
**CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL
ONTARIO REGIONAL COUNCIL**

CFRA-AM re Family Fortune

(CBSC Decision 95/96-0145)

Decided October 21, 1996

A. MacKay (Chair), R. Stanbury (Vice-Chair), P. Fockler, T. Gupta,
M. Hogarth, M. Ziniak

THE FACTS

On February 15, 1996, CFRA-AM (Ottawa) aired an episode of its daily 90-second feature *Family Fortune*, "a program dedicated to the financial issues affecting women and their families." On this particular occasion, the segment dealt with the question of avoiding unnecessary interest charges. The host's introduction to the subject was as follows:

Are there ways to save on your total overall interest costs? I believe there are. And what we have to do is follow a direct plan. And I'll give you some ideas about this plan, right after this [commercial].

In fact, the subsequent advice given was not oriented toward either sex; it had principally to do with the question of avoidance of credit card debt that could not easily be paid off in the post-holiday season.

The complainant wrote the Chairman of the CRTC on February 15 in the following terms:

I am writing regarding a programme entitled "Family Fortune" described by the announcer as "Financial Affairs affecting Women and their families", which a Gerry White announces on CFRA radio in Ottawa broadcast dozens of times over the past two months (if you need a date, use February 15, 1996).

I believe that this programme is a clear violation of the CRTC policy on gender portrayal in family life. This programme on family issues pointedly and unnecessarily excludes men.

He then quoted portions of the *CAB Sex-Role Portrayal Code* and interspersed his comments among the Code provisions:

In this programme, women were portrayed as the sole and exclusive decision-makers, a clear violation of your policy. ... This programme only portrayed women as the beneficiaries of this area of family life and portrayed only the financial needs of women. ... I contend that the expression "Women and their families" associates an inequitable male role with the exclusion of men from financial affairs in family life and as such is negative and stereotyped.

... What percentage of fathers are mentioned on these programmes? Does the figure zero on CFRA conform to your policy? Where is the balance? Where is the diversity? This programme ignores many family types and concerns because it assumes family includes only women, and their children on these financial family issues.

That letter was forwarded to the CBSC, which in turn remitted it to the broadcaster, whose General Manager replied to the complainant on March 5. His letter included the following observations:

"Family Fortune" is a daily feature focussing on finances and financial decisions. The focus of the 90 second feature is practical advice on saving, investing, banking, financial planning, estate planning and the like.

Research has shown that women have historically left these types of financial decisions to men. The program offers advice to women to empower them to begin to take responsibility for their own financial future.

Although the program focuses on issues important to women in Canadian society, the content does not exclude men. Many men also listen to this program. Men gain valuable insights into the issues women face in the financial world. We consider this an important benefit to the program.

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

THE DECISION

The CBSC's Ontario Regional Council considered the complaint under the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code* of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB).

Clauses 2 and 3 of that Code read as follows:

Clause 2: *Diversity*:

- (b) Television and radio programming shall portray all persons as supporting participants in family, home management and household tasks. Women and men should participate on an equitable basis in organizing such family activities as health care and financial matters, encompassing a wide range of responsibilities and decision-making roles.

Guidance: The interpretation of this provision depends to a large extent on individual experience and beliefs, and is therefore open to discussion. For example, in one family, the sharing in all chores and responsibilities related to family and home may be on a 50:50 basis, while in another, it may mean that one partner contributes as the wage-earner while the other offers an equitable contribution as home manager, performer of domestic tasks and/or caregiver to spouse and children.

- (c) 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.

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 Regional Council members listened to a tape of the program in question and reviewed all of the correspondence. The Council is not of the view that the program violates any provision of the *CAB Sex-Role Portrayal Code*.

The Content of the Program

The Council can find no indication whatsoever in the actual broadcast of the program segment which reveals even a trace of a sexist approach to the subject. The subject matter and the terms used are absolutely gender neutral.

It follows that the only objection which the complainant can have, in the view of the Council, is that the program itself is described as “a program dedicated to the financial issues affecting women and their families.” The description of the program does not imply that the advice in question is not useful for others than the group to which the daily segment is directed. That it may be aimed at women in particular is no more sexist than is the aiming of boxing or wrestling or even less violent sports at a male audience. That it may be aimed at women in particular is no more discriminatory than targeting Saturday morning cartoons at children. That it may be aimed at women in particular does not make it any more sexist, discriminatory or exclusive than targeting any particular demographic group in the creation or airing of any show.

The issue is not the targeting of the show at an audience; it is rather the *portrayal* of persons which is the concern of the *Sex-Role Portrayal Code*. Some might consider that the *raison d'être* of the program is that *women* need such financial advice but it is clear that *no* justifiable complaint lies with respect to the position that it is *men* who are improperly or inequitably portrayed.

The Broadcaster's Response

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 Council considers that the General Manager's letter was an entirely proper response. 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.