
**CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL
ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL**

CITY-TV re Fashion Television

(CBSC Decision 93/94-0176)

Decided June 22, 1994

M. Barrie (Chair), S. Fish, P. Fockler, D. Luzzi, R. Stanbury

THE FACTS

Fashion Television deals with the fashion industry and the models involved in it. The program in question aired January 23, 1994, contained interviews with celebrities, models and members of the public relating to how women view fashion and the importance of cultivating a personal style. It also dealt with the new fashions and lifestyles in Miami Beach, Florida. Finally, the program covered a New York showing of a well-known designer's fashions.

A viewer wrote to the station, with a cover copy to the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC). The letter, dated January 29, 1994, outlined several specific clips to which the complainant objected, and stated in part:

The camera is constantly zooming in on women's body parts, showing us crotches, thighs, bums, cleavage, and plenty of breasts - naked or otherwise. I find the bold, invasive style of the camera especially offensive.

...what we're seeing on this program is not fashion, it's pornography.

The message being conveyed on Fashion Television is that women's bodies must be young, taut, cellulite-free, thin, perfectly rounded, and as naked as possible, because all this makes men happy and it makes them like us....We women don't have to "do" or "accomplish" anything. We just have to look good and show bare skin and make sure men look at us.

I find this all horribly degrading and oppressive.

The viewer further described her personal experiences of trying to rebuild her self-esteem after trying for so long to conform to the beauty myth. She summed up her objection to the program by stating that:

... the beauty obsession is based on something superficial and self-limiting, and can build no lasting sense of identity. Power through beauty signals subordination and dependency, leaving a person vulnerable, insecure, and often mentally and emotionally underdeveloped.

The CBSC sent the complaint to the broadcaster for response.

On February 21, 1994, the Program Manager for CITY-TV replied to the complainant, explaining that:

We report on fashion shows as they happen and we do not equate nudity with pornography. Fashion and photography to our mind are art and we would no more condemn designers and photographers and their stylists than we would any other artist who chooses to represent the human form.

The Program Manager also addressed the complainant's concerns regarding the depiction of women in general, noting that Fashion Television had run stories on "the power of being a woman and the power that comes from believing in yourself not just in your physical being". She also noted that many runway models are aware that "'looking good' is not as important as what they have personally accomplished", and felt that the majority of the viewing audience felt the same way.

In closing, the Program Manager stated that "fashion is 'eye candy' and only meant to entertain and to be artistically expressive - we have never suggested that people should sacrifice substance for style". She apologized for any inadvertent offence the complainant had felt.

The complainant wrote to the CBSC on March 7, 1994, stating that she was dissatisfied with the station's response, and requesting that the CBSC Ontario Regional Council consider the complaint. She also explained her concerns about the program in general, stating:

I would like the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council to recognize that my complaint is about Fashion Television in its entirety, not about a single episode that happened to offend me at one particular moment. Fashion TV promotes a way of thinking and behaving that is

detrimental to women and to society, and that doesn't happen in just one episode, it happens in all of them.

THE DECISION

The CBSC considered the matter under Clause 4 of the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code for Television and Radio Programming*, which reads as follows:

Television and radio programming shall refrain from the exploitation of women, men and children. Negative or degrading comments on the role and nature of women, men or children in society shall be avoided. Modes of dress, camera focus on areas of the body and similar modes of portrayal should not be degrading to either sex. The sexualization of children through dress or behaviour is not acceptable.

Guidance: "Sex-exploitation" through dress is one area in which the sexes have traditionally differed, with more women portrayed in scant clothing and alluring postures.

The five Regional Council members present (broadcaster Al MacKay being absent) reviewed the correspondence and screened the logger tape of the program in question. The Regional Council considered that the program did not contravene the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code*.

All members present agreed that CITY-TV's Fashion Television was entertainment which highlighted the fashion industry in a manner similar to other programming on the same subject. They felt it did not exploit women or present a negative or degrading portrayal of them. Indeed they indicated that the message conveyed in the first part of the program was that women should develop a personal style, based on their individual preferences (rather than those of society). As a result, the program did not constitute a breach of the *Code*.

The Regional Council members further noted that the complainant's concern was really the fashion industry in general, a concern which the station cannot be expected to address. The Regional Council also noted that the complete and considerate response from CITY-TV, explaining the station's position and outlining its other efforts to promote women's self image, was exemplary.

This decision is a public document upon its release by the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council and may be reported, announced, or read by the station against which the complaint had originally been made; however, in the case of a favourable decision, the station is under no obligation to announce the result.