
**CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL
NATIONAL CONVENTIONAL TELEVISION PANEL**

CTV re *The Sopranos*

(CBSC Decision 00/01-0130+)

Decided March 8, 2001

R. Cohen (Chair), M. Hogarth, E. Holmes, M. Lewis, J. Levy, H. Pawley

THE FACTS

The television series, *The Sopranos*, the story of a dysfunctional family whose head, Tony Soprano, is a New Jersey Cosa Nostra (often commonly referred to as the Mafia) boss, aired in the United States on the pay television service, Home Box Office (HBO). Canadian rights for the first season of the series were licensed to CTV, a conventional television broadcaster. The thirteen episodes (each of roughly one hour's duration) which were a part of that initial season were run nightly at 10 p.m. by CTV between September 17 and October 1 (except for September 23 and 30), 2000. Complaints were received by the CBSC from 138 individuals; however, only ten of these filed Ruling Requests, which are required by the CBSC as evidence of the complainant's desire that the matter be adjudicated upon by a CBSC Panel. In the circumstances, these alone form the basis for this decision. They relate to the episodes of September 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 27 and 28.

The television series fully develops both the domestic family and the mob (syndicate) family lives of their common *paterfamilias* Tony Soprano, through the thirteen episodes which comprise the first series. The principal characters on the household side are Soprano's wife Carmela, their children Meadow and Anthony Jr., Tony's widowed mother, Livia, his sister Janice and his late father's brother, Corrado (Junior). There is no need to review the extensive household crises which, although central to the story, cause no difficulties to the complainants. The Panel does consider it important to emphasize, though, that *The Sopranos* depends on the recounting of the domestic side of events to differentiate itself from other Mafia-style programs and films and so develops these elements that any description of the series as a simple crime show would sell it far short of its real achievement.

The criminal activities centre around Christopher Moltisanti, “Paulie Walnuts” Gualtieri, “Big Pussy” Bonpensiero, Silvio Dante, Furio Giunta, Tony Soprano’s uncle, Junior, and “Hesh” Rabkin. Other characters move in and out of the criminal circle from time to time. Each of the challenged episodes includes two or so scenes of violence, which tend to be characterizable as realistic and quite graphic in their presentation. In the first, for example, Christopher and Tony beat up a defaulting gambling debtor and Christopher executes Emil by shooting him in the back of the head. In the second episode, Christopher hijacks a truck and beats up the driver. There is a later scene in which Brendan and another aspiring criminal hijack a truck without the family’s permission and shoot the driver. In the third episode Brendan is executed in the bathtub by one of Junior’s henchmen in retribution for his “unauthorized” hijacking. In that episode, as a paid-for “favour”, Soprano family representatives severely beat a Hassidic Jew in order to extract a favourable settlement regarding his ownership of a motel business with his father-in-law, as a part of his divorce arrangements. The other episodes are sufficiently similar that it is unnecessary to elaborate further on the specific violent components included in each.

With respect to language, it is fair to say that it is consistently foul, if not extremely coarse, at least in the discussions amongst the criminals. Four-letter words or their derivatives constitute the *lingua franca* of the group, who, it is abundantly clear, are uneducated and have vocabularies which do not appear to extend frequently to polysyllabic utterances. Viewers become accustomed to such communication on the mob side of the program. In some respects, the usage of such words, *far* less frequently, on the domestic side of the story, is more shocking when it occurs.

Nudity and sexual activity are common in each episode, although they are rarely related. The syndicate members meet at their “clubhouse”, the Bada Bing! Club, a strip joint, at which dancers in G-strings only are frequently seen in either the background or, occasionally, foreground. They are essentially disregarded as sexual objects, at least by the criminals themselves; their role is more as a part of the business paraphernalia, much as computers might be in a different kind of corporate environment. That being said, the gang members deal with women outside of that environment as sexual objects. With the exception of Christopher and his girlfriend Adriana, we see little of the home life of the family members other than Tony Soprano and, in his case, despite the strength of Carmela as a character, being unfaithful is a part of his “moral” creed. The women who are the mistresses or short-term companions of the Soprano family members are never the Bada Bing! Club dancers and they are rarely, if ever, seen bare-breasted in the context of their sexual interactions with those men.

The Letters of Complaint

The full texts of the ten complaint letters (whose authors filed Ruling Requests) are reproduced in the Appendix hereto; excerpts only are provided in the body of this decision.

The following are representative excerpts from the complaints received which fairly reflect the issues raised by all of the complaints:

[N]umerous times during the show the word “fuck” and words “mother fucker” were used. This is contrary to the RSC Chapter 949, *Broadcasting Act, Television Broadcasting Regulations, 1987* which provides:

Programming Content

5.(1) A licensee shall not broadcast...”

c) any obscene or profane language or pictorial representation.

[File Number 00/01-0144, concerning the September 27, 2000 broadcast]

...

1) CTV provided two warnings before the program began that it contained scenes of violence, course [*sic*] language and nudity.

2) The warnings in 1) above are appropriate. However, my complaint against the televised broadcast of this program is not remedied by appeal or recourse to the warnings provided by CTV; quite simply the program contravenes the *Television Broadcasting Regulations, 1987*. In these Regulations, Section 5(1) we read: “A licensee shall not broadcast” continuing at (b) “any abusive comment or abusive pictorial representation that, when taken in context, tends or is likely to expose an individual or a group or class of individuals to hatred or contempt on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.”

3) I submit that the pictorial representations of persons of Italian origin or ethnic heritage taken in the context of this program are exposed to contempt and that this exposure contravenes both the letter and the spirit of the *Television Broadcasting Regulations, 1987*. The perception of Italians provided and nurtured by this program is that of a group of persons in whom any degree of moral awareness is absent. Obsessed by mindless violence they kill others and the taking of human life is regarded as unremarkable behaviour; the intention to kill is formed and the act simply flows from it. This profoundly pejorative, and I would emphasize mistaken, perception of a particular group engenders contempt towards them. It also diminishes us who are not of Italian origin or heritage if we remain silent and allow the pictorial representations of the perception to pass across our television screens as unremarkable.

[File Number 00/01-0137 concerning the September 19, 2000 broadcast]

...

I only watched a few minutes of this show, which aired at 10:00 pm EST, and I was shocked and disgusted at the filth that this so-called drama spewed both visually and verbally.

In one 5 minute stretch, I not only heard multiple uses of the F word, but I also had the great displeasure of seeing two topless women bearing [*sic*] their breasts to the camera. Nothing was left to the imagination.

This show is violating community standards, and CTV should be prevented from showing this trash. [*File Number 00/01-0145, concerning the September 18, 2000 broadcast*]

...

My wife and I have never been so disgusted. Every other word was a F... word, together with all kinds of other filthy language. Also they showed the use of drugs as a normal thing to do. The worst was however that the name of "Jesus Christ" was used as a joke and a mockery.

I am sure you would not allow jokes to be made of any ethnic or minority group. You would not allow fun to be made of any gay person, without having a lawsuit on your hands.

