in the groups tended to agree with this observation.

*It was almost like a Naked Gun movie, you know how they take snippets out of everything?*

*... a bit of a mixture of all different types of movies I've seen ... there were so many different themes.*

#### 7.4.2 Comedy and Violence

Numerous comments by the Panel related to the issue of mixing comedy with violence and the impact of this juxtaposition. There was a dichotomy of views whereby some of the Panel maintained that the comedy diffused the impact of the violence (which appeared to be the view of the Board). However there was a contrary interpretation which found that the combination of humour and violence represented a problem. The younger group pointed to extreme examples in the Tarantino cult films. Although the instances were far milder in *A Life Less Ordinary*, it was evident to the Panel that the violent episodes were very quickly followed by comedy and some people found this disturbing and inappropriate.

*A fun movie but some of the violent scenes were unnecessary.*

*Snippets of humour were funny but thrown in with violence.*

*If it's a comedy, which it basically was, then I don't think you need that shot of the blood really do you? It wasn't a funny scene; it was just a shock scene.*

*In a serious movie it would probably have had less impact because you're expecting it, whereas in a comedy you're not expecting it; it's out of character to a certain degree.*

*That would upset me if it was a serious movie - it just seems that it was on my mind that this was all horseplay, nothing was serious.*

*I would have thought that in a comedy you would take it slightly less seriously.*

*The violence is not humorous, but you know it's not going to go too far in this context (a comedy).*

*I thought the shaking scene in yesterday's movie (Fairytale) disturbed me more (than the*

bank scene) because it was a more serious movie.

*I thought it was a farce, a real send up of the macho scene. I didn't like it ... I found it uncoordinated ... The violence and bad language, I don't like language.*

### 7.4.3 Violent Scenes

Numerous Panel members disagreed with the Board's verdict that 'generally depictions of violence do not contain a lot of detail and are not prolonged'. While the majority of comments were not overly critical of the style of violence, there was nevertheless thought to be a considerable number of violent scenes. Participants considered the dentist operation scene to be very detailed and the shots of the 'dead' angels at the end to be both detailed and prolonged due to the frequent repetition of close-ups.

*They seem to have to go right into detail and it has to be graphically shown. What's happened to people's imagination or stirring peoples imagination? It's got to be laid out, shown to you.*

*To me, the whole movie was full of crime and violence; it started off with shooting and the kidnapping.*

*What are they (children) going to think about an angel holding a gun and being killed? He's going to dig his own grave, he's going to be executed, then eight minutes down the track, she's holding a gun at the young girl's head. In the space of eight minutes there were some very serious scenes weren't there?*

#### **The bank scene**

The majority of the Panel found the bank holdup scene particularly disturbing, especially as it involved threatening a young female. It was generally not seen as comedy, although some derived satisfaction from the tables being turned on the 'hero'. This scene elicited more controversy than any other.

*At that point you didn't really know where the film was going to go, whether (it would become) a Bonnie and Clyde situation ... is this going to be gruesome or funny?*

*I gave it an R because I felt that the bank scene ... sank the film, it was supposed to be humorous but it wasn't. It was frightening especially when a child is involved with a gun at its head. I would make it 18 plus. There was a lot of violence, shooting ... reference to firearms consistently in use.*

*I think that scene would have worked equally as well if they didn't put the gun to the little girl's head. If you took it out the scene would still be funny.*

*I think the age of that girl was probably the age that most kids would go to see this movie and they could relate more to it.*

*That scene (the bank scene) made the film MA just because of that (it) would bring back a lot of bad memories to people in our society who have been in that experience.*

*Maybe they could have put the gun at the cashier's head - it might have had less impact than a young girl's (head).*

*If it had gone that step further and she had been shot (in the head in the bank scene) then I would have had a totally different feeling.*

*They could have cut it (the bank scene) completely out, and maybe had a hostage scene instead. I think that would have moved it down from R. I think a lot of violence in society have been copies of movies or videos ... it gives them the idea.*

#### **The angels and violence**

The Panel generally accepted the incompetent angels as contributing to the comedy and were less bothered by their misadventures. However many were critical of the scenes late in the film which showed several close-ups of the angels after they had been shot.

One of the older males queried whether there was much difference between the episodes of the indefatigable angels bouncing back and watching *Road Runner* cartoons. Others disagreed that the live action with humans could be compared to the unreality of cartoons.

*The bank scene was very emotional, and also when the angel was on the truck that smashed on the rocks ... that was pretty traumatic.*

*But that was diluted when you saw her come back with only a broken arm. That was funny.*

*Just the ordinary shooting I was alright with until I saw the close-ups ... When she was on the front of the truck and she hit the rocks - I could live with that because she was an angel and then straight away she came back with just a broken arm, so that sort of negated that.*

*I didn't particularly like the close-ups after the two angels got shot - it was a bit gory.*

*When they got shot in the head ... that was maybe a bit out of character for the movie.*

*You knew that whatever happened they'd come crawling back again.*

### **Knives and cutting**

There was considerable debate about the impact of violence which featured knives compared with the use of guns. The older group, in particular, was generally far more disturbed by knives and any depiction of cutting into flesh. While the younger group made less of this distinction, they nevertheless commented on the considerable impact of the scene where the heroine cuts herself with a razor blade. There were divided opinions as to what extent this cutting had actually been shown on film. The Panel was surprised that the Board had not commented on this scene under their 'stronger depictions of violence' section.

*What about that scene when she razored her arm to get some blood? That horrified me, I don't think that would be good for young children to see.*

*The scalpel scene at the dentist's surgery.*

*And when the cut sliced ... and the blood ... I couldn't stand that.*

*Teenagers would have seen so many scenes with guns. I would have more of a problem with knife-related violence than gun-related violence because guns are so detached. 'Til they go off they don't do anything, whereas*

*knives I find more threatening. I have much more of a problem with scalpels than I did with the bank scene.*

*I try to avoid gory movies ... although it seems that I don't succeed very often, when with friends. I had some problems with Reservoir Dogs, slicing the guy's ear off. ... Knives are great (for gore)! I really would make a distinction between being shot and being cut.*

*That's probably the way we've been brought up (society being used to guns), remember the Westerns, they always shot people ....*

*I agree with him about the knives, because if you have a knife you've got to be close to that person, and they've got to have a reaction.*

*That's right, and you've got to feel then, and I just hate anything (like that) ... a gun can be something (used) from 100 metres away.*

*A little man can become a big man with one of those things (knives) .*

*No-one's arguing that we want to be shot , it's just the impact of it (gun violence) is different.*

*I mean you look at a young kid these days and you think about how many times have they seen someone get shot, there's going to be hundreds (of times).*

### **7.4.4 Sex**

Only one member of the focus groups made an unprompted reference to depictions of sex in the film (ie the couch scene). When asked about the treatment of sex, there was some discussion of the couch scene between the heroine and her former lover. The majority in both of the focus groups agreed that the sexual content was mild and inoffensive. The older focus group made it clear that they were not comfortable watching sex scenes in general. They were particularly embarrassed to be viewing depictions of sex in the company of their children and stressed that their children (and grandchildren) felt the same.

*When she was on the couch with her dentist ... there were sexual connotations which weren't very nice...*

*I was OK with it, but some people might find it a little degrading. She degraded herself to get the operation done.*

*I don't mind seeing a couple of people in bed but I don't want to see ... not much left to the imagination.*

*I don't like anything sexual at all. I find that if I'm with others I feel very uncomfortable if it's over the top sex. I'm very prudish that way I suppose.*

*I think the schools are giving good sexual education. It's all helping dispel the myths ... a love scene is more natural than a violent scene ... if a kid sees a love scene maybe they'll think 'that could be me one day', whereas with a violent scene they'll be saying 'I hope I never get in that position, where I'm threatened.'*

*My kids have often said, 'you shouldn't be watching this mum!'*

*My little brother who's eight would probably turn up his nose and go 'yuck'. My little sister is ten and she knows where babies come from.*

### 7.4.5 Language

The language used in the film was scarcely raised as an issue. Most of the Panel agreed that the swearing was not excessive and was in context with the action. There was agreement with the Board's view that the one use of the expletive 'motherfucker' was not offensive due to the comedy of the particular scene.

*They introduced the word 'shit' into the movie; I was guided a bit by that.*

*I thought I heard 'shit', but I didn't pick up the other word (ie fuck). Had I heard it, I'd have put it up (a classification).*

*The reason I put it at PG was because I only heard the word 'shit'.*

### 7.4.6 Classification Debate

In nominating a suitable age for viewing *A Life Less Ordinary*, the majority said fifteen years. However two in the younger focus group

suggested twelve and thirteen respectively. Interestingly the older focus group nominated even younger ages with one saying eight years and another saying ten years while two others in the same group put down eighteen years as appropriate.

*I gave it an M because I thought that the violence was over the top ... an eight year old would see that it is ... not real. And looking at it, the violence, just from a comedy point of view. And I didn't think there was much sexual innuendo and the language was only very slight. (Treatment of) divorce and the relationships between people was on the good side.*

*I gave it an M because they were using that magic word a few times in the picture, and (there was) frequent use of guns in scenes. I felt the bank scene was light hearted in so far as ... she switched the focus and turned the gun on him. You wouldn't think that the little girl's life was in danger because the scene switched so quickly.*

*I thought the impact of the violence might have a strong influence on people younger than 18. I don't think a lot of children under 18 would be able to comprehend the film.*

*I would have given it a PG but for the level of the violence, the scalpel and razor blade scene and the blood. Other than that, I thought the violence was pretty much in the context of the movie.*

*Borderline M/MA as there were close-ups of the shootings etcetera which would make it MA but the comedy diluted it to some extent.*

### 7.4.7 Classification Decision

Initial classification of this film spanned the categories from PG to R. Prior to the focus group discussion, approximately equal numbers awarded the film an M and MA. Following the discussion, a majority of participants settled on the M classification which was in keeping with the Board's decision (remembering that the groups were not aware of this until after their votes.)

	Pre-Discussion	Post-Discussion
G	-	-
PG	1	-
M	7	12
M/MA	2	-
MA	8	8
R	2	-
Refused classification	-	-

*I found it left me feeling really tense and anxious because I live in the inner city and there are quite a few gangs in Marrickville and I can just see that happening so easily. I know it's a real sort of situation, it's not just a fantasy. It's getting right into the blackest side of kids you can probably see and I find that really disturbing.*

*Very violent; I don't enjoy that sort of movie. Strong language. Everyone had disrespect and no care for authority. Unfortunately I can see that happening in our schools very easily here today ... It's a very strong film.*

**7.5 SYDNEY PANEL'S REPONSES TO ONE EIGHT SEVEN**

The Board's synopsis read as follows:

*'187' is the NY Police Code for homicide and the title draws upon the cruel irony of reducing such a vile deed to a mere number. The setting of the film is a high school in a three way contest with Garfield the Teacher v Caesar the Student v 'The System'. Garfield is the victim of a previous school attack and he is attempting to return to his vocation however he faces the unrelenting taunts of a class out of his control. Garfield describes himself as 'God's lonely man' and sees himself as just and right in meeting force with force.*

The Board classified the film R and the Consumer Advice read 'adult themes, medium level violence'.

*I found it really depressing, I got very uptight, I was ready to walk out. I've never had to see violence like that in my life, but just to have to watch it, the hopelessness. It's dreadful to see young people going on like that.*

*It's a hard subject to cope with, very emotionally charged, I felt quite drained actually. But I enjoyed it. We weren't prepared for the ending.*

*It was a very powerful movie; a lot of social and racial issues were in there. And it wasn't just about the school; it was also what was happening outside the school environment, the society they lived in.*

**7.5.1 General Responses**

Although most of the Panel found the film depressing and confronting, several respondents also described it as very powerful and well made. Numerous comments were made about the realism and the documentary style which left no doubt that such events could take place in the United States. The strong themes of the film prompted much debate about the direction of our society and youth plus expressions of fear that Australian schools could soon manifest similar gang and violence outbursts.

*Fear of the future, fear of our country becoming like that.*

*I was left drained, heavy and down ... really down.*

*I thought it was a strong film with emotions, frustration, anger, waste, feelings of hopelessness.*

*I thought it was an awful movie; pointless, exaggerated - I don't think violence is that bad in real life - I thought it was pretty disturbing. It would be disturbing to some young people and may even leave a permanent mark on them.*

*I'd say it's disturbingly real.*

**7.5.2 Impact of the Violence**

Although some respondents were very troubled by the constancy of the violence, others found it to be appropriate and in no way gratuitous. A couple on the Panel compared the style of violence with action movies featuring Stallone and Schwarzenegger, being far more critical of these.

*It's less to do with the actual scene than the impact of all the themes, it seems.*

*I think violence is far more warranted in this real life situation. It's not sugar coated.*

*It was so full of continuous violence; it makes me wonder what minds make these movies. It worries me that they're around.*

*...highly disturbing scenes. ... the rape scene, the finger scene, even getting shot with that arrow, that was horrible ... extreme violence ...*

*When that poor fellow was doing graffiti on the wall and they just came up and shot him up, I thought that was so callous ... it made me boil.*

The scene where the teacher is attacked with a knife drew many comments mostly about the high impact due to the repetition of stabbings. One woman said it was easier to watch because the camera did not stay on the knife and two of the men agreed it was well handled.

*They didn't show it too explicitly. It didn't get too close up ... it didn't leave a bad feeling.*

*The stabbing was more of a close-up on their faces. You could see the emotion but there was no blood spurting.*

### 7.5.3 Messages Arising From the Film

Some of the Panel members were very disturbed by the overall message of disrespect for parents and teachers. The lack of any clear positive message, role model or 'winners' contributed to the Panel's reluctance to recommend the film for a young audience. In particular, respondents were offended by Caesar's treatment of his mother and were worried about what message that would convey. Another controversial issue was the drugtaking and several respondents interpreted the teacher's demonstration with drugs as suggesting that he condoned the student's drugtaking.

*I think it was pointless making a movie like that; what good is it going to do?*

*There was a great message at the end about the pyrrhic victory.*

*It didn't offend me as much as some other movies I've seen where every second word was (offensive). (In this film), that's how kids talk.*

*That's what you'd expect at that type of school ... the talk ... the machos ... and abuse of the teacher.*

*It's a great way for young kids to see what can happen if you go the wrong way .*

*There was no force of any kind in the movie that was going to outdo the violence ... you're just going to have to make sure you have a really good gun!*

*I don't think the language in the film is going to be an issue for a teenager aged 15. They'd be responsible enough to understand everything portrayed through the film. If anything, it may give the outlook for the brighter teenagers to say, 'hey, we don't want to walk down that path' ... someone gang related ... is going to say, 'yes, well that's where we're heading anyway', so it might lead them to change their ways in the future as well.*

### **The 'copy cat' factor**

There was considerable debate about the likelihood of young people copying elements of the film. Even those who were dubious about such copy-cat behaviour, acknowledged particular concerns in relation to suicide.

*(The suicide scene) was exactly like the Deer Hunter. Seeing it on the TV and playing the game later (was an influential scene when classifying).*

*The Russian Roulette scene would be pretty hard not to follow.*

*I think they'd (16/17 year olds) copy it.*

*The tattooing and numbers on the neck, the bar coding ... I really hated that.*

*After watching the film, you'll find the kids running through Marrickville with barcodes. They'll see that film and think 'that's cool'.*

*...disrespect ... there's a fair bit to be copy-catted.*

*That scene where he's hitting the mother, some kids might say, 'gee, I'll do that, mine's a pain in the arse'.*

#### 7.5.4 Classification Debate

The Panel was almost equally divided about whether this film warranted an R or MA. The divided opinions appeared to replicate the debate of the Classification Board. One 24 year old male respondent commented that this was the type of film that would make him wish to change the classification guidelines. He thought that the Guidelines clearly suggested the film should be an R but he would not want to prohibit an audience of 15 and over.

*I was wanting this film to get through (lower than R) ... that's why I wanted to alter the classification guidelines. Some kids need to be protected from overprotective parents.*

*It's targeting that kind of age group (teens) in a way. I think kids at 15, these days, would be old enough to understand that.*

*I'd be uncomfortable about my 15 year-old daughter seeing this movie, but it'd be her choice.*

*I'd like to see it with my children; I have a 16 year old daughter and a 19 year old son, and I think it would be a really great movie to open communication between kids.*

*For all the reasons others said 15 year olds should see it, I disagree. There really is no winner in the end ... the disturbing themes overpowered the film and won in the end with the deaths. These are issues that only adults can deal with.*

*I wouldn't prohibit my children from seeing it if they were the age to see it ... If a parent hasn't put in the right morals to their children at the age of 15, then it doesn't matter what age they see the film, it's not going to affect them either way. ... If the morals have been properly implanted in the children, then I don't think that film will sway them either way at 15 plus.*

*I would rather not anyone see it quite frankly ... I haven't given it a classification. The*

*teacher got attacked ... there was no support system for him. In the end the only solution was for him to die; to me it's not a good message, look at our youth suicide rate. I actually gave it one above R especially because it showed how to use drugs.*

#### 7.5.5 Classification Decision

The Panel agreed with much of the Board's evaluation of 'One Eight Seven' however an interesting different was the comparative lack of attention given by the Panel to the so-called Russian roulette scene. Almost one hour into the discussion, one of the focus groups had to be prompted for their views on this controversial scene because it had scarcely been mentioned at all. The Panel saw the danger of the suicide scene in the potential for a young audience to copy it, especially as the event itself was directly copied by the character Caesar in response to seeing a similarly harrowing scene in the film *Deer Hunter*.

It appeared that the Panel were inclined to select an R rating for the film on the basis of the intensity of the adult themes and the cumulative effect of the violence rather than due to any individual scene of violence, including the Russian roulette scene. Conversely, the significant number that chose an MA rating did so because of a perceived absence of explicit violence.

As can be seen below, immediately after viewing the film, equal numbers of the Panel awarded the film an MA and an R with one voting for M and two of the older age group claiming it should be refused classification. Following discussion, the R rating was nominated over MA by a majority of only one.

	Pre-Discussion	Post-Discussion
G	-	-
PG	-	-
M	1	-
MA	7	7
R	7	8

Refused classification	2	2
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## 7.6 CONCLUSIONS - SYDNEY PANEL

### 7.6.1 The Nature of the Community Assessment Panel

The Sydney Panel was very supportive of the need for the Guidelines and for Consumer Advice. Participants generally found the Board's rulings on the films they viewed to be clear and justifiable. While they might, in some instances, differ in the classification they would give a film they, nonetheless, could understand the Board's classifications in light of the Guidelines. The Panellists referred to the classification manuals frequently during the discussion, making use of the official terminology and regularly reminded each other of definitions and levels.

A useful aspect of the methodology that was developed was the capacity to identify the classification made by each individual and *then* to assess the effect of peer opinion on the individual's subsequent considerations. The decisions made before the discussion took place always showed a wider spread of classification levels which became narrower as discussion occurred within the group. The Panel never reached a unanimous agreement on any of the films but participants did listen and respond to each other's views; the lengthy discussion also allowed certain aspects of the films to be revealed which some in a group acknowledged they had overlooked.

### 7.6.2 Concerns About Films

There is no doubt that the Panel as a whole shared similar concerns about film content. Parents in particular were vitally concerned by the content of their children's viewing but made reference to the vast array of media and other influences which shape the values of young people. Moreover children and teenagers were judged to be increasingly mature and often knowledgeable about topics which adults might like to shield them from. In the focus group discussions, Panellists often made comparisons

with television in terms of unsuitable content for children. It was not only the disturbing nature of some news, documentaries and movies, but also the messages conveyed by some of the popular soap operas and series about which Panellists complained.

Violence was definitely the main concern of the Panel. In the preliminary questionnaire, 17 out of the 20 Panellists claimed to be concerned or very concerned about violent film content. Consistent with the research on this topic, the level of concern tended to be higher with the older people, parents and women.

