
**CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL
ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL**

CIII-TV re *the Bugs Bunny and Tweety Show* ("Hansel and Gretel")

(CBSC Decision 97/98-1260)

Decided February 3, 1999

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

THE FACTS

On July 25, 1998, *The Bugs Bunny and Tweety Show* on CIII-TV (Global Television, Toronto) which aired at 5 p.m., included a recounting of the "Hansel and Gretel" fairy tale à la Bugs Bunny. The short cartoon was entitled "Bewitched Bunny". In this revisionist version, Bugs Bunny stumbles upon a witch who is in the process of luring two children into her house, presumably in order to eat them for dinner. Bugs Bunny intervenes and allows the children to escape but, in so doing, he upsets the witch who resolves to have Bugs Bunny for dinner instead. A chase inevitably ensues and the heroic hare narrowly escapes death by dinner by using a bag of "Magic Powder" as a type of grenade. The bag explodes on impact and out of the cloud of dust emerges a beautiful female rabbit. Bugs Bunny, smitten by this newly incarnated female, takes her by the arm as they walk into the "happily ever after".

The complaint stems from the last line of the cartoon. As the happy couple walks away, Bugs turns to the camera and says: "Ah sure, I know! But aren't they all witches inside?"

The Letter of Complaint

On August 10, a viewer wrote to the President of Global Television stating that:

This is a complaint concerning the televised cartoon Bugs Bunny re-telling "Hansel and Gretel."

This cartoon portrayed Bugs as rescuing the children and then attempting to evade the witch. In the final scene, Bugs finds "Magic Powder" and throws it onto the witch who turns into a

seductive female rabbit. Bugs responds to the female rabbit, starts to go off with her, then stops, looks into the camera and says "I know, but aren't they all witches inside?"

Televising this anti-woman cartoon demands that you personally offer a televised apology to woman viewers of Global Television. This can best be done during the "First National" news program and repeated at the 11 p.m. news program. A copy of this complaint is being mailed to the CRTC.

The Broadcaster's Response

The Director of Regulatory Affairs replied to the complainant on September 5, 1998 with the following:

We are in receipt of your letter dated August 10, 1998, in which you raise concerns regarding a Bugs Bunny cartoon episode retelling the story of "Hansel and Gretel."

In your letter, you raise concerns about the closing scene of this classic Bugs Bunny cartoon where Bugs Bunny transforms a witch into a "seductive female rabbit", turns to the camera and says: "I know, but aren't they all witches inside?"

We are sorry that this episode offended you, but we disagree with your characterization of this cartoon as "anti-woman." First, with all of our programming, we are diligent in ensuring that contents meet established guidelines of the Sex-Role Portrayal Code. According to the Code, "negative or inequitable sex-role portrayal" refers to "language, attitudes or representations which tend to associate particular roles, modes of behaviour, characteristics, attributes or products to people on the basis of gender..."

In the episode you refer to, one could argue that the female character (the witch) is portrayed as strong and intelligent, while the males are seen as weak and somewhat naive. While Bugs Bunny warns the witch that "any rabbit's too smart for you", she actually outwits the rabbit, not once, but three times in attempting to catch him. While he knows that she wants him for dinner, he nonetheless eats the poisonous carrot she offers him, after which he falls into a deep sleep. Bugs Bunny is then saved by the Prince from "Snow White", who seems dazed and confused about which fairy tale he's supposed to be in. Finally, as Bugs Bunny tries to escape, the witch once again corners him, at which point his only recourse is to break the glass case which reads: "break in case of emergency", and use the magic powder to transform her into a rabbit. Given this, we do not believe that this episode of "Bugs Bunny" portrays women in a negative way, nor that it contravenes any provision of the Sex-Role Portrayal Code.

We thank you for the time you expended in expressing your views, and hope that you will continue to enjoy Global's programming in the future.

The complainant was unsatisfied with the broadcaster's response and requested, on September 15, 1998, that the CBSC refer the matter to the appropriate Regional Council for adjudication. With her request, the complainant added a short note which further explained her position.

Global's explanation of the cartoon in question is inadequate.

