
**CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL
NATIONAL CONVENTIONAL TELEVISION PANEL**

CTV re *The Sopranos* (Season 2)

(CBSC Decision 01/02-0104+)

Decided May 9, 2002

R. Cohen (Chair), P. Hebden, M. Hogarth, E. Holmes, C. Murray

THE FACTS

The television series, *The Sopranos*, is the story of a dysfunctional family whose head, Tony Soprano, is a New Jersey Cosa Nostra (often commonly referred to as the Mafia) boss. The series, which originally aired in the United States on the pay television service, Home Box Office (HBO), had at the time of this CBSC decision completed its third season there. All three seasons had been licensed to, and broadcast by, the Canadian pay television service, The Movie Network (TMN), which was not a CBSC member; Canadian conventional television rights for the first and second seasons of the series had been licensed to CTV, which has always been a CBSC member.

Various episodes of the first season were the object of a series of complaints received by the CBSC; the Council's decision relating to Season 1 can be found at *CTV re The Sopranos* (CBSC Decision 00/01-0130+, March 8, 2001) and a general description of the theme and content of the series can be found there. The complaints raised with respect to Season 2 for which Ruling Requests were received relate to the episodes of September 17, September 30, October 1, October 14 and November 5, 2001, which were broadcast by CTV beginning at 10:00 pm on each of those dates (and ending, on the majority of those dates, several minutes after 11:00 pm rather than on the hour). In general, these raise the issues of violence, obscenity, profanity, nudity and sexual activity, all of which were dealt with in the CBSC decision relating to Season 1. None of the initial complaints relating to Season 2 raised the concern of some Season 1 complainants regarding the question of Italian nationality. Excerpts from the letters of complaint follow; however, the complete correspondence can be found in the Appendix.

All episodes included the following viewer advisory in audio and visual form at the beginning of the program and at the end of every commercial break:

This program is not intended for children. It contains scenes of violence, extremely coarse language and nudity. Some adults may be offended by the content. Viewer discretion is strongly advised.

All episodes also included a classification icon of 18+ for at least 15 seconds at the beginning of, but not elsewhere during, the program.

Complaint from Mr. S:

It would be good to see all programming which contains violence, obscenity, and profanity either banned from the airwaves or at least severely censored. Perhaps in light of the recent events in the real world, people will think more carefully about the reality of violence in any form, and the universal truth that there should be more respect for human life.

Complaint from Mr. M (1):

I am appalled at the violent nature of the so called award winning series, *The Sopranos*. [...] The show glamorizes criminal behaviour as well as belittles females (nudity) and the weak. This type of programming should be accessible only through pay channels. I am particularly upset this program is broadcast on a national station, which normally sets the standard for which other stations can follow.

Complaint from Mr. P:

I find the dialogue on these programs extremely offensive particularly degrading to women. Now that it is being broadcast on a regular channel (not pay-for-view), I believe that it is in very very poor taste.

For instance, at 10:25 PM on the above date, Tony Soprano was referring to an Asian lady as @that Chinese C- - -, at the laundry down the street

You are probably well aware that all of the players (women included) use the AF@ word liberally, many times 4 or 5 times in a single sentence.

Complaint from Ms. M:

I enjoy the TV show *The Sopranos*. I don't mind the language, the suggestive dialogue, the aggressive depiction of Mafioso [*sic*]. I do not choose to watch this type of entertainment often, but I do enjoy this TV show. Most of it is carried late at night, so as to miss the very young audience However

I was very concerned about 1 segment that ran last night at about 10:40 PM in Toronto. I found the earlier dialogue about "blowjobs" offensive ... but I let that slip by. It was the depiction of the act with one woman, with another giant bare breasted woman in the scene that bothered me. Teenagers are exposed to these images on a daily basis, tremendously influencing their worldview. Today, our youth cannot turn on the TV or log onto the internet

(hotmail) without receiving visual stimuli about sexual encounters. The problem is, they do not have personal experience to help them interpret the information.

Complaint from Mr. M (2):

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: On September 30th at 11:02 P.M. I switched channels to CFRN, expecting to watch the 11 o'clock news. Instead I heard a conversation between a woman and a male acquaintance. The male (I presume) had told the woman that she reminded him of another woman. The woman, facing into the camera said something like this. You say that I remind you of this other woman. I get the impression (not the right words) that you want or wanted to fc her, or me, (unsure).

CTV=s Vice President, Programming Communications, replied to all the complainants with essentially the same letter, which read as follows, in principal part:

We understand and appreciate your concerns. CTV is broadcasting *The Sopranos* because it is an excellent drama, but we do so with the full knowledge that it is not going to appeal to all viewers. For this reason we are taking great care to ensure that it runs as late in the evening as possible. *The Sopranos* airs at 10:00 p.m. across the country, an hour after the 9:00 p.m. mark that is considered by the CRTC to be the start of adult viewing times.