The majority of the Panel appeared to accept that violence in films could be a dramatic device which heightened the impact of the film but few were tolerant of violence shown in graphic detail. The younger viewers were far less bothered by violence and often admired the skilful special effects entailed in realistic depictions. In keeping with the Guidelines, the Panel agreed that context was all important as was the frequency of the violence. Many on the Panel were particularly disturbed by repetitive acts of aggression towards people, particularly any attacks involving knives or cutting of people.

A number of people on the Panel seemed to believe in a direct link between violent films and a violent society and considered young people particularly vulnerable to a 'copy cat' phenomenon (though generally not their own children, but rather 'other' young people).

Sex was scarcely dealt with in the three films which the Sydney Panel viewed so it did not arise much in the discussion. Nevertheless 13 of the 20 Panellists recorded in their questionnaire that they were concerned by sexual content in films generally and many Panellists indicated they were uncomfortable with sex scenes in films, particularly if viewing the film with a young person. Young people were seen to be relatively well informed about sex and concerns about the portrayal of sex revolved around images that were obscene, degrading, exploitative or combined with violence.

Language was similarly not raised as a strong concern in discussions with the Panel. However in

the pre-discussion questionnaire, coarse language was noted as a concern by 13 participants - the same result as for the element of sex. Strong language was a major element of the film *One Eight Seven* but many on the Panel considered it appropriate to the language of the American high school students portrayed and thus were not critical or were less critical of its usage.

### 7.6.3 Comparison with Classification Board Decisions

The majority of the Panel awarded all three films they viewed the same classification as the Board. Some Panel members opted for lesser classifications than the Board whereas some opted for higher classifications.

In this final section a summary of the Panel's positions in relation to each of the films is compared with the Board's position, concentrating on any points of difference. It can be assumed that if differences are not indicated then the Panel were in agreement with the Board's report.

#### **Fairytale - A True Story** (rated PG)

A majority of the Panel (11) rated the film PG while the remainder (9) nominated G.

There were very few controversial elements in the film. In general the adult themes identified by the Board were regarded as somewhat less significant by the Panel. In particular, the adult themes of the dead son and the missing father were not seen by the Panel as likely to upset very young children, nor was the grieving mother seen as a problematic character. Several Panellists did agree with the Board's identification of the after-life references as reflecting an adult theme. Here there were queries, not so much about allusions to the spirit world, but about encouraging children to believe in fairies. However most agreed that the fantasy element was appropriate given that it was based on a true story and that, as stated by the Board, the main theme related to belief versus adult scepticism.

#### **A Life Less Ordinary** (rated M)

A majority of the Panel (12) rated the film M while the remainder (8) nominated MA.

The Panel generally agreed with the Board's description of this film as 'a darkly comic fantasy'. However many of the Panel disagreed with the Board's view that the violence lacked detail. They regarded the shots of the dead angels' faces as both detailed and prolonged and also found the dentist operating with the scalpel to be detailed although brief. The impact of the scalpel scene lay in the fact that it involved cutting skin which the Panel found disturbing. Their strong reaction to any such cutting also prompted considerable comment about the heroine drawing her own blood with a razor blade (a scene not commented on by the Board). In general the scene which elicited most comment from the Panel was the young girl being threatened in the bank, with the age of the girl being a significant issue.

This scene and others containing violence were often observed to be followed by comedy. The Panel was somewhat divided about whether, and to what extent, this juxtaposition lessened the impact of the violence. Everyone enjoyed the comic elements but some were uncomfortable about the mixture of comedy and violence.

#### **One Eight Seven** (rated R)

A slight majority (8) rated the film R, while an almost equal number (7) nominated MA and a further two would have refused a classification. (Note that the Panel for this film was reduced by three members who were under 18 years.)

The Panel agreed with much of the Board's assessment of the film and used comparable words as the Board members in describing the film's pervasive sense of 'disillusionment and hopelessness ... confrontation and despair'. Specifically, many Panellists concurred with the Board's conclusion that the adult themes had a cumulative impact of 'a sufficiently high intensity to warrant R'. Those who voted for MA did so because the themes and acts of violence did not

have a great impact on an individual basis which was also the view of some Board members.

The main difference between the Board and the Panel in respect of this film was the different emphasis on the final suicide scene. The Panel did not place such significance on this sequence and although it was definitely found to be harrowing viewing, a large proportion of the Panel did not think it warranted an R. The debate surrounding the Russian roulette scene was the degree to which it might incite 'copy-cat' suicide and several respondents were convinced of this threat. Another key factor which persuaded some Panellists to opt for an MA was the fact that the film featured high school students and so some felt that this age group should not be prohibited from seeing it. Others stressed that, in fact, it was the focus on young people that made the film's bleak and anarchic message particularly unsuitable for youth.

## 8.0 BRISBANE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PANEL

### 8.1 Brisbane Panel Procedure

The Brisbane Community Assessment Panel was the second Panel conducted and took place 5 to 7 December 1997 over a Friday night, Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon. Viewing and discussion took place at the Greater Union Theatrette in downtown Brisbane. The methodology used was as described earlier in Section 2 of this report.

The films viewed by the Brisbane Panel were:

- n *Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway* - period film recalling a woman's youthful era.
- n *Tomorrow Never Dies* - spy action movie where James Bond thwarts the outbreak of war.
- n *The Winter Guest* - contemporary melancholy drama set in a Scottish fishing village.

As noted elsewhere, the consultants were not informed about the classification the films received from the Board to avoid any conscious or unconscious influence by the consultants on the decision-making of the Panel.

### 8.2 Brisbane Panel Composition

Recruitment of Panel members in Brisbane was sub-contracted to NFS Market Research, an independent company specialising in such recruitment. NFS Market Research was established as a recruitment company in 1985 and was a founding member of the IQCA (Interviewer Quality Control Australia) scheme which is operated by Market Research Quality Assurance Incorporated. Its work, including its recruitment procedures, is independently audited on an annual basis. The company holds a data base of approximately 18,000 people, developed by referrals, cold calling and advertising.

The table over the page summarises the characteristics of the 23 Panel members actually participating in the Brisbane Panel.

Appendix C sets out the results of the questionnaire which sought further information on the background of Panellists, their film viewing habits and preferences, knowledge of classification categories etc.



### 8.3 BRISBANE PANEL'S RESPONSES TO VIRGINIA WOOLF'S MRS DALLOWAY

The Board's synopsis of the film is as follows:

*Based on a novel by Virginia Woolf. As she prepares for a party in London in 1923, Clarissa Dalloway recalls her carefree days as a young woman. Whilst shopping, she notices Septimus, a shell-shocked young man in the street, and feels a great surge of sympathy and connection with him. His anxious Italian wife takes him to various doctors to cure him, but they decide to institutionalise him. Later, Clarissa is shocked to learn that he has committed suicide.*

The Board Classified the film M and its Consumer Advice was 'adult themes'.

#### 8.3.1 General Response

The Panel, especially the younger focus group, responded negatively to the film - generally describing it as 'slow', 'disjointed' and 'dull' - some found difficulty in maintaining their interest in the film and others struggled to comprehend the storyline. However, a few Panellists also described *Mrs Dalloway* as 'historical' or 'mildly entertaining' despite the overall view of the film not having 'much of a point'. Some members of the Panel suggested it was more suited to older viewers. The initial comments from both groups which are set out below indicate that issues related to classification were not uppermost in most of the Panel members' early responses.

The following quotes are from the younger focus group:

*Old fashioned, slow storyline, I didn't really seem to get into the movie.*

*For my age group of 15 years, I don't think most people would like it since it is the kind of movie for adults because of the type of setting.*

*Very enjoyable but at times was a little depressing, consistently referring to suicide and getting old.*

The following quotes are from the older focus group:

*A little slow, it took a while for certain plots to have relevance, but all in all it was a nice film, a period piece.*

*I enjoyed it; it was historical, accurate, subtle. However, it seemed to bumble along without any real purpose.*

*Moving and thought provoking; it had several themes running concurrently involving different social issues of the time.*

*Dull. It lacked a story that developed the characters of the film. The jumping from aged Clarissa to young Clarissa took a while to assimilate.*

#### 8.3.2 Adult Themes

The younger group, in general, identified the dominance and impact of adult themes, particularly the suicidal elements that were a common thread throughout the film. In fact, most of this group were convinced that the main character, Clarissa, was going to commit suicide too. In contrast, the older group, although acknowledging the presence of adult themes, tended to perceive their impact as minimal, relatively mild and infrequent.

##### **Suicide**

There was considerable agreement, especially among the younger group, that Septimus' personality represented a disturbing theme in *Mrs Dalloway*; this group clearly felt uneasy about 'his craziness' and continually referred to his suicide. These Panel members were very concerned about this character's impact on younger viewers.

*The psychological state of Septimus ... he was portrayed as being off-balance for the whole movie.*

*You don't want children to see that scene of him preparing to jump.*

*You don't want to give them (children) any ideas.*

*The more you see or hear about things the more acceptable they become ... people could commit suicide ... it becomes more frequent, people are less shocked.*

*... depression, suicide and war would be the main things I would be concerned with. Those three main things would be the most likely to affect my six year old daughter ... she would be saying to me, 'why did he do that'?*

*In consideration of children, the thing I wouldn't be happy about is the suicide part of it ... with teenage children ... they seem to focus on those things.*

In marked contrast to the above, some members of the Panel, particularly those in the older group, perceived the impact of the suicide to be low.

*All you did see was him jumping ... it could have been on the ground ...*

*It was subtle and non graphic ... it's not going to conjure images of anything too sinister.*

*One thing that comes to my mind is that suicide is a (strong) ... issue at the moment, especially among teenagers, but I don't feel that those people would want to commit suicide after watching that.*

*If he was 'normal' and jumped out of the window that would have been a bit strange, but because he was crazy it was a little accepted.*

Others revealed a stronger reaction to the suicide:

*... weren't there special effects (noises to sound like a violent end to the jump)?*

*I didn't need to see it (the suicide); I felt it and visualised it.*

### **Mental disturbance and depression**

The Panel were divided about what effect *Mrs Dalloway* might have on younger people's understanding of mental illness and depression.

*He (Septimus) was of no threat to anyone else.*

*I think even a nine year old would know what the veterans went through, the Vietnam War and what happened there ... but I don't think it would affect them because it didn't show any violence.*

*I thought the mental disturbance was very clear ... but to me that's part of life so I wouldn't consider my children not seeing it ... the portrayal was so accurate of someone who was shell-shocked and because it was very accurate I could say, 'yes, that's what did happen' and 'yes, there wasn't any treatment (for those people then)' ... and I don't consider that beyond a child's comprehension ...*

*Kids might think it was the right thing to do (commit suicide) if you're schizophrenic, a solution to the problem.<sup>4</sup>*

*Those questions she was asking herself at the end ... her reasons for living and why does life go on ... if you're asking yourself these kinds of questions, if you can't come up with anything, suicide could become relevant to you ... you could mull over it ... and become depressed.*

A couple of Panellists believed that *Mrs Dalloway* could illustrate to younger people how inadequately mental disturbance was dealt with in earlier times. 'Back then they didn't know how to handle mental problems'.

The older group was divided on whether *Mrs Dalloway* left the viewer feeling any hope and faith, whereas the younger group found it held little to be optimistic about. These younger Panellists pointed to the generally depressing atmosphere of the film and cumulative nature of its 'darker' themes.

*... (the heroine) made bad decisions all along ... the fact she eventually chose to live was no big deal.*

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<sup>4</sup> As already noted Panellists did not necessarily use terms such as 'kids' or 'children' to refer to particular age groups.

*It might have been a good thing that she didn't take another bad option (suicide) but at the end of the day she's a troubled woman with a fairly miserable existence ...*

*I got the impression that maybe she (Clarissa) suffered from some kind of a breakdown herself ... and hearing Septimus' story ... actually gave her a feeling of getting on with her life.*

### **Impact of adult themes on younger people**

The younger group, particularly its teenage members, initially commented that because *Mrs Dalloway* was a period film younger people would find it difficult to relate to. They implied that this could mean that harmful scenes would have less of a damaging impact on children than similar scenes in more contemporary films. The Panel as a whole felt that the film would be of little interest to younger people and would also be too complex for them to grasp, thus the content of some potentially troubling scenes would 'go straight over their heads'.

*If a younger person saw it they wouldn't get half of it ... the period ... the themes ... looking back on younger years.*

*If you portrayed suicide in the 90s it would have far more of an effect ... if you're going to commit suicide today there are other options, better options (than jumping out of a window) to do it ...*

*I don't think my 16 year old or 14 year old would be able to relate to the film.*

*Kids wouldn't be interested in that being explained; they'd have lost interest anyway.*

*... is he crazy now or is he sane now? If we can't grasp it, kids won't understand.*

*But the themes were of such a complexity that those it would probably harm in any way probably wouldn't have got to the point of real understanding ... so if you understood it that far ... then you're probably capable of discerning between fiction and reality ...*

*To understand the film - the suicide and depression - you would need to be at least 16.*

However a few individuals commented that even if children didn't fully understand the scenes in a cognitive sense or knowingly watch them, they could still absorb the visual impact, even in the more obscure scenes.

*If kids are in the room they still see certain images.*

*What they understand is irrelevant; what is, is if they become confused or upset.*

*My five year old would have picked up the guy 'suiciding' and the guy being blown up on the field.*

*Children have curiosity and imagination; if they don't understand something they'll ask.*

One Panel member observed that it wasn't a straightforward matter to determine if children were upset by a film whereas another member, a childcare worker, thought otherwise.

*Sometimes questions get asked weeks after ... it's amazing how much they absorb.*

*You'll know if the film has affected your children, you can feel their vibes.*

Further into the discussion, some members appeared to be less convinced that the distancing by period of the central suicide theme would in fact lessen its impact. This position was more evident among the Panellists in their teens and twenties who also referred to, with concern, the recent suicide of the influential rock star, Michael Hutchence.

*You could distance yourself from a lot of it ... but suicide is a major issue NOW ...*

*Before our discussion the storyline was the lady having the party but now it's really the suicide and the lady having the party is just not the story; the story is the suicide.*

### 8.3.3 Violence

Some members of the younger group found the images of war quite distressing; one mother thought the opening scenes of *Mrs Dalloway* to herald a war movie. A few of the females in this group considered some of the war scenes to be too visual and detailed ... *the body was blown to bits; that was charming.*

However some members of the Panel construed *Mrs Dalloway's* more violent scenes to be 'mental pictures'. Being flashbacks of short length and infrequent nature, the impact was perceived to be slight.

*I didn't picture the body parts flying through the air; ... it was more 'now you see him now you don't'.*

*... it didn't linger ... subtle and non-graphic.*

*The violence was not like Arnie or Stallone ... certainly we were told about the guy throwing himself out of the window, but you didn't see him land there or see him in agony ... I think it's fair enough, you see worse in cartoons ... it wasn't over the top in violence.*

A Panellist suggested that younger people experienced far worse violence on children's television. *Everything on TV, all those cartoons in the morning are worse than that.*

There was some debate about how much was actually shown in the land mine scene. A few Panellists thought they saw dismembered body parts while one participant didn't recall one of the more criticised violent scenes at all. *I wouldn't have remembered that gentleman being blown up.*

Most of the younger group were aware of the scene when Septimus, highly distressed, focuses on a pair of scissors but this issue was scarcely raised in the older group.

### 8.3.4 Sexual Implications

Although a minor issue for a couple of the women in the older group, the scenes where two young women were kissing elicited considerable debate

in the younger group. Unprompted, the youngest females in this group (the teenagers) raised this matter when asked by the facilitator what they believed the strongest elements of *Mrs Dalloway* to be. The teenagers found these scenes to be both inappropriate and surprising, assuming the scenes to represent lesbian behaviour. One girl, in particular, was clearly embarrassed and offended. Interestingly, these Panellists found it difficult to believe that 'lesbianism' occurred 'openly in those days'.

*They were kissing ... aarrgh!*

*... it portrayed some lesbianism ... that was really ... (pause) ... wonderful (in sarcasm)!*

*I didn't realise that lesbianism was an issue then, back in the 20s ...*

*... the two girls kissed and they showed that a second time too. It wasn't just a quick thing, and at THAT time - 1923 - out in public!*

*When she kissed her ... it's just not acceptable ... you didn't expect it, what was it (that scene) there for, was there a purpose for it being there?*

By comparison, the older members in both groups (both male and female) found these scenes reflected sisterhood and warmth, and to be somewhat vague, mild and not necessarily sexual.

*You really thought that was touching on homosexuality? I don't think it was ... it was just life experiencing ... it was a fleeting moment.*

*It was ... to show how close they were as friends.*

*Lesbian tendencies ... I have no problem with; I thought they did it quite well and in context.*

*Even if that was a homosexual bit, what was wrong with that anyway?*

The issue of suggested lesbianism, for most Panel members, was not an aspect of the film to consider when making classification decisions.

*I thought the suicide was more to think about than that little kiss.*

*Kissing is just kissing for them (younger children); how would they differentiate that kiss from when they kiss their mother?*

*I don't think a young kid would bring it up.*

A scene where a woman was partially naked in a bathroom was barely mentioned. Indeed when one individual from the older group nominated 'nudity' as consumer advice for *Mrs Dalloway*, the other members argued strongly against this suggestion.

### 8.3.5 Panel Classification

Shown below are the classification decisions of the Panel collectively and separately in the two broad age groups, illustrating the marked differences of opinion. It should be remembered that both classifications were recorded before the Board's decision was revealed to the Panel.

Immediately after viewing *Mrs Dalloway*, a slight majority of the Panel gave it PG classification, particularly members of the older age group. After discussing and debating the elements of the film, a couple of the Panellists modified their ratings to a lower classification, leaving a larger majority in favour of a PG or G classification (the Board gave the film an M classification). Thus the discussion had the effect of leading 70% of the Panel to place a *lower* classification on the film than the Board did.

#### **VIRGINIA WOOLF'S MRS DALLOWAY (M)**

	<b>TOTAL PANEL</b>	<b>UNDER 35 YEARS</b>	<b>35+ YEARS</b>
G	2	1	1
PG	14	4	10
M	6	6	-
MA	1	1	-
R	-	-	-

### Panel classification by age

There were substantial differences between the classification decisions of the two focus groups; whereas all of the older focus group members classified *Mrs Dalloway* PG or G only a minority (some 40%) of the younger focus group members gave the film a PG or G classification.

Upon further examination of the younger age group, a gender influence appears to be operating. Five of the seven women in this age group classified *Mrs Dalloway* as M or MA after the discussion.

### 8.3.6 Classification Debate

Immediately after viewing the film but *before* the group discussion, Panellists nominated in the questionnaire a minimum age for an acceptable audience for *Mrs Dalloway*. There was a substantial divide between the two age groups; 75% of the younger Panellists compared to around 25% of the older Panel members thought a minimum viewing age of 15 years would be suitable. The other Panellists in the older group recommended a range of ages from ten to fourteen years; over half of the older participants even suggested ages *under* 13 years as suitable minimum ages.

As noted, some members of the older group were of the opinion that a sizeable proportion of the more controversial scenes would be 'above very young people', therefore not warranting a high minimum viewing age. This older focus group tended to take the meaning of PG quite literally, as indicating a need for a supportive adult to be present or to respond to post-viewing questions about the potentially troubling themes (eg psychological traumas) rather than perceiving the material to be harmful and dangerous in absolute terms. Having determined the suicidal and melancholic elements of *Mrs Dalloway* to be mild, relatively infrequent, non-visual and non-violent, this group suggested that a suitable comment for consumer advice would be 'subtle adult themes'.

In stark contrast, the younger group were extremely critical of the potential effect on young people of the film's psychological elements of

despair, erratic mental behaviour and suicide. They considered these adult themes to be dominant and cumulative in *Mrs Dalloway*, having a strong influence on their selection of a suitable minimum viewing age.

The younger Panel members who classified *Mrs Dalloway* as M were asked by the facilitator what modifications would need to be made for the film to be classified as PG. Interestingly only one individual had a suggestion to make - that the suicide be referred to only in verbal terms and not shown visually. The others found the central elements of the film to warrant an M classification in their own right.

