
**CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL
ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL**

DECISION CONCERNING THE CHEZ-FM (OTTAWA)
MORNING SHOW OF OCTOBER 14, 1992
92/93-0030

April 1, 1993

FACTS OF THE CASE

On October 14, 1992, CHEZ-FM aired a sketch on its morning show regarding a "talking Ken doll."

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission received a complaint dated October 15, 1992, about the program, and sent the complaint to the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC). In the complaint, a listener explained that:

"... their doll says things like, 'Gee, that math test was easy, even a girl could have done it!' and 'Sure, honey, I'll always love you' (pause) 'What did you say your name was again?'

"I can't understand why CHEZ-FM would (in jest or otherwise) find this suitable material to broadcast. Are they not aware of the current public sentiment? Do they fancy themselves above social responsibility? The flippancy CHEZ-FM perpetuates is exactly the kind of attitude that works to block a sincere and benevolent concern for everyone's social welfare

The CBSC Secretariat sent the letter to the broadcaster for response. CHEZ-FM had also received the complaint directly from the complainant prior to receiving the letter through the CBSC.

In its response, CHEZ-FM wrote that the sketch was aired at a time when controversy over the talking "Barbie" doll was occurring. CHEZ-FM explained that:

"The remarks coming out of our fake Ken were blatantly stupid and sexist. They were written to ridicule dated male attitudes, not uphold them. That tool is known as satire, and it's a cornerstone of the Morning Show Satire opens up many fields to discussion, and discussing can bring about change...."

The complainant was unsatisfied with the broadcaster's response, and wrote to the CBSC to have the complaint considered by the CBSC's Ontario Regional Council. The regional council considered the complaint on February 16, 1993.

CODE AT ISSUE

The CBSC Secretariat determined that the complaint could be considered in light of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' (CAB) Code of Ethics, clause 2 -- human rights. The clause reads as follows:

"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."

CBSC DECISION

The Ontario Regional Council reviewed the broadcaster's explanation of the sketch, as well as its content, in terms of clause 2. The council unanimously agreed that the sketch was clearly intended to be satirical and that, in context, as part of the program's formatted approach, the sketch was not abusive toward women or men. Rather, the sketch was meant to question gender stereotypes. The council found that, given its satirical intent, the sketch did not contain "abusive or discriminatory material or comment ... based on matters of sex". Therefore, the broadcaster did not contravene the code.

The regional council also took the opportunity to remind CHEZ-FM that member broadcasters must describe the CBSC complaints process and the complainant's recourse to regional council consideration of their complaint, at the time of the initial response to the complainant. This requirement applies to all complaints that relate to the CAB codes.

Because the broadcaster did not contravene the code, CHEZ-FM has the option of airing the decision, which will also be released to the regional media.