Additionally, in keeping with CTV=s commitment to responsible viewing, a strong advisory notifying viewers of the content of the program runs at the top of the program and in every commercial break. These advisories are intended to provide viewers with information that can assist them in making an informed viewing choice, whether for their children, or for themselves.

CTV=s decision to air *The Sopranos* is based on its outstanding writing and acting, and the unique portrayal of life that it exhibits. In the past year that we have broadcast the program, there has been a fair amount of debate from people both strongly in favour of, and strongly against, the story it tells. Included in the debate was the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council, which reviewed our broadcast of season one and upheld CTV=s decision to air *The Sopranos* on the condition that we provide adequate viewer warnings.

We understand that our response may not be the exact answer you are seeking. But we hope that you can appreciate that CTV is a broadcaster that attempts to meet a diverse spectrum of viewer choice. You believe, sincerely and strongly, that *The Sopranos* contains messages inappropriate for television viewing. But that feeling is not shared by millions of your fellow viewers, or by CTV.

There were further responses from some of the complainants who returned their Ruling Requests with accompanying letters elaborating their positions (all of which are included in the Appendix).

THE DECISION

The National Conventional Television Panel Adjudicators considered the complaints under the following provisions of the various Canadian Association of Broadcasters= (CAB) private broadcaster Codes.

CAB Code of Ethics, Clause 6, paragraph 3:

It is recognized that the full, fair and proper presentation of news, opinion, comment and editorial is the prime and fundamental responsibility of the broadcast publisher.

CAB Sex-Role Portrayal Code, Article 4 (Exploitation):

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.

CAB Violence Code, Article 1.1 (Gratuitous and glamorized violence):

- 1.1 Canadian broadcasters shall not air programming which:
- ! contains gratuitous violence in any form*
 - ! sanctions, promotes or glamorizes violence

(*A^AGratuitous@ means material which does not play an integral role in developing the plot, character or theme of the material as a whole).

CAB Violence Code, Article 3.1 (Scheduling):

- 3.1.2 Accepting that there are older children watching television after 9 pm, broadcasters shall adhere to the provisions of article 5.1 below (viewer advisories), enabling parents to make an informed decision as to the suitability of the programming for their family members.

CAB Violence Code, Article 7.0 (Violence Against Women):

- 7.1 Broadcasters shall not telecast programming which sanctions, promotes or glamorizes any aspect of violence against women.
- 7.2 Broadcasters shall ensure that women are not depicted as victims of violence unless the violence is integral to the story being told. Broadcasters shall be particularly sensitive not to perpetuate the link between women in a sexual context and women as victims of violence.

CAB Violence Code, Article 4.0 (AGVOT Classification System, Icon Use Protocols):

Frequency

The rating icon is to be keyed over the first 15-16 seconds of the program. It is expected the Americans will have their ratings up for 15 seconds. For programs which run longer than one hour, the icon is to be repeated at the beginning of the second hour. These are minimal use standards; stations may wish to use the icons more frequently on programs with particularly sensitive content.

The Adjudicators watched each of the episodes and reviewed all of the correspondence relevant to this decision. The National Conventional Television Panel considers that, for the reasons given below, the series does not violate any of the program *content* requirements of the private broadcaster Codes. It does, however, consider that the broadcaster has not fulfilled all of the *Violence Code* requirements with respect to the use of classification icons on two of the episodes. Consequently, to this extent, the Panel finds CTV in breach of the *CAB Violence Code*.

The Previous CBSC Decision

The decision of this Panel just over a year ago dealt with the allegedly inappropriate portrayal of Italians as an identifiable group on the basis of their national origin, the presence of gratuitous or glamorized violence, the use of coarse, crude or foul language and the presence of nudity and sexual situations. On each of these issues, the Panel decided in favour of the broadcaster. One of the complainants in the Season 1 decision has asked the CRTC to review that decision with respect to the allegedly inappropriate portrayal of Italians as an identifiable group on the basis of their national origin. While the regulator's decision has not yet been released, that issue is not germane to the matter at hand.

As to the substance of the previous CBSC decision, suffice it to say that the principles applied there apply here. The question for the Panel on this occasion is whether the *facts* (that is, the actual broadcast matter), which of course vary from episode to episode, are so materially different as to call for a different decision in the present circumstances. Moreover, as will be discussed at slightly greater length in the following section, the CRTC has applied the principles established in the previous CBSC decision to a *Sopranos* complaint with respect to a non-CBSC member broadcaster, which leaves the Council comfortable in their application to the matter at hand.

