

WRITTEN REASON FOR DECISION SECTION 12

TITLE OF PUBLICATION: Scream

OFLC REF:9700120

The publication was examined and the contents were recorded in an examination transcript. A written consideration of the legal criteria was undertaken. This document provides a summary of the reasons for the decision.

HEADNOTE

Decision:

The Classification Office has classified this publication as:

Objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 16 years.

Display Conditions:

Nil.

Descriptive Note:

Contains violence and offensive language.

DECISION

Submission procedure:

The 35mm film *Scream* was submitted to the Office of Film and Literature Classification (Classification Office) by the Labelling Body for classification under s12(1) of the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993 (the FVPC Act).

Under s12(1) of the FVPC Act, the Classification Office is required to examine and classify the 35mm film pursuant to s23.

Under s23(2) of the FVPC Act, the Classification Office must determine whether the 35mm film is to be classified as unrestricted, objectionable or objectionable except in certain circumstances.

Description of the publication:

The film contains the feature *Scream* which has a total running time of 112 min 22 sec.

The plot of the feature revolves around a number of mysterious brutal murders in a small town and the increasing levels of hysteria and suspense which follow as authorities attempt to solve the crimes. The central female character Sydney initially believes her boyfriend to be responsible for the deaths, however, attention then moves to Sydney's missing father. The plot builds to a bloody finale at an adolescent party in which a number of people are killed. The killers are finally revealed to be Sydney's boyfriend Billy and his best friend Stu. Sydney battles them with help from friends, and kills them both.

Woven into the plot of *Scream* are continual references to horror films and the formula that is used to produce them. The film appears to be an intentional send-up of contemporary horror films which results in murders being depicted to some degree in a farcical manner. The language is at times offensive.

The meaning of “objectionable”:

Section 3(1) of the FVPC Act sets out the meaning of the word “objectionable”. The section states that a publication is objectionable if it:

“...describes, depicts, expresses, or otherwise deals with matters such as sex, horror, crime, cruelty, or violence in such a manner that the availability of the publication is likely to be injurious to the public good.”

In classifying this film the main question is whether it deals with matters of violence and horror in such a manner that the availability of the publication is likely to be injurious to the public good.

Matters of violence

Scream contains a large number of scenes in which men and women are depicted being killed and injured by means of deliberate force (usually stabbing) from unknown assailants. The killing and wounding of the victims, and the suspense around each, is the predominant focus of the feature as it builds to a climatic and bloody finale in which the killers are revealed. Although there is a lot of blood splatter throughout the feature, many of the actual killings tend to be inexplicitly portrayed. Some of the killings are poorly choreographed and executed (it would seem purposely so) giving them a farcical appearance which significantly reduces

any impact they might otherwise have had. However, there are some scenes that do have considerable impact upon the viewer. These matters are further discussed under s3(3)(a)(i).

Certain publications are deemed to be objectionable:

Pursuant to s3(2) of the FVPC Act, a publication is deemed to be objectionable if it promotes or supports, or tends to promote or support, certain activities listed in that subsection. None of the activities proscribed by s3(2) of the FVPC Act are promoted or supported in any way by *Scream*.

Matters to be given particular weight:

Section 3(3) of the FVPC Act deals with the matters which the Classification Office must give particular weight to in determining whether or not a publication (other than a publication deemed to be objectionable under s3(2)) is objectionable, or should be given a classification other than objectionable.

The Classification Office has considered all the matters in s3(3). The only matters which it considers relevant to *Scream* are those set out in s3(3)(a)(i) namely:

...the extent and degree to which, and the manner in which, the publication describes, depicts or otherwise deals with acts of torture, the infliction of serious physical harm, or acts of significant cruelty.

The opening scene of *Scream* presents a teenage female at home alone receiving phone calls from an unknown male who initially appears friendly, chatting to her in flirtatious manner. The male then asks the female's name stating, "I want to know who I'm looking at." The frightened female hangs up the phone. The male calls back telling her that if she hangs up again, "I'll cut you like a fish." The female is then forced to play a question and answer game for the life of her boyfriend. Upon getting a question wrong the female's boyfriend is killed, his abdomen is cut open revealing his intestines. Although there is a tense build up to this scene the impact remains predominantly with the suspense created before the death of the victim rather than the actual killing which is not depicted. The victim is seen only fleetingly afterwards and at a distance with his intestines hanging from his abdomen.

