



OFFICE OF FILM
& LITERATURE
CLASSIFICATION

Te Tari Whakarōpū Tukuata, Tubitubinga

50 Cent: The Massacre Introduction

On 11 October 2006, the “Special Edition CD/DVD” set of rapper 50 Cent’s album *The Massacre* was submitted for classification to the Office of Film and Literature Classification by the Department of Internal Affairs on behalf of a member of the public. 50 Cent is an American rap artist who specialises in the genre of gangsta rap. His music has become increasingly popular over the last few years both in the United States and New Zealand. However the images, words and subjects featured in his music have raised concern among some groups about the impact and influence of this music on young people, particularly teenagers (for example, see the decision on the Broadcasting Standards Authority website regarding a complaint made about a 50 Cent music video that was screened on television: <http://www.bsa.govt.nz/decisions/2005/2005-062.htm>).

The original complaint was made regarding the lyrics of some of the songs on the CD. However when Inspectors from the Department of Internal

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Affairs went to acquire a copy of this CD they found the Special Edition Set, which included an unlabelled DVD of the music videos for the songs featured on the album. Because all films, including music videos, which are made available for sale to the public on DVD must be classified/labelled, the DVD was submitted to the Office for classification along with the CD. You can find out more about the classification of music videos at http://www.censorship.govt.nz/schools_music_videos.html.

The Office can classify anything defined by the Act as a “publication”. Under section 2 of the Act, the meaning of “publication” includes “any film, book, sound recording, picture, newspaper”. Music recordings are not automatically examined by the Office in the way that films (including DVDs) are. Instead, music recordings are only considered for classification if they are submitted to the Office by the Department of Internal Affairs, the Police, Customs, a member of the public or a member of the music industry.

The CD was examined on a PC using Windows Media Player and a copy of the lyrics for each of the tracks was obtained from the internet site The Original Hip-hop Lyrics Archive. Both the CD and the DVD were examined by a Classification Officer.

Many of the tracks on this album focus on 50 Cent’s hip-hop lifestyle. He brags about his rapping ability, his wealth, and his prowess with women, and he issues threats to enemy rappers and anyone else who should cross him and his

“The publications’ treatment of violent crime is of particular concern because of its potentially glamorising effect, due to the fact that violence is a large element of the image of himself that 50 Cent presents to the public. The lyrics might encourage impressionable young listeners and viewers to adopt the aggressive attitudes espoused in the songs and possibly express these in violent behaviour.” - Office of Film and Literature Classification Decision.



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crew, G-Unit.

“...the words glorify violence and crime and display a perverted attitude to women...the only influence that these ‘songs’ can have is negative...contribute to the increasing crime and lawlessness...many young adults are not old enough to discern this material...”

- letter from original complainant.

There are references to sex in a number of songs. There are also limited depictions of sexual imagery in the music videos. Some songs include passing references to drug use and drug dealing, generally in the context of the “gangsta” lifestyle. There are numerous references to violent activities that would constitute crimes such as murder and assault. Guns and gunplay are a recurrent motif throughout both publications.

New Zealand’s censorship system is governed by the Films Videos and Publications Classification Act 1993. The censorship system is designed to protect the New Zealand public from material that is likely to be harmful, or injurious to the public good. The Act defines what is considered harmful, and establishes criteria for classifying and labelling films and other publications.

In its decision, the Office concluded:

The publications’ treatment of violent crime is of particular concern because of its potentially glamorising effect, due to the fact that violence is a large element of the image of himself that 50 Cent presents to the public. The lyrics might

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encourage impressionable young listeners and viewers to adopt the aggressive attitudes espoused in the songs and possibly express these in violent behaviour.

Both the CD and the DVD were classified as: “Objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 16 years”. This is represented by the label R16, with the descriptive note “contains violence, sexual references and offensive language”.

Questions

- 1) What matters were considered by the Classification Office under section 3 (4) of the Act?
- 2) Compare the decision of the Classification Office in relation to the CD/DVD of *The Massacre* with the decision by the Broadcasting Standards Authority in relation to the music video of *Candy Shop*, also by 50 Cent. What are the differences between the decisions? What arguments are used in each case?
- 3) Think about the types of publications which the Office classifies. What different things need to be taken into consideration when classifying different publications, such as sound recordings or images? What do you think is the difference between sound and image recordings in terms of the impact on the audience?
- 4) How do you think the depictions of violence, sexual references and offensive language on this CD and DVD compare to other CDs or DVDs?