The CRTC Decision regarding The Movie Network

The Movie Network (TMN) is a pay television licensee which is not a member of the CBSC. Complaints relating to any of its programming are, therefore, filed with, and dealt with by, the CRTC. In May 2001, the Commission received a complaint regarding an episode of *The Sopranos* that was broadcast at 8:00 pm on April 8, 2001 in the Toronto area. (The CTV broadcast of Season 1, as well as Season 2, began at 10:00 pm.) In the course of its decision (Decision CRTC 2002-83, April 8, 2002), the Commission dealt with the issues of inappropriate portrayals of women, gratuitous nudity, and violence against women and specific groups (and incidentally in this regard, gratuitous or glamorized violence), as well as the issues of viewer advisories and scheduling. It concluded:

It is clear that *The Sopranos* is intended for adult audiences. The licensee itself applied an R rating and an on-screen advisory alerting viewers to the adult nature of the program, which is

an acknowledgement of the mature nature of the content. This, combined with the particularly disturbing story and graphic content, especially the murder scene, as foreshadowed by the attack on the bodyguard, indicates that this episode should have been broadcast after the 9:00 p.m. watershed hour. [...] TMN should therefore have respected the watershed provision of the *Pay Violence Code*. The Commission finds that, by not doing so, the licensee has committed a breach of condition of licence.

On all other substantive aspects of the programming, the CRTC did not find against the broadcaster. Those points of that decision relative to the matter at hand will be cited under the relevant headings below.

Violent Content

There can be no doubt but that the “business” side of the life of Tony Soprano and his cohorts is marked by an undercurrent of violence. While the surface motivation of the mobsters is profit, their enforcement system is neither contractual nor judicial; it is violence-based. Consequently, violent acts can be expected to be a part of the development of the plot of each of the episodes. They are not, however, the only theme of the program; nor are they even the principal theme of the *Sopranos*. Nor are there more violent sequences in the episodes of Season 2 reviewed by the Panel than there were in Season 1. In its earlier decision dealing with Season 1 of *The Sopranos*, this Panel said:

Many of the complainants expressed concern regarding the significant amount of violence in the series. While there is an undercurrent of the *threat* of violence, the quantity of on-screen violence in each episode is not significant. Of each 60+ minute show, there are not more than two scenes of violent action. That being said, when it occurs, the violent action tends to be graphic. Graphic true, perhaps because it is realistic in its presentation, but not excessive, and always contextual. The Panel considers that no act of violence in the episodes was dramatically unsubstantiated. In other words, every such act was contextual and had a clear role in the advancement of the plot or was “justified” (not, of course, in a societal *legal* context) by some previous action on the part of the victim. While such justification flows from the socially distorted rules of the Cosa Nostra or of Tony Soprano’s mob family in particular, the story knows no *random* acts of violence such as those in some dramas which may only be circularly justified by the fact that the perpetrators “enjoy” or thrive on such random acts.

[...]

While recognizing the occasional graphic brutality of the violent acts, the Panel considers that the violence is relatively infrequent, playing a smaller role in the story-telling than some complainants suggest. It is not, as noted above, either gratuitous or glamorized in the context of the challenged episodes and was relegated to a post-Watershed broadcast (10 p.m.) accompanied by very specific viewer advisories [...]. The National Conventional Television Panel finds no breach on this account.

In the part of its decision (Decision CRTC 2002-83) dealing with the violent scenes in the episode it reviewed, the CRTC concluded similarly.

The Commission considers that while the violent scenes could be characterized as disturbing and graphic, they played an integral role in the program's plot and character development. The character committing the two violent acts was depicted as an unstable and highly agitated individual, prone to irrational, violent outbursts. Further, the violence was not sanctioned by the other characters, who chastised the character for his actions.

The Commission considers that the violence in these scenes was integral to character and plot development in the story and was therefore not gratuitous. As well, it considers that the scenes did not sanction, promote or glamorize violence.

The Panel acknowledges that the scenes with violent elements in Season 2 are, generally speaking, structured with different components than those in Season 1. It would expect that, for reasons of dramatic diversity alone, this would be the case. For this or any other dramatic series, the Panel assumes that the creators would seek fresh ideas to maintain audience interest. Fundamentally, the Panel does not consider that the scenes with a violent component in Season 2 present any substantively different considerations to it than those in Season 1. It concludes that CTV has committed no breach of Article 1 of the *Violence Code* in broadcasting Season 2 of *The Sopranos*.