[*File Number 00/01-0174, concerning the September 18, 2000 broadcast*]

I have started this letter to you over and over again a number of times as I am trying to find the right words to complain once again and help you and the Council to understand how very dangerous and damaging this programme is. I am having trouble because this is so very important to me and I want to make sure that my words are as effective as possible. Yet I know that it is not words alone that I am trying to relay but more importantly my feelings.

...

I keep reading critics who have used the word "courage " and applied this word to senior executives at BCE-CTV who 'courageously stood down the complaints' and aired this 'no holds barred television show, going where television has never gone before' and all I keep thinking is.... violence as we have never seen before on conventional television ... more nudity and women being used as sex objects like we have never seen before on conventional television.... profanity like we have never seen on conventional television ... and a horrifically dysfunctional family people are killed and the characters laugh afterwards ... women being called "cunt" and treated as objects ... how can the degradation of women being treated as objects be "good" for society, with all the violence we already have against women I watch this dysfunction and I think to myself ... how can more violence be good for society ... all this degradation is performed by characters who are Italian Italian words, food, rituals, are thrown into this mix and are forever married.... how can this not affect perceptions of Italians..... how can this show about the Italian mafia be any different than the other 314 that came before how can this disgusting programme [*sic*] be considered creative and imaginative, even an "epic"....God what is it that we are valuing? How horrific.. this disgusting violence, profanity, degradation of women, is being performed by Italian characters!! This defames Italians!!

...

In Canada .02 % of Italians are involved in crime. The figure is the same in the United States. Therefore 99.98% of Italians in Canada and in the United States are honest, law-abiding and contributing members of society and I might add have made significant contributions to these countries that seem to be ignored by mainstream media because they are overshadowed by this myth.

... Yet our stories and contributions as Canadians are as heroic and life affirming as those Canadians in Mr. Matheson's world! This is the "real" community that has been hurt by the mobster mystique that is thrust upon us over and over and over again such that these accomplishments are clouded by the hovering negative portrayal that the mainstream is so fond of presenting and making money from. Television is a mirror, and we all want to see ourselves reflected there. It makes us feel like we belong here and are part of the plurality

that is Canada. How many years will it take for Canadians of Italian heritage to be Canadians with equal rights in this country such that we too have a right “not to be stereotyped” and instead to be “real people”? Again why are the Italians being singled out?

...

I am tired and fed up with Italians being represented in this same old same old negative stereotypical paradigm of the mobster. The repetition and use of this same paradigm and the unbalanced representation of Italians on the screens has hurt our community in our real lives over and over again. We are also never given any other Italian American / Canadian heroes. When was the last time we were given a lawyer, a judge, a doctor, a professor with an Italian name on a television programme or on a film screen. These are too few and too far between.

Instead we are given a Tony Soprano who takes his daughter to visit colleges, and during that trip, with his bare hands and a wire, strangles a man, and goes back to his daughter like a "good" father, without skipping a beat. Recently I was told by a young Italian Canadian woman, that Tony has a “heart”. Is this not incredible he is not faithful, he kills with no thought, he spews profanity and bigotry, he cheats on his wife, he lies to his children and his family, he calls women “f ----- refugees, and cunts” and yet he has a “heart”. Our young men mimic the characters because they are romanticized and look “cool”. The audience is presented an evil character who is given “normal” characteristics such that the audience is manipulated to forget the animal and bigot that Tony Soprano is and instead “sympathize” with him.

[File Number 99/00-0763, concerning the September 17 and 18, 2000 broadcasts]

The Broadcaster’s Response

CTV’s Vice President of Corporate Communications responded to each complainant with a letter addressing his or her specific concerns. The following excerpts were chosen as a fair representation of the broadcaster’s position on the various issues raised by the complainants:

The Sopranos is an excellent, critically acclaimed, award winning drama that we see as an imaginative story about families and the “human condition.” Certainly the characters are Italian, and many of them are criminals. But the genius of the series is that it draws the universal out of the particular so we see some of the Sopranos’ life in all our lives.

CTV recognizes that *The Sopranos* is controversial among people of Italian background. Some disapprove of the program. Others, including the show’s creator and its Italian cast members, do not.

We do respect your opinion. But we agree with those critics who say *The Sopranos* is an excellent drama and respect it for its artistry. It has earned these laurels precisely because it is not stereotypical. We cannot censor this drama because some people believe, however sincerely, that the program sends messages they abhor.

The Sopranos does contain violence, sexual scenes and coarse language. To alert viewers, we ran on-air advertising spots strongly advising viewer discretion. We also ran an advisory at the top of the program, as well as after the first commercial break. The following was the exact wording of the advisory:

This program is not intended for children. It contains scenes of violence, extremely coarse language and nudity. Some adults may be offended by the content. Viewer discretion is strongly advised.

After 9 p.m. is considered by the industry and the CRTC to be adult viewing time.
[File Number 00/01-0137]

...

I understand your reaction to the content of *The Sopranos* but we cannot censor this program because some people believe, however sincerely and strongly, that it contains messages inappropriate for television viewing. There are many viewers who have expressed that they would have been equally disappointed if we had edited the series.

[File Number 00/01-0145]

THE DECISION

The National Conventional Television Panel Adjudicators considered the complaints under the following provisions of the various CAB private broadcaster Codes.

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 Sex-Role Portrayal Code, Article 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.

CAB Violence Code, Article 1.1 (Gratuitous and glamorized violence)

- 1.1 Canadian broadcasters shall not air programming which:
- ! contains gratuitous violence in any form*
 - ! sanctions, promotes or glamorizes violence

(*"Gratuitous" means material which does not play an integral role in developing the plot, character or theme of the material as a whole).

CAB Violence Code, Article 3.1 (Scheduling)

- 3.1.2 Accepting that there are older children watching television after 9 pm, broadcasters shall adhere to the provisions of article 5.1 below (viewer advisories), enabling parents to make an informed decision as to the suitability of the programming for their family members.

CAB Violence Code, Article 5.1 (Viewer Advisories)

- 5.1 To assist consumers in making their viewing choices, broadcasters shall provide a viewer advisory, at the beginning of, and during the first hour of programming telecast in late evening hours which contains scenes of violence intended for adult audiences.

The Adjudicators watched each of the episodes and reviewed all of the correspondence relevant to this decision. The National Conventional Television Panel considers that, for the reasons given below, the series does not violate any of the program *content* requirements of the private broadcaster Codes. It does, however, consider that the broadcaster has not fulfilled all of the *Violence Code* requirements with respect to the use of viewer advisories, which enable viewers to choose, on an informed basis, whether or not they wish to view the series. Consequently, to this extent, the Panel finds CTV in breach of the *CAB Violence Code*.

The Elements Considered

The series has raised many substantive issues of concern to viewers. Those considered by the National Panel relate to the allegedly inappropriate portrayal of Italians as an identifiable group on the basis of their national origin, the presence of gratuitous or glamorized violence, the use of coarse, crude or foul language and the presence of nudity and sexual situations.

Abusively Discriminatory Programming?

