
**CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL
ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL**

CITY-TV re Fashion Television (The Erogenous Zone)

(CBSC Decision 93/94-0021)

Decided February 15, 1994

M. Barrie (Chair), A. MacKay (Vice-Chair), S. Fish, P. Fockler, R. Stanbury

THE FACTS

As a segment of its Fashion Television program, CITY-TV aired a story entitled "The Erogenous Zone" at 6:30 p.m., on September 19, 1993. About two minutes into the segment, following an introduction and explanation of the material to follow, the broadcaster aired a viewer advisory: "Due to the subject matter of the following item, viewer discretion is advised."

The program involved discussions with designers and fashion commentators on which areas of the female anatomy were currently being focused upon and which areas will receive more attention in the future. The program also showed clips of runway models in a variety of outfits, including some that exposed their breasts; one model quickly lifted the skirt of her dress showing her pubic area. The program also included interviews in which part of the audio was censored. The station had also edited a still photograph of a partially nude model, using a black bar to cover her lower torso.

A viewer wrote to the CRTC on September 23, 1993 complaining about the program stating in part:

I was sick to my stomach at what I saw and heard. They were discussing how showing women's breasts is no longer titillating. Now, they will focus on exposing the woman's vagina!!!! ... Is this really necessary? Have we not been degraded enough? When will it stop? It is not enough to say "if you don't like what you see, turn the channel, that is the same as ignoring the problem and I am tired of ignoring because the problem is getting worse.

As CITY-TV is a member of the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council, and the issues raised by the complainant fell within the Council's mandate, the CRTC referred the complaint to the Council for consideration. The Council sent the complaint to the broadcaster for response.

On October 15, 1993, the Producer of Fashion Television wrote to the complainant, explaining that "all the top designers agree that their job is to constantly find new ways for women to look titillating...our purpose was to find out and report on how they do it".

Fashion Television considered that the subject was handled in a straightforward way, and not in a gratuitous manner; however, CITY-TV, understanding that the topic might be too frank for some viewers, prefaced the story with an advisory: "due to the subject matter of the following item, viewer discretion is advised."

The Producer also addressed the complainants concerns about the depiction of women in general on television. He added, "many of the designers in the Erogeous Zone story are women who believe that they and their female customers have every right to behave and dress in any manner they choose".

The complainant wrote to the Council on October 25, 1993, stating that she was dissatisfied with the station's response, and requesting that a CBSC regional council consider her complaint. She stated in her letter that she was dissatisfied with the response because it "basically states that they are sorry that I was offended by the show, but they will continue to broadcast it in their usual perverse way".

THE DECISION

The CBSC considered the matter under Clause 4 of the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code for Television and Radio Programming*. The clause 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-ploitation" through dress is one area in which the sexes have traditionally differed, with more women portrayed in scant clothing and alluring postures.

The Regional Council (composed of five members, broadcaster representative Don Luzzi being absent) reviewed the correspondence and screened an air-check tape

of the segment in question. The Regional Council considered that the program did not contravene the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code*.

The program was typical of depictions of international fashion shows, validly portraying fashion news. The fact that CITY-TV aired a story on the place of women's breasts in today's fashion was not exploitative. The Council further considered that the brief glimpse of one model's pubic area had more to do with an adjustment of her skirt as she walked down the runway. Other shots which would more purposefully have exposed models' pubic area as a function of the design of the clothes were blocked out over that area. The Council felt that the concern of the complainant may be with what the international fashion designers are doing, but Council's view was that the reporting of those design trends did not exploit women or present a negative or degrading portrayal of women. As a result, the program did not constitute a breach of the *Code*.

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.