The Use of Coarse, Crude or Foul Language

Similarly, in Season 2, the Panel does not find that the use of coarse, crude or foul language differs in any material respect from Season 1. In the earlier decision, this Panel said:

There is no disputing that the language used in *The Sopranos* is exceedingly coarse. Moreover, it is constantly present in the dialogue among the Cosa Nostra members. There are few sentences in which one or another of the "forbidden" words, four-letter and otherwise, is not present. Religious epithets are also used. While, as noted above, these tend to be far less present in the domestic family dialogue, it must be admitted that they are present there as well from time to time.

[...]

In this case, the coarse, foul, indeed crude, language used by the mobsters is their vernacular. It is not employed gratuitously; it is used as one might expect that they would *really* use it. Uneducated, their choices are fewer than those of the more literate people in the show who use such terms infrequently or not at all. While not endorsing its usage, the Panel recognizes its relevance to the story being told. It is up to the broadcaster to play such programming in the correct time slot and to apply those other tools which the Codes require, such as explicit viewer advisories. Having aired the show at 10:00 p.m., timing is not an issue and advisories are dealt with below. The broadcast of the language itself, in the circumstances of this show, while not for everyone's ears, is not a sanctionable usage.

The CRTC did not deal with the use of coarse language in its decision relating to the broadcast of *The Sopranos* by TMN. In the present decision, the Panel can do no better than to reiterate its earlier position. The broadcaster is not, in this respect, in breach of

Clause 6, paragraph 3, of the *CAB Code of Ethics* with respect to the broadcast of Season 2.

The Presence of Nudity and Sexual Situations

The case of nudity and sexual situations is also nearly identical between Season 2 and Season 1. In this respect, this Panel said of the first season that “it [nudity] is rarely seen in combination with sexual activity.” In the episodes of Season 2 viewed by the Panel for the purposes of this decision, however, there is but a single scene (it is in the opening series episode on September 17) in which nudity and sexual intercourse are seen in combination. Otherwise, the observations of this Panel are apt:

While nudity is present in virtually every episode of *The Sopranos*, it is rarely seen in combination with sexual activity. In general, nude women are seen dancing on stage as a part of the business operations of Tony Soprano’s Bada Bing! Club. They are so much the backdrop of more important activities that, even when one of the women comes forward to speak to one of the mobsters, her unclothed appearance seems to be virtually ignored, if not utterly unimportant. This is not to suggest that the syndicate family members are without interest in sex, but only that that interest is essentially sublimated in the Club context. In this respect, the Panel sees no reason to diverge from the view expressed by the Quebec Regional Panel in *TQS re the Movie Strip Tease* (CBSC Decision 98/99-0441, February 21, 2000). After reviewing the numerous CBSC Panel decisions regarding bare breasts, in both news and public affairs, and dramatic contexts, the Quebec Panel explained:

While acknowledging that the showing of bare breasts on strip tease dancers was intended by the filmmaker to be sexual, the Council considers that the absence of sexual contact or lovemaking in the film rendered it, to all intents and purposes, sufficiently innocent that there would not even be a requirement that its broadcast occur only in a post-watershed time frame. Moreover, by airing the film in a family-viewing period (at 8:00 p.m.) with appropriate advisories and the rating icon established by the Régie du Cinéma, the broadcaster had provided sufficient opportunity to make that choice to those who might prefer not to see the film or not to have it available for their families.

The fact that the Soprano syndicate members tend to be unfaithful and appear generally to use women sexually, according them little respect except in their roles as wives and mothers, does not bear upon the nudity issue. The sex role portrayal is presented as a cultural issue on the part of the syndicate members primarily and even their sexual proclivities are isolated from the nudity at the Bada Bing! Club.

As to the single scene in which bare breasts are seen in the context of sexual intercourse, it must be noted that the episode is shown well past the Watershed hour and that such a scene is not, in that context, problematic in any event.

Moreover, with respect to the issue of sex-role portrayal, the observations of the CRTC in its TMN decision are germane:

The Commission examined the issue of inappropriate portrayals of women in relation to the principle set out in the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code* which indicates that the portrayal of women and men should reflect "their actual social and professional achievements, contributions, interests and activities." The Commission notes that the episode in question depicted women in a variety of roles, not only as strippers, but also as mothers, daughters and as Tony Soprano=s psychiatrist. The Commission considers that the depiction of each of those roles was not inappropriate, nor was the presence of any of those roles inappropriate to the story line. Consequently, the Commission finds that TMN did not breach the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code*.

The National Conventional Television Panel finds no breach with respect to any of the aspects of the broadcast of Season 2 in connection with nudity, sexual situations or sex-role portrayal.

