



**Australian Government**  

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**Classification Review Board**

**18 December 2003**

**23-33 MARY STREET  
SURRY HILLS, NSW**

**MEMBERS:** Ms Maureen Shelley (Convenor)  
Mr Jonathan O’Dea (Deputy Convenor)  
Ms Jan Taylor  
Ms Kathryn Smith  
Mr Robert Shilkin

**APPLICANT:** Dr Arnold Veraa, retired senior social worker and former registered psychologist, Victoria.

**BUSINESS:** To review the Classification Board’s decision to Refuse Classification (RC) for the CD-ROM interactive film *The Sexualisation of Girl Children and Adolescents on the Internet* under the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995* (the Act).

**DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION**

**1. Decision**

The Classification Review Board (the Review Board) determined that the interactive film *The Sexualisation of Girl Children and Adolescents on the Internet* is Refused Classification (RC) under the Act.

**2. Legislative provisions**

The *Classification (Publications, Film and Computer Games) Act 1995* (the Classification Act) governs the classification of films and the review of classification decisions. Section 9 of the Classification Act provides that films are to be classified in accordance with the National Classification Code (the Code) and the classification Guidelines.

Relevantly, section 11 of the Classification Act requires that the matters to be taken into account in making a decision on the classification of a film include:

- (a) the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults; and
- (b) the literary, artistic or educational merit (if any) of the film; and
- (c) the general character of the film, including whether it is of a medical, legal or scientific character; and
- (d) the persons or class of persons to or amongst whom it is published or is intended or likely to be published.

The Code states that films that “depict in a way that is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult, a person who is, or who looks like, a child under 16 (whether the person is engaged in sexual activity or not)” are to be classified RC refused classification.

Further the Guidelines state that films will be refused classification if they include or contain “depictions of child sexual abuse or any other exploitative or offensive depictions involving a person who is or who looks like a child under 16 years”.

### **3. Procedure**

The Review Board received a written application for review and supporting written submission from the Applicant, Dr Veraa.

Due to the nature of the interactive film, enquiries were made prior to the Review Board meeting, to the National Child Protection Clearinghouse (NCPC) and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) as to the principles of ethical conduct and research involving children and young people, particularly in the child protection context. Material was obtained from these sources and Dr Veraa was advised of these enquiries and the nature of the material received.

Dr Veraa declined several invitations to make oral submissions to the Review Board, including after being apprised of the material received from the NCPC and the NHMRC.

Five members of the Review Board viewed the interactive film at the Review Board’s meeting on 18 December 2003.

The Review Board then met in camera to consider the matter.

### **4. Evidence and other material taken into account**

In reaching its decision the Review Board had regard to the following:

- (i) Dr Veraa’s application for review (including written submissions);
- (ii) the report of the Classification Board relating to *The Sexualisation of Girl Children and Adolescents on the Internet*;
- (iii) the interactive film *The Sexualisation of Girl Children and Adolescents on the Internet*;
- (iv) the relevant provisions in the Classification Act;
- (v) the relevant provisions in the Code, as amended in accordance with section 6 of the Classification Act; and

- (vi) the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games*; and
- (vii) the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (NHMRC 1999).

## **5. Synopsis**

The CD-ROM contains computer-generated images of text, and photographs of girls who appeared to be between the ages of four and 16. The text is a discussion paper regarding the sexualisation of girls and adolescents by Dr Arnold Veraa a qualified and experienced former child protection worker.

## **6. Findings on material questions of fact**

The Review Board found that *The Sexualisation of Girl Children and Adolescents on the Internet* contains:

- (a) Exploitative and offensive photographs of girls who appear to be aged between four and 16;
- (b) That many of the photographs were pornographic in nature including but not limited to copy492.jpg, copy708.jpg, copy599.jpg, copy749.jpg, copy621.jpg; copy688.jpg, copy792.jpg, copy827.jpg, and copy554.jpg. Descriptions of these images are contained within the Classification Board's report. The Review Board accepts these descriptions as factual;
- (c) That while it could be argued that some efforts had been made to provide an educational slant and the author stated that the paper was for educative purposes, the text in the film could be used as instruction for those seeking to participate in what is known as "paedophile grooming"; and
- (d) The text included detailed acknowledgements with references to child pornography websites. Whilst acknowledging that there may be an academic purpose of this referencing, the Review Board noted that the extensive list of these websites, together with instructions on how to access them, could facilitate paedophile activity.

## **7. Reasons for the decision**

In reaching its decision to refuse classification for *The Sexualisation of Girl Children and Adolescents on the Internet* the Review Board took particular note of the Code in regard to films that "depict in a way that is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult, a person who is, or who looks like, a child under 16 (whether the person is engaged in sexual activity or not)".

The Review Board also noted that the Guidelines state that films will be refused classification if they include or contain "depictions of child sexual abuse or any other exploitative or offensive depictions involving a person who is or who looks like a child under 16 years".

It is the Review Board's determination that *The Sexualisation of Girl Children and Adolescents on the Internet* contains many offensive and exploitative images of girls who appear to be aged 16 and under including but not limited to copy492.jpg, copy708.jpg,

copy599.jpg, copy749.jpg, copy621.jpg; copy688.jpg, copy792.jpg, copy827.jpg, and copy554.jpg.

The Review Board noted that many of the approximately 40 photographs included a “zoom navigational tool” that allowed a user to zoom in on any specific area of the photograph and view the photograph at full-screen size. The tool also allowed the printing of each of the photographs in colour and in enlarged detail.

Dr Veraa submitted that the film “was a serious social science, professional and educative attempt to expose and evaluate the sexualisation of children on the internet in an overall framework of child abuse”.

The Review Board had no evidence before it that would call in to question Dr Veraa’s intention in regards to the better education of child protection workers. However, the amount of illustrative material was considered by the Review Board to be more than necessary for educational training in the child protection area.

The Review Board noted the lack of academic rigour as had been present in other papers written by Dr Veraa and included in his written submission namely *The Influence of Personal and Professional Knowledge Upon the Recognition of Intra Familial Sexual Abuse* (unpublished) and *The Influence of Personal and Professional Characteristics of Child Protective Workers Upon the Recognition of Intra Familial Sexual Abuse* (unpublished). The interactive film *The Sexualisation of Girl Children and Adolescents on the Internet* lacked such standard academic items as an abstract, a literature review, references to other academic studies, and did not comply with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans*.

Further, the Review Board was not provided with any evidence of the safeguards that would be put in place to ensure that the material would be limited to its stated intended audience.

The Review Board determined that the interactive film's alleged educational merit and Dr Veraa's stated intended audience of child protection professionals would not mitigate against the pornographic nature of the photographs included in the film. The harm caused by the extensive and detailed depictions of child pornography involving children and young people would not be outweighed by the expected benefits to knowledge.

## **8. Summary**

*The Sexualisation of Girl Children and Adolescents on the Internet* is refused classification as it includes child pornography.