



Australian Government

Classification Review Board

18 June 2010
23-33 MARY STREET
SURRY HILLS, NSW

MEMBERS: Ms Victoria Rubensohn AM (Convenor)
Ms Ann Stark
Mr Alan Wu
Dr Melissa de Zwart

APPLICANT Sony Pictures Releasing

INTERESTED PARTIES The Australian Council on Children and the Media (the ACCM)

BUSINESS To review the Classification Board's decision to classify the film *The Karate Kid M* (Mature) with the consumer advice 'Martial arts violence'.

DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION

1. Decision

The Classification Review Board (the Review Board) unanimously classified the film PG (Parental Guidance), with the consumer advice 'Action violence, bullying violence and themes'.

2. Legislative provisions

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

Relevantly, the Code in paragraph 5 of the Table under the heading 'Films' provides that:

Films (except RC films, X 18+ films, R 18+ films, MA 15+ films and M films) that cannot be recommended for viewing by persons who are under 15 without the guidance of their parents or guardians are to be classified 'PG', and

Films (except RC films, X 18+ films, R 18+ films and MA 15+ films) that cannot be recommended for viewing by persons who are under 15 are to be classified M.

The Code also sets out various principles to which classification decisions should give effect, as far as possible.

Section 11 of the 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.

Three essential principles underlie the use of the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games 2005* (the Guidelines), determined under s 12 of the Act:

- the importance of context
- the assessment of impact, and
- the six classifiable elements – themes, violence, sex, language, drug use and nudity.

3. Procedure

The Review Board received an application for review from Sony Pictures Releasing on 3 June 2010. On 17 June, the Review Board determined that this application was valid.

Prior to the Review Board's meeting, the Convenor granted 'interested party' status to the ACCM. The original applicant and the ACCM provided written submissions to the Review Board.

On 18 June, four members of the Review Board met to conduct the review. After viewing the film, they heard oral submissions from two representatives of the applicant.

The Review Board then considered the matter.

4. Evidence and other material taken into account

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

- (i) Sony Pictures Releasing's application for review

- (ii) Sony Pictures Releasing's written and oral submissions
- (iii) a written submission received from the ACCM
- (iv) the film, *The Karate Kid*
- (v) the relevant provisions in the Classification Act, the Code and the Guidelines, and
- (vi) the Classification Board's report

5. Synopsis

The Karate Kid tells the story of a young boy, Dre (Jaden Smith), who moves with his mother from Detroit to Beijing, where he promptly makes an enemy of the local school bully, Cheng. Dre finds an unlikely ally in his building's aging maintenance man, Mr. Han (Jackie Chan), who is secretly a kung fu master. Mr Han trains Dre in kung fu in preparation for participation in the local tournament, where Dre faces his fears and competes against Cheng.

6. Findings on material questions of fact

The Review Board found that the film contains aspects or scenes of importance related primarily to the classifiable element of violence:

At approximately 18 minutes, Dre confronts Cheng in the local park. In the ensuing fight, Dre is tripped and forcefully knocked to the ground, where he is implicitly and repeatedly kicked and punched. Dre grimaces in pain as the park empties. In the next scene, Dre is seen applying his mother's makeup to his face in order to disguise a large bruise around his eye.

At approximately 42 minutes, a group of older boys pursues Dre through a series of side streets, eventually cornering him in a courtyard, where they close the gate and prepare to fight. After a scuffle, a group of boys restrain Dre as he is implicitly hit and kicked in the stomach, with several attacks shown in slow motion. Dre winces in pain. As the boys prepare to escalate the fight, Mr Han arrives and intervenes, instructing the boys to go home. Instead, the boys attack, provoking a fight in which Mr Han deflects or redirects their punches and kicks to immobilise the bullies and defend himself and Dre. Throughout the sequence, which involves heavily stylised martial arts movements, Mr Han does not himself actively punch or kick the boys.

At approximately 50 minutes, Cheng spars with a fellow student at a martial arts school. After defeating his opponent, the instructor orders him to 'finish'. Cheng punches the boy in the head, causing him to flatten to the floor. The instructor then orders Cheng to him, and explicitly slaps him across the face.

The final 25 minutes of the film (commencing at approximately 110 minutes) depicts the elaborate martial arts tournament in which both Dre and Cheng compete. The early matches are shown through a series of quick montages, and involve a variety of stylised martial arts kicks and punches that make contact with the heads and torsos of

competitors. The impact of the martial arts action is heightened by sound effects and slow-motion replay of the acts that appear on the stadium's large overhead screen.

At 120 minutes, Dre is repeatedly elbowed in the leg by a fellow competitor, who is then disqualified. As Dre grimaces in pain, he is led off the stage and appears to retire from injury. However, in the next scene, Dre seems to have recovered from the brunt of the pain, and after receiving medical assistance from Mr Han, decides to compete in the final match against Cheng.

At approximately 126 minutes, during the final match with Cheng, Dre is kicked off the platform on which they are competing, landing on an adjacent, padded area, where he quickly recovers and rejoins the contest. At 129 minutes, Cheng kicks Dre's injured leg in an attempt to break it. Dre is knocked to the ground and is shown wincing in significant pain. However, after less than a minute, he gets back up and, though limping, continues to compete.

In the Review Board's opinion, the violence in *The Karate Kid* is no higher than mild in impact.

The Review Board also notes that the film contains themes and coarse language that can be accommodated at a lower classification.

The Karate Kid is mild in viewing impact and 'may contain material which some children find confusing or upsetting, and may require the guidance of parents or guardians'. It is therefore classified PG.

7. Reasons for the decision

The Classification Guidelines permits material which contains violence that is mild, infrequent and justified by context to be classified PG. It also notes that 'Material classified PG may contain material which some children find confusing or upsetting, and may require the guidance of parents or guardians.'

In the Review Board's opinion, the violence in *The Karate Kid* is episodic and, given the total length of the film (140 mins), infrequent. It is heavily choreographed and stylised, and, through quick cuts and obscuring camerawork, often lacks explicit detail. The violence is also justifiably contextualised within the film's narrative, which deals with school bullying, martial arts training and a martial arts tournament.

This tournament is the setting to the lengthiest sequence of violence. During these scenes, participants engage in athletic competition in a regulated environment with adult supervision and cheering spectators (including Mr Han, Dre's mother and his friends). This pageantry, as well as the lack of explicit injury detail, blood detail and weapons, and what is generally a quick recovery of competitors after injury, mean that narrative tension stems primarily from the competition and its outcomes, rather than any genuine sense of threat or menace. Ultimately, while the film features depictions of martial arts within a competitive environment, the broader context and message is clearly one that condemns bullying and senseless violence.

In the opinion of the Review Board, the impact of the violence is no higher than mild, and the film can be accommodated within the PG classification.

8. Summary

The Karate Kid is classified PG (Parental Guidance), with the consumer advice 'Action violence, bullying violence and themes'.