The Use of Classification Icons

Neither the CBSC in its decision on Season 1 of *The Sopranos* nor the CRTC in its decision relating to TMN dealt with the issue of the use of classification icons as these are presented to the CBSC in the matter at hand. In this case, one of the complainants, Mr. M (2), raised his concern about elements of the September 30 episode *as a function of his expectation of seeing the 11:00 pm news* when he tuned his television set to CTV:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: On September 30th at 11:02 P.M. I switched channels to CFRN, expecting to watch the 11 o=clock news. Instead I heard a conversation between a woman and a male acquaintance. The male (I presume) had told the woman that she reminded him of another woman. The woman, facing into the camera said something like this. You say that I remind you of this other woman. I get the impression (not the right words) that you want or wanted to fc her, or me, (unsure).

The reason for Mr. M=s dilemma results from the fact that the program was produced for HBO rather than a conventional broadcaster. Consequently, the programming requirements relate to the needs of a subscriber-driven service rather than an advertiser-driven network and are not such that each episode be *precisely* of a certain length. In fact, on the majority of broadcast dates examined for this decision, *The Sopranos* ended after 11:00 pm, anywhere between two and ten minutes after that hour. The viewer who filed the complaint regarding the September 30 episode was clearly caught by surprise, as other viewers may well have been (although Mr. M(2) was the only person to have raised the issue). While it must be acknowledged that this would have been the case even if the icon had been present, the reality is that it was not. It would at least have constituted modest, but useful, advice to the viewer whatever the nature of the on-screen activity. The rule is clear: *For programs which run longer than one hour, the icon is to be repeated at the beginning of the second hour.* Moreover, the classification system=s Icon Use Protocol provides that these are *are minimal use standards* and the Protocol advises that *stations may wish to use the icons more frequently on programs with particularly sensitive content.* It is clear that the Protocol attempts to ensure that further viewer information is provided for those who tune to a program at the top of the hour. It was not

provided in this instance and the Panel finds the broadcaster in breach of its obligations under the classification requirements of the *Violence Code*.

Broadcaster Responsiveness

The CBSC reviews and comments on the broadcaster=s responsiveness to the complainant(s) in every file which reaches the adjudicative process since it is a part of the broadcaster=s CBSC membership obligations that its representative respond carefully to individuals who take the time to write of their concerns. In this case, the letter written to each of the complainants by CTV=s Vice President, Programming Communications, was informative and reflective of the complainants= concerns. Nothing more could be expected pursuant to the Council=s standard of responsiveness.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE DECISION

CTV is required to: 1) announce this decision, in the following terms, once during prime time within three days following the release of this decision and once more within seven days following the release of this decision in the time period in which *The Sopranos* was broadcast; 2) within fourteen days following the broadcast of the announcements, to provide written confirmation of the airing of the announcements to the complainants who filed the Ruling Requests; and 3) at that time, to provide the CBSC with that written confirmation and with air check copies of the broadcasts of the two announcements which must be made by CTV.

The Canadian Broadcast Standards Council has found that CTV has breached the classification provision in the *CAB Violence Code* in its broadcasts of *The Sopranos* during the Fall of 2001. Although it provided a rating icon of 18+ at the start of each episode of the program, as required, many episodes ran more than sixty minutes and CTV failed to run that rating icon again at eleven o=clock. Consequently, CTV has breached the requirements of the article of the *Violence Code* that deals with classification issues.

This decision is a public document upon its release by the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council.

APPENDIX

CBSC File 01/02-0104+ CTV re *The Sopranos* (Season 2)

I. The Complaint

The CBSC received five complaints during Fall 2001 for which correspondents returned their Ruling Request forms concerning the second season of *The Sopranos*. The complaints are as follows:

Complaint from Mr. S:

I thank you for your letter of September 27. I have received a written response from CTV network dated October 4, 2001, in response to my complaint about CTV's continued airing of the program called "The Sopranos", a copy of which has been forwarded to your office by CTV. Their response shows their total disregard and irresponsibility of conforming to the Television Broadcasting Regulations in complete compliance of Articles 5 (1) (a) and 5 (1) (b). Their disinterested attitude and continued violation of the Television Broadcasting Regulations should not be permitted to continue.

Therefore I submit to you the enclosed signed "Ruling Request" Form. I ask that you consider giving all the complaints and points that I mentioned in my letter to you of September 10 the closest of attention. Further, you may add to my list of complaints all of the obscenity, profanity, and violence aired by CTV in its broadcasts of "The Sopranos" at 10 PM local time on September 16, 17, 23, 24, and 30 and on October 1, and 8.

In light of the terrible violent reality of the terrorist attacks of September 11 in the United States, I would hope that a new ruling would be made in the future regarding the type of programming and the inappropriateness of violence, obscenity, and profanity on the Canadian Television airwaves in the name of a sick and warped form of so-called "entertainment".