The essence of this aspect of the complaints is that Italians, as an identifiable group distinguishable by their national or ethnic origin, suffer discrimination on that basis as a result of this programming. As aptly put by one of the complainants,

The perception of Italians provided and nurtured by this program is that of a group of persons in whom any degree of moral awareness is absent. Obsessed by mindless violence they kill others and the taking of human life is regarded as unremarkable behaviour; the intention to kill is formed and the act simply flows from it. This profoundly pejorative, and I would emphasize mistaken, perception of a particular group engenders contempt towards them.

The facts are indisputable. It is the *fairness* of the alleged characterization which is at issue. The programming does portray that element of organized crime known familiarly as the Mafia or the Cosa Nostra. It is undeniably Italian. It also portrays the general family life of Tony and Carmela Soprano, their children, parents and other relations. They too are

undeniably Italian. That being said, the Panel must make it clear that the mere mention of Italians (or any other national or ethnic group) does not constitute a breach of the human rights provision of the Code. The issue is *how* they are portrayed. It is with that matter which the Panel must come to grips. Moreover, on an analogous basis, it should not be forgotten that the CBSC's lengthy jurisprudence under the human rights provision of the Code has made it clear, in dealing with *many* nationalities, that, to be in breach, comments must not merely be discriminatory, they must be *abusively* discriminatory. The issue is not, in other words, whether programming deals with people of Italian nationality, but rather whether it portrays them in an abusively discriminatory fashion *on the basis of that nationality*.

In this respect, the Panel cannot fail to take into consideration the fact that this series constitutes a multi-dimensional and complex look at the notion of "family" on the two levels, criminal and domestic. Because the stories are neither shallow nor uni-dimensional, they depend on involved value systems in both areas. For those value systems to be credible, they require a cultural component. The creators needed to choose a nationality to weave their story. They chose the Italian nationality. Why? Perhaps because they, the creators, personally knew that cultural background better than any other. Perhaps because they believed that, on the criminal level at least, the Cosa Nostra was better known to the general public than other organized criminal groups. In some respects, it might be observed that the reputation of the Cosa Nostra is legendary, not *because* they were Italian but *because* they were, criminally speaking, successful and very public in their achievement of that success. It should not be ignored that, historically speaking, Lucky Luciano's renowned partner in crime was the Jewish mobster Meyer Lansky. Success, not nationality, was the issue in the historical criminal reality.

In the present matter, the Panel cannot ignore the fact that the series is about criminals acting as criminals, not about criminals acting as Italians. Could the show's creators have chosen another national or ethnic group? Undoubtedly. Should they have? What would have been gained by so doing? Probably only satisfaction on the part of those persons who feel wronged or slighted by the choice which was made. Moreover, this sensibility would have likely been replaced by the discomfiture of those who would have felt similarly on behalf of their own national or ethnic compatriots.

The point is that, understandably, *no* national or ethnic group would wish any of its members to be portrayed as criminal. That, though, cannot be the determinative matter since all criminals have gender, skin colour, national origin and other characteristics. Some persons may, in other words, feel offended by the fact that one of "theirs" was represented as a criminal. The issue must be approached from the other side. Not "How was the criminal portrayed?" but rather "How was the group (of which the criminal was a member) portrayed?" In other words, in the end, it is not for the CBSC to challenge or question the choice of group to be portrayed by the creators of the program but rather only to evaluate the way in which they have executed that decision. (The CBSC's link is not, of course, with the creators but rather with the broadcaster which has chosen to air the show.)

It is the view of the Panel that there is not any characterization of Italians as bad, evil, nasty, despicable individuals. To the contrary. Apart from the criminal elements in the story, the household family, Tony and Carmela Soprano, Meadow and Anthony, Jr., represent very strong family values. While dysfunctional in ways that correspond to modern families of many national backgrounds, that cohesive family unit displays admirable characteristics. Carmela is a strong, even tough, emotional, sensitive, somewhat guilt-ridden, funny, religious, family-oriented woman. Meadow is an intelligent, attractive, soft, loving, extroverted, albeit somewhat feisty young lady, who succeeds in her attempt to enter an Ivy League University. Anthony, Jr., shows up as a contrasting figure. Young, sports-loving, computer game-driven, a bit lazy, introverted, quiet, he is still a loyal member of the family. Moreover, in most of the episodes considered by the Panel, the domestic family scenes represent as significant a part of the show's time as the scenes of criminal activity. There are also admirable Italian figures outside of the domestic family, including the central figure, Jennifer Melfi, Tony Soprano's very professional psychiatrist, and Jean Cusomano, the financially successful, well-connected, clubby, snobby neighbour. Recognition of Italian achievements is also not ignored throughout the series. Moreover, the criminal activities in the series are not left solely in the hands of the Soprano gang. There are criminals from other communities and one of the regulars, Hesh Rabkin, obviously a gangster of considerable experience, who appears to rank close to, if not with, Tony Soprano, in terms of rank, is Jewish.

In the end, the Conventional Television Panel considers that this series, while focussed on an Italian family, does not in any way disparage Italians. The sophisticated television series goes behind the "ordinary" Cosa Nostra stories which have been relatively common fare for many years, to demonstrate the domestic lives of a complex web of distinctive family relationships, with its pluses and minuses. The show probes issues which focus on Italian cultural and traditional values, poking fun at some, underscoring others with admiration. As the Ontario Regional Panel stated in *History Channel re the movie Midnight Express* (CBCSC Decision 98/99-0203 and 0244, June 17, 1999)

From the Council's perspective, the undeniably negative comments made about the Turkish people by Billy Hayes *must* be narrowly viewed, even if they are framed by him in general terms. The fact of the matter is that the only Turks in the film about whom Hayes has any justification to evaluate are those with whom he has had the worst experiences, namely, the representatives of the legal and penal system. They are painted brutally by director Alan Parker but they are the *only* segment of the Turkish population the viewer has contact with. There is no assessment made by the screenwriter, the director or the film's characters about the Turks or Turkey in general. It is a story of penal injustice. When Billy Hayes screams in the courtroom "I hate you, I hate your nation, I hate your people", he does so in anger and bitterness for the lengthy sentence handed to him when he had hoped to be free in 53 more days. That he lashes out against the country and the people does not mean that the film or the broadcaster has gone to such extremes of generality, for they have not. The context is the prison, not the country. The comments are directed at the keepers, not the people. The film is a drama, not a documentary. ... In the view of the Council, the discriminatory comment does not target the Turkish people or the nation. The bitter discriminatory perspective is limited to injustices perpetrated by the jailers, the lawyers and the judges and

this perspective of the system is a legitimate political point of view, one protected by freedom of expression and artistic license and, therefore, is not in breach of any Code.

The show's view is *not*, as noted above, limited to the criminal activities. It is an entire perspective of the good and the bad, seen as a whole, the domestic and "business" sides of the life, it should be remembered, of *one* family, not an entire community. And that family is hardly representative. *It is*, on the business side of its *paterfamilias*, a *criminal* family. It is not *everyfamily*. Nor is there any indication that the creators or broadcasters propose that their view of *this* family ought to be extended beyond its own boundaries. The Panel does not consider that there has been any attempt whatsoever to suggest that the creators' or broadcaster's view of this microcosm is to be understood as reflective of the nature, habits or practices of an entire *people*. Accordingly, it does not constitute abusively discriminatory comment and is not in breach of the *CAB Code of Ethics*.

