



OFFICE OF FILM  
& LITERATURE  
CLASSIFICATION

*Te Tari Whakarōpū Tukuata, Tūbitūbinga*

## Me, Myself and Irene Introduction

The film *Me, Myself and Irene* was submitted to the Office of Film and Literature Classification on 6 June 2000, by the Film and Video Labelling Body for 20th Century Fox Film Distributors. It was submitted to the Office because it had received the MA 15+ classification in Australia and the restricted 15 classification in the UK.

The film was examined on the 12th of June and a decision was issued on the 16th. This is a standard turnaround time for theatrical releases, which are usually classified under urgency. Distributors pay an extra 50% of the usual fee for this service.

The classification officer who classified the film noted in the consideration sheet that the film made fun of many different groups of people, notably black, disabled and short people. However, she was more concerned with the level of offensive language, and the sex and sexual references in the film. Offensive language on its own would not have led to the film being restricted in 2000 (that changed in 2005), but if it was of a sexual or violent nature it could be considered under those headings.

**The Office classified the film R13, with the note “Contains offensive language and sexual references”.**

On 30 June, the Manager of The Project to Counter Stigma and Discrimination Associated with Mental Illness, who also represented the Mental Health Foundation and the Schizophrenia Fellowship, applied for a review of the film. The grounds for review were that the film reinforced common stereotypes about mental illness, associating it with sustained violence,

*... the Chief Censor should have been aware of the film’s potential to discriminate and should have considered the following questions:*

- 1. whether it could be reasonably inferred that allowing the film to screen would have the effect of undermining the right of people with schizophrenia to be free from discrimination;*
- 2. if so, whether the right of the film distributors to freedom of speech is sufficiently important to justify undermining the right to freedom from discrimination in this context;*
- 3. if so, whether the film can be shown in a way or a form which minimises its impact on people with schizophrenia.*

*Submission of The Project to Counter Stigma and Discrimination Associated with Mental Illness to the Board of Review, August 2000*

abusive language and gross sexual behaviour. The Project identified the film’s classification as “legally defective” because it ignored Sections 3(3)(c) and 3(3)(e) of the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993.

In the Office’s submission to the Board of Review, the Chief Censor noted that the recent *Living Word* decision of the Court of Appeal meant that a publication must fit through the “gateway” of Section 3(1) of the Act in order for it to be classified restricted, that is, it must contain matters such as sex, horror, crime, cruelty or violence. The *Living Word* case involved two videos which denigrated gay and lesbian people. These videos had been classified objectionable (banned) by the Board of Review on the Section 3(3)(e) grounds that they held lesbians and gay men to be inferior. The Court of Appeal decided that the videos did not contain sex, horror, crime, cruelty or violence and therefore could not be restricted or banned.

While a number of aspects of *Me, Myself and Irene* do fit through the gateway, for example, the sexual references and violence, it is difficult to see where mental illness can be fitted. This



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point is not discussed in the Board's decision, and the Board raised the classification on the basis of the same points noted in the original decision – sexual references and offensive language.

**The Film and Literature Board of Review classified the film R15, changing the note to “Content may offend”.**

## Questions

1. What matters under Section 3 of the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993 are noted in the original decision of the Office?
2. What matters under Section 3 of the Act are discussed in the Board of Review's decision?
3. Since a 2005 law change, the Office has been able to consider offensive language when making decisions about restricting films. Do you think that the level of offensive language in this film would change the classification? Do you think the particular words in the film make a difference?
4. Do you think the change of descriptive note by the Board of Review makes a difference?
5. Do you think that discrimination of any kind should be something the Classification Office has to consider? How easy do you think it would be to determine what should be done?
6. What would be your classification and descriptive note for this film? Why?