It would be good to see all programming which contains violence, obscenity, and profanity either banned from the airwaves or at least severely censored. Perhaps in light of the recent events in the real world, people will think more carefully about the reality of violence in any form, and the universal truth that there should be more respect for human life.

It is my hope that you will make a new ruling regarding CTV and "The Sopranos" as soon as it is possible for the CBSC to do so.

Complaint from Mr. M (1):

I am appalled at the violent nature of the so called award winning series, *The Sopranos*. It is broadcasted at 10:00 PM, Monday evenings, on CTV (channel 7 in Ottawa). The show glamorizes criminal behavior as well as belittles females (nudity) and the weak. This type of programming should be accessible only through pay channels. I am particularly

upset this program is broadcast on a national station, which normally sets the standard for which other stations can follow.

Complaint from Mr. P:

Gentlemen and Ladies;

RE: THE SOPRANOS PROGRAM
Station 9 in Vancouver (C.T.V.)
October 1st, 2001

I want to put-pencil-to-paper and let you know my thoughts about the above program, as well as all of the episodes of THE SOPRANOS.

I find the dialogue on these programs extremely offensive particularly degrading to women. Now that it is being broadcast on a regular channel (not pay-for-view), I believe that it is in very very poor taste.

For instance, at 10:25 PM on the above date, Tony Soprano was referring to an asian lady as "that Chinese C- - -, at the laundry down the street

You are probably well aware that all of the players (women included) use the "F" word liberally, many times 4 or 5 times in a single sentence.

Within 5 minutes of the above example, Tony Soprano went on to say He is "trying to F- - - that Broad....."

I am sure that I don't have to articulate any further in fact, I turned off the TV at that time and I decided to read a book.

I hope that this information is of assistance to your good offices,

Complaint from Ms. M:

Dear Sir/Madame,

It is time for the CBSC to investigate the influence of today's *laisaize [sic] faire* television/media programming on Canadian youth.

I enjoy the TV show "The Sopranos". I don't mind the language, the suggestive dialogue, the aggressive depiction of *Mafioso [sic]*. I do not choose to watch this type of entertainment often, but I do enjoy this TV show. Most of it is carried late at night, so as to miss the very young audience However

I was very concerned about 1 segment that ran last night at about 10:40 PM in Toronto. I found the earlier dialogue about "blowjobs" offensive ... but I let that slip by. It was the depiction of the act with one woman, with another giant bare breasted woman in the scene that bothered me. Teenagers are exposed to these images on a daily basis, tremendously influencing their worldview. Today, our youth cannot turn on the TV or log onto the internet (hotmail) without receiving visual stimuli about sexual encounters. The problem is, they do not have personal experience to help them interpret the information.

Well, so what.

The fall-out of this irresponsible approach to public media is becoming evident in the behaviours exhibited daily by our teens. The key issue is that they become entrenched in adult-like behaviours at a very young age. The result is an escalation in personal problems. Did you know that 80% of Ontario teens grade 11 to 13 drink alcohol. 43% of all Ontario teens participate in binge drinking (5+/event) each month, 10% on a weekly basis. 20% of all Ontario teens will be admitted to an emergency department for clinical depression. Hospital admissions for clinical depression increased by 70% in males and 85% in females between 1991 and 1997.... to list only a few.

I suggest the CBSC explore the relationship between troubled teens and the environment being created around them. Clearly, the media is not the only influence. However, the media frames their knowledge and understanding of the world, and how events should be interpreted.

This type of policy analysis should be used to "test" the nature of Canadian Broadcast programming. Thank you for your time.

Complaint from Mr. M (2):

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: On September 30th at 11:02 P.M. I switched channels to C.F.R.N., expecting to watch the 11 o'clock news. Instead I heard a conversation between a woman and a male acquaintance. The male (I presume) had told the woman that she reminded him of another woman. The woman, facing into the camera said something like this. You say that I remind you of this other woman. I get the impression (not the right words) that you want or wanted to f— her, or me, (unsure).

I couldn't believe what I was hearing, but I hit the mute, not wanting to listen to this kind of garbage talk, but mistified [*sic*] as to why this was on the 11 o'clock news. But now the conversation was coming up on the screen in print. I don't remember the exact content, but the f word was used three to five times more in less than a minute. I switched to channel five to see what had happened to the news, only to find that the news would come on at 11.08 for some reason, rather than the regular time of 11 P.M.

I see and hear many things on T.V. that are very offensive to me simply while surfing the channels and probably as most Canadians do, I do nothing; but this time I was incensed. I contacted Shaw Cable and C.F.R.N. with my concerns. Shaw cable advised me that they could do nothing, but to contact the C.R.T.C. which I did by phone; and now by fax, hoping that I am only one of thousands of customers who daily are offended by the gutter perspective of (not all) the television industry.