The Use of Coarse Language

There is no disputing that the language used in *The Sopranos* is exceedingly coarse. Moreover, it is constantly present in the dialogue among the Cosa Nostra members. There are few sentences in which one or another of the "forbidden" words, four-letter and otherwise, is not present. Religious epithets are also used. While, as noted above, these tend to be far less present in the domestic family dialogue, it must be admitted that they are present there as well from time to time. While off-colour language has been raised as an issue in the past, there has been but one occasion when it has been as constantly present as it is in this series. In *CJOH-TV re "White Men Can't Jump"* (CBSC Decision 94/95-0060, March 12, 1996), the Ontario Regional Panel, in dealing with the language of youths in the streets of Venice Beach, California, applied the principle laid down by the same Panel in *CFRA-AM re Steve Madely* (CBSC Decision 93/94-0295, November 15, 1994).

While it is not the same language which was used in this film, the Council considers that the same principles are applicable and that it cannot interfere with the broadcaster's choice to air the film. The Council also adopts the conclusion of the Ontario Regional Council in the *Madely* decision, namely, "While good taste and judgment might have dictated the non-use of the expression on the public airwaves, it was not a sanctionable usage."

In this case, the coarse, foul, indeed crude, language used by the mobsters is their vernacular. It is not employed gratuitously; it is used as one might expect that they would *really* use it. Uneducated, their choices are fewer than those of the more literate people in the show who use such terms infrequently or not at all. While not endorsing its usage, the Panel recognizes its relevance to the story being told. It is up to the broadcaster to play such programming in the correct time slot and to apply those other tools which the Codes require, such as explicit viewer advisories. Having aired the show at 10:00 p.m., timing is not an issue and advisories are dealt with below. The broadcast of the language itself, in the circumstances of this show, while not for everyone's ears, is not a sanctionable usage.

The Appropriateness of the Violence

Many of the complainants expressed concern regarding the significant amount of violence in the series. While there is an undercurrent of the *threat* of violence, the quantity of on-screen violence in each episode is not significant. Of each 60+ minute show, there are not more than two scenes of violent action. That being said, when it occurs, the violent action tends to be graphic. Graphic true, perhaps because it is realistic in its presentation, but not excessive, and always contextual. The Panel considers that no act of violence in the episodes was dramatically unsubstantiated. In other words, every such act was contextual and had a clear role in the advancement of the plot or was “justified” (not, of course, in a societal *legal* context) by some previous action on the part of the victim. While such justification flows from the socially distorted rules of the Cosa Nostra or of Tony Soprano’s mob family in particular, the story knows no *random* acts of violence such as those in some dramas which may only be circularly justified by the fact that the perpetrators “enjoy” or thrive on such random acts.

It follows that, in terms of Article 1 of the *Violence Code*, none of the violence in the episodes under consideration here is gratuitous. The Panel equally considers that none of it is glamorized. Where acts of violence occur, they are, as noted above, retributory. They tend to be brutal and sometimes the result of sheer anger on the part of the perpetrators that the victim has not respected the Soprano rules for which they are being punished. The violence is, in that sense, a part of the business of the Soprano family but never an *enjoyable* part of their work. The family members are interested in the money which they earn from their activities, not in the violent tactics which may occasionally “need” to be employed to ensure that their livings are not interfered with. What glamour there is in their world flows from their power and the respect/fear which they generate from outsiders. There is no glamour in their retributory acts, not even by their own colleagues. If anything, there is periodic regret, which results from the inefficiency of being able to achieve the result of making money without the need to resort to such acts.

While recognizing the occasional graphic brutality of the violent acts, the Panel considers that the violence is relatively infrequent, playing a smaller role in the story-telling than some complainants suggest. It is not, as noted above, either gratuitous or glamorized in the context of the challenged episodes and was relegated to a post-Watershed broadcast (10 p.m.) accompanied by very specific viewer advisories (of which more below). The National Conventional Television Panel finds no breach on this account.

Nudity and Sexual Activity

While nudity is present in virtually every episode of *The Sopranos*, it is rarely seen in combination with sexual activity. In general, nude women are seen dancing on stage as a part of the business operations of Tony Soprano’s Bada Bing! Club. They are so much the

backdrop of more important activities that, even when one of the women comes forward to speak to one of the mobsters, her unclothed appearance seems to be virtually ignored, if not utterly unimportant. This is not to suggest that the syndicate family members are without interest in sex, but only that that interest is essentially sublimated in the Club context. In this respect, the Panel sees no reason to diverge from the view expressed by the Quebec Regional Panel in *TQS re the Movie Strip Tease* (CBSC Decision 98/99-0441, February 21, 2000). After reviewing the numerous CBSC Panel decisions regarding bare breasts, in both news and public affairs, and dramatic contexts, the Quebec Panel explained:

While acknowledging that the showing of bare breasts on strip tease dancers was intended by the filmmaker to be sexual, the Council considers that the absence of sexual contact or lovemaking in the film rendered it, to all intents and purposes, sufficiently innocent that there would not even be a requirement that its broadcast occur only in a post-watershed time frame. Moreover, by airing the film in a family-viewing period (at 8:00 p.m.) with appropriate advisories and the rating icon established by the Régie du Cinéma, the broadcaster had provided sufficient opportunity to make that choice to those who might prefer not to see the film or not to have it available for their families.

The fact that the Soprano syndicate members tend to be unfaithful and appear generally to use women sexually, according them little respect except in their roles as wives and mothers, does not bear upon the nudity issue. The sex role portrayal is presented as a cultural issue on the part of the syndicate members primarily and even their sexual proclivities are isolated from the nudity at the Bada Bing! Club.

As long as the nudity is identified by viewer advisories, as it is here, its context in *The Sopranos* is not in violation of the Codes.

The Use of Advisories

The purpose of viewer advisories is sometimes thought to be oriented toward children. While their utility for that purpose is clear and important, they are, as a tool, media literacy based and oriented toward adults as much as children. They are intended to provide viewers with sufficient information to enable them to determine, whether for their children *or for themselves*, what will be suitable viewing fare. It is of the essence of the Canadian broadcasting system, which, the *Broadcasting Act* provides, encourages diversity of programming for the broad range of interests and tastes of Canadians, that potential viewers be advised, even after the protective Watershed hour (which is principally children-oriented), that programming may contain elements which they may not find palatable.

To assist broadcasters in providing such information to their audiences, Canada's private broadcasters have provided a number of different wording choices as a part of their *Violence Code*. In this case, however, the broadcaster has chosen to tailor, more carefully, in the view of the Panel, than the "boilerplate" options would suggest, a form of advisory which is targeted at the precise nature of this unusual show. CTV has clearly and

assertively provided the following advisory, in both written and oral formats, *prior* to the rolling of the opening credits and immediately following them, so that viewers are *twice* informed of the extreme nature of the programming before the program even begins.

This program is not intended for children. It contains scenes of violence, extremely coarse language and nudity. Some adults may be offended by the content. Viewer discretion is strongly advised.

