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**CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL  
ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL**

CIII-TV (Global Television Network) re PSA (Heritage Minute)

(CBSC Decision 95/96-0236)

Decided May 8, 1997

A. MacKay (Chair), R. Stanbury (Vice-Chair), R. Cohen (*ad hoc*),  
P. Fockler, M. Hogarth, M. Ziniak

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**THE FACTS**

The complaint concerns a Public Service Announcement (PSA) produced as part of CRB Foundation-National Film Board Canadian Heritage Project known as “Heritage Minutes”. The PSA in question is entitled “Rural Teacher” and is based on the painting “Meeting of the School Trustees” by Robert Harris in which a young Prince Edward Island teacher is meeting with school trustees. The dialogue in the PSA is principally between one of the trustees, a Mr. Clarence, and the female teacher:

**Mr. Clarence:** You must understand, young woman, that you work for us and not the other way round.

**Teacher:** But you would like to tell me how I must go about teaching the children to read.

**Mr. Clarence:** I've told you what it is we want you to do and that's enough.

**Teacher:** Mr. Clarence, will you take a look at this?

**Mr. Clarence:** You'll not bother me with that.

**Teacher:** But you see, sir, your son read this today. It is quite a difficult passage. It is from the Bible. This is what I use to teach him to read.

**Trustee #2:** Ah, Mr. Clarence, why don't you just read it then?

**Mr. Clarence:** Both of you know I cannae read a word.

**Voice-over:** Throughout most of our history, millions of Canadians have owed their education to young women who taught in one-room schoolhouses much like this one.

## The Letter of Complaint

A viewer sent a complaint to the CRTC, which was, in turn, forwarded to the CBSC. In his complaint, he stated that

This ad as broadcast mentioned only women as teachers and implied strongly that Canadians oed [owed] their education to young women only. This is a false and misleading representation of Canadian history, and the fact that my tax money is being used to spread these gender-based lies is an outrage.

My grandfather was a teacher in the early days of Western Canada. Thousands of men were teachers as well as women. Not all teachers were young. Global, the NFB and Canada Post are trying to rewrite history to exclude him, other men and older teachers. I am offended by the bias and exclusion shown by this ad.

The gender lies and violations of your gender policy do not stop with the teaching profession. Canadians owe their education also to the volunteers who started and ran the school boards. This ad makes the outrageous claim that Canadians owe their education {only} to young women. Any fair minded person would agree that we owe our education also to these school board trustees, both men and women.

...

This ad attempts to exclude men (and older Canadians) from credit for the education system. As such it is an attempt to exclude men from the teaching profession and from school boards. One of the major problems Canada has is that most children are denied male teachers until halfway or more through public schools, at which point their gender views are mostly fixed. The results of this gender imbalance are increased school dropouts, increased gender suspicion and unrealistic portrayals of the other gender.

## A Note Regarding a Factual Discrepancy in the Complaint

The complainant alleged that the PSA was aired on CIII-TV (Global Television Network), on July 27, 1996, at 3:55 p.m; however, a review of its logger tapes indicated that CIII-TV had *not* run the PSA “which fit the description in [the complainant's] letter” on that date or, for that matter, at 3:55 p.m. on *any* day in the week of July 22. CIII-TV acknowledged, however, that they had occasionally run the PSA in question at some other time and, although they assumed that the complainant “could have been watching another Canadian station as most broadcasters air these minutes”, they were prepared to supply a copy of the Heritage Minute in question to the CBSC for the purpose of resolving the issue.

Despite these unusual circumstances, the collaboration of the broadcaster permitted the CBSC to consider whether the complaint was well-founded as to substance if not as to broadcaster. In normal circumstances, particularly where a challenged program could not be assumed to have ever run on the station alleged by the complainant to be responsible for the broadcast, the CBSC would not be prepared to proceed in this way. Since CIII-TV acknowledged having broadcast the PSA at *some* point in its broadcast schedule, the rest of this decision is able to be presented as though the broadcaster had aired the PSA in question at the time suggested.

### **The Broadcaster's Response**

CIII-TV (Global Television Network), through its National Program Director, responded to the complaint on September 3, 1996, despite the mistake of the complainant regarding either the time of broadcast or the broadcaster involved. In his response, he stated that:

After re-screening this program, it is clear that it presents young women in a positive context, strongly supporting our efforts of presenting positive and balance role-models of both genders.

...

In your letter, you suggest that the program and narration strongly infers that “only” women were our country’s early educators. While we respect your opinions and your personal perspective on these historical events, we find it difficult to support your view as it relates to the content of this program.

In our view, “Rural Teacher” shows the viewer a possible “slice of life” in 1885, and does not exclude, betray or deny male teachers their credit in the development of Canada’s educational system.

The complainant was unsatisfied with this response and requested, on September 13, that the CBSC refer the matter to the appropriate Regional Council for adjudication.