It is my understanding that technology is there to delete this kind of language from the screen, at the discretion of an operator; but for some reason the choice to let it go was made. Obviously they did not find this kind of wording offensive; which makes me wonder what they **would** find offensive?

Much more wholesome entertainment is and would be available. But it concerns me that so much of the television industry should pander to the **lowest element**. We should AIM HIGHER; ENDEAVOUR TO MAKE OUR NATION GREAT.

II. The Broadcaster's Response

CTV's Vice-President, Programming Communications sent the each of the complainants the same letter:

The Canadian Broadcast Standards Council has passed along your letter regarding CTV's broadcast of The Sopranos.

We understand and appreciate your concerns. CTV is broadcasting The Sopranos because it is an excellent drama, but we do so with the full knowledge that it is not going to appeal to all viewers. For this reason we are taking great care to ensure that it runs as late in the evening as possible. The Sopranos airs at 10:00 p.m. across the country, an hour after the 9:00 p.m. mark that is considered by the CRTC to be the start of adult viewing times.

Additionally, in keeping with CTV's commitment to responsible viewing, a strong advisory notifying viewers of the content of the program runs at the top of the program and in every commercial break. These advisories are intended to provide viewers with information that can assist them in making an informed viewing choice, whether for their children, or for themselves.

CTV's decision to air The Sopranos is based on its outstanding writing and acting, and the unique portrayal of life that it exhibits. In the past year that we have broadcast the program, there has been a fair amount of debate from people both strongly in favour of, and strongly against, the story it tells. Included in the debate was the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council, which reviewed our broadcast of season one and upheld CTV's decision to air The Sopranos on the condition that we provide adequate viewer warnings.

We understand that our response may not be the exact answer you are seeking. But we hope that you can appreciate that CTV is a broadcaster that attempts to meet a diverse spectrum of viewer choice. You believe, sincerely and strongly, that The Sopranos contains messages inappropriate for television viewing. But that feeling is not shared by millions of your fellow viewers, or by CTV.

Thank you for taking the time to express your concerns. The opinions of our viewers are important and valuable to us.

III. Additional Correspondence

Some of the complainants sent further correspondence.

From Mr. S:

I thank you for your letter dated November 27.

Please stand advised that I do not have even the slightest intention of dropping my complaint against CTV television for its continued broadcasting of the TV series "The Sopranos". CTV has clearly violated the Canadian Television Broadcast Regulations of 1987 in accordance with Articles 5(1)b and 5(1)c by broadcasting episodes of "The Sopranos" with "unedited" obscene language. Further, such an offensive and obscene abhorrent piece of trash such as "The Sopranos" is not worthy of being aired on Canadian

public television. (Notice I call it what it really is, not by some misnomer such as "art" or "excellent drama" as CTV might do).

Further to my last letter, I will now add the following dates of the CTV broadcasts of The Sopranos at 10 PM local time to those of my former complaint: they are those aired on October 14, 15, 21, 22, 28, and on November 5, 11, 18 and 25.

I continue to uphold that unedited violence and obscenity cannot be allowed to be aired on Canadian Television, if one adheres **STRICTLY** and **COMPLETELY** to the letter of the wording in Article 5(1)b and 5(1)c of the Television Broadcasting Act. It is my recommendation that a complete censoring with regard to offensive language and highly descriptive violence, or preferably a ban on programming such as The Sopranos, must be done in the future by a competent board of the CBSC or the CRTC **before** programs are aired in the future, not after they have offended the viewing public.

Nonetheless, I continue to hold CTV responsible for violating Article 5(1)b and 5(1)c of the Television Broadcasting Act.

I do sincerely hope that they will be held accountable for this and that if there are any penalties to be paid for violation of the Broadcasting Act, that they are applied in a full and complete manner to CTV.

Censorship is necessary for the security of the future and for the rights of the public television viewer to ensure that the Canadian airwaves are filled with more positivity in the future, and far less violence, foul language, and negativity.

The world needs more love, not hate. My complaints stand firm.

From Mr. M (1):

I believe the specific show that I found offensive and degrading to woman [sic] was broadcast, 17 Sep, 10:00 PM. The show portrayed two naked prostitutes who performed sexual acts to one of the actors (near the last 10 mins of the show).

As recent as this past Sunday's episode (14 Oct), the use of the F...ck word was rampant (again near the latter part of the show).

I must admit that I have never watched more than 10 mins of the Sopranos without changing channels in disgust. As an adult, I know the difference between acting and true life. I am concerned, though, about young people who watch and often emulate.