Meanwhile, the older group principally debated among themselves why *Mrs Dalloway* should be classified PG rather than G (given one Panellist was convinced the film warranted a G). *I still think it's G, everything was rather gently handled. We hardly saw a suicide at all, the attempt was there, but that was it. The nudity and sexual overtones were hardly there and could miss the kids altogether.*

### **Justification of PG**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film PG:

*A lot of the shows my kids watch are far more violent and scary than that.*

*Isn't that what PG is all about; for (young) people to be spoken to (rather than discuss independently of parents) about suicidal tendencies?*

*I was tossing it up between G and PG, even with the suicide theme; anybody under 15 probably wouldn't pick up on it and the nudity was nothing ...*

*It really would be a G but it really wasn't aimed at any young people ... (but) I don't think it should be restricted to mature audiences. I just feel it's not a movie for children but I don't think there's anything wrong with children seeing it. But they won't enjoy it, they won't get anything out of it. But I don't think my son would be affected by the film.*

*I don't think it would go to a mature audience; I've said it would be suitable for a 12 year old to see it ... but I still think the parents should be able to be there just to advise them that sometimes people really did get sick in the head from the things they did at war ... probably so they could sleep at night without dwelling on the facts too much ... but I certainly wouldn't consider an M rating; I wouldn't be upset if a 12 year old bought a ticket and saw that movie ... but again someone should be there to give some counselling if required. But it's not like 'Mary Poppins' so I wouldn't give it a G.*

*I think 13-14 year old girls would get a lot out of that movie but would need to have an opportunity to talk to an adult about it if any of those scenes would cause a disturbance.*

*G to me is more like Disney ... but I think it would be OK for 11-12 year olds.*

*I know there wasn't much nudity but there was one scene when a woman had nothing on ... and the suicide ... and I wouldn't like my children putting the movie on the video to just sit there and watch it, being able to replay bits ... I don't think it should be a G.*

*It's (G classification) to give parents an idea that this movie is perfectly harmless, it's for the kids OR there maybe something in there that may disturb that child ... if there's something on that (video) box that says 'this is not too bad a movie, but there is something (there)' then it means parental guidance. And then it gives that parent a chance to say, 'there's something in that movie that isn't JUST for children otherwise it would be a G'. but it doesn't eliminate anybody (by legally enforcing a minimum viewing age), it's up to (parents/guardians) to do.*

### **Justification of M**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film M:

*The film rotated around suicide.*

*It's better to be that way (conservative) than take a chance, give it PG and find it might affect them (children).*

*Some kids are able to think and cope and others aren't.*

*I wouldn't want to go out and view a movie with my son to come home and talk about suicide ...*

*Suicide is not something you would talk about to an under 15 year old.*

*How many parents have the time to preview a movie before they let their children go ... ?*

*It could be more dangerous for a 15 year old than a ten year old ... (the actress) she mentioned at the end that if you die young you'll stay young forever.*

*Comparing with children's programs that have more violence ... this was worse, it was just so much more serious ... it gives you a lot more to think about than those other movies.*

### **8.3.7 The Board's Assessment**

After the Panel had made their final, post-discussion classification they were given the Classification Board's report of *Mrs Dalloway*; this document outlined what aspects of the film influenced the Board's classification decisions and why.

The younger Panel members were in general agreement with the Board's report, which focussed on the centrality of the 'severe mental disturbance and suicide' themes, of concern that these elements might have a harmful effect on young viewers. Only one individual in this group remarked the Board were rather restrictive and 'Big Brother-ish'.

The Panellists in the older group were astonished by the Board's classification of M for *Mrs Dalloway* and heatedly questioned its rationale, arguing that the four controversial scenes referred to in the Board's report were taken out of context and that the anticipated impact was over estimated.

*... you'd think this was a movie about a man committing suicide ... whereas it's not.*

*The four instances they've nominated, I fail to see how that exceeds their 'discreet and mild impact'.*

*It was not as violent as that.*

*This has been stripped back to certain points for it to be classified as M whereas we've been sitting here seeing it as a whole ... and that's why the consensus here is PG ... in my opinion they've (the Board) have gone totally outside of what you've explained to us as (how) the category classifications have been created.*

For this film, the older group literally interpreted the PG classification as one that represented a film that required parental support and advice for the more troubling themes. *But isn't that* (that the four scenes could be upsetting) *what we're agreeing (with) ... the PG suggests that parental guidance is recommended for persons under 15?*

The subjects of benchmarking and comparison with other films were also raised. One mature aged mother referred to the 'scary' *Jurassic Park* that was rated PG. *Kids are supposed to differentiate between what is real and what isn't; ... 'Jurassic Park' was a fantasy thing ... I presume that must be why* (the Board rated this film PG).

The older Panellists mentioned that had they not already viewed *Mrs Dalloway* they would presume it was unsuitable for their children under 15 years simply because of its M classification. A father stated that even if he was viewing with his children he would prefer 'family films' not to have an M rating, *... then I don't have to be that alert or have to clarify things at the end.*

## 8.4 BRISBANE PANEL'S RESPONSES TO TOMORROW NEVER DIES

The Board's synopsis of the film read as follows:

*Bond saves the world from the plans of media mogul, Carver, to start a war between China and the UK.*

The Board classified the film M and the Consumer Advice was 'low level violence, sexual references'.

### 8.4.1 General Response

The Panel generally enjoyed the film and were thoroughly entertained. The majority of responses from both focus groups referred to the 'non-stop action', fast pace, light humour and sense of adventure.

*Very good - fast moving, light hearted and entertaining.*

*This film was very action packed and was very interesting to watch. This film will keep you watching all the way through.*

*... there's lots of violence in it, always action-packed from start to finish.*

*... it's always got your attention ...*

*There's always something happening; somebody's punching or somebody's shooting.*

*Good escapism, action, light tongue-in-cheek movie.*

*Great, something was always happening.*

Participants enthused about the film's fast pace and contrasted this with *Mrs Dalloway's* lack of action and slowness. *... it doesn't start off slow, it starts off fast.* Instant recognition of the characteristic Bond music prompted cheering as the film opened.

Many Panellists commented on the predictable nature of James Bond films, but most found this familiarity to be comforting. Participants presumed a film of this genre would follow a certain formula

and would provide 'easy-going' entertainment for a broad range of viewers.

*Although the theme is predictable, one can enjoy the familiar Bond adventure.*

*There wasn't a story to follow as such, just a series of entertaining scenes ... you were just enjoying it.*

*You don't have to do a lot of figuring out; you always know who the good guys are and who the bad guys are ...*

*You know what's going to happen but not how and that's the enjoyment of it ... every time is different.*

*You're watching rather than thinking.*

*Because you've seen the other James Bond movies you know it's not going to be too real.*

*You can escape reality ...*

*I feel more comfortable; I know what's going to happen.*

*It's never heavy duty violence.*

*It was violent, (but) it was 'Bond violence'.*

The James Bond genre clearly appealed to all, regardless of age or gender. *James Bond is a superhero for all, not just young kids.* The females, however, were less enthusiastic about the film than their male peers, particularly in the older group.

### 8.4.2 Violence

There was general acceptance by the Panel of the stylised violence in such action films as typified in the Bond genre.

#### **The Bond genre**

The Panellists generally described the violence as unrealistic, non gratuitous, and neither close-up, detailed nor comprising lengthy post-violence visuals. Thus this was in keeping with the genre.

*It wasn't senseless violence, there was always a reason for it ... it's like watching a police show ...*

*... with the shooting you see the shot but you don't see the blood, you don't see anything ...*

*... they never did overdo any of the killing ... it's left to the imagination ... you're not sitting there closing your eyes ...*

*.. there was every bit of action a person could dream of in an action movie, but it wasn't horrifically gory ...*

*... there's full on action and violence, but you don't see it.*

*... you didn't see much blood, did you?*

*... there weren't too many scenes that left you gasping with the violence and left you with a feeling it was too real ...*

*... there was violence but not much bloodshed ...*

*The violence was stylised and predictable.*

*People expect that kind of violence in a James Bond movie.*

However, in both groups, some individuals were anxious about *Tomorrow Never Dies* starting to breach the genre.

*It's almost ruined it for me, almost pushing it into the Bruce Willis genre, it's almost 90s Hollywood action not classic James Bond ...*

*... it's starting to get borderline now ... (although) it's still not in the bracket of senseless violence ...*

*The dead bodies on the ship were pretty gross ... you actually saw the expressions on their faces in the water, not breathing.*

*There were several gunshot problems with graphic footage of a gunshot wound. There was a ninja star in the throat, there were a couple of knife shots in the arms and legs, there was the drilling machine into Carver ... it's just very fast.*

*He doesn't normally bleed or get hurt.*

*Along with the action there was violence in every scene too; it was like a Sylvester Stallone movie or an Arnie Schwarzenegger one ...*

*... for the younger kids, it's (the violence and action) probably too full on ...*

One Panellist was concerned that some scenes would be harmful for the children he considered to be avid Bond fans. *It probably would have a bit of an impact for kids over five, particularly boys ... there's probably a couple of death scenes that would be disturbing.*

The younger group had some discussion about the level of impact construed from two different types of violence - knives and stabbing/cutting compared with guns and shooting. The consensus was that depictions of knife violence had more impact, being more close-up, drawn-out, dramatic and gory.

*... the violence was graphic - the star, stabbing in the chest, the reaction when pulling it out ... when things blew up it was over and done with, but the knife and the star - it was there - it showed a bit of graphics.*

*I think that knives and stabbing are worse than getting shot. One pull of a trigger and it's over.*

### **The gun scene ('execution style' shooting)**

This scene elicited considerable debate; the majority of the Panel found the 'gun to the head' scene to be disturbing and beyond the boundaries of 'Bond violence'.

*The gunshot to the head of the German guy ... that was fairly full-on.*

*I don't know if you can justify a close-up gunshot to a person's head just because he (James Bond) is a good guy ... it's brutal ... it's not as if it's hit or miss.*

*That's why I thought it's come out of the area of James Bond a little bit. That sort of scene was a little untypical of James Bond; it would have been a little more subtle than that.*

*... the scene when Bond had the pistol at his head ... I've never seen that in a Bond film before where Bond has cold-bloodedly just 'bang', it was an assassination ... not quite as direct as that before ... I was very surprised; if he tied a hand grenade into his (assailant's) mouth and pushed him out of the window and then he went 'boom', that's alright ...*

The younger, child-less women observed that the genre required continuous updating to maintain its impact on each generation of Bond viewers, and suggested that they didn't mind some degree of violence in the films they viewed.

*... (but) this is the James Bond we're used to ... the same James Bond reincarnated in the 90s.*

*Some detail (of violence) is interesting but it can come to a point when it's overdone and repulsive ...*

*I liked the woman fighting; she was independent.*

One male admitted, *you've always got an appetite for something that's a little more than expected.*

### **Modelling behaviour**

Some Panellists, in particular the mothers, were concerned about the violent scenes having a modelling influence on children who might try to imitate the action.

*It's almost more important (than Mrs Dalloway) to have this film classified properly because a lot of young people do want to see the action ...*

*It's unreal for us but I don't know how real younger children would think it was.*

*They'll probably try to act it out.*

*... they could always start a fire and think that that might blow up.*

*... little boys running around thinking they're Power Rangers, trying to do flips and kicking the girls ... what are they going to get out of this?*

*... if they see the star throwing I'm sure there's something like that in Power Rangers, so if they see it they'll think, 'Power Rangers do it, they do it, I can do it'.*

*I feel that any young child going to see that will come out with a feeling that ... violence is good as long as you're on the good side, that you can use violence to get your own way. That's the message. ... I don't think that James Bond movies are for children; they weren't written for children, they're adult books.*

*I don't like it (the kick boxing) because they do it all the time. It was something I took out of that movie that I see kids do in the street ....*

*... a couple of scenes where Stamper you could see was getting pleasure ... you could see it in his face. I didn't think that was good because any young kid would think 'ooh ' ... If you're fighting for your life ... that's different, but to be getting satisfaction out of it ... to me, you can see a little bully in the playground, kicking a little kid thinking, 'I'm boss here', and getting pleasure.*

At this point, comparisons with children's programs were drawn in.

*... the 3D computer games have more violence than this.*

*What about the TV program 'Zena'? That's on at 6.30pm and that's got just as much violence.*

Other Panellists also perceived the film scenes to be relatively harmless. Some of the older males expressed their desire to view *Tomorrow Never Dies* a second time, on this occasion with their own children.

*But the good guys, the heroes come through.*

*But you've still got the qualities that he stands up for; his country, to protect the women and get the baddies.*

*Kids would like the shootings and things blowing up.*

*I think that kids would enjoy it too; they wouldn't see it as reality but 'make believe'.*

*... I don't think the violence could be taken seriously ... and the kids love it.*

The younger group debated whether children would model themselves on James Bond and to what extent.

*They usually try to act out Superman and Batman ...*

*There's also technical things ... that kids wouldn't be able to recreate ... so they'd pretend ...*

*I don't think he's a young child's hero.*

*They don't relate to him, but it's, 'he can do it, I can do it'; it's just the action.*

*I'd be more inclined to think that they'd imitate Superman, Power Rangers or Batman ... James Bond wears a tux!*

*They don't necessarily have to identify with the character to have it disturb them later.*

### 8.4.3 Comedy and Violence

The younger group discussed this traditional aspect of Bond films, where action/violence was combined with James Bond's witty 'one-liners'.

*... you don't think of the gruesome part ... comedy is at the forefront ... I think it's great ... it's the only way violence should be shown ...*

*... it's a lot easier to take violence with a few laughs than to have straight violence thrown at you.*

However, these Panellists did not believe the Bond genre stretched the violence/comedy combination to the excessive limits of the controversial 'Tarantino style' films.

### 8.4.4 Sex

Few members of the Panel commented on the sexual content of *Tomorrow Never Dies*, referring to *physical* aspects of the scene where Bond was in bed with the Danish linguist. Again, there was reference to this film's deviation from the standards of the genre.

*... it didn't show much ... it left your imagination open.*

*... the sex scenes were a little hotter than what Sean Connery used to have ...*

*... there were more sex scenes in this (than previous Bond films)...*

*... the sheets were always covering ... but a little less these days ...*

There was little comment about the sexual innuendos in Bond's exchanges with Money Penny. A couple of the younger Panellists noticed the sexual references but commented that they would not be a classification issue. Most of the Panel had not even noted the sexual implications of the repartee.

### 8.4.5 Adult Themes

The younger group introduced a couple of minor issues into the discussion, relating to gender and racial stereotyping; these topics were not raised by the older group.

#### **Gender portrayal**

Aspects of the 'Bond woman's' role were criticised by the teenage girls, but on the other hand, they were impressed by the more heroic female character in *Tomorrow Never Dies*.

*In the movie the females are the sex object where the male is the aggressor.*

*The girl was (an aggressor) too ... but she was the sex object.*

#### **Negative portrayal of nationalities**

Unprompted, a couple of Panellists also commented on the 'foreign' origins of the Bond foes, as portrayed in *Tomorrow Never Dies*.

*They're usually a different nationality.*

*It probably was worse in previous movies because the forces of evil were always Russian or Chinese ... but this time it was more of a corporate thing and at least they've gone away from portraying different races as bad.*

While acknowledging that most of Bond's adversaries appeared to be of non-Anglo origin, no-one was concerned about the impact this may have on viewers.

**8.4.6 Panel Classification**

Prior to the focus group discussions, a slight majority of the Panel were in favour of classifying the film M and almost one third (30%) supported a classification of MA; the spread of this initial classification was similar in both focus groups. Although the discussion consolidated support for M overall (in keeping with the Board's decision), the two focus groups differed. All but one of the younger Panellists classified *Tomorrow Never Dies* as M whereas, due to a slight shift towards the MA rating, the older group were split between M and MA. Only one Panellist nominated a post-discussion classification below M.

**TOMORROW NEVER DIES (M)**

	TOTAL PANEL	UNDER 35 YEARS	35+ YEARS
G	-	-	-
PG	1	-	1
M	16	11	5
MA	6	1	5
R	-	-	-

There were some paradoxical elements in the classification assessments made by the older group:

- They were less conservative than the younger group when considering what the minimum viewing age should be for *Tomorrow Never Dies*.
- Despite the older males' support for their children viewing the film, four of the five older Panellists who classified *Tomorrow Never Dies* MA were males. Generally they

appeared comfortable with their children viewing the film as long as a parent accompanied them. All of the older participants who nominated MA had children under 12 years.

- Even after final classification, no-one in this group said they would prohibit any of *their own* children from viewing this film.

**8.4.7 Classification Debate**

Immediately after watching the film, the majority of the Panel (14 of the 23 members) nominated 15 years as the minimum suitable viewing age for *Tomorrow Never Dies*. However a broad range of minimum ages were suggested: 25% of the younger focus group proposed ten years and around 50% of the older Panellists nominated ages from eight to fourteen years.

Panellists admitted that the violent scenes, rather than ones involving nudity, pushed the minimum suitable viewing age up. The scene where Bond shot his assailant at close range was very much a controversial point. *I think that sort of scene starts to get borderline for those aged between ten and fifteen.*

Some Panellists were worried about younger children and their understanding of the violence in the film - much of the killing depicted minimal consequence. The younger group agreed that such invincibility would be seen as fictitious to those aged 15 years or more.

*I put down ten because the younger ones would feel, 'I think that was real and would try to do it' ...*

*I think the over 12s would pick up on the storyline, but the younger ones would pick up on the action and emulate those actions ... inappropriate use does go down in schoolyards.*

*I'd take my eight year old son to see it, but I know he's not the kind of person to do karate kicks, but he'll enjoy the escapism and the action ... but I'm aware that other kids do try to emulate that in the playground.*

*It's only a movie, it's not real.*

The females in the older group tended to be anxious about the messages that would be conveyed to children from some of the action scenes - would they result in 'copycatting' of violent behaviour - but, as noted, the Panellists that rated the film MA were predominantly older males (with pre-adolescent children).

One of the teenagers wondered if action films would influence boys and girls in a different manner. *Guys might relate differently and might be more inclined to run out and start hitting people ... but my sister's fine and she's been watching James Bond since she's ten ... so it looks as if it'd be up to the parents' discretion.*

The sex scenes, although generally regarded as minimal, still generated some discussion.

*It's not the sort of thing you want your little daughter to see ... Teri Hatcher with a nice suspender belt on ... so it's socially acceptable to be sleeping with two different women if it's James Bond?*

*Ten (years of age) because they didn't dwell on those scenes for very long ...*

*Kids around ten have some idea (about sex at that age) ...*

The Panellist who nominated PG forwarded his reasons for doing so. *It depends on how you view the violence, whether children are able to define whether it's a tongue-in-cheek violence or serious violence; ... it's a tongue-in-cheek violence, a funny violence if you like. When you compare it with 'Independence Day' which was PG you could say that some of those scenes could have an affect on children. And so I gave it a PG purely because 13-14 year old children would view it from an enjoyable point of view rather than a horrific point of view.*

One father revealed an interesting position in terms of young people's civil rights: *... MA for me is not allowing my under 15 year old child and his under 15 friends to see a film during the school holidays when I'm working; that's a severe restriction on a person's rights. So it would have to be something to put them right off track, some explicit sexual thing or when you see a brain get*

*splattered ... you're taking a legal right from a person.*

A somewhat contrary position won mild support among the older group. *I gave it an M, but I'm on the verge of an MA because ... everybody knows James Bond, everybody knows there's violence in James Bond, but how many kids walk into the cinema without their parents knowing about it? Should they be able to do that?... I don't think it's the copycatting, it's the impact of the violence.*

### **Justification of M**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film M:

*I gave it an M because of the level of violence, but I didn't want it to go up to MA because what with it being a Bond film and escapism and being fun and action ... it would be up to the discretion of the parent to let their children go and see it, either accompanied or unaccompanied. ... It's just like watching 'Star Wars'; it's just fantasy, a bit of escapism and a bit of fun for a couple of hours ...*

*I wouldn't like to see it legally restricted by age because of parental responsibility. It's too violent for a PG but it's not gory, it's just a lot of violent action, so I gave it an M.*

*The sex scene with the Danish instructor was one reason I gave it an M (rather than PG).*

### **Justification of MA**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film MA:

*I wouldn't mind going with my five year old to see this movie ... but I wouldn't send my ten year old to the pictures by herself to see it. ... But some cartoons are just as violent.*

*... I wouldn't take any ten year old to see it at the movies; I was worried about the violence and the sex scenes ...*

*That style of movie - an action movie - belongs to that classification (MA).*

When asked what would need to be altered for *Tomorrow Never Dies* to move down one classification, one member insisted that a particular scene would have to be removed: ... *the Doctor's, it's a sadistic portrayal and his delight when he thought he was going to annihilate his victim.* Another commented, ... *the violence and non gratuitous sex ... was still there. It could go down to M without the bullet to the head and the dead (drowned) people.*

### 8.4.8 The Board's Assessment

When presented with the Board's report, the Panel, particularly its younger members, generally agreed with the Board's classification decision about this film, basing their assessment on the occasionally detailed violent scenes and, to a far lesser degree, sexual references. The scene where Bond shoots his assailant 'execution style' raised notable concern in both groups. The underlying consensus was that such violence was too direct for the Bond genre; the violence in this genre would normally be more stylised, common to 'action-packed' movies.