### **THE DECISION**

The Ontario Regional Council members viewed a tape of the PSA in question and reviewed all of the correspondence. The Council considers that the broadcast in question does not violate the provisions of the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code for Television and Radio Programming*.

#### **The Code**

The CBSC’s Ontario Regional Council considered the complaint under the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code for Television and Radio Programming*. The relevant clauses of the Code read as follows:

### *Sex-Role Portrayal Code, Clause 2 [c] (Diversity)*

Television and radio programming shall respect the principles of intellectual and emotional equality of both sexes and the dignity of all individuals. Television and radio programming should portray women and men as equal beneficiaries of the positive attributes of family or single-person life. Women and men should perform in a range of occupations and function as intellectual and emotional equals in all types of thematic circumstances. This should be the case for both work and leisure activities requiring varying degrees of intellectual competence.

Guidance: Women and men should be portrayed as working toward a comfortable existence through mutual support, both economically and emotionally, and in both public and private spheres. Despite the problems of societal systemic discrimination, television and radio programming should reflect an awareness of the need to avoid and overcome discrimination on the basis of gender.

### *Sex-Role Portrayal Code, Clause 3 (Demographic Spectrum)*

Television and radio programming shall portray the wide spectrum of Canadian life. Women and men shall be portrayed with fair and equitable demographic diversity taking into account age, civil status, race, ethnocultural origin, physical appearance, sexual orientation, background, religion, occupation, socio-economic condition and leisure activities, while actively pursuing a wide range of interests. Portrayals should also take into account the roles and contributions of the mentally, physically and socially challenged.

Guidance: Compared to men, the portrayal of women in television programming has often been more restricted with respect to age, appearance, background, occupation, lifestyle and interests. Additionally, the elderly, the disabled, and native peoples have also been under-represented. Special attention should be paid to increasing the portrayal of ethnic and visible minorities, whose presence constitutes an ever-expanding aspect of Canadian society.

## **The Content of the Program**

The context of this broadcast is the well-known series of PSAs dealing with a variety of Canadian historical events and perspectives. These “Heritage Minutes” cover many different socially culturally significant moments in Canadian history. The Council notes that the PSA in question highlighted the contribution of young *women*, as opposed to young *men*, to the education field; but the Council does not find that, in so doing, the PSA in any way denigrated or devalued the contribution of men.

As indicated in its Statement of Intent, the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code* is “intended to assist in overcoming systemic discrimination portrayed in broadcast programming, based on gender.” In the Council’s view, this PSA, like many others which also emphasize the role played by women in Canadian history, is in keeping with the spirit and the letter of the Code’s stated intent as it seeks to redress the near absence of women in the annals of history - it seeks to add “*her-story*” to “*his-story*”.

The Council considers that, in many respects, this complaint is analogous to that raised in *CFRA-AM re International Women's Day* (CBSC Decision 95/96-0157, October 21, 1996). In that case, a listener complained of a news story which highlighted International Women's Day, claiming that the broadcaster had not reported International Men's Day and that such a report violated “just about every principle of your code on portrayal of men and women.” The Ontario Regional Council held:

The complainant does not, however, have an entitlement to complain about any lack of balance in the treatment of men's and women's issues on the simple basis of the comparison between the treatment of the respective International Days.

Moreover, as the same Regional Council decided in *CFRA-AM re Dr. Tomorrow* (CBSC Decision 95/96-0152, October 21, 1996),

It is critical to the understanding of the Council's view of inequitable treatment to appreciate that the praising of one group does not imply any degradation of the other.

In that decision, in which the complainant had alleged the broadcaster's discriminatory comment in observing that women run 25% of the total businesses in the United States and that women would “soon hold more than 50% of jobs and positions of power and influence.” The Council concluded that the complainant should have

realized that Ogden had represented that women in the United States own “25% of the total [businesses]”, which clearly means that *men* own the other 75%. And, in the Canadian context, by referring to the fact that “here in Canada, two of the largest corporations, General Motors and Xerox, are run by women”, the implication is that the balance, or most of the balance, of the major Canadian corporations are run by men.

The piece is, if not expressly, then by implication, filled with the notion that men are doing better than women *today* and that, for Ogden's speculative reasons, women may *catch up* and even do *slightly* better down the road. There is no reasonable way in which these assessments can be seen to be degrading. It appears to the Council that the complainant views any positive statement about women as the equivalent of a degrading statement about men. The CBSC does not share this view; nor does it believe that such positive assertions constitute a violation of any provision of the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code*.

In the matter before the Ontario Regional Council at this time, the Council finds it ironic that the complainant raises no voice regarding the depiction of *all* of the school trustees, the positions of power in the school, as men.

### **Broadcaster Responsiveness**

In addition to assessing the relevance of the Codes to the complaint, the CBSC always assesses the *responsiveness* of the broadcaster to the substance of the complaint. The broadcaster's letter deals directly and sufficiently with the complainant's principal argument. Nothing more is required.

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