In addition to telling viewers *what* is in the programming, the broadcaster has adverbially underscored both the coarseness of the dialogue and the advisability of discretion in making this viewing choice. It has also made it laudably clear that the program is not only *not* intended for children but that some *adults* may be offended by the content.

Despite all of the foregoing positive observations regarding the excellent advisory structure, the Panel is disappointed by the failure of the broadcaster to adhere to the provisions of the *Violence Code* regarding the *frequency* of its use. In Article 5.1 of the Code, it is provided that, where advisories are required, they must be broadcast “at the beginning of, and during the first hour of programming telecast in late evening hours.” This means that, where advisories are required, they must be shown *coming out of each commercial break*. As the Ontario Regional Panel said in *CTV re Poltergeist - The Legacy* (CBSC Decisions 96/97-0017 and 96/97-0030, May 8, 1997), in which there was an advisory at the start of the film, no others in the first hour and sporadic advisories during the second hour,

The rationale underlying the requirement of viewer advisories is found in the background section of the Code, which state that “... creative freedom carries with it the responsibility of ensuring ... that viewers have adequate information about program content to make informed viewing choices based on their personal tastes and standards.” The repetition of viewer advisories *during the course* of the first hour serves as a second, third and fourth chance for viewers to receive important information concerning the program they are considering watching, even where they may tune in late. The Code takes into account that many viewers make their viewing choices *after* the first few minutes of a program, which may result in a viewer missing an initial advisory. The Council is of the view that CTV’s approach to viewer advisories in this case, *i.e.* other than the initial advisory, providing them only in the *second* hour of the program, is insufficient for viewers and in breach of the spirit and wording of the Code.

It is a strength of the Canadian private broadcasters’ system that they have looked at matters from the point of view of the audience. They established a set of *mandatory* standards in 1994, by which they agreed that programming containing scenes with violent content would be subject to rules which they themselves, the broadcasters, would apply to their programming. There would be no gratuitous or glamorized violent content. Special rules would apply to children’s programming. A classification system would be established to assist viewers in assessing the applicability of programming in a family context. There would also be a system of viewer advisories which would enable audiences to determine *in words*, in addition to the ratings *icons*, just what there was about their programs that might assist viewers in their tuning choices. Advisories *inform*. The foregoing rules are a

package. They are not meant to be separated. They are collectively essential to the operation of the broadcasters' *Violence Code* safeguards for public viewing.

In the present case, the excellent advisories were present coming out of each of the commercial breaks on the shows of September 17 and 18 but each of the remaining shows only employed the advisories following the first commercial break. They were missing following the second and third sets of commercials in each of the shows of September 19, 21, 22, 24, 27 and 28. They should not have been. Nor is this, as noted above, a simple "technical" issue. Consequently, CTV is in breach of Article 5.1 of the *Violence Code* with respect to each of the six broadcasts mentioned.

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 responses attempted to address the issues raised by each of the complainants. Consequently, the broadcaster has not breached the Council's standard of responsiveness. Nothing more is required.

CONTENT OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE DECISION

CTV is required to: 1) announce this decision, in the following terms, once during prime time within three days following the release of this decision and once more within seven days following the release of this decision during the time period in which *The Sopranos* was broadcast; 2) within the fourteen days following the broadcast of the announcements, to provide written confirmation of the airing of the statement to the complainants who filed the Ruling Requests; and 3) to provide the CBSC with that written confirmation and with air check copies of the broadcasts of the two announcements which must be made by CTV.

The Canadian Broadcast Standards Council has found that CTV has breached the viewer advisory provision in the *CAB Violence Code* in its broadcasts of *The Sopranos* on September 19, 21, 22, 24, 27 and 28, 2000.

By failing to provide viewer advisories following each of the commercial breaks during the first hour of the show advising audiences of its coarse language, nudity and violent content, CTV has breached Article 5 of the *Violence Code*.

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

**APPENDIX
TO CBSC DECISION**

CTV re The Sopranos

(CBSC Decision 00/01-0130+)

I. The Complaint:

The following complaint dated September 19, 2000 was sent to the CBSC (CBSC file 00/01-0174):

To whom it may concern,

Usely [*sic*] my wife and I watch CTV News at 11 P.M. on ch. 6 and 11 here in Nanaimo BC. Last night, not being 11 PM yet, we watched the last 10 minutes from *The Sopranos*. My wife and I have never been so disgusted. Every other word was a F... word, together with all kinds of other filthy language. Also they showed the use of drugs as a normal thing to do. The worst was however that the name of "Jesus Christ" was used as joke and a mockery.

I am sure you would not allow jokes to be make of any ethnic or minority group. You would not allow fun to [be] made of any gay person, without having a lawsuit on your hands. You would not dare to make fun of the Moslem religion. Someone who did had to go into hiding for his life.

Yet you DARE to let the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to be used as a mockery and a joke in this program *The Sopranos*.

Even if you would not be religious, I still cannot believe that the filthy language would not offend a decent person. We know from history, that the Roman empire was not conquered, but collapsed because of moral corruption. We are in that time of history again. Think of it, *The Sopranos* won all kinds of Emmy awards with all their filthy language. People love it, same as at the time that the roman empire collapsed. That is real scary, is it not?

Meanwhile millions of Christians will not allow that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ be used as a joke and mockery, as was not allowed by the Moslems, as mentioned earlier. It seems there is no other option left for you then to take *The Sopranos* off the air now.

We could and should as Christians of Canada and the US dedicate a Sunday as a special prayer Sunday all across Canada and the US to ask all members of all churches to sign a petition to have programs like this removed, as being offensive and disrespectful to our Lord Jesus Christ.

The following complaint dated September 21, 2000 was forwarded to the CBSC from the CRTC (CBSC file 00/01-0137):

Re: *The Sopranos* televised by CTV at 10pm local time on 19 September, 2000

- 1) CTV provided two warnings before the program began that it contained scenes of violence, course [*sic*] language and nudity.
- 2) The warnings in 1) above are appropriate. However, my complaint against the televised

broadcasting of this program is not remedied by appeal or recourse to the warnings provided by CTV; quite simply the program contravenes the Television Broadcasting Regulations, 1987. In these Regulations, Section 5.(1) we read: "A licensee shall not broadcast" continuing at (b) "any abusive comment or abusive pictorial representation that, when taken in context, tends or is likely to expose an individual or group or class of individuals to hatred or contempt on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability."

3) I submit that the pictorial representations of persons of Italian origin or ethnic heritage taken in the context of this program are exposed to contempt and that this exposure contravenes both the letter and the spirit of the Television Broadcasting Regulations, 1987. The perception of Italians provided and nurtured by this program is that of a group of persons in whom any degree of moral awareness is absent. Obsessed by mindless violence they kill others and the taking of human life is regarded as unremarkable behaviour; the intention to kill is formed and the act simply flows from it. This profoundly pejorative, and I would emphasize mistaken, perception of a particular group engenders contempt towards them. It also diminishes us who are not of Italian origin or heritage if we remain silent and allow the pictorial representations of the perception to pass across our television screens as unremarkable.