Some of the Panellists in the older group challenged the Board's classification of *Tomorrow Never Dies*; indeed almost half of this group, mainly the males, (and over 25% of the Panel as a whole) awarded the film a higher classification than the Board's rating of M.

There was mild disagreement in this group about the Board's decisions regarding violence; the perception of a graphic and *detailed* style of violence throughout the film led some Panellists to dispute the Board's classification and consumer advice, ... *it should be medium level violence* (rather than 'low level' as advised by the Board).

Significantly, no-one in the older group indicated they would prevent any of their children (who were of toddler age and above) from watching this film.

## 8.5 BRISBANE PANEL'S RESPONSES TO THE WINTER GUEST

The Board's synopsis read as follows:

*Frances, a photographer, lives in a small Scottish fishing village with her teenage son, Alex. As a harsh, cold snap arrives, freezing everything in sight, Frances retreats into moody listlessness as she struggles with the memory of her dead husband and the meddling of Elspeth, her aging mother.*

The Board classified the film M and the Consumer Advice read 'adult themes, medium level coarse language'.

### 8.5.1 General Response

The Panel evidenced mixed responses to *The Winter Guest*, some finding it to be morbid - 'too deep, too sad, too slow', whereas others commented positively on the touching characters and the film's final message of hope. Generally, the females and the older members of the Panel favoured the film more than the others. Acknowledged by the Panellists as a 'woman's film', many of the males who enjoyed aspects of *The Winter Guest* mentioned that it was not the type of film they would normally consider viewing. Comments regarding sexual scenes, the themes of death and 'bleakness' and the use of coarse language were raised by few Panellists at this initial stage.

Observations of the younger focus group included the following:

*Wonderful character interaction that required little story base. Lily and Emma Thompson were just superb! It was a story of hope and reliance on others as well as calling on personal strengths.*

*A bit dull mainly because I am not into tear jerking movies. I also think it contained a bit too much swearing that was not needed.*

*I couldn't pick up on the story; it was too slow.*

*A bit depressing - no plot - relationship based with life and death issues.*

The older focus group members commented:

*Very enjoyable because of its realistic portrayal of the different stages of life and its daily struggles.*

*Good - more of a woman's movie. Slow to start but moved on. Had a story to follow.*

*Good but slow at covering loss, grief, sexual awakening, inadequacy and dissatisfaction. People of all ages were shown facing the subject of death in one day.*

*Touching story about several relationships and winter life in a small Scottish village.*

*Deep and meaningful - made the viewer think hard. It was not to my taste in films although beautifully filmed.*

*Too heavy going and morbid. The movie did have some humorous parts and nice photography, but it was just too deep.*

### 8.5.2 Language

The language used in the film was the major issue raised by both groups, in particular the frequent use of the word 'fuck' by two pre-adolescent boys. At the outset numerous Panellists were overwhelmed by the use of such language by young people but after discussing the related issues, some of the participants thought that the strong language was appropriate to the film's storyline.

*I think it's important that the kids were portrayed the way they were, at the cusp of maturing ... they feel the need to use excessive language because adults use it. ... Kids tend to be over-the-top about things; ... it gives them that feeling of growing-up ... experimenting, trying to be little adults.*

*The language was relevant; there was a bit of humour there.*

*That's the everyday language of that particular group; we assume that's how they talk outside the home. ... That's just keeping to a little bit of realism. Do we*

*want a movie to portray life being really lovely or life on the not so glossy side in the not so salubrious areas?*

*What else would you expect a young boy to say after he's just put on 'Deep Heat' (on his penis) ... followed by a handful of ice?*

Several of the Panellists were offended by the frequency of swearing by the pre-adolescent boys rather than the actual words themselves.

*It was more the extent it was used. ... After a while I thought, 'why so much, why so much'?*

*The language was comical but still excessive. It was more acceptable for the boy in pain to swear like that.*

*In a movie the language should be toned down - it was a bit too much.*

Interestingly, once most of the Panellists in the older group accepted that children spoke coarsely when adults were not present, one member insisted that a social standard was acknowledged in *The Winter Guest* because the young boys only swore when they were on their own; they would cease swearing when an adult was present. From this arose a major topic of concern - the modelling of behaviour to children - which the older Panellists debated thoroughly. Even if coarse language or other detrimental behaviour, such as smoking, was characteristic of youth (ie not gratuitous), was society condoning such behaviour by its screen portrayal? Participants wondered if the media demonstrated that it was socially acceptable for young people to use coarse language or to smoke.

*(In defence) There was a mention that you shouldn't be smoking.*

*How do you rate it; there are kids in it. ... There's frequent use of language by the kids. ... kids are going to relate to them I guess ...*

*We talk about role models. Those 12-13 year old boys were experimenting with life, they were experimenting with tobacco ... there's the language ... I can see other*

*children as young as that saying, 'well, they're doing it on that picture, it must be OK'. ... We have all these restrictions and legalities about the selling of tobacco to minors yet we're portraying them doing it in the movies.*

*Don't you feel you're condoning bad language by saying, 'yes, everyone's doing that, we'll say that in a movie'? Then the kids will think nothing wrong of it.*

*The language I didn't like ... there are quite a number who don't know that it is inappropriate ... at that age group, hearing it like that, and everyone else in the audience laughing just reinforces that it's OK and it doesn't matter. ... We're getting to the stage now where there are no standards ... they go into the workplace using it ... and it's young people.*

### 8.5.3 Adult Themes

The older Panellists identified similar adult themes as the Board, but there was a difference of opinion in regard to the level of impact of these adult elements.

#### **'Bittersweet' elements**

Unprompted, the older group debated whether the film's concern with 'life and death' issues would leave an air of depression or a sense of hope with the viewer.

*... there was nothing going for any of them ... the futility of those boys' lives; they couldn't mature ... they had nothing to look forward to ...*

*... it almost could be used as instructions on life ... it's either pessimism or optimism; the optimists would say everything's going to be alright ...*

*Children can be in very sad, deprived places and still grow up to be very well-rounded, mentally healthy, successful people often because of their background*

*... different people dealing with different ways of dealing with death ... those kids had no fear of death, it was a challenge out of ignorance. Then you had the old lady who was afraid to greet death ... (she was) morbid about it; then (the boys) walking on ice was a contrast to everyone's else's.*

The boys on the beach made some bleak observations about their family life which made an impact on some of the younger Panellists. The lack of laughter and maternal affection in their homes was said to explain their attraction to the older woman and one boy's lonely disappearance at the end.

#### **Question of suicide**

Particularly ambiguous was the closing scene of *The Winter Guest* where first one and then (more hesitantly) the other boy walked out on the frozen sea only to disappear from view in the mist. Those who perceived the entire film to be sad tended to feel there was a suicidal tone to the ending, whereas most of the other older Panellists thought the film concluded with an optimistic note.

*... it depends on how you think ... it's up to you to decide on whether the boys will come back or not.*

*I took it as them never coming back again.*

*You could interpret it as suicidal ... especially to a younger mind.*

*It was the way they were talking when they were sitting around the fire, about life ... in my mind, he kept walking and didn't come back.*

*I didn't see that there was anything depressing in the picture at all; ... it was quite poignant in a couple of ways ... it was a reasonable ending. The daughter cleaned out the attic so the mother could come and stay with her, the young boys had the kittens, and the young fellow has this relationship going with the girl and she said she'll see him again!*

*The boys did not go out there for suicide.*

*... the cats gave them an impetus; 'I've now got something to care for, I now have a purpose in life.' ... There was no suggestion of suicide at all.*

A couple of Panellists expressed a more neutral position; *... he made a foolish decision ... just out of stupid youthful ignorance ... but not deliberate suicide ... maybe accidental death.*

As was the case with *Mrs Dalloway*, the younger Panellists seemed more sensitive to the suggestion of suicide. Several of the younger Panellists were adamant that the boy who walked over the ice was bent on self-destruction.

A minor point but of importance to some of the younger female participants was the welfare of the kittens in the film, who were carried by one boy as they crossed the ice.

A member of the Panel believed the bath scene (where the lead character is submerged under the bath water) had the potential to mislead younger viewers; another Panellist disputed this.

*... the girl was in the bath tub, the fact she went under the water, giving them ideas ... you shouldn't be showing that as a way of escape.*

*It wasn't close to suicide ... it was just showing a way of how sound won't get to you ...*

Regarding these adult elements, there were no major differences of opinion by gender in either group.

**Nudity and Sexual References**

The older group, although admitting the nudity and sex were elements to take into consideration when classifying the film, mostly believed these scenes would have a low impact on younger viewers. The younger group described the sex and nudity as low key, subtle, sensitive and totally harmless.

*The first scene of the woman in the bath was so brief I don't think you could consider it at all. They only other scene was when the young couple were in front*

*of the fire and he touched her face ... and took her shawl off; ... there was a brief glimpse there. But however that portrayed a naked embrace, although they were dressed from the waist down. ... You had to take that into consideration in the rating of it ... but it was only very brief.*

*It wasn't out of place and it was tastefully done.*

*I completely forgot about that nude scene!*

Most of the Panel did not criticise the scenes depicting the pre-adolescent boys' sexual curiosity in their own genitalia. However a couple of the younger males were mildly discomforted by one boy's description of his father's penis.

**8.5.4 Panel Classification**

The majority of Panellists (52%) gave *The Winter Guest* an M classification - the classification given by the Board - and a further two Panellists (from the younger group) gave the film the lower classification of PG. However nine Panellists gave the film a classification of MA.

There were no significant age or gender differences in classifying *The Winter Guest*.

**THE WINTER GUEST (M)**

	TOTAL PANEL	UNDER 35 YEARS	35+ YEARS
G	-	-	-
PG	2	2	-
M	12	6	6
MA	9	4	5
R	-	-	-

**8.5.5 Classification Debate**

Although almost equally divided on the film's classification, most of the Panel (16 of the 23 Panellists) agreed that 15 years was the youngest suitable viewing age and one other member suggested an even higher minimum viewing age of 17 years. Interestingly, a couple of younger Panellists thought PG was the most appropriate classification for *The Winter Guest* despite the

inclusion of the expletive 'fuck', thus challenging the Classification Guidelines on language. The core issues on which people differed in their opinions appeared to be the frequent use of coarse language, its modelling influence on children and the film's poignant themes. The older group was in agreement that the serious and adult themes of growing up and survival in adversity dominated the film.

### **Justification of M/PG**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film M or PG:

*Plenty of children use language like that anyway. I just thought it was a very realistic portrayal of the stages of life ... The only reason I said PG was I don't think language is an issue ... I didn't feel depressed by it ... they are the implications of living.*

*When I started watching it I thought PG then I thought, no, I thought there was a fair bit of nudity ...*

*I didn't think it warranted the MA because boys at that age together would speak that way and try to smoke ... I thought that everything was going to come right at the end.*

*I would have given it a PG were it not for the language.*

### **Justification of MA**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film MA:

*... I gave it an MA, I felt the language was the primary factor, I felt it was gratuitous ... every second word, and there was no real need for that, and according to this (the Guidelines) that's where it belongs ... The nudity and the sexual references don't really come up to the same extent.*

*The movie had a mature perspective, you have to be a certain age before you have any idea of that mature perspective; that's why I gave it an MA. The attitudes, a*

*depressing story; ... I think it would give kids a wrong impression of life...*

*Mine was MA, mainly for language. ... It was full on, all the time, especially by the kids ...*

*I chose MA because of language and the themes, such as death. The themes could be disturbing for someone under 15 ... they may require some guidance for any questions asked.*

*... kids are so influenced by films, if there was a child under 15, who had come from a depressed situation, that would be reinforcing the continuities of what life is about, and that's worried me the most ... that's why I gave it MA.*

### **8.5.6 The Board's Assessment**

Around half of the older group disagreed with some of the Board's assessment, in particular its decisions regarding the scope of the adult themes and the level and frequency of coarse language in the film.

*There's too much language for M. Not the words themselves, but there's a lot of it ... We're going by their Guidelines; they're saying it should be MA.*

*...to me, the impact (of adult themes) was quite high throughout the film. ... I disagree with that classification.*

However, other Panellists argued in defence of the Board's decision by commenting that they didn't think the language was 'aggressive' or 'detailed'.

As noted, the ambiguous ending of the film aroused much interest. Both groups debated whether the boys intended to commit suicide or not. Panellists held conflicting views on the overall message of the film and its ending - a discouraging film with a pessimistic conclusion or a touching dramatisation with a hopeful ending. Many of the Panellists expected these concluding scenes of high impact to be cited in the Board's assessment of the film and were surprised to learn of their absence. Similarly, the scenes of

children smoking were not a classification factor for the Board, yet a few Panellists were concerned about the message this would convey to impressionable young viewers.

Using the Board's classification for *Mrs Dalloway* as a benchmark, some Panellists in the older group were swayed by this assessment when making their classification decisions for *The Winter Guest*, a film they generally regarded to be far more damaging and controversial.

### 8.6 CONCLUSIONS - BRISBANE PANEL

#### 8.6.1 The Nature of the Community Assessment Panel

The Brisbane Panel was very supportive of the need for the Guidelines and for Consumer Advice. The Panellists referred to the classification manuals frequently during the discussion, making use of the official terminology and regularly reminded each other of definitions and levels. However, some participants, particularly those in the older group, disputed the Board's classification decisions at times, especially in the case of *Mrs Dalloway*.

A useful aspect of the methodology was the capacity to identify the classification made by each individual and *then* to assess the effect of peer opinion on the individual's subsequent considerations. Within their groups, the Panellists occasionally reached a near unanimous agreement on a couple of the films but when there was a difference of opinion participants listened and responded to each other's views. The lengthy discussion also allowed certain aspects of the films to be revealed which some acknowledged they had initially overlooked.

#### 8.6.2 Concerns About Films

The Brisbane Panel generally shared common concerns about film content, although there were occasions when some Panellists attached more significance to some issues than other members of the Panel.

Although violence was one of the major areas of concern for the Panel, the impact of despondent

themes and suicide on young people emerged as a major issue debated by the Panel. Concern about coarse language and its effect on young viewers was also discussed in length, but only in regard to *The Winter Guest*.

The younger Panellists in particular thought the suicidal and angst-ridden nature of *Mrs Dalloway* could be harmful and dangerous to vulnerable young viewers, being conscious of a high suicide rate amongst Australian youth. In contrast the older Panellists did not attach as much importance to these elements for a variety of reasons. Perhaps because suicide does not have as high a profile for their own generation, the older participants did not perceive these themes to be as dominant or as distressing as the younger group did. Older Panellists found some of the supposedly controversial scenes to be fairly mild, non-violent and not particularly graphic. These older participants did not experience a strong cumulative effect from these more depressing themes which they described as infrequent and isolated in contrast to the younger Panellists view.

The younger group acknowledged that the suicide of rock star Michael Hutchence influenced their perception of the suicide theme in two of the films. This heightened awareness is an example of fluctuations in community attitudes which are subject to external world events and media reporting.

Some interesting points were made, in both focus groups, regarding children's cognitive thought processes which influenced the classifications they gave films. Some members of the Panel assumed that the more complex adult themes would 'go straight over their heads', whereas others asserted that children absorbed and comprehended more material than was assumed.

Initially, a few Panellists (more so the older participants) found it difficult to grasp that they needed to make classification decisions for an audience wider than what they assumed it would be. Some were convinced that young people would not be interested in watching certain films, (eg a slow, period drama such as *Mrs Dalloway*) thus when these Panellists originally classified this film they repeatedly commented that its

impact on children was *not* an issue since it was unlikely that young people would view this particular film.

The older group, all of whom were parents, indicated a willingness to explain the more controversial and troubling elements of films to their children, suggesting *Mrs Dalloway* should have been classified as PG because it was a film that literally *required* parental guidance. On the other hand, the younger people were more concerned that viewers may be disturbed by the film's content in the first instance. The older Panellists were far more conscious of the poignant themes in *The Winter Guest* and what impact they may have on younger people although there was no definite suicide in this film. In this case the mature elements were said to be dominant throughout the film, and their impact was considered more intense because of the accumulation of themes involving high emotional content.

Violence and to a lesser degree, the use of coarse language, were other issues that the Panel discussed, and some were particularly concerned about its modelling effect on children.

In line with the Sydney Panel, parents, older people and women in the Brisbane Panel tended to be more concerned about violence in films, although it was still an issue for most of the Panel. Mothers, in particular, were anxious about children 'copycatting' screen violence. Other members of the Panel declared that children were immune to violent scenes on screen, and referred to children's television programs - 'real' and animated - such as *Power Rangers* and *Superman*. Again, as identified in the Sydney group, Panellists were generally more concerned about the behaviour of other children rather than their own.

Perhaps relevant to the films viewed, participants were also more anxious about an increase in children's 'acting out' rather than their emotional state after viewing a violent/action film. For instance there was little mention that some violent material may frighten or scare young viewers. In general the Panel assumed there was a fairly direct influence on children's behaviour arising from screen entertainment. It was further

assumed that children imitated actions they observed on screen.

The Panel tended to be critical of 'senseless', detailed, frequent violence that was out of context, thus in agreement with the Classification Guidelines. The violence in the extremely popular action genre, typified by the Bond films, was generally accepted by the Panel. However, when acts of violence were outside the fine line of 'Bond violence' they were deemed to be inappropriate for the genre and therefore 'unacceptable'. The older males in particular felt it would be appropriate to watch *Tomorrow Never Dies* with their children, believing this genre to be suitable for 'family viewing'.

In relation to the potential harmful impact on children, the Panel was inclined to be more concerned about 'depressing and real' elements in films than with what they perceived to be the escapist nature of stylised violence (although admittedly within strict boundaries) as depicted in *Tomorrow Never Dies*. Also, violence involving a cutting instrument (eg a knife, a ninja star) was often felt to be more distressing than when firearms or bombs were used. Stabbing/cutting was regarded as more immediate or personal - thus heightening its effect on viewers - whereas other forms of violence were generally perceived to be more distant or impersonal. (Members of the Sydney Panel voiced similar views on this issue.) Thus the 'impersonality' of a shooting was seen to be breached when the James Bond character actually held a gun to the head of a villain.

Language was a highly debated topic in relation to *The Winter Guest*. The Panel were divided on whether coarse language should be portrayed to such an extent, even when its use was in context. The Panellists who were most critical about its modelling impact on young people tended to be those who were the most appalled by the pre-adolescent boys frequent use of the word 'fuck'. The offence taken by these Panellists appeared to be exacerbated because the swearing was *committed by minors*.