The killer then stalks the female in the house, killing her by stabbing her body and cutting her throat. The knife is seen to flash up and down with blood on it, but the actual stabbing is not depicted. The killer is then shown dragging the still living female across the ground as she slowly dies, her face and body are covered in blood. The victim is then depicted suspended from a tree by a rope, her intestines hanging from her abdomen. This is presented briefly from a distance, substantially reducing its impact, but not removing it.

The purpose of this scene appears to be to present a typical horror movie scenario so that it can later be held up to ridicule by presenting further such scenes in a farcical manner. It would seem that the intention is to make fun of the set formula used in making contemporary horror movies.

The finale to *Scream* in which a number of people are killed at a party does at times have a limited impact upon the viewer. For example one scene depicts a male having his throat cut with a close focus upon his neck and head; a knife is pulled across the victims throat by the killer, blood immediately streams from the wound, and a look of terror on the face of the victim is evident. However, the focus on this depiction is brief and occurs within what appears to be an intentional farce of horror films, substantially reducing its impact.

Additional matters to be considered:

Under s3(4) of the FVPC Act, the Classification Office must also consider the following additional matters:

The dominant effect of the publication as a whole:

The dominant effect of the film is of a horror movie which appears to be an intentional send-up of contemporary horror films.

The impact of the medium in which the publication is presented:

The 35mm film with Dolby sound provides the opportunity for a high impact upon the viewer within a theatre setting, with large public audiences.

The character of the publication, including any merit, value, or importance that the publication has in relation to literary, artistic, social, cultural, educational, scientific, or other matters:

This film is a slickly produced, big budget production. It has artistic and technical merit as it's well made, edited, and contains strong performances from the lead actors.

The persons, classes of persons, or age groups of the persons to whom the publication is intended or is likely to be made available:

The film appears to be an intentional send-up of contemporary horror movies, and is directed by well known Hollywood Director Wes Craven. It contains well known actors such as Drew Barrymore and Courtney Cox who have a high level of appeal with older teenage audiences. It is likely that the film is intended for and will appeal to this age group and those familiar with the horror movie genre.

The purpose for which the publication is intended to be used:

The film is intended for the entertainment of the viewer.

Conclusion:

The 35mm film *Scream* is a horror movie that contains continual references to other horror films and the formula that is used to produce them. The film appears to be an intentional send-up of contemporary horror films which results in much of the violence being depicted in a farcical manner. Although there is a lot of blood splatter throughout the film, many of the actual killings tend to be inexplicitly portrayed. They appear to be poorly choreographed and executed, at times purposefully, which adds to the farcical manner of the film. This significantly reduces the level of impact the scenes might otherwise have had, but does not remove it.

Given the extent of violence and strength of the horror themes presented in the film the Classification Office considers that the availability of the publication is likely to be injurious to the public good unless it is restricted to an older teenage audience and above.

The Classification Office therefore classifies *Scream* as a restricted publication, namely:

Objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 16 years.

Display Conditions:

Where the Classification Office classifies any publication as a restricted publication, it is required under s27(1) of the FVPC Act to consider whether or not conditions in respect of the public display of the particular publication should be imposed.

In considering the issue of public display, the Classification Office must have regard to the matters set out in s27(2) of the FVPC Act, namely:

- (a) *The reasons for classifying the publication as a restricted publication;*
- (b) *The terms of the classification given to the publication; and*
- (c) *The likelihood that the public display of the publication, if not subject to conditions, or as the case may be, any particular condition, would cause offence to reasonable members of the public.*

The film is classified as a restricted publication because of its presentation of violence and horror themes. The title of the publication does not expressly refer to its contents and is not considered likely to offend reasonable members of the public. Therefore no display conditions are imposed on this film.

Written reason for decision is not required for section 12 submissions. It is the policy of the Classification Office to provide written reasons for section 12 submissions.