4) It would be difficult for me to think of a clearer example of a fundamental difference between American culture and Canadian culture than the one *The Sopranos* provides. I hope you will respect your own Regulations and hold CTV responsible for its breach of public trust.

The CBSC also received the following complaint dated September 22, 2000 (CBSC file 00/01-0158):

Please consider this a formal complaint against the broadcasting of the aforementioned show.

Last evening, that being Thursday Sept. 21st while channel surfing I came across a broadcast of the show on the CTV network, cable channel 8 in Saint John. At approximately 10:15 p.m. and again at 10:40 p.m. I heard the word F**K used not less than 10 times. 5 times in fact within the space of 3 sentences spoken consecutively. While I realize that a warning was probably posted at the start of the show I did not have the good fortune to hear that, and to say I was flabbergasted by the use of such language on television during prime time would be an understatement. I would appreciate your comments on what course of action if any will be taken by the CBSC regarding the use of such profanities on television.

I have also contacted the CRTC and have been advised that failing satisfactory action by the CBSC they will review the issue and take steps if deemed necessary to correct this issue.

In addition, the CBSC received this complaint dated September 25, 2000 (CBSC file 00/01-0145):

I would like to make a formal complaint against CTV, and their airing of the television show *The Sopranos* on September 18, 2000.

I only watched a few minutes of the show, which aired at 10:00pm est, and I was shocked and disgusted at the filth that this so-called drama spewed both visually and verbally. In one 5 minute stretch, I not only heard multiple uses of the F word, but I also had the great displeasure of seeing two topless women bearing their breasts to the camera. Nothing was left to the imagination.

This show is violating community standards, and CTV should be prevented from showing this trash. This type of filth is usually reserved for American cable. Why is CTV allowed to broadcast this

across the airwaves? Especially during prime time? Please look into this matter.

On September 27, 2000 the CBSC received the following complaint (CBSC file 00/01-0198):

I would like to make an official complaint about the show *The Sopranos* that you have allowed to be broadcasted on CTV. Since it first aired on CTV on September 17, 2000 at 10pm Central Standard time, I have been appalled at what I heard and saw.

Hearing the “F” word constantly along with many other swear words is something that certainly does not need to be aired on public television let alone prime time TV. Society is corrupt enough as it is without allowing this kind of filth into our living rooms and into the homes of families. Ultimately this show will be seen and heard by teenagers and children. It doesn’t matter if a warning tags along with it or not; or even if it is at 10pm instead of 8pm. It hurts anyone, any age, by its content.

The sexual content is too explicit for television. It sickens me to no end. It doesn’t need to be offensive to be a good show. I know this because I am a writer myself. My husband recorded another mob show on CTV Saturday (early morning) September 16, 2000 called *Hoffa*. It also had offensive language. Yet, every single word of the offensive language was bleeped out. And it was late night not even prime time. Why such contradictions when you go ahead and allow another show to “bear it all”. *The Sopranos* is immoral and disgusting!! Please *please* (for the sake of Canada’s children, teens and *everyone!*) TAKE IT OFF THE AIR IMMEDIATELY!

The CBSC also received the following complaint dated September 29, 2000 (CBSC file 00/01-0156):

I watched the show *The Sopranos* on CTV September 28 at 10:00p.m. I cannot believe this show meets the standards developed from input from the public. My teenage daughter said she overheard two boys at school talking about a strip bar scene on this show and they could not believe this was on television. We do not get cable and I did not expect to ever see or hear on CTV the nudity or language I heard on this show. I understand you are a self regulating organization. Please tell me what you consider appropriate community standards? Who do you receive input from in order to decide what children should have access to. My twelve year old requires 9 hours of sleep and gets up at 8:00 for school. I don’t think this type of show should be accidentally discovered by any 12 year old in our country. My 12 year old is often up at this time and I would not want her switching channels and seeing the opening scene of last night’s show. A warning that is shown before a show airs is only effective if you are tuned to that channel in those first few seconds. Doesn’t she have rights to decency on television?

The CBSC further received the following complaint dated October 2, 2000 (CBSC file 00/01-0144):

On Wednesday, September 27, 2000 between the hours of 10:00 P.M. and 11:00 P.M. CHEK Television broadcast on Channel Six in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada and in Central Saanich, British Columbia, Canada a television show called *The Sopranos*; numerous times during the show the word “fuck” and the words “mother fucker” were used. This is contrary to the [...] Broadcasting Act, Television Broadcasting Regulations, 1987 which provides:

Programming Content
5.(1) A licensee shall not broadcast...

(c) any obscene or profane language or pictorial representation.

At the time of the broadcast, I contacted the non-emergency number of the Victoria Police Department to complain about the broadcast. I was told to contact the CRTC. The following day, I also contacted Industry Canada, Radio Inspectors department and again complained and asked for advice. I was advised to contact the CRTC.

I look forward to hearing from the CRTC on this matter; I'm also considering forwarding this message to Mr. Gary Lunn, MP who is my member of parliament.

The CBSC received the following complaint dated October 9, 2000 with respect to the broadcast of September 22, 2000 (CBSC file 00/01-0197):

The language content is not appropriate for T.V. I watched for under a minute [and] the f... word [was] used 3 [times]. The CBSC needs guidelines before the fact. Shows like this should not even go on the air without being edited.

Finally, the CBSC received the following letter dated September 30, 2000 from a complainant regarding the negative portrayal of Italians, as well as other issues, in the series (CBSC file 99/00-0763):

Dear...

I have started this letter to you over and over again a number of times as I am trying to find the right words to complain once again and help you and the Council to understand how very dangerous and damaging this programme is. I am having trouble because this is so very important to me and I want to make sure that my words are as effective as possible. Yet I know that it is not words alone that I am trying to relay but more importantly my feelings.

Sunday, the 17th of September, was a sad, sad day for television and I am greatly disturbed that BCE-CTV will have aired all thirteen episodes by the time the Council has time to deal with these complaints. In a move billed as competition with the Olympics, but in reality, I see as a hostile attack on the Italian Canadians that have complained and refused to be silenced. Therefore the damage to our culture will have been done.

I keep reading critics who have used the word "courage" and applied this word to senior executives at BCE-CTV who 'courageously stood down the complaints' and aired this 'no holds barred television show, going where television has never gone before' and all I keep thinking is.... violence as we have never seen before on conventional television ... more nudity and women being used as sex objects like we have never seen before on conventional television.... profanity like we have never seen on conventional television ... and a horrifically dysfunctional family people are killed and the characters laugh afterwards ... women being called "cunt" and treated as objects ... how can the degradation of women being treated as objects be "good" for society, with all the violence we already have against women I watch this dysfunction and I think to myself ... how can more violence be good for society ... all this degradation is performed by characters who are Italian Italian words, food, rituals, are thrown into this mix and are forever married..... how can this not affect perceptions of Italians..... how can this show about the Italian mafia be any different than the other 314 that came before how can this disgusting programme be considered creative and imaginative, even an "epic"God what is it that we are valuing? How horrific. this disgusting violence, profanity, degradation of women, is being performed by Italian characters!! This defames Italians!!