For the Panel, the three films elicited little controversy over sex reflecting, in large part, the limited sexual references in these films. There was limited reference to the genital self-

experimentation carried out by the pre-adolescent boys in *The Winter Guest* and practically no mention of Bond's sexual innuendos although these were cited in the Board's classification assessments. The most pronounced issue was one related to *sexuality* rather than the act of sex; a few of the female Panellists, notably the teenagers, found scenes of women kissing to be highly offensive.

### 8.6.3 Comparison with Classification Board Decisions

The majority of the Brisbane Panel awarded two of the three films they viewed the same classification as the Board. The older Panellists in particular tended to nominate different classifications, at times lower, and other times higher than the Board's choice.

In this final section a summary of the Panel's positions in relation to each of the films is compared with the Board's position, concentrating on any points of difference. It can be assumed that if differences are not indicated then the Panel were in agreement with the Board's report.

#### Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (rated M)

A majority of the Panel (14) rated the film PG and the next most frequent classification was M (6 people). The remainder nominated G (2) and MA (1).

The two groups representing the Panel - one comprising members aged under 35 years, the other mainly those aged 35 years plus - offered quite contrasting views of this film. All eleven participants in the older group classified *Mrs Dalloway* a lower rating than M yet over half the members of the younger group chose M or MA.

The older Panellists were surprised at the Board's classification of *Mrs Dalloway*. These Panel members strongly disagreed with both the Board's and the younger focus group's views on the level of impact of the suicidal and depressive themes and their centrality in the film. Indeed, the older group, all of whom were parents, did not perceive these elements to be harmful, but if they did trouble young viewers, these Panellists asserted that these mature elements could easily be

explained afterwards or be given advice by any responsible adult. Some of these participants were of the opinion that these scenes would be beyond children's cognitive understanding.

The older group were equally surprised to discover that *The Winter Guest* had been classified with the same rating (M), a film they considered to be far more harmful, dangerous and influential to young people.

The younger Panellists, in comparison, were more conservative, commenting on *Mrs Dalloway's* 'disturbing' themes, thus agreeing with the Board. They were particularly concerned about the more despondent themes having a considerable impact on distraught, vulnerable youth; this group was very aware of the prevalence of suicide and depression among young Australians.

Only a few Panellists - notably the teenage girls - mentioned the scenes where two women were kissing. The teenage girls were offended by these scenes which were not referred to in the Board's report.

#### Tomorrow Never Dies (rated M)

A majority (16) rated the film M, while a significant minority (6) nominated MA and the remaining Panellist selected PG.

Five of the MA nominations were from the older participants.

Most of the Panel agreed with the Board's assessment of *Tomorrow Never Dies*. However, a few Panellists, mainly in the older group, felt the film contained highly regular, graphic and detailed violence, elements they considered deserved an MA rating. These Panel members also considered the violence to be *medium* level thus in conflict with the Board's decision on consumer advice.

#### The Winter Guest (rated M)

A slight majority (12) rated the film M, while a substantial minority (9) nominated MA and a further two Panellists selected the PG classification.

The older group were split between M and MA mainly because of the film's general poignancy (which was prominent in its ending) and the level and frequency of coarse language used by the pre-adolescent boys.

Some of the participants were accepting of the boys' swearing, stating that it gave the film a realistic feel. Others were highly concerned that the film would, in effect, be condoning the use of coarse language among children.

The Panel was divided on *The Winter Guest's* 'bittersweet' elements; a significant number were concerned that its core themes were too bleak for young viewers. As a whole, the Panel was surprised that the ending, which they considered to be of high impact, was not raised in the Board's classification assessment.

A couple of the male participants in their twenties were embarrassed by the young boys' increasing sexual awareness. However the rest of the Panel barely mentioned these scenes when discussing the classifiable elements of the film. Likewise, there was minimal debate on the sexual scenes involving the teenage couple.

A few of the older participants were concerned that *The Winter Guest* depicted children (the pre-adolescent boys) smoking.

## 9.0 WAGGA WAGGA COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PANEL

### 9.1 Wagga Wagga Panel Procedure

The Wagga Wagga Community Assessment Panel was the third Panel conducted and took place from 13 to 15 March 1998 over a Friday night, Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon. Viewing and discussions took place at the Forum 6 Cinema in the centre of Wagga Wagga. The methodology used was as described earlier in Section 2 of the report.

The films viewed by the Wagga Wagga Panel were:

- n *Anastasia* - animated picture built on the fabled survival of the daughter of the last Russian Tsar.
- n *Primary Colors* - confrontational political drama alleged to depict President Clinton's pre-selection campaign.
- n *Dangerous Beauty* - period film based on the true story of a 16th century Venetian courtesan.

As noted elsewhere, the consultants were not informed about the classification the films received from the Board to avoid any conscious or unconscious influence by the consultants on the decision-making of the Panel.

### 9.2 Wagga Wagga Panel Composition

Recruitment of Panel members in Wagga Wagga was sub-contracted to J & S Research, an independent company specialising in such recruitment; this organisation also recruited the Sydney Panel. J & S Research was established as a recruitment company fifteen years ago and has been a member of the Market Research Quality Assurance Scheme since its inception six years ago. Its work is independently audited on a yearly basis. In Wagga Wagga the company holds a data base of approximately 650 people developed by referrals and advertising.

The table over the page summarises the key characteristics of the 21 Panel members actually participating in the Wagga Wagga Panel.

Appendix C sets out the results of the questionnaire which sought further information on the background of Panellists, their film viewing habits and preferences, knowledge of classification categories etc.



### 9.3 WAGGA WAGGA PANEL'S RESPONSES TO ANASTASIA

The Board's synopsis of the film is as follows:

*Anastasia is based on the real life events surrounding the overthrow of Tsar Nicholas, the murder of his family and the rumoured survival of his daughter, Anastasia. Anastasia leaves the orphanage in which she grew up seeking adventure. Dimitri, a young con man, escorts her to Paris, hoping to collect a finder's fee. They are pursued by Rasputin, the mad monk, trapped in hell because his curse on the Romanov family is incomplete.*

The Board classified the film PG with a Consumer Advice of 'supernatural themes'.

#### 9.3.1 General Response

The Panel generally enjoyed the film and commented on its technical and artistic quality - 'its animation, music and appropriate voices of famous stars'. However, a few Panellists did indicate that *Anastasia* was 'historically inaccurate' and that 'kids are going to watch it and not know better'. Most of the Panel thought that many young children, irrespective of gender, would 'love this movie'. Early in the discussion, only a couple of the younger participants pointed out aspects of the film that could frighten younger children. Some initial comments from both groups are set out below.

*Great. Good story line made from a true experience. Loved the music and singing.*

*Excellent! Wonderful piece of 'Computer Art'. ... there was a magicalness there ... Beautiful colour, nice 'love' storyline, happy ever after feel. A sense of knowing that good would triumph.*

*I enjoyed it. It should be good for younger audiences - easy to watch, good escapism. An attempt at balance of gender issues. Excellent animation - especially of larger scenes and views, etc.*

*I loved the movie - fairy tale, love story with hero, heroine, and an evil person, music and dances - not boring.*

*It was typical of that genre, a lovely girl, handsome guy, the storyline is very cliched, but it does what it sets out to do which is to entertain, and in that sense it does it very well.*

*Very young children would enjoy the story for the story's sake, but older children would get sick of the fairy tale-ness of it all. But I still think the older kids would find it hard not to enjoy it.*

*Animation good; voices very good; historically useless (names, places etc, misused). As a romantic fairytale - fine.*

*Technically good. Not necessarily very interesting theme for boys.*

*Good story - somewhat predictable. Intense in stages.*

*It was good. Most of it was without any doubt a 'G' film. There were a few bits, eg Rasputin falling apart that I wasn't sure how my five year old would feel.*

#### Visual impact

A few of the older Panellists commented on the film's 'looming' style during the more violent and emotional scenes. They remarked that this impact would be lessened on 'the small screen'.

*To me the size of everything was as frightening as the content ... it was quite overwhelming at times ... it would make a small child feel even smaller.*

*It just occurred to me - the size of the screen - the scale of Rasputin was huge, awesome; you see that on a TV screen and it is not all there ... at the cinema, I would take that into consideration if I look at the impact of what could be ridiculous on a TV or video screen ... also it's dark around, the child concentrates much more on the screen.*

*... initially when he appeared and cursed the family, the whole screen was filled*

*with this menace. A little child could be very frightened by that.*

One individual commented that the entire movie was filmed in a style which heightened the visual impact: ... *filming was done on low shots coming up which would increase that feeling.*

### 9.3.2 Violence

The Panel debated the effect that some of the film's aggressive content could have on young children. Mixed views were expressed; the older participants (all of whom, but one, had children), especially the women, tended to be more concerned than the younger group.

*... I can imagine some children being quite frightened by parts of it. There was a repetition of the word 'kill' and it was quite violent, the visuals were violent. And I can imagine some young children needing someone to hold their hand.*

*There was quite a bit of slapping faces ... which didn't really fit in.*

*I think an 11 year old would enjoy it and not be frightened at all. But a little one would need an adult there ... it was scary and a bit violent too.*

*... I'd be very careful about which five year old I would send along to it ...*

*... I think at the beginning someone squashed someone or threw them hard to the floor, fighting scenes, the girl slapping the man ...*

#### **The Rasputin character**

There was some suggestion that 'heroes and villains' was a traditional concept in films, especially ones aimed at young children. One father described Rasputin as the perfect 'baddie'. *Rasputin to me was the Cruella de Ville character, he served the purpose of being the bad guy beautifully well ... everybody, even from an early age would easily identify with the malice of Rasputin.* However, there was a general consensus, more so among the older members, that Rasputin was one of the most disturbing

elements in *Anastasia*. Panellists were concerned that this character might scare younger children.

*I enjoyed it but I wouldn't take a very small child to see it. ... My four year old would not be too impressed with Rasputin, he'd want to go with an adult. You'd need to explain the bad guy. ...*

*The one thing that stands out in my mind is Rasputin, there's just no doubt about it. ... he had a presence that really came across as nasty.*

Occasionally in the film, body parts of Rasputin - a 'doll-like' ghoul - are mechanically dismembered from his torso and face. Many older Panellists described these as gruesome scenes when asked what were the most disturbing elements of *Anastasia*.

*The depiction of Rasputin - rotting corpse and constantly falling apart.*

*... may be scary for a very young child - eg creatures' limbs, head falling off. Slightly risqué.*

*Rasputin's finger coming off and his head disappearing ...*

*That last bit when Rasputin died, that was pretty graphic when he was yelling and being dragged over the ground, a bit intense ...*

However, some Panellists did not regard these scenes as harmful because they perceived the film as an animated fantasy.

*The eyeball dislodging and being replaced - I didn't think kids would have too much of a problem with because it's an old trick that many cartoons use.*

*But I think that kids are so exposed to these type of things and because it's animated ... it doesn't look real ... so the kids would laugh it off, I think.*

*I thought he became friendlier when he started losing his bits ... he became a bit more vulnerable.*

*The Rasputin character ... bits of him fell off, that can't present a real challenge to kids, they'd have worked that out ...*

There was general discussion about the impact of animation and whether it heightened or reduced the impact of the aggression in *Anastasia*.

*Normally I'd say it's not going to scare them that much because it's animated, but it was sometimes real, real, real.*

*Despite being animated, it was very real in places.*

*My son was given 'Tom and Jerry' videos and they're so much worse ... at one point one was chasing the other with a knife ... it's a bit much.*

*But there's no blood and guts ... they can be violent but they're done in a comical way ...*

One mature aged mother described the action as 'scary' for younger children. *I think it was the implied violence that might disturb the children ... there wasn't anything actually violent in it ... the threat of the unknown ...*

Many Panellists mentioned that the comical elements in *Anastasia*, in particular the Jewish bat character, counteracted the more violent and troubling scenes to some degree.

*... the little guy is making funny quips in the background but is bashing his head against the wall ... it made me crack up, it wasn't violent, it was funny.*

*The small amount of violence or evil vision was balanced well with a small white amusing animal to make the darkness appear a little comical as to not cause disturbances in kids' heads.*

*... the Rasputin thing was perfectly counterbalanced with the little bat.*

*... I thought the edge was taken off that with the bat character.*

### 9.3.3 Adult Themes

The Panel as a whole identified elements which they considered to be 'adult themes'. Some Panellists found particular elements to be 'intense', entailing considerable emotional impact.

#### 'Good versus Evil'

The younger group were particularly concerned about the theme of 'evil' and what effect its portrayal could have on young viewers. For many from this group this was the strongest theme in the film.

Panellists from both groups were worried that the notion of 'evil' may frighten young children but, on the other hand, suggested there was a positive moral element in the tale because 'good defeated evil'. Parents were certain that this subject would need to be explained to five year old children. Some Panel members also suggested that young children would need an adult nearby while viewing the more frightening or sad scenes.

Participants were concerned about how younger children would cope with the more 'evil' aspects of the film, referring to *Anastasia's* more unsavoury characters.

*I worry about the evil bits ... how much it affects kids ...*

*What upsets me is that the guy that is centred on as the hero (Dimitri) is a rat ... kids need heroes ...*

A few of the older members said that some aspects of the film heralded a vague sense of threat accentuated by the eerie 'unknown spirits'. *Those little green things were a bit disturbing.*

However, many Panellists concluded that there were elements in the film which offset the threat of 'evil'.

*What I like is that evil is killed in the end, something bad happens to evil ...*

*It shows kids that some people are bad, some people are good, that's it.*

A couple of Panellists commented that the conflict between *Anastasia* and Dimitri was illuminating because of its moral lessons.

*I thought it was good where she said to him, 'I'm not afraid of you', and whacked him. Good stood up to evil, that's what the film implied you had to do.*

*I think too the business where he came out to make a profit out of her and in the end couldn't out of his own self-respect. I think that sort of shows the kids making money doesn't always work out.*

### **The Russian Revolution**

A few members of the Panel were perturbed that the murder of the Romanov family formed the basis of a feature film for young children. Some also believed that the topics of revolution and war were inappropriate and too tragic for young viewers.

*If the audience is like that (comprised of a young age group) why bother with things like that (the Revolution)?*

*Sometimes you don't necessarily want your children to see people try and kill other people for whatever means. Sometimes they don't understand that in the end the good people do win ... you're a bit worried how influenced they are.*

The older Panellists referred to a war scene at the beginning of the film where soldiers were running through a town. Most of the group regarded this scene to be very tense, instilling 'the feelings of a chase'.

*The train scene, when the trains pulls down the bridge and explodes up into the screen ... everything is fire, bright red and they just escaped ...*

*... musical score contributes to mood.*

### **Supernatural themes and the dream sequence**

The Panel scarcely talked about the supernatural theme prevalent in *Anastasia*. However, Panellists did refer to these 'black magic' elements a little more in their post-viewing questionnaires.

*... there are some issues regarding the devil and after life that may need to be explained to younger children.*

*The graphic handling of the occult/magical theme would perhaps scare some younger kids.*

*There were adult themes of the supernatural and mild horror.*

At one stage in the film, Rasputin invades Anastasia's dreams while she sleeps on a boat in a storm. This scene was a minor issue among the younger group.

*To me it's not violent ... to me, the boat scene was evil, if that part had been taken out, it would need to be re-classified. The intensity needs to be broken ... It (the tension) started before that, in the scene where he says 'right I'm going to get inside your head'. The tempo of the music started to change ... the intensity was still there and it was a long scene, leading to the jump.*

*I couldn't see it being troubling, just the intensity levels were a bit long for a three year old to handle in certain parts ... the boat scene.*

The dream sequence was raised in the older group only after some prompting. A couple of Panellists thought that the dream sequence could induce some children to have nightmares.

*The potential is there if a child has a leaning towards reacting in that way and the dream sequence where she was following the butterflies and it turned out to be horror at the end ... that concerned me that to her that was a good dream and the reality was horror ...*

*That was a bit nerve-racking ... when Anastasia was almost plunged into the sea.*

On the other hand, a mature father expressed quite a different view. *... the guy could have gone in and stabbed her which would have been very nasty ... but they decided to do it subtly with these little things ...*

**9.3.4 Panel Classification**

Shown below are the classification decisions of the Panel. It should be remembered that both classifications were recorded before the Board’s decision was revealed to the Panel.

The Panel was split between the ratings of G and PG prior to the discussion of *Anastasia*. A narrow majority (by a single Panellist) of the Panel gave it G classification (the Board gave the film PG classification). Both groups were divided between these two classifications although the younger participants were marginally more in favour of the G rating than the older group. After the discussion, none of the Panellists changed their choice of classification rating.

**ANASTASIA (PG)**

	TOTAL PANEL	UNDER 35 YEARS	35+ YEARS
G	11	6	5
PG	10	4	6
M	-	-	-
MA	-	-	-
R	-	-	-

**9.3.5 Classification Debate**

Immediately after viewing the film but *before* the group discussion, Panellists nominated in the questionnaire a minimum age for an acceptable audience for *Anastasia*. The younger group recommended a broader spectrum of minimum ages (from two to ten years of age) than the older Panellists (from five to eight years of age).

In the discussion, it was generally accepted that children around the age of five years would most *enjoy* the film. Some parents added that they thought that ten or eleven year olds may find *Anastasia* somewhat 'childish'. Nevertheless, more so among the older participants, parents stated that these younger children would need a supportive adult present to explain some of the film's more troubling and complex elements and to comfort them during its frightening moments.

*To small children there's no harmless fear, an adult should be with them. For older children it's pretty enjoyable, they don't mind getting a bit of a fright ...*

*... it's still essentially a children's movie with a few real life elements in it ... as long as you explain it to them that these things sometimes happen and let them know why, it's a good thing ... as long as we break out of our stereotypical responses (such as), 'you're a boy don't cry' ...*

Participants who emphasised the need for an adult presence tended to nominate a PG rating to send 'a message' to parents. Most of the older group questioned whether five or six year old children would go to the cinema without a guardian, regardless of whether the film was classified G or PG.

*Parents wouldn't allow their five and six year old just to go alone to the cinema.*

*A lot of parents do, especially in the cities, a lot of parents use cinemas as baby sitting services, and so you've got to protect those children ...*

*I wouldn't send any five or six year old to a movie on their own because there is a big G up there ...*

*Some young children go to the movies without adult supervision - this one needs for the child to go supervised.*

*I know parents that watch the video first and decide whether it is suitable or not ...*

The Panellists who were unsure about which classification to select argued that in this situation it was 'safer to go higher'. *If you're not sure which way to go it's better to go up to PG ... rather than having little children on their own really frightened.*

The Panel, in both groups, identified that it was difficult to categorise all children when judging the impact of some scenes.

*The younger kids could be a little traumatised by it, but when classifying we can't satisfy everyone ...*

*My nephew laughs when there's death and sorrow in some films!*

*Kids can sit down and watch Hercules, Zena on TV now, and that's got more horror in it than what was on the screen today, and they're on (television during) children's viewing times.*

There was a variance of opinion in relation to what age children were capable of handling or recalling certain scenes.

*It depends on the age group watching it. A five to six year old would be able to understand it and know what's real and what's not, but a three year old's attention span wouldn't last ten minutes.*

*You can't say they're three, they'll forget it, because they won't.*

*The violence and 'scary bits' although present are in context. The children in my experience of five years of age and older can handle these brief examples.*

A couple of Panellists thought some of the more troubling scenes would go 'over young children's heads', but one stated that they could be a problem for slightly older children. *Some of the adult themes are too complicated for younger children, yet if they were ten ...*

As noted, most of the Panel were concerned that young children would be frightened by the elements of 'evil', but some participants were satisfied because the film adopted a 'subtle touch on morals and responsibility'.

For a couple of the youngest, child-less participants, *Anastasia* was clearly a G rated film.

*The violent scenes were funny, and overall the movie had a gentle theme.*

*Its infrequent use of violence was of a tone suitable for children. The themes were designed for children.*

The younger Panel members who classified *Anastasia* PG were asked by the facilitator what modifications would be needed for a rating of G. One individual suggested that the film could not move down one classification because of its

fundamental association with the Russian Revolution. *It's mainly when they're discussing the revolution in the first half hour or so ... but you couldn't take it out otherwise it would ruin the movie ... you couldn't do any more for it to be a G.* Another implied that the central themes required a mature perspective, and therefore it was essential that *Anastasia* was PG. *It was an ongoing thing through the movie where things need to be explained.* A couple of the Panellists referred to the dream sequence; this elicited a mild debate in the younger group.