First, they claim the witch, a female figure, is strong and intelligent. They fail to address the witch's evil attempt to eat children and terminate Bugs. This is not a negative portrayal?

I did not complain about the witch! She was behaving like a witch, not a woman!

I complained about the statement by Bugs in regard to the attractive female rabbit, "aren't they all witches inside?" Implying that all females are evil and destructive.

This is the basis of my complaint.

If the audience had been adults, perhaps we could chuckle and forget it. This cartoon was aimed at children who are forming their attitudes to men and women. Therefore, this cartoon is not only offensive to women, but gives a wrong idea of women to impressionable children: women are evil inside. "Aren't they all witches inside?" This means I am a witch inside, Charlotte Bell is a witch inside, and Gretel of the cartoon is a witch inside. Misogynistic attitudes do not belong in children's cartoons.

THE DECISION

The CBSC's Ontario Regional Council considered the complaint under the *Code of Ethics* and the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code* of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB). The relevant clauses of those Codes read as follows:

CAB Code of Ethics, Clause 2 (Human Rights)

Recognizing that every person has a right to full and equal recognition and to enjoy certain fundamental rights and freedoms, broadcasters shall endeavour to ensure, to the best of their ability, that their programming contains no abusive or discriminatory material or comment which is based on matters of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, marital status or physical or mental handicap.

CAB Code of Ethics, Clause 3 (Children's Programs)

Recognizing that programs designed specifically for children reach impressionable minds and influence social attitudes and aptitudes, it shall be the responsibility of member stations to provide the closest possible supervision in the selection and control of material, characterizations and plot. Nothing in the foregoing shall mean that the vigour and vitality common to children's imaginations and love of adventure should be removed. It does mean that programs should be based upon sound social concepts and presented with a superior degree of craftsmanship; that these programs should reflect the moral and ethical standards of contemporary Canadian society and encourage pro-social behaviour and attitudes. The member stations should encourage parents to select from the richness of broadcasting fare, the best programs to be brought to the attention of their children.

CAB Code of Ethics, Clause 15 (Sex-Role Stereotyping)

Recognizing that stereotyping images can and do cause negative influences, it shall be the responsibility of broadcasters to exhibit, to the best of their ability, a conscious sensitivity to the problems related to sex-role stereotyping, by refraining from exploitation and by the reflection of the intellectual and emotional equality of both sexes in programming.

Sex-Role Portrayal Code, Clause 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.

The Regional Council members viewed a tape of the program in question and reviewed all of the correspondence. The Council considers that the program in question does not violate any of the aforementioned clauses.

The Content of the Program

The Council understands, and is sympathetic to, the complaint of the viewer. There is an undeniable innuendo in the closing line “But aren’t they all witches inside?” which some may find offensive. That being said, the Council is not of the view that a breach of one of the broadcast Codes it administers is entailed. In the first place, the line is a throwaway and is not reflected, as to its substance, at any other moment of the episode. It is, in a sense, an “out-of-the-blue” comment. Second, it is, if anything, contradicted by every other aspect of the program. It cannot, in fact, even be seen as a serious comment in the sense that the line is uttered in the context of a happy couple walking off arm-in-arm into the sunset. Moreover, there is nothing in the demeanour of Bugs Bunny or any other character or element of the episode of the *Bugs Bunny and Tweety* show which suggests a *program attitude* which could be broadly interpreted as constituting “negative or degrading comments on the role and nature of women,” contrary to the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code*, or abusively discriminatory comment, contrary to the human rights provision of the *Code of Ethics*. While the Ontario Regional Council does not approve of the line of dialogue, particularly in the context of children’s programming, it does not consider that its use, in the context of this case, constitutes a breach of either of the CAB Codes referred to above.

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. In this case, the Council considers that the broadcaster’s response addressed fully and fairly all the issues raised by the complainant, even if the complainant did not agree with its substance. It has long been the position of the Council that it is not necessary for the broadcaster’s perspective to be that of the complainant. Indeed, it is that difference in perspective which results in the matter coming to this stage of the Council’s process. Consequently, the Council considers that the broadcaster has not breached the Council’s standard of responsiveness. 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.