I have spent ten years of my life in a classroom trying to teach high school students art and English. Many of my students' needs however went way beyond English or art. Over the years things have been changing for the worse...more young people who have lost faith in themselves, lost faith in society, and an increase in violent incidents and I might add I have definitely worked with my fair share of dysfunctional families and they come from all classes, all cultures, all shapes and sizes and all coloursI understand HBO began airing this violent show in the United States on the heels of the Columbine High school tragedy ... the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the United States just completed a study on television violence directed at children that was implemented after the Columbine tragedy, as an attempt at looking at how media messages affect young people. They did discover abuses. David Walsh of the National Institute on Media and the Family, stated in a USA Today article "The FX received many reports of kids being targeted for adult products The youth entertainment market is huge, bigger than the baby boomers ... With all that potential income, it's awfully tempting for people with entertainment products to make them attractive to kids, even if they're not appropriate to kids" (Mon. Sept. 11, 2000, ID). As part of the government investigation into the marketing of violent entertainment to children, the movie studios were required to submit confidential marketing documents to the FTC. Those documents show that some of the biggest companies in Hollywood routinely recruited scores of teenagers and children as young as nine to evaluate story concepts, commercials, theatrical trailers, and rough cuts for R-rated movies" (Toronto Star, Sept 28, 2000 pA25). Warner Bros. is a big company in Hollywood and it owns HBO. After the report was released the big companies conceded that they "won't knowingly include persons under the age of 17 in research screenings for films rated R" or in focus groups for R-rated films, unless the kids are with a parent or adult guardian" (Toronto Star, Sept 28, 2000 pA25), however they refused to not market their R-rated material to children under 17. President of Warner Bros/HBO, Alan Horn stated "There is nothing illegal or immoral or inappropriate about kids under 17 attending R-rated films if their parents allow them to do so" (Toronto Star, Sept 28, 2000 pA25). Such greedy hypocrisy First they spend years using young children, as young as nine, teaching them violence, bigotry, sexism, knowingly, for their selfish greed and now they pass the buck to parents, in order to continue making their bigger bucks. These are the people that BCE-CTV has gone to bed with by buying *The Sopranos*. People who created the chaos, vulgarity, profanity, violence, degradation, bigotry, with help from children and now turn away and refuse to accept responsibility for the damage they have done and surely will continue to do. Such shameful immorality.

In Canada we may not have had a high school tragedy the size of the Colombine experience, however we have, to mention only two, our Marc Lepine and the Montreal massacre as well as Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka..... yes violence, sexism, and bigotry is all around us and in high schools all of these incidents are on the increase I wonder if [the CTV executives] would care to spend some time with our young people as I am sure it will not take long for them to see the violence, confusion, pain and the hurt. I would like to see them use some of that same "courage" and look a classful of students in the eyes after a violent incident maybe a fight caused by racist remarks, maybe a knifing, or maybe the most horrific act of violence, a teen suicide. Yes let them take that courage they are attributed with for airing this programme and let them use it in a classroom. Let them try to look deep into the souls of these students and say "*The Sopranos* yes that is a great show. Yes, we think we need that in Canada, yes this is good stuff" or maybe [...] the next CEO at the network [...] should visit the Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal and speak to those women who truly exemplify courage, and try to explain to them how a programme about men dominating women is "good" for society!...Or maybe BCE-CTV should talk to the "Take back the night march" organizers here in Toronto, who recently received Marc Lepine like violent threats. Or maybe they can tell the students that they do not have to worry, because the characters are Italians anyway!! If BCE-CTV really thinks that the disclaimers deterred young people from watching then they really have lost touch with reality. It has been so difficult to even get home supervision for homework, let alone wonder about what the students are watching. The reality however is that the negative influence of television on young people's perceptions are clearly reflected in their actions and attitudes.

Shame on them for caring more about money than about what they are really contributing to society. Television is a powerful tool. Television influences perceptions. Instead of helping society heal they are throwing us deeper into the abyss with this kind of programming ... bigotry, dysfunction, profanity, sexism and violence! Yes they should be proud.

[The CTV Vice President] stated in his letter to me that this is a story about the "human condition" yet is it not interesting that most critics who have written about it, always see it from an Italian perspective. John Allemang, who clearly does not know the first thing about Italian Canadian history, on Sept. 15, in his *Globe and Mail* article titled "Breasts, Blood and brilliance" stated ... "there has never been a greater celebration of the Italian experience in the New World than we get from Chase and his brilliant team of writers." Alex Strachan in the *Vancouver Sun* on Sunday Sept. 17 in his article titled "All in the Family: TV's most talked-about mob series is an endearing and darkly comic drama," wrote... "CTV's decision to show *The Sopranos* reflects both courage and common sense: courage, because no matter how the network softens its pitch, an uncut *Sopranos* is going to draw complaints like FBI wiretaps to a Gambino family phone, and common sense because business is business, and it makes good business sense to counter CBC-TV's Olympics coverage with programming that's hard to refuse." Therefore, Chase gives us an "Italian experience" and those of us complaining are being associated with the "mafia" ...hence again we have the myth being confused with reality in our real world by real journalists because if we complain, unlike other Canadians who have the democratic right to voice their objections, for Italian Canadians, it is compared to the Gambino's complaining about a wiretap. How utterly offensive, defaming and demeaning. This alone is proof that what we see on television does affect perceptions, such that fiction is taken as fact in our real world.

Last week after CTV's press conference, I fielded many phone calls from journalists and radio programmers, all wanting to talk about the complaints from the Italians, wanting an interview. I often found myself suggesting that they talk to non-Italian Canadians to discuss the "human condition angle of the show" as [the CTV Vice President's] letter stated ... you know to find out if Canadians can discuss this show without focusing on the Italians, to discuss their perceptions the journalists quoted above sure could not and it is unfortunate that this did not take place in other forums.... instead what happened was that Italian Canadian was pitted against Italian Canadian. Does this mean that non Italian Canadians think violence, profanity, bigotry and vulgarity are Okay? Or was this a way of dismissing us and not taking us seriously by getting us to argue amongst ourselves instead of getting answers from BCE-CTV about how this is yet again an untrue ethnic stereotype being used to make money? Would this be done to any other ethnic group?

On *Canada AM*, this is also exactly what happened. On Monday the 18th during the interview with our president of the National Congress of Italian Canadians, Antonio Sciascia, we again had myth and reality being seen as one and the same. Mr. Sciascia clearly stated that the real Italian Canadian community has been hurt and defamed by this representation. He also stated that seven real major Italian American organizations have spoken out against HBO because this offensive programme *The Sopranos* because they too have determined that it defames our Italian culture and heritage. Instead of giving this interview the seriousness and dignity it deserved, Mr. Matheson and his other guest "chuckled" about whether the myth was really a myth or not. Mr. Matheson's question focused on the fact that this show was created by an Italian American, David Chase.....he asked "are they the ones defaming you?",

Again Mr. Matheson pitted Italian against Italian. Such a huge insult and it took place in our real world and on National television. David Chase's grandfather changed his name from De Cesare to Chase in the early part of the century to deal with the bigotry and racism he faced. Today Chase has sold out what remained of his heritage for a buck in order to make it in the film industry that is the reality Mr. Matheson did not want to face. Just as blacks have their "Uncle Tom" we Italians too have our "zio Tomaso"....Chase is our "Uncle Tom". Mr. Matheson dismissed the real hurt on the Italian Canadian community that Mr. Sciascia was trying to point out and instead used it to once again pit Italian against Italian instead of facing the real question. This is an untrue ethnic stereotype being used once again to make money. In Canada .02% of Italians are involved in crime. The figure is the same in the United States. Therefore 99.98% of Italians in Canada and in the United States are honest, law-abiding and contributing members of society and I might add have made significant contributions to these countries that seem to be ignored by mainstream media because they are overshadowed by this myth.