*That was 'Star Wars' for some kids. I don't think it would scare kids.*

*But some might go away with nightmares! It was unexpected. It might shock them and scare them a bit.*

*... my son watched an episode of 'Goosebumps' last year (aged two and a half years) and still tells me about Pumpkinhead ... how he's chasing him in his dreams and wanted to kill him ...*

Many of the PG nominees in the older group held firm views on their classification choice because of the guidelines for the G and PG categories. *To me I thought the guidelines for PG were a fairly good descriptor of the film ... there was mild horror, it was supernatural basically ...*

Panellists differed sharply in opinion on whether the animation heightened or lessened the film's impact on young children.

*Because it was animation, I feel that children would not have nightmares.*

*The realism of the technique accentuates the violence.*

### **Justification of G**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film G:

*It had no sex and no coarse language, no adult scenes ... the evil that was there was so well balanced ... there was nothing there that could offend anybody, nothing at all.*

*... I've seen a lot worse with a G rating anyhow ... '101 Dalmatians' was a heavier film.*

*I gave a G; it is not much different from the stuff my kid has on video at home.*

*... the moral issue was well handled.*

*... I finally settled on G because the parts I had problems with were in context ... the violence ... the atmosphere. It would be totally engrossing for the child while they were in the cinema, any negative feelings they would have would dissipate when in their natural surroundings.*

*The fact that evil dies in the end and the happy ending, they would come out happy.*

*There were no extremes.*

*It wouldn't harm anyone of any age.*

*I thought that movie there was similar to 'Aladdin' - Rasputin, a love story, getting together at the end.*

### **Justification of PG**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film PG:

*Just to explain things ... there's death and the killing of her family ... although it is balanced (you need) to explain that you can't go round killing people 'cos you don't like them ... it's good if you're there, but if you're not there, then they can't ask.*

*The violence of Rasputin towards the Romanovs. Slightly more than acceptable for G.*

*I'd like to be there explaining it all to my three year old.*

*The level and the frequency of the violence was too strong for it to be a G.*

*The beginning, the train and the slime in the end ... when Rasputin dissolves his*

*flesh falls off, and the skeleton comes out, and then he dissipates into dust ...*

*... the bridge scene, with the statues coming to life.*

### **9.3.6 The Board's Assessment**

After the Panel had made their final, post-discussion classification they read and discussed the Classification Board's report of *Anastasia*.

Most of the Panel understood the Board's assessment of the film but many did not think 'the dream sequence' merited such concern. Particularly so in the older group, Panellists were mildly critical of the Board's position and were surprised that the report did not refer to any of the other troubling scenes in *Anastasia*, elements and themes they considered to be worthy of PG classification.

*I'm surprised they've based it (the PG classification) on just on one scene ...*

*... it's just four minutes of the whole movie ...*

*I felt most of our argument today was on 'good versus evil' and we've hardly mentioned anything about the dream.*

*I don't think the violence had 'a light tone'.*

*I agree with their classification but not for the same reasons.*

The Panel was mildly concerned about young children's perception of fantasy and reality but, with a couple of exceptions, not in relation to the dream sequence. The Panel agreed that the supernatural elements in *Anastasia* could be troubling but were referring more to the 'dark ghoulishness' of Rasputin's character. Likewise, when debating whether animated films contributed to a different sense of threat because they were not 'real', Panellists were referring to scenes such as the ones involving the dismemberment of Rasputin's torso.

One individual remained convinced that *Anastasia* should be a G rated film. *I still think it would be G. Kids would be quite capable of making that quantum leap between the reality and the fantasy thing ...*

At the end of the discussion, the older group was informed that the dream sequence had been removed from the film and consequently the Board re-classified *Anastasia* as G with the following Consumer Advice: 'some scenes may be unsuitable for very young children'. All Panellists were highly supportive of the final classification of this film; ... *the G with a Consumer Advice would give parents a warning.*

### 9.4 WAGGA WAGGA PANEL'S RESPONSES TO PRIMARY COLORS

The Board's synopsis of the film read as follows:

*Political drama based on the best-selling novel of the same name by Anonymous - in turn said to be based on Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton's successful campaign to become President of the United States of America. Henry, idealistic grandson of a black civil rights leader, is recruited to the campaign team of Governor Jack Stanton but spends much of his time in damage control as the Governor's alleged sexual indiscretions surface.*

The Board classified the film MA and the Consumer Advice was 'medium level coarse language'.

#### 9.4.1 General Response

On the whole, the Panel found the film to be stimulating and informative and were thoroughly absorbed. The older participants in particular found *Primary Colors* 'fascinating'. Some of the younger Panellists criticised the film's duration - it was almost two and a half hours long.

The following quotes are from the younger focus group:

*Very confrontational considering the current scandal. I enjoyed the movie, it gave insight into campaigns and moral judgements. The movie kept me interested the whole time.*

*Extremely interesting. Good illustration of political agendas and manoeuvres.*

*I thought the film was fairly good. An intense drama that interested you throughout most of the film.*

*Good but drawn out, they could have kept the tempo up consistently throughout the film.*

*I thought it was really good. It ... dragged on a little, but was quite interesting and entertaining throughout.*

The following quotes are from the older focus group:

*Powerful comments on the US electoral process and the influence of the media. It seems that ethics and responsibility triumphs in the end.*

*Great entertainment. Well acted. Some humour. Current enough to be interesting.*

*Engrossing. The corruption of power and the hordes that flock to it amazes me.*

*Fabulous - great range of emotions. Funny, sad, aggressive, romantic.*

*An excellent, powerful, confrontational movie ...*

A few people enjoyed the film despite their dislike of politics and its association with sleaze.

*Great movie. Acting was great, focussing on political issues - corruption and all. Powerful and real.*

*This film made me think of the processes used in the political arena and although I didn't appreciate their methods, I enjoyed the film.*

*I enjoyed the movie but it still left a bad taste in my mouth as to how disgusting politics could be, but I think that was the idea of the movie.*

The Panel referred to its 'realism' and the central character's 'resemblance to Clinton and JFK'. Most of the Panel were impressed by the characters Jack Stanton (played by John Travolta), his wife (played by Emma Thompson)

and Stanton's prime troubleshooter, Libby (played by Kathy Bates).

After its initial praise, both groups instantly discussed the more controversial elements of *Primary Colors*.

### 9.4.2 Language

A number of the Panellists objected to the use of coarse language in the film, and this issue elicited lengthy debate in the older group. The most common criticism was the frequency of swearing in *Primary Colors*, particularly of the word 'fuck'.

*You know what disappoints me so much about these films? Why, why, why do they go over the top with all the foul language, it just spoils it.*

*There's just so much of it.*

*I drew a parallel to 'Pulp Fiction'; I thought that was too much too.*

*The language could have been toned down.*

Other Panellists defended the use of such language by arguing that the swearing was in context with a heated political campaign, enhancing the film's authenticity.

*If it was more cleaned up in terms of the language, for me, it would be completely unrealistic. They don't speak nicely ... they are aggressive, they want to win ...*

*A lot of that is under stress ... when people would come out with things like that.*

*It would have taken away (if the language was toned down) the feeling of sleaze behind all of it ... he manipulated everyone from his wife down to Henry ... so he could achieve his goal in the end. It was actually needed otherwise the film would have been so sweet, so sugary that to me it would have been sickening and boring.*

*... the homosexuality, the gay thing, AIDS, all of these things being here were very real ... the level of language was totally*

*appropriate for that, I don't think it was used for its (own) sake ...*

A couple of Panellists compared the film's level of swearing with other movies, such as Tarantino's, and concluded that the language in *Primary Colors* was far milder.

The majority of participants agreed that the use of coarse language was justified, but not the frequency. Panellists often stated that less swearing would have been equally effective.

*I'm quite happy to have heard 90 per cent of it, but it was the extra ten per cent of it. It was that little tiny bit too much.*

*I didn't think all the swearing was completely necessary ... at times they got carried away: 'fuck, fuck, shit, fuck, fuck, shit.'*

*They could have halved it and it still would have had an effect, but not be so monotonous.*

*... it was getting over the top, there's no dialogue ... just swear words.*

*To me it was the quantity. The quantity took away from the quality.*

*It got to the stage where the word 'fuck' didn't have the same effect on me anymore.*

A few of the younger Panellists suggested that the frequency of coarse of language was inconsistent with some of the characters.

*It was all swearing or nothing ... it was a bit unrealistic ...*

*At one stage he was gross and disgusting, flopping his dick out ... and saying 'fuck' every second ... and then he'll go into a room and say 'no swearing' ...*

*(It was unrepresentative) for this much swearing among such educated people, can't they think of another word ... ?*

The Panel barely discussed the manner in which 'fuck' was used. One of the older women stated it was more acceptable to call each other names than straight out f, f, f, f, f, f.

In one scene, Libby uses the word 'cunt' once, while stressed.

*The 'c' word slipped in there once very quietly and that sort of rocked me ... it just stuck out that much.*

*She did say 'cunt' didn't she ... I thought that was a bit rough.*

Although many were offended by the word 'cunt', particularly those in the younger group, a few Panellists were not even sure if they even heard the word being used.

After much prompting, the older Panellists considered what effect the level of coarse language might have on young viewers; this topic did not appear to be a primary focus of concern for them. A number in the older group thought the OFLC should be 'protecting minors from coarse language', one male stating, *yes they should, that's their job!*

*That's the only problem I have with the amount that the word 'fuck' was used ... it just gets used so consistently that it becomes part of normal language and then the kids take that away from the movie they've seen ...*

*(Just because other people swear) It doesn't make it any more acceptable.*

*If you're under 15 you're impressionable, your mind's open ... As he (another Panellist) said, his child hears 'idiot' on the television so now he's calling the dog 'idiot'.*

Many from this group perceived the impact of the word 'fuck' to be heightened for older viewers or for people from a different culture.

*Coming from a different religious background ... I was not used to the 'f' word ... but my daughter said, 'Mum, it's normal, we talk like that'. To them it's normal, the 'f' word.*

*But we had other words didn't we? If we said 'shit' that was a really bad word and now 'shit' is really normal just like 'fuck' is*

*to the kids now, and probably the 'c' word will be OK in ten years time.*

*You know how we're always worried about children, well I'd feel really embarrassed to be with my grandmother at a film like that, I would be cringing at the language, it's really disrespectful stuff. Older people too are just as vulnerable as the little kids ... my mother and her girlfriends sometimes walk out because of the really over the top language and they just don't like it. They haven't got it in their face all the time like we have.*

*I've seen an elderly couple, in their 70s or 80s, kill themselves laughing at 'The Full Monty' and that word was all the way though it. Nobody took offence at it. (But) I think this was a more hard-hitting movie.*

The younger Panellists pointed out that the film might condone the use of coarse language to young viewers. *When it's acceptable for this big guy (Stanton) to say 'fuck' and what not and he's got people working for him that say 'cunt', are we promoting swearing, are we saying that it's OK to swear? We should never accept it otherwise it will go further.*

As mentioned, few members of the older group seemed concerned about this potential to influence youth. Indeed, one father expressed, *... for this movie here to be cut or hacked (for) language would be such a pity ... with so many issues kids need to come to terms with.*

### 9.4.3 Adult Themes

Particularly for the younger group, the Panel was anxious about some of *Primary Colors'* adult themes and the 'modelling impact' they may have on younger viewers. A few participants stated that the film had many adult themes 'crammed into it'.

*... they were getting as many things in as they could; make her a lesbian, make him gay, make him a drug user ...*

*The whole movie was 'themes' ...*

### **Adultery and other moral issues**

Some of the older Panellists found the cunning politicking and 'bizarre' acceptance of adultery by Stanton's wife to be among the most stimulating elements in the film.

*... it portrayed the politics exactly the way we expected it to be, it was cut-throat, it was bloody ... but it was lifelike in a way. You could relate to the characters doing what they did, the tactics they used against each other ...*

*The part I enjoyed the most was the relationship between the husband and the wife.*

In contrast, many in the younger group were offended by the film's 'moral judgements' which they considered to be among the strongest elements to take into consideration for classification purposes.

The younger Panellists tended to be sympathetic towards the chief campaigner, Henry, because of his idealistic political beliefs.

*To me it showed the naivety of Henry ... he wanted to follow someone who could stand up for sound moral and political judgements yet the Travolta character was, 'in order to do that you've got to ... do all these other things' ...*

*I think he's resigned himself to the fact he's never going to find that ultimate person ... you've just got to take people how they are ... and to put up with his flaws.*

Across the Panel, members expressed distaste at the lack of integrity presented in American political life.

*... they're always going to dig dirt on the other person, and just how deep they're prepared to go about digging dirt ...*

*... there was very little to do with politics, and more to do with who can win and how ... and there was a definite moral issue on how far you should or shouldn't go ...*

*... it's not what you do, it's how you can defend what you've done and make the other person look bad ...*

*... I would be worried about the affairs, lies and deceit ... but that's all part of politics, I suppose.*

*The dispensability of human beings ... even people's emotions were expendable, so I hurt my wife but that's OK ... so I look someone in the eye and lie but that's OK ... then I can fire this one, then that one.*

*... the Presidency was more important than his cheating on her ... she was willing to do what it took, to save face.*

Some of the younger women were concerned what messages *Primary Colors* would convey to younger viewers.

*Some 15 year olds may be turned off (by the lies and deceit), some might not be. Depends on how you've been brought up.*

*All these affairs aren't good for younger kids, and she (his wife) just accepts them...*

*I think if kids watch those kinds of things over and over again they get set in their minds, the more accustomed they become. If they keep seeing affairs and things like that they become accustomed and don't see it as that bad.*

A few of the younger Panellists were anxious that a Presidential candidate - despite the 'warts and all' portrayal - could be a role model for influential young people. However, one male was optimistic about Stanton: *... at a basic level John Travolta's character was a good, honest decent type of man who realised to change the country he'd need to lie, cheat, steal to get into office ... you do get the impression that at the end, when he's President, he might try to do some good things ...*

### **Suicide**

The scene depicting Libby's suicide was not raised early in the discussions by the Panellists. Once prompted for a response to this element of

*Primary Colors*, the younger Panellists showed marginally more concern than the older members.

Initially, a few participants commented on Libby's qualities and the politics surrounding her suicide.

*Her ethics and morals were so debased that she felt she had nothing left. Nothing left for her to go onto.*

*She really died with honour. In many ways that lady was the hero of the movie. ... She had a set of values that she quite rigidly adhered to.*

Most of the Panel perceived the suicide scene to be quite mild in impact.

*They could have done it in a much worse way ... if they really wanted to be messy they could have been.*

*It was very subtle ...*

*When she drove off I thought 'there's a suicide coming up here', but there was no sound of the gun, there was nothing at all ... then I heard the sirens going off and I thought it wasn't related, then all of a sudden it was, and I thought that was pretty tame.*

One younger male justified this scene by saying: *if we didn't get that close-up of her would we have got the same emotional reaction from Henry? ... I think it was there to capture the emotion from Henry rather than the suicide itself ...*

A few of the female Panellists from both groups were concerned about the potentially dangerous message the suicide could deliver to younger viewers.

*... it could perhaps put an idea in somebody's head ...*

*The suicide ... watch the suicide rate climb ... could be a bit scary.*

*That would show people how it was done.*

*... some people could be having a hard time and think I'll do that ...*

Despite the acceptance of the suicide scene by the majority, some believed that the scene should have been filmed with less detail of the suicide.

*I don't know that we actually needed to focus on where she put the gun. The long shot down to the ute would have been just as effective.*

*Her comments before she drove away, you knew what she was going to do anyhow so all you really needed to see was the ute in the distance.*

*We didn't need to see the gun; a shot or maybe a funeral would have been sufficient.*

### Drugs

Only a couple of Panellists perceived the reference to a political opponent's cocaine habit to be an issue to a young audience. Most of the Panel found this element of *Primary Colors* to be in context, mild in impact and an illustration of drug use as 'bad news'.

*I thought it was relevant in so far that it was a part of his life that he left well and truly behind and now he regretted that and was totally against it ...*

*There was a small mention of drugs but it wouldn't bother me.*

*The drug references really discredit the use of drugs anyway. One man's dying of AIDS, another's family is breaking up and is in a position of being nationally disgraced; it didn't promote it at all.*

*I thought it was a great moral story.*

### Sexuality

There were a couple of instances in *Primary Colors* where gay or lesbian behaviour was raised. In one scene, Libby kissed a fellow female campaigner fairly passionately. The older group scarcely raised this issue, but a few of the younger women noted this scene with disapproval.

*... I don't think it's necessary to show two women on screen kissing ...*

*It wasn't relevant to the movie, if they had to kiss it didn't need to be so long ... you expected it to stop but it just kept on going a bit longer.*

A couple of the males in this group disagreed.

*... I'm not offended by a man and a women kissing so why be offended by two men or two women kissing ... it's irrelevant whether they're homosexual or not ... they're portraying two people that are intimate together.*

*... to me it was emphasising Libby's character ... she wasn't going to be dominated by anyone, she was herself and her individuality ... I wasn't looking at the sexuality side but more the dominant role she played.*

**Sexual references**

A couple of the younger women agreed that a particular scene in which a male staffer appears to expose himself to a female colleague at work was despicable and possibly gratuitous.

The Panel agreed that there were 'no visual sex scenes' despite the 'countless' verbal sexual references.

**9.4.4 Violence**

An individual in the older group referred to a scene where, upon hearing about her husband's affair, Mrs Stanton slaps her adulterous spouse. *... I think that's why the slaps were used. If someone were to call someone a strong word it wouldn't have registered any more than the day-to-day language, so the slap really reinforced the fact.*

Most of this group were not concerned by this scene although one woman asked, *don't you think that's disturbing though ... the language wasn't strong enough anymore ... could that be giving a message that it's better to slap?*

One young male recalled a scene where Libby threatened to 'blow off someone's balls' with a gun. However, he felt that its depiction was in a comical light which lessened the impact and *you knew she wasn't going to do it.*

**9.4.5 Panel Classification**

There was little difference between the Panel's pre- and post-discussion classification decisions. All participants rated *Primary Colors* M or MA; in respect to their final choices, some 60% of the Panel were in accord with the Board's classification of MA.

**PRIMARY COLOURS (MA)**

	TOTAL PANEL	UNDER 35 YEARS	35+ YEARS
G	-	-	-
PG	-	-	-
M	8	1	7
MA	13	9	4
R	-	-	-

**Panel classification by age**

There were differences between the groups; nearly all of the younger Panellists favoured the MA classification compared with almost two-thirds of the older group nominating M.

**9.4.6 Classification Debate**

Immediately after watching the film, the majority of the Panel (15 of its 21 members) nominated 15 years as the minimum suitable viewing age for *Primary Colors*. The range of suggested minimum ages was fairly narrow; four of the younger members nominated 16 years of age and the remaining two participants (one from each group) said 14 years.

For most members of the Panel, the frequency of coarse language and the 'skulduggery' (primarily adultery) were the major classifiable elements of *Primary Colors*. To a far lesser degree, some Panellists said they also took the suicide, reference to drugs and depiction of homosexuality into consideration when classifying. Thus most of the Panel agreed that the Consumer Advice should mention the coarse language and the adult themes. Some Panellists asserted that the Consumer Advice should read 'frequent coarse language', but others disputed this description.

Some Panellists were concerned what effect the swearing and issue of infidelity may have on impressionable children aged under 15 years. The younger members of the Panel were particularly anxious about the film's impact on young viewers and tended to support the MA classification for 'moral issues'. The Panel here, as on other occasions, appeared to disregard the age recommendation entailed in M, and assumed a younger audience would gain access.

