



OFFICE OF FILM
& LITERATURE
CLASSIFICATION

Te Tari Whakarōpū Tukuata, Tubitubinga

Savage Honeymoon **Introduction**

The New Zealand film *Savage Honeymoon* was originally classified by The Office of Film and Literature Classification as R18 “contains offensive language and anti-social behaviour” in December 1999. However this classification was overturned and replaced with the classification of R15 by the Film and Literature Board of Review in April 2000.

The film covers three days in the lives of the Savage family. Following a number of incidents including stealing a motorbike, gate crashing a wedding, receiving stolen goods and being raided by the police, the family decide to go on a second honeymoon at a camping ground north of Auckland. Here they spend a considerable amount of time drinking and socialising with others. There are arguments, fights and parties, with the weekend ending with the family happy and relaxed in their temporary home.

The Office classified the film R18 with the descriptive note “contains offensive language and anti-social behaviour”.

The film was exhibited in New Zealand during the 1999/2000 summer, which was the first summer where alcohol could be sold and served to people aged 18 years and over. The Office was concerned that celebrations at New Year would be likely to be protracted and involve high numbers of young people using alcohol.

The Office described the film as one which was well-made and which demonstrated considerable affection for the characters and the New Zealand setting, and anticipated it would be well received in this country.

In making its decision, the Office took into consideration the film’s treatment of nudity, offensive language, violence, crime and anti-social behaviour including conspicuous and substantial consumption of alcohol. The Office described the film as one which was well-made and which demonstrated considerable affection for the characters and the New Zealand setting, and anticipated it would be well received in this country.

The film was exhibited in New Zealand during the 1999/2000 summer, which was the first summer where alcohol could be sold and served to people aged 18 years and over. The Office was concerned that celebrations at New Year would be likely to be protracted and involve high numbers of young people using alcohol. In the film, the behaviour of the drunken characters is presented as comic, yet certain actions, such as placing a gas cylinder on a bonfire to explode, could potentially appeal to audiences to be re-enacted. The Office concluded that the comic use of alcohol and its lack of effect on the characters in the film may well be injurious to young people who have limited experience of alcohol and its effects.

In February 2000, the Office received a letter from the Energy Safety Service, which administers the legislation governing safety of gas supply and utilisation in New Zealand. Having seen a



**OFFICE OF FILM
& LITERATURE
CLASSIFICATION**

Te Tari Whakarōpū Tukuata, Tubitub

television news report regarding the film and its classification, the Service commented that:
“dealing with gas in such a casual way, let alone throwing a cylinder into a fire, puts lives at risk...The Energy Safety Service aims to reduce injuries and deaths associated with gas use, and therefore supports actions that might discourage ‘copycat’ irresponsible behaviour as far as gas dangers are concerned”.

Also in February, the Growth Through Moderation Society Inc. wrote a letter to the Office after hearing discussion of the R18 classification on the National Radio Station and on the televised Holmes programme:

“As an organisation working in the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse we feel that your ruling must be upheld...This is not a good message to be promoted as entertainment...We are positive that the young should not be exposed to anything that makes drunken behaviour seem in any way amusing, desirable or safe. It is very doubtful if many older citizens should be either.”

However, the classification also generated a significant amount of criticism from the public towards the Classification Office. Newspaper coverage featured the surprise and disappointment expressed by various sectors,

“As an organisation working in the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse we feel that your ruling must be upheld...This is not a good message to be promoted as entertainment...”

- Letter from the Growth Through Moderation Society Inc. to the Office of Film and Literature Classification.

“The classification office’s thinking is flawed on several levels. It is difficult to conceive that people, no matter how immature, would be persuaded to imitate this explosive piece of folly.” – The New Zealand Herald, February 10 2000.

including the film industry, over the R18 rating given by the Office:

“The decision has stunned the film’s makers, who have appealed against the rating. They say it is out of step with public opinion. Ruth Harley, Chief Executive of the Film Commission, which provided most of the film’s finance, said the decision suggested a failure of the sense of humour in the censor’s office. “I think the decision is mind-bending. This is a comedy. Comedies are almost always about sacred cows.”” – The New Zealand Herald, February 9 2000.

“The classification office’s thinking is flawed on several levels. It is difficult to conceive that people, no matter how immature, would be persuaded to imitate this explosive piece of folly.” – The New Zealand Herald, February 10 2000.

The distributors of the film, REP Film Distributors (NZ) Ltd, appealed to the Film and Literature Board of Review on 7 January 2000. Any person who is dissatisfied with a decision of the Office may seek a review of the publication by the Film and Literature Board of Review within 30 working days of that decision. The Board of Review does not review the Office’s decision. It must conduct its review of the publication without regard to the Office’s decision. You can read more about the



OFFICE OF FILM
& LITERATURE
CLASSIFICATION

Te Tari Whakarōpū Tukuata, Tuhituh.

Board on the Office website at http://www.censorship.govt.nz/censorship_system.html.

The Board noted that a constant factor of the film was the heavy and continuous consumption of alcohol without adverse or realistic consequences. A particular aspect was the recurrent juxtaposition of drinking and driving. The Board was concerned that young persons could take the message from the film that any generation can drink to excess and drive, and if they do not, they are not having fun. It was also conscious of the extensive media commentary on the scene in the film where the gas bottle is thrown onto the fire. The Board noted the recent amendment to the legislation lowering the drinking age. It concluded that persons aged 15 years and over would be sufficiently mature to make the necessary distinction between acceptable and anti-social conduct relating to drinking and to drinking and driving.

The Board concluded that the film should be classified as R15 with the descriptive note that it “contains irresponsible behaviour associated with alcohol”.

Questions

- 1) Think about the classification decisions in relation to *Savage Honeymoon*. Who were the key stakeholders?
- 2) Part of the debate centred around the potential for young viewers to re-enact unsafe behaviours shown in the film. Look at section 3B of the Act. Do you think there is a connection between what people see and what they do?
- 3) This film was classified just before the New Year, which happened to be the turn of the millennium. In addition, the drinking age had only recently been lowered to 18. How do events in society shape people’s perceptions of films? Can you think of any other occasions where real-life events have impacted on responses to film?