If this is how the ctv intends on keeping Canadians watching, I will soon be switching to other stations for good, even though I believe the ctv 11:00 pm news coverage is the best on tv.

Further correspondence from Mr. M (1):

Yes, I received the ctv's response and still do not agree. The letter mentions that 'millions of viewers' do not agree with my view that the Sopranos is too violent and portrays woman [sic] in demeaning roles. I have always been skeptical of polls that indicated what viewers did not prefer since they can be so easily biased.

Please proceed with the next level of grievance.

From Mr. P:

RE: CBSC File 01/02-131
THE SOPRANOS

Thank you for your letter of October 25th, 2001, with enclosures. Reviewing the pamphlet, I appear to have taken the preliminary steps that you recommend. I first called the CTV (in Vancouver) then, I called The Status of Women, and the CRTC. I believe that it was the CRTC that gave me your address.

Some of the points that you outline in your brochure refer to

- 1: violence,
- 2: Controversial Public Issues
- 3: Portrayal of Women (particularly the demeanour of either sex.)

You have my October 2nd 2001 letter so I will only touch on these 3 points.

- ITEM #1: Violence on TV is not new. However, the more gratuitous killings (and blood) that is shown today, means the more we will see tomorrow and in the future shows. Someone called this "The increasing shock theorem"
- ITEM #2: If I were Italian or Sicilian [*sic*], I believe that I would feel very very insulted when a program tries to show that everybody of that nationality subscribes to these ideals. And that they want to expand the circle portrayed. I think that the acting is too good.
- ITEM #3; This appears to be my main concern so I will spend a bit of time on it. The SOPRANO message (as depicted verbally) must be inappropriate. I believe that opinion is shared by "millions" of my fellow viewers of CTV.

Some will say "if you don't like it, shut it off". Well, that is exactly why I am referring to only 2 examples of outrageous dialogue. I got the two examples within 5 minutes and then I switched channels. Dialogue such as he "is trying to *F- - - that broad" and he ... "want to *F- - - that Chinese **C- - -"

CTV has the tapes.

I am sure that the CTV's "adequate Viewer Warnings" would vary from the opinions of the Status of Women. They probably are objectionable to "millions" of gentlemen (although gentlemen don't have a specific group or Council)

My signed Ruling Request Form is enclosed.

CC:....You seem to have a good CC system so I have not CC'ed any other stake holders, at this time.

* "F- - -" is abbreviation [*sic*] for fuck.

** "C- - -" is abbreviation [*sic*] for cunt.

Ms. M copied the CBSC on this e-mail that she sent to CTV:

Thank you for your response to my comments re: the Sopranos. I appreciate the points you make about CTV's compliance with current regulations, quality of programming and public opinion. Yes, CTV was loudly applauded by its adult audience for running Sopranos "uncut". To other forms of media, this was a brave thing to do. And yes, I also agree with CTV that the Sopranos is an excellent program.

As such, I acknowledge that my concerns will largely go unheard. I knew what your response would be before I sent the note. However, that said: Social responsibility requires some additional discretion in what is aired on TV. Although the broadcast regulations were negotiated by policy people and lobbyists to protect the interests of very young children, they clearly have little relationship to viewing realities of Canadian young people over the age of 7.

Broadcaster discretion must be the key, especially since the current cable distribution system provides little control over what broadcasters put on the air and what programs enter the home. When families choose not to subscribe to cable services to restrict exposure of their children to adult oriented programming, they are actively harassed by cable companies, who assume their services are being used illicitly.

We all recognize CTV's right to program. However, by being on the public airwaves (as opposed to specialty station) CTV also chooses to serve the Canadian population and all that that entails. That requires responsible decisions to protect the well being of our young people, regardless of what the Broadcast regulations say.

[Ms. P], the bottom line is that 10-14 year olds should not have an operative understanding of blow-jobs or other sexual acts.

By airing segments like the one on the Sopranos (an excellent program) at 10:00 pm, CTV contributes significantly to the worldview of our Canadian youth.

...No wonder they are having such a difficult time.

From Ms. M directly to the CBSC:

You have received a copy of my response to CTV re: the Sopranos. Their response was as expected.

I am quite aware of the terms of the Broadcast Act. I have had several opportunities to review the codes in the past. I think it is time to expand the industry codes to include current viewership patterns and issues of responsible programming. I'm sure ACNielsen and their measurement arm can tell the CBSC (and CTV) who is watching TV after 10:00 pm. The question should be: How explicit should sexual imaging be allowed to go? This should not be determined by me or you, but by viewership and parental values.

To reiterate the point I made to CTV, young adolescents should not have an operative understanding of sexual things as a result of programs distributed over the public airwaves. They do not have the life experience to put these images into perspective.