*What with the suicide and the homosexuality I wouldn't want to take a kid under 15 to see it. If you took an under 15 year old along I'd want to be there with them to explain to them that this may be portrayed as the norm where everybody is in everyone else's bed but we don't do it that way.*

*An eight year old might take the swearing and sexual affairs as what everyday life is like.*

*There is not a clear message what side of the fence is right, is the one to stand on. You'd have to be a fairly mature person to decide ... 15 year olds could do that by themselves.*

Some Panellists found the film to be 'quite borderline' and deliberated on their choice of final classification. One mature mother said she would have preferred to classify it PG, but she interpreted the M category's language guidelines as being the most applicable to *Primary Colors*. *The language stopped it from being a PG ... it was a shame that this couldn't be a PG movie because they were so many things in it ... . It's historically interesting, it's current, it has interesting messages and themes. ... but I also felt very strongly that the language was very appropriate so that's the dilemma.* In contrast, another mother from this group stated, *I would like to see the film as M, but according to the guidelines (for language) it would be MA.*

There was some confusion among a number of Panel members as to what restrictions the M and MA classifications required or implied. In the older group, some had to be reminded that the M rating only *recommended* that viewing was for children

aged 15 years and over. On the other hand, a few Panellists in the younger group were concerned that the MA rating did not legally restrict children under 15 years in absolute terms. A couple of the younger males suggested a category was required 'between MA and R' and considered rating *Primary Colors* R to prohibit children under 15 years from watching the film *at all*.

*You could make it an R for the swearing (if children under 15 can enter accompanied). Kids under 15 swear like this anyway but I think the possibility should be taken away for kids this age to watch this movie at all.*

However, most of the other younger Panellists disagreed with this position and a minor debate ensued.

*But that's the responsibility of the parent, that's why it (should be) MA.*

*But then some parents aren't responsible.*

*But then you're being discriminatory.*

*The classifiers have to protect kids in different areas ... 'so we'll put an R on that' ... we have to make it harder for them to see these things.*

In both groups, Panellists expressed that young people were 'far more experienced', mature, understanding and sophisticated than adults gave them credit them for.

*You shouldn't underestimate people in that age group. We could protect them from what could harm them ... but it's a pretty tough world ... it's not going to harm them. ... to take it any higher than that (MA) would be just ridiculous.*

*... we can do as much as we can by saying '13 year olds shouldn't see this movie, there's too much swearing in it', but I just know that 13 year olds know every swear word and will use them anyway.*

A few participants suggested that younger people would not be interested in a film such as *Primary Colors* or would find the plot too complex,

implying that some of the harsher elements 'may go over their heads'. However one individual admitted that if younger viewers did comprehend the film he would not be particularly concerned. ... *complicated political scenarios - I know 30 year olds that wouldn't understand them ... but there's nothing harmful or dangerous about the politics.*

A couple of the younger males commented on what would be needed for the film to move one classification down from MA to M.

*Taking out some of the swearing might bring it down to an M, ... and take out some of those implying scenes (a couple lying in bed).*

*Mainly the (frequent) swearing.*

In reference to the quantity and cumulative effect of the variety of classifiable elements, one young woman suggested that the central themes required that *Primary Colors* remain an MA film. *I think it was made for the MA rating.*

### **Justification of M**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film M:

*(The language) ... was used in intense situations, in context and not continuous.*

*I have a problem with inappropriate use of language (in general) ... but I think that kids are pretty intelligent and they can learn what is socially acceptable and what is not ... I found that the language in it came at about an M level ...*

*Some adult themes - homosexuality, suicide ... discreetly handled. Language ... some repetition ... almost a PG.*

*I thought it was a bit over the top for (PG) but if they cut that ten per cent out I would have been happy ...*

*The coarse language was extended, strong, aggressive but not gratuitous.*

*There was nothing that really stood out and said, 'this has to be MA'.*

*If you saw someone actually having an affair in the nude, besides the moral aspect, it would go up to MA.*

### **Justification of MA**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film MA:

*... it (the Guidelines for M) says ... 'coarse language that is strong, detailed or very aggressive should be infrequent' and it wasn't, it was frequent. So I gave it an MA. Plus the adult themes, the suicide, the homosexuality, those sort of things I thought MA fitted the bill in the end.*

*I gave it an MA because of the frequent use of coarse language and the complexities of the moral decisions and the moral interactions between people that a younger audience wouldn't understand or get the full implications ...*

*Swearing and adult themes ... . The suicide, the gay and lesbian situation, the lies and deceit that goes on behind people's backs, how the wife puts up with it.*

*The amount of coarse language and reference to sex ... a parent would need to condone this material themselves.*

*Themes such as suicide and adultery could leave a lasting impression on younger viewers.*

*Borderline-ish, but probably more MA. The swearing mainly, but also the way it deals with corruption and politics. John Travolta was cheating on his wife and was getting away with it; it could give a wrong impression.*

*Some of the language was warranted, that brings the reality to it, but not to such excessive lengths.*

#### 9.4.7 The Board's Assessment

When presented with the Board's report the Panel, on the whole, agreed that the language, rather than other classifiable elements, pushed *Primary Colors* up to MA. The participants that classified the film M (mainly from the older group) understood the Board's decision but would not have taken such a strong stance on the language.

*There are times when you can over-protect people with the best of interests ... it is a very timely statement and should be encouraged be to looked at as by as many of our teenagers as possible ... they'll be running the country in ten, fifteen years ...*

*... I would be very keen for my eldest children to see this movie if they were interested but because they're under 15 they couldn't go (by themselves) ...*

*I wouldn't make it an MA because of any of the themes ... (although) they were a bit strong ... but I wouldn't consider them to give emotional, long-term problems for anyone under 15.*

The Panel observed that no-one pointed out the use of 'motherfucker' which was referred to in the Board's report. Panellists illustrated some diversity of opinion in discussing the issue.

*I agree 'motherfucker' was used once, but it's a commonly used word by Americans. When they're angry they come out with words like that.*

*... I don't see how 'cunt' and 'motherfucker' is contextually justified. I don't think there was any need for it. I don't see how it established her character.*

In contrast to the Board's report the Panel barely discussed the manner in which swear words were used in *Primary Colors*; the older Panellists implied that using the word 'fuck' in a sexual context was no more offensive than when it was used 'conversationally'. Clearly, *frequency* was the main issue for the Panel when classifying the film's coarse language.

#### 9.5 WAGGA WAGGA PANEL'S RESPONSES TO DANGEROUS BEAUTY

The Board's synopsis read as follows:

*Based on a true story set in Venice in the 16th century, the more lowly Veronica is not permitted to marry Marco, her high-born lover. Veronica's mother introduces her to life as a courtesan, following in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother. After experiencing a life of being one of the most sought after women in Venice, she is thrown in prison and forced to undergo a gruelling 'holy inquisition' by the Church during which her life hangs in the balance.*

The Board classified the film M and the Consumer Advice was 'medium level sex scenes, adult themes and low level coarse language'.

##### 9.5.1 General Response

The majority of the Panel responded positively to *Dangerous Beauty*, commenting on the film's artistry, setting and cinematography.

*Excellent. Great love story, not much offensive language. Poetic.*

*Enjoyed the film. Very artistic with the love scenes.*

*Extremely interesting. Historical themes mixed with comical traits.*

*I thoroughly enjoyed it. Loved the cinematography, music, storyline.*

*An excellent movie - emotional - in my culture it has been a reality, it even made me cry, women - abused.*

*Beautiful - fabulous scenery, settings, photography, costumes. A feel good movie.*

A few of the older members of the Panel asserted that *Dangerous Beauty* was a 'thought provoking' film that provided social comment 'on themes still relevant today'.

*Characters portrayed brilliantly, overcoming the synthetic value systems*

*imposed by generations of bigots, fools and hypocrites.*

*The strength/courage of repressed women was inspiring.*

*I did not exactly enjoy the movie but I thought it was very good for me personally - many of my prejudices were questioned and I felt I learnt a lot about myself.*

Other participants were not as enthusiastic about the film. An older male remarked that *Dangerous Beauty* was 'a woman's film with a great emphasis on women's rights' but nevertheless admired the 'good acting, casting and photography'. A couple of the younger Panellists found the beginning of the film rather slow, but admitted that they enjoyed it overall.

*I thought this film was good, slow to start but quite involving by the end. I enjoyed the cinematography.*

*At the start and for the first half an hour or so, I thought it was extremely boring, but after that it got much better and I really enjoyed it.*

Although the male Panellists tended to be less appreciative of *Dangerous Beauty*, a couple of the older men were surprised by their own enjoyment.

*Though I seldom enjoy love stories this one I would include on that small list. Well shot and ably directed, I felt unusually pleased at the ending.*

*I don't think I would have normally come along to see it ... it was brilliant ... the characters were strong and it was a true story to boot.*

There was little reference to classifiable elements early in the discussion. Only one individual, a young male, said: ... *the sex scenes may have been excessive.*

### 9.5.2 Adult Themes

#### **Prostitution**

In both groups, Panellists instantly remarked on the unconventional portrayal of prostitution in *Dangerous Beauty*.

*... I saw the courtesans and I thought here we go ... but it showed a real balance. I thought it was going to be men using women but really the women were using the men.*

*It was an interesting role for the courtesans ... they were the more educated ... which was unusual.*

*I thought they handled the issue of prostitution well because it had such a strong female role ... you didn't get this feeling that she was being over exploited.*

Enlightened by the film, many Panellists sympathised with the ordeals Veronica went through for her to succeed as 'an educated woman in a man's world'. On the whole, the Panel held Veronica's strength and determination in high esteem.

*She didn't want to be locked into the politics of being a respectable wife, being uneducated, being the woman behind the man, she wanted some freedom.*

*I had respect for her.*

The Panel noted that throughout the film Veronica was not depicted in a 'demeaning' manner. Some participants suggested that the lack of exploitative and abusive sexual activity led them to assess the film's sex and nudity in a more liberal light than, say, a more traditional representation of prostitution would allow.

Participants in both groups debated whether *Dangerous Beauty* was advocating prostitution. The Panellists with such concerns tended to be women, anxious that this aspect of the film may have a modelling influence on teenage girls.

*There were only a few times when she said she didn't like it ... and it was also a way for her to feed her family. And she also said she didn't have an option. Well, for a younger person, under 15, they might see that as an option.*

*... she said she would not change her way of life.*

Panellists of both genders disagreed with these women, stressing that the film did not glamorise prostitution.

*When she was in that boat with her friend, she showed her what happened to old courtesans ... street-walking trash who can be abused by anybody ... I don't think it was glorifying it completely. ... Although for her it was definitely the better choice rather than ending up in a marriage and not having any rights at all.*

*... at the end she was trying to save her life. She triumphed because she was alive not because she was a prostitute.*

*... they made it obvious it was not a very moral career choice.*

One of the older women felt the prostitution theme carried a broader message about the role of women in 16th century Venetian society. *Isn't that part of the message of the film? That women were prostitutes of one type or the other ... the women in Venice were prostitutes, it was just which form of prostitute.*

### 9.5.3 Sexual Activity and Nudity

Most participants felt that the tone of the sexual activity in *Dangerous Beauty* was 'arty', harmless, consenting and contextual. Many members of the Panel, the female Panellists in particular, praised the style in which the sex scenes and nudity were filmed.

*I don't think the body is offensive ... It wasn't in an aggressive way, it was quite stylised.*

*The sex was done really nicely, in context, it was very tame.*

*... it was tasteful ...*

*... Used in a love way to explain the story.*

*It had artistic merit.*

*Most of the sex was well within the context of the film.*

*The nudity and sex scenes were never degrading. Through most of the movie when this was happening she wasn't abused or demeaned ...*

Some Panellists mentioned they found the level of the sex acceptable.

*The sex was simulated ... it was not explicit or offensive.*

*It's obvious what they were doing, but there were no extreme scenes.*

On the other hand, other members of the Panel, mainly from the younger group, objected to some of the sexual depiction in the film. One individual described the sex as 'very strong in some scenes'. The younger group immediately discussed this issue in terms of classification criteria which is reported in Section 9.5.7 in more detail.

In the older group, there was very little reference to the sex scenes without prompts from the facilitator. In general, this group was unconcerned about the sexual activity and nudity in *Dangerous Beauty*. Some members said 'it made a difference' that Veronica and Marco 'were in love'. One scene which attracted some attention in this group was the second sex scene where Veronica sits astride Marco. A few of the older participants insisted there was a glancing shot of Marco's genitalia, but nevertheless were not offended by the apparent nudity.

*There was only one brief moment, a split second ... the bedroom scene, she rolled on top of him ...*

*You got to see a little more than maybe they intended ... of him!*

A sexual scene which drew some comment and concern across the Panel was that in which Veronica's mother instructs the heroine how to sexually please men, demonstrating by pointing to the off-screen genitals of an undressed male. Although several Panellists were concerned about the influential impact of this 'instruction' scene on young viewers, one mature mother commented on the discretion of the actual images: *... it didn't show any detail ... you didn't see more than you*

*needed of the naked male ... so it was very implied. In contrast, one of the younger women was appalled by this scene; she was convinced she saw the male's genitals. I saw a penis!*

### 9.5.4 Violence

The younger participants did not raise the issue of violence when they discussed *Dangerous Beauty*. On the other hand, the older Panellists were quite vocal about elements of perceived violence in the film.

#### **Duel scene**

Envious of Veronica's affinity with Marco, Marco's cousin initiates some poetic banter with Veronica that turns into a duel. When Veronica holds him at swordpoint, Marco's cousin punches her in the mouth. Several of the older participants thought 'the punching had a big impact' and elaborated on the intensity of this scene.

*... that fight went from being light-hearted to very serious ...*

*There were moments in that swordfight that bordered on a little bit of fear ... you could read fear in her when she was running.*

#### **King of France**

In bed with Veronica, the King holds a sword at her throat. He is rumoured to have perverse sexual leanings and the scene implies that Veronica will satisfy them. The group's discussion centred more on the violent nature of the scene rather than the sexual references; *... the only part that could have been disturbing was him threatening her with a knife.*

However, most of the older group agreed that they were taken aback but not greatly troubled by this scene, *... it wasn't disturbing, but surprising.* One mother thought the violence may have been too subtle for younger viewers to notice. *... because it was implied ... I know the knife was there ... adults would know what exactly what was going on, but for a lot of young people it would just go ...*

#### **Whipping scene (post-action)**

The courtesans are blamed for the outbreak of bubonic plague in Venice and as punishment they are strung from scaffolds in public; one woman is viewed with blood on her naked back. Although 'the flogging of females' was 'implied', members of the older group still felt slightly startled by it: *... the whipping of the courtesans... (with) scars on their backs.*

Despite their initial anxiety, most of the older group concluded that, overall, the violence in these three scenes was justified by the narrative and was neither harmful nor offensive.

*It wasn't disturbing violence.*

*It was very necessary in telling the story.*

Nevertheless, a few of the older Panellists found other scenes to be 'disturbing', some suggesting that the impact of violence was heightened because *Dangerous Beauty* was 'based on real life'.

*The prostitutes at the end (the Inquisition) ... the reality of it.*

*The scene that disturbed me most was during the plague when they were dragging bodies out of the rivers and dumping them in the gondolas and throwing all the clothes in the fire. That was only disturbing in so far it was real; that was what really happened.*

A couple of the older women commented on the film's aggressive treatment of women.

*... The more I think about it, the more I realise that there was a fair bit of violence against women in the film, but it was subtle.*

*In those days ... it was more acceptable that women were put down more.*

*That was the degrading bit. The girl was crying while she was having her hair hacked off by the nuns in the convent.*

**9.5.5 Language**

Although it was a minor aspect for them, the younger group did refer to the coarse language in the film. *They say 'whore' and 'slut'. It was said quite offensively.*

One young male was mildly offended by the sexual context of the swearing, but a mature father held a different view.

*... 'fuck' only came up a few times ... but it was still there, and the connotations of the word wasn't just exclaiming something, it was in the context of 'screwing' someone ...*

*... the use of the 'f' word in that duel ... was part of their standing with words ... it was used quite correctly, poetically as a verb ... appropriately, 'to fuck'.*

One young male observed, *... if you're offended by those words, then more than likely you'd be offended by the movie itself.*

However, the majority of the Panel thought the language was in context with the film's storyline and did not find it offensive, frequent or gratuitous.

*... it wasn't all the way through the movie.*

*The language was there but it was OK.*

*I was impressed that we had to wait so long for 'fuck'!*

*It (fuck) only came up three times.*

*... the language was in context.*

*... it was very infrequent coarse language.*

*... that was part of the theme of the movie.*

One young woman even admitted that she 'did not notice the language'. *Dangerous Beauty's* language content was barely discussed in the older group; no-one appeared to be concerned by it.

**9.5.6 Panel Classification**

Prior to discussion, 14 Panellists nominated MA, 4 individuals selected M and the rest of the Panel (3

members) classified *Dangerous Beauty* R. As shown below, the discussion resulted in a slight downwards shift towards the lower classifications, but some 70% of the Panel still nominated a final classification *higher* than the Board's rating of M.

**DANGEROUS BEAUTY (M)**

	TOTAL PANEL	UNDER 35 YEARS	35+ YEARS
G	-	-	-
PG	1	-	1
M	5	-	5
MA	13	8	5
R	2	2	-

**Panel classification by age**

As illustrated, there were clear differences by age. All members of the younger group selected a higher classification than the Board, the majority (80%) nominating MA. Two male Panellists who debated what was intended by the guidelines, selected the R rating for *Dangerous Beauty*.

In contrast, the older participants held less conservative views when making their final classification assessment. One member nominated PG, while the remainder of the group were evenly split between M and MA.

**9.5.7 Classification Debate**

When making their classification assessment, the notion that the film 'would not interest' children was prevalent among the Panel. Some Panellists then expressed that young people 'would not understand' certain themes and scenes in *Dangerous Beauty*. *It's not a child's movie*, said one mature mother.

The younger group was cautious in their choice of an appropriate minimum viewing age for *Dangerous Beauty*. Their nominations ranged from 15 to 18 years with half selecting 15 years. The older participants nominated ages ranging from 13 to 16 years. The vast majority of this group thought the film would be appropriate for 15 year olds; only one individual selected 16 years as a minimum viewing age in the older group. Subsequently, around 70% of the entire Panel

found *Dangerous Beauty* to be suitable viewing for 15 year olds (this percentage includes three older participants who selected minimum viewing ages under 15 years).

The older group found the film's overall impact to be fairly low although, for some, the adult themes meant certain scenes were considered unsuitable for too young or too impressionable an audience. A few of the older women heralded some concerns.

*My daughter is brought up in a strict family ... I just feel that the heroine gave the impression it was better to get into that field rather than just a simple married life.*

*... there's an atmosphere of dark ... one woman is standing there with a lot of feeling venomous of men, it was pretty threatening that inquisition scene.*

*... Some parents would worry about under 15s seeing the (sexual) activity.*

There was some debate about the influence of the instruction scene.

*I think it's terrible for girls (viewing) in one way. The mother had her conversation with her daughter and the girls would probably make out 'it's OK to do that', sleeping around.*

*But she (the mother) said 'forgive me' when she was dying.*

A couple of the older Panellists thought the film would affect young males and young females differently.

*I really think there'd be a different reaction between boys and girls. The non-political violence - the boys couldn't care less and the girls would say 'arrgh'.*

*I think the girls aged between 14 and 16 would be angry ... women were abused in those days, but boys would enjoy it ...*

Some members of this group envisaged what effect this film would have on their own children.

*... maybe 14 year olds with appropriate preparation and supervision would get an awful lot from that movie ... the idea of the woman as the hero was very well dealt with ... it makes it a very modern film. ... The use of language, the application of nudity, the roles of males and females in that specific society and the bubonic plague (would need to be pointed out to younger children).*

*If the ending was different then I think a younger person's reaction to this might be different ... if she'd been burnt at the stake or something else.*

*With my children in mind (15 years plus) there would be no problem with whatever sex was being shown in that movie, it was part of the story. ... there was no dwelling on the actual physical act at all.*

*... if they did see any of that I can't see anything that would have a lasting effect on them (11 years plus).*

A few members of the older group mentioned that they considered rating the film PG because of 'its historical and educational value'. Indeed, one of the oldest Panellists asserted that *Dangerous Beauty* needed to have a reasonably low classification. *I learnt so much from it; I thought the ideas in the film were important enough to be made available to as wide an audience as possible.*

Many from this group took into account the fact that *Dangerous Beauty* was based on real life events when classifying the film.

*The history softens the impact.*

*I think it being a true story too softens it even more.*

Most of the Panel concluded that the sexual depictions, nudity and the central role of prostitution were the film's prime classifiable elements. Language was a secondary factor for the younger Panellists but was not an issue for the older group. The older participants also brought up the film's violence and to a lesser degree, its references to war, religion, death and plague. The

younger Panellists thought the Consumer Advice should read 'medium level sex scenes and nudity', but were not sure about including 'coarse language'.

Much of the classification debate, particularly for the younger Panellists, centred around the film's depiction of sex and which Guideline level was appropriate. Some members of the Panel were confused by the terminology in the sex guidelines for the M, MA and R categories; Panellists were unclear about what 'simulated sex' and 'implied or suggested' sex denoted. Generally, the Panel felt that the sex guidelines were open to subjective interpretation. (This issue became more complicated when participants were convinced they had seen male genitalia in *Dangerous Beauty*.)

When asked what they found to be the strongest elements in the scenes involving sex or nudity, the older group had very little to say. Most were not offended by the sex in *Dangerous Beauty* but had difficulty matching the level of sex to the Guidelines when assessing the film. Some of the older participants faced the predicament that, intuitively, they believed the film to be suitable for a certain classification but found the relevant set of guidelines to be an inappropriate match for the sexual content.

*This is the problem with this film. We can argue 'artistic merit' ... and then we look at the Guidelines ... For MA it says 'sexual activity may be implied or suggested'. Parts of that seemed to be pretty close to (actual sex) ... it certainly wasn't debasing or abusive ... I wouldn't want it to go to an R, it just depends on how you interpret the sex.*

*... I originally classified it as R because of the (second) sex scene ... yet I think it's appropriate for, say, a 16 year old to go and see it.*

*According to the standards it's the nudity that's the most outstanding.*

*... does nudity not include seeing even his penis as long as it's not (seen to be performing sex)?*

Most of the older group were strongly against considering an R rating.

*I would not agree (with R). You could not see anything like penetration and just saw a little part of his anatomy.*

*... (R) would be comparing it to something like Trainspotting which is just 'in your face', aggro ...*

Choosing between M or MA was a dilemma for some in the older group.

*It's difficult in deciding whether you let them go in on their own or not.*

*MA just to be sure.*

In contrast, the younger group debated at length whether *Dangerous Beauty* should be classified MA or R. Some expressed that the second sex scene partly satisfied the R criteria although they perceived the film as a whole to be MA.

*For R it says, 'sexual activity may be realistically simulated' ... which in the second scene ... it was there ... compared with MA which says that 'sexual activity can be implied or suggested'.*

*It's a really, really fine line.*

*I thought it was verging on R ... that particular scene tipped into R ... this movie could fall into an M category except for that particular scene ... to me it was explicit.*

*... in the R-rated section (of the manual) it said you could have simulated sex, and in that second sex scene we did see some simulated sex, but it was contextual, it wasn't exploitative, it wasn't demeaning, it was very quick ... and I thought you couldn't give it an R rating at all. But it definitely needed an MA rating because of the sex.*

Others thought it was more clearly an MA film.

*There's no reason whatsoever to take it to an R. The sex was fairly natural there was no violence involved ...*

*... it wasn't harmful, degrading or abusive, so people aged 15 would be able to take that sort of thing.*

One young woman referred to the classification of *The Piano*<sup>5</sup> in her decision. *... there was some sex and nudity in 'The Piano' and I was surprised to see that rated as M as opposed to MA. And that what's probably led me to go to the MA rather than higher. After her comment, the younger group looked at examples of M, MA and R rated films and decided that *Dangerous Beauty* 'now seemed to fit better' in MA. The group deduced that the sex guidelines were 'misleading'.*

When MA nominees from both groups were asked what would be required for *Dangerous Beauty* to become M rated, they mainly referred to the sex scenes.

*The second sex scene where she's rolling over to sit on him.*

*The first one (sex scene) had a bit of thrusting, that would need to be taken out.*

*I'd take out the sex scenes, mainly the first one. The second one was more gentle, the first one was more 'different'.*

*Without the second sex scene I reckon it would be an M.*

*They could have covered that (the instruction scene) a little quicker, without dropping the hands down ...*

However, a couple of Panellists acknowledged that the sex scenes were crucial aspects of the film's narrative and drama. *You'd probably ruin the film if you took too much of that out.*

### **Justification of MA**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film MA:

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<sup>5</sup> The Classification Board originally gave *The Piano* an MA rating. Under appeal, the Classification Review Board gave it an M.

*Mainly the profusion of sexual scenes made me choose MA.*

*Although it wasn't sexually explicit, the intensity of the sexual references was very strong.*

*The only reason why I wouldn't change it to an M was because the prostitution wasn't actually discouraged.*

*Nudity/sex scenes. I considered the R rating but the sex scenes weren't depicted in a violent, demeaning way. I would like to give it M but according to the guidelines, MA.*

*Violence, sex, coarse language, adult themes, prostitution - but in context. Falls just on the MA side of guidelines (rather than M) because of total impact of the entire movie.*

*It was (MA) for a couple of things: the training from the mother, teaching her what to do, plus the sex scene between the girl and her lover. I just thought that that was a bit much for an M.*

*That sex scene with Marco was a bit too far ... with the MA they (children under 15) can't get in (on their own), I'd like them to see it 15 up. That's what pushed it for me. ... plus the knife at the throat. ... I came from a domestic violence household ... my child at ten years would not have been a good idea. I would have had to prepare her and tell her, 'it's just a story ... it's not necessarily what happens'.*

### **Justification of M**

The following comments were made by those who classified the film M:

*I'd have loved to have seen it go to PG, but M because of all the various things about sex - nudity etc - are there, but only mildly there. Under the Guidelines it's a straight clear cut M movie.*

*I went for an MA but then when I looked at the historical context and the artistic merit I went to an M.*

*Language, sex, violence, politics, but all elements, including war and plague, were shown well and appropriately. I'd have given a PG but wouldn't only because of the 'fuck' exchanges in the duelling scene.*

*Adult themes ie sex, its variations and insinuations. M rating only because of focus on breasts. Personally I would have given it a PG as the sexual innuendos, sex acts and naked bodies were not inappropriate or in bad taste. My children (aged ten to fourteen years) would not have problems with this movie.*

*Sex, naked embraces, nudity - not a lot of detail and quite short, not gratuitous. Because of the historical background I would have liked to have given it PG but because of sexual scenes, violence and religion I gave it M.*

### **Justification of PG**

The older male who supported the PG classification had this to say: *the more I thought about the sex scenes the more harmless I thought they were.*

### **9.5.8 The Board's Assessment**

Although around half of the older participants classified the film MA, this group was supportive of the Board's assessment and agreed they had 'pretty much picked up similar things'. One woman in this group admitted that the Board's report reminded her of a significant scene. *I'd forgotten about the spitting and that did have an impact ... I found that quite offensive.*

In contrast, the younger group disagreed with the Board's classification of M, a rating lower than the ones they had nominated. Again, Panellists overlooked this classification's recommendation of suitability for audiences aged 15 years or more; the younger group was fairly united in their view

that children under 15 years should not view *Dangerous Beauty* unaccompanied, and felt that the film's historical and dramatic content did not warrant a more lenient assessment.

*Speaking from a male point of view, at 14 I wouldn't be seeing it for historical content or critical content, I'd be going for the half naked women.*

*But a ten year old can go!*

*It's too open; it needs to be restricted.*

*They've dealt with it too lightly here.*

*Some of these adult themes they're suggesting would need an adult present if they're under 15.*

They also noted that they had not explored the witchcraft theme and a few were concerned that it might confuse viewers under 15 years.

Some of the younger participants expressed surprise at the Board's decision because they considered the MA and R sex guidelines to be accurate descriptions of the film's sexual activity and nudity.

However, most of this group admitted that they were fairly confused by the guidelines relating to sex and nudity. Many of the younger Panellists agreed with the following comment: *I think that 'sexual activity may be implied or suggested' in MA may lead to a belief that any real pictures of sex would be an R rating. The first paragraph under the heading 'sex' in R led to a belief that any action is 'simulated' and therefore should be R. There seems to be a big difference in meanings and could be misleading as to where to categorise sex scenes.*

Some members of the younger group, mainly women, remained critical of the Board's interpretation of the Guidelines.

*These sex scenes ... could be an M, but when mixed with the adult theme of prostitution, I think it pushes it up.*

*But did you think it (the sexual activity) was discreet or brief?*

*They didn't deal with Veronica not having a choice and having a pretty perverted King.*

*They've dealt with her final speech lightly. It didn't discourage prostitution.*

*The mother basically told her ... what to do with the guy's penis. That's blatant instructions. That's not discreet.*

The Panel was confident that the sex scenes and other adult themes in the film were in context and not exploitative, but for the younger Panellists they were 'not in isolation', thus the accumulation of mature elements was said to heighten the impact of the film. Some of the younger women thought the central theme of the film - 'selling for sex' - was not an appropriate topic for the M classification.

## 9.6 CONCLUSIONS - WAGGA WAGGA PANEL

### 9.6.1 The Nature of the Community Assessment Panel

The Wagga Wagga Panel was very supportive of the need for the Guidelines and for Consumer Advice. The Panellists referred to the classification manuals frequently during the discussion, making use of the official terminology and regularly reminded each other of definitions and levels. Only in one case - *Dangerous Beauty* - did some of the Panel, particularly the younger participants, dispute the Board's classification decision, primarily because they were confused by the language in the sex and nudity guidelines across a range of classification categories.

A useful aspect of the methodology was the capacity to identify the classification made by each individual and *then* to assess the effect of peer opinion on the individual's subsequent considerations. Within their groups, the Panellists sometimes reached a near unanimous agreement but when there was a difference of opinion participants listened and responded to each other's views. The lengthy discussion also allowed aspects of the films to be revealed which some participants acknowledged they had initially overlooked. (The Wagga Wagga Panel was

distinguished from the Sydney and Brisbane Panels by the fact that their pre- and post-discussion classification decisions showed little variation. It could not be said whether this characteristic arose from the nature of the films or the Panel itself.)

### 9.6.2 Concerns About Films

The Wagga Wagga Panel generally shared common concerns about film content, although there were occasions when some Panellists attached more significance to some issues than other members of the Panel.

No elements or themes stood out as major areas of concern for the Panel across the films, a reflection of the diversity of the three films viewed. Violence was the only common classifiable element among all the films but elicited little debate, indicative of the small amount and nature of the violence in each film. Unlike the previous Panels, participants were primarily concerned about children's emotional state when absorbing violent scenes rather than their imitation of screen violence. In the case of *Anastasia* - a film comprising supernatural and intense elements - the Panel was anxious that the aggression of Rasputin and the threat of 'evil' would give young children nightmares. There was very limited reference to the dream sequence which had been the prime rationale for the Board's classification decision.

The Panel was divided on whether the 'unreality' of animation lessened the 'scary' impact of *Anastasia* since some found its style realistic and sometimes with an overwhelming scale. However, most Panellists agreed that the humorous elements in this film counterbalanced the more intense scenes.

In line with the Sydney and Brisbane Panels, parents, older people and women in the Wagga Wagga Panel tended to be more concerned about violence in films, although it was still an issue for most members of the Panel. They acknowledged, however, the difficulty of judging what could harm or frighten children; the Panel's anecdotes suggested that young people's reactions varied widely, even among children of similar ages. As identified in the two previous Panels, participants

were generally more concerned about the behaviour of other children and other parents rather than their own children or themselves.

Coarse language was a concern in the Panel's assessment of *Primary Colors* and *Dangerous Beauty*; in regard to both these films, the younger group tended to be more conservative than the older Panellists. The recurrence of the word 'fuck' in *Primary Colors* irked many across the Panel and the younger group tended to be fairly critical of the single use of the word 'cunt'. The older Panellists tended to justify the language content more so than the younger group, arguing that it was appropriate to *Primary Colors'* tough realism. Most of the Panel agreed that their primary concern of the film's coarse language was its frequency. The older participants barely commented on the language content in *Dangerous Beauty*, but some of the younger Panellists found the sexual context of the coarse language distasteful.

The older group was less affected by the sexual content in *Dangerous Beauty*. Their acceptance of the sex was partially attributed to the film's period setting, its reflection of true events and the love between the two main characters. The younger Panellists perceived the film's mature elements as dominating throughout and considered their impact quite intense because of the central theme of prostitution and the accumulation of a combination of sex, nudity and coarse language. However, as one young male pointed out, *you can't do a movie about prostitutes without talking about and showing sex*. On the whole, the Panel did agree that the sex depicted in *Dangerous Beauty* was contextual and not exploitative.

There was minor reference to depictions of sexuality in *Primary Colors*. A few of the young female participants found the scene of two women kissing offensive (similar opinions were voiced among the youngest women in the Brisbane Panel in regard to suggested lesbian contact).

The younger Panellists were concerned what messages *Primary Colors* and *Dangerous Beauty* would convey to impressionable youth. They were anxious that *Primary Colors* would appear to condone coarse language and a poor moral code,

including infidelity. To a certain degree, members across the Panel were also worried about the influence on young viewers of the prostitution in *Dangerous Beauty* and to a much lesser extent the suicide in *Primary Colors*.

The Panel had some difficulty applying the classification structure and sex guidelines on a couple of occasions. Firstly, some found it hard to grasp the restrictions for M and MA in relation to viewers aged under 15 years. A couple of young male participants suggested that a category be created between MA and R to 'restrict under 15 year olds at all times'. When assessing *Dangerous Beauty*, some Panellists found the language in the sex guidelines 'misleading' and were further confused by perceived similarities in the M, MA and R classification levels. Terminology, such as 'simulation', was interpreted differently to the Board's usage. The sex guidelines were viewed as being particularly subjective.

Children's capacity to understand and relate to adult films was often raised by the Panel and at times influenced the classifications they selected. Many members of the Panel assumed that the more elaborate adult themes would 'go straight over their heads', whereas others asserted that children absorbed and comprehended more material than was assumed.

Occasionally, a few Panellists found it difficult to grasp that they needed to make classification decisions for an audience wider than what they assumed it would be. Some, for example, were convinced that young people would not be interested in a 'complex' film about politics such as *Primary Colors*. This position, and also the perception of children's lack of understanding, was also evident in the Brisbane Panel.

Subject matter was a modest issue raised among the Panel; some thought the Russian Revolution in *Anastasia* was not a suitable base for a children's film. The central theme of prostitution in *Dangerous Beauty* was felt by a few to be inappropriate for viewers under 15 years, particularly if they were not accompanied by an adult.

### 9.6.3 Comparison with Classification Board Decisions

The majority of the Wagga Wagga Panel awarded *Primary Colors* an MA classification, as did the Board. In the case of *Anastasia*, the Panel was virtually equally divided between G and PG with only one extra Panellist in favour of G. A majority nominated a classification higher than the Board's choice for *Dangerous Beauty*.

In this final section, a summary of the Panel's positions in relation to each of the films is compared with the Board's position, concentrating on any points of difference. It can be assumed that if differences are not indicated then the Panel were in agreement with the Board's report.

#### **Anastasia** (rated PG)

A slight majority of the Panel (11) rated the film G and the remainder nominated PG (10).

There were no major differences when analysing the classification decisions of the two age groups, but the older participants, most of whom were parents, offered more protective views than the younger group and were in slight favour of the PG rating.

The older group asserted that an adult would need to accompany a viewer aged around five or six years. The more troubling and startling elements of *Anastasia* were considered to require explanation, thus, in some participants' views, the PG rating was necessary to deliver 'a message' to parents. In further support of the PG classification, elements of the 'good versus evil' theme were considered by some of the Panel to be rather complex and at times frightening. Some commented that the animation did little to distance the viewer and a few regarded the Russian Revolution and the violent death of the Romanovs as inappropriate bases for G rated material.

However, other Panellists found the animation added fantasy to the more aggressive scenes, lessening the impact. They also construed the ending as moral and happy because 'good beat evil' and some argued it was very uncommon for children around five years of age to go to the cinema without an adult.

Once the Board's position was established, few disputed its choice of classification. However, some queried why the Board's assessment focussed on the dream sequence, rather than on general aspects of Rasputin's character and disintegrating body. Few participants commented on the supernatural elements of *Anastasia*.

The Board's report indicated there had been a similar division and debate about the suitability of G or PG. Both Board and Panel concurred that *Anastasia* was a borderline film and there was strong support for the Board's final decision to modify the dream sequence and to release the film as G with Consumer Advice.

#### **Primary Colors** (rated MA)

A majority (13) rated the film MA, while the remainder (8) nominated M.

There were clear differences between the two focus groups; all except one of the younger participants rated *Primary Colors* MA whereas almost two thirds of the older group nominated the M rating. The older group was less concerned about the film's moral elements than was the younger group; they were primarily focussed on the coarse language which many felt to be in context with the subject matter of the film. Other more minor classifiable issues raised were suicide, reference to drugs and sexuality.

There were some extremes in the classification debate on *Primary Colors*. Some older participants considered the PG rating while a few of the younger people deliberated on selecting R. Many in the younger group were concerned that the frequent coarse language and acceptance of adultery might influence young viewers. Thus a small number considered the R rating in order to prohibit children under 15 years under all circumstances.

The Panel largely agreed with the Board's assessment. The only minor points of difference were that participants made no comment about the use of 'motherfucker' and the Panel did not distinguish swearing related to sexual references.

#### **Dangerous Beauty** (rated M)

This film exhibited the most diverse voting pattern among all the Panels, spanning from PG to R. A majority (13) rated the film MA, while the largest minority (5) nominated M. A couple of Panellists chose R (2) and the remaining individual selected PG.

Both the R nominees were young males. There were contrasting views between the two age groups; all the younger Panellists chose classifications higher than M while the older group were split between M and MA.

Both groups agreed that the primary classifiable elements were sex and nudity, but the older participants tended to also focus on perceived violence in the film. The younger group expressed concern about the language used while the older participants took account of the themes of war, religion, death and plague when classifying.

Some members of the older group referred to the historical aspect of the film, stating that the film's impact was lessened because of it. The M and PG nominees in this group thought the film would be 'harmless' for those under 15 years, but could not match the sexual content of the film to the lower classifications. The Panel, as a whole, found it difficult to apply the sex guidelines to *Dangerous Beauty*, being unclear about the distinctions between the M, MA and R levels. Panellists also differed from each other and the Board in their interpretation of words such as 'simulation'. Several Panellists referred to scenes where they imagined male genitalia was revealed. This apparent nudity was not an issue for the older group, but it seemed to influence a couple of the younger participants in their assessment.

The older participants were quite accepting of the Board's report but many in the younger group were against children under 15 years having the opportunity to view this film unaccompanied by an adult. For some of these Panellists prostitution was an inappropriate topic for this age group and they disagreed that the historical setting softened the film's impact.

The older group admitted that they were influenced by the loving nature of Veronica and Marco's relationship. Most of the Panel agreed

that the sex was 'natural' and not exploitative, abusive or gratuitous.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **ADDITIONAL RECRUITMENT QUESTIONS**

**APPENDIX B**

**RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHIC  
QUESTIONNAIRE (A)**

**APPENDIX C**

**RESPONSES TO RESPONDENT  
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE (A)**

**APPENDIX D**

**AFTER VIEWING FILM  
QUESTIONNAIRE (B)**

**APPENDIX E**

**FOCUS GROUP  
DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**APPENDIX F**

**CLASSIFICATION BOARD  
REPORTS**