If Mr. Matheson would like to see some "real" Canadians of Italian heritage, maybe he should tune in to some of the multi-lingual stations that are not part of the mainstream. There is CHIN, CFMT and Telelatino. Minimally he should explore Telelatino's particular spot called "Notabene". It showcases what "real" Canadians of Italian heritage are really doing in this country, their tremendous contributions to and from all sectors of society medicine, history, film, visual art, music, theatre, fundraising, writing, education, festivals, sports, science, law, food, fashion, business, construction, public service, health... etc etc. Or maybe he could contact Guernica Publications where many Canadian writers of Italian heritage have had books published, or maybe the Association of Italian Canadian writers (AICW), or the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, or Centro Scuola or the Columbus Centre, or, again minimally, even the two local Universities that have Italian Canadian Studies departments: The Mariano A. Elia Chair at York University and the Frank Iacobucci Chair at the University of Toronto. The possibilities are endless. These are only a few of the many places where you will find "real" Canadian accomplishments that are rarely seen on mainstream television. Yet our stories and contributions as Canadians are as heroic and life affirming as those Canadians in Mr. Matheson's world! This is the "real" community that has been hurt by the mobster mystique that is thrust upon us over and over and over again such that these accomplishments are clouded by the hovering negative portrayal that the mainstream is so fond of presenting and making money from. Television is a mirror, and we all want to see ourselves reflected there. It makes us feel like we belong here and are part of the plurality that is Canada. How many years will it take for Canadians of Italian heritage to be Canadians with equal rights in this country such that we too have a right "not to be stereotyped" and instead to be "real people"? Again why are the Italians being singled out?

Perhaps Mr. Matheson should have done a bit more research on just how many times Italians are stereotyped and on the difference between myth and reality and the point is, just as he did on Canada AM, that the myth is being taken as the reality. That is what *The Sopranos* does and that is exactly what Mr. Matheson did on National television. His ignorance proved that his perceptions have been influenced by what he has seen on television. I have no difficulty with Canada AM presenting both sides of a story, even though I do not think that is what took place. What I do have great difficulty with is that a serious issue such as Bigotry is, was belittled because it was challenged by Italian Canadians. He owes Mr. Sciascia his personal apology and owes all Italian Canadians a public apology on National television.

Would this "chuckling" have taken place if Mr. Matheson was interviewing Mr. Kweisi Mfume, the president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, (NAACP) who recently and successfully pressured the networks ABC and NBC into better behaviour in employing and DEPICTING African Americans, even winning signed deals. Perhaps Mr. Matheson is not aware that CBS led the way with producer Steven Bochco, creating a new show called "City of Angels" where the black characters do not act or speak like stereotypes. Or maybe if Mr. Matheson was interviewing the leaders of B'Nai Brith on their reasons for wanting Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* banned from our schools. Our issue is the same. I am tired and fed up with Italians being represented in this same old same old negative stereotypical paradigm of the mobster. The repetition and use of this same paradigm and the unbalanced representation of Italians on the screens has hurt our community in our real lives over and over again. We are also never given any other Italian American / Canadian heroes. When was the last time we were given a lawyer, a judge, a doctor, a professor with an Italian name on a television programme or on a film screen. These are too few and too far between.

Instead we are given a Tony Soprano who takes his daughter to visit colleges, and during that trip, with his bare hands and a wire, strangles a man, and goes back to his daughter like a "good" father, without skipping a beat. Recently I was told by a young Italian Canadian woman, that Tony has a "heart". Is this not incredible he is not faithful, he kills with no thought, he spews profanity and bigotry, he cheats on his wife, he lies to his children and his family, he calls women "f----- refugees, and cunts" and yet he has a "heart". Our young men mimic the characters because they are romanticized and look "cool". The audience is presented an evil character who is given "normal" characteristics such that the audience is manipulated to forget the animal and bigot that Tony Soprano is and instead "sympathize" with him. Then we give it an award! What a terribly dangerous and destructive message!

It is a shame that BCE-CTV refuses to see this continuing use of this untrue ethnic stereotype as the bigotry that it is and the damage that it is causing. If I am to take [the CTV Vice-President's] statement as fact that "we are all the Sopranos". Then I suggest to [the CTV Vice-President], that he must cheat on his wife, spew profanity at his wife and children, he must kill easily and brutally anytime someone gets in his way and he must also call women "cunt" and "f ----- refugees". This is *The Sopranos*, or will it be easy for [the CTV Vice-President] to now state, "oh no, it's the Italians, that are the Sopranos. What a horrendous and bigoted lie that BCE-CTV has tried to give to Canada. This is the Emperor's new clothes! They are blinded by the money they are making. They ignored our appeals and our pain. There are a handful of Italian American's working on *The Sopranos* and profiting from it. There are a number of major Italian organizations that have spoken out on the defamation of this programme in both Canada and the United States. They represent a larger group than the few who get paid to act in the show. Italian Canadians deserve the same respect that the NAACP or B'Nai Brith would have been given. Not more, not less, just equal.

Therefore I am once again writing to the CBSC and appealing to your Council for help in stopping the continuing slander of my Italian heritage. I am resubmitting my original letter of complaint as its contents are still very relevant. I am also submitting a number of articles, letters, responses etc. from both Italian Canadian as well as Italian American sources that I hope will help you to understand that there are many Canadians and Americans who feel as I do ... who are hurt and have been hurt by this overwhelming singular way we are always portrayed. There is no balance. We rarely see any normal Italian characters on mainstream television. We are always negatively stereotyped!

Some of the newspaper articles you will note already are hostile and angry and this hostility and anger is directed at Italian Canadians who are refusing to remain silent in the face of this bigotry and defamation of our Italian culture and heritage. I am asking the Council to look carefully at the four codes that encompass our Broadcast Standards and ensure that such hostile bigotry towards an ethnic group, such horrific violence, sexism, vulgarity, profanity, and human degradation are not what we want to see on our Canadian televisions.

In June of this year, French CBC aired a three part British documentary on the Italian American mafia entitled "Mafia". As well on French Television, a Quebec-based fiction series titled "Omertà" written by Luc Dionne which according to the letter from Lina Allard, the Director of TV Current Affairs programs at Societe Radio-Canada, is "a well scripted thriller [which] has garnered huge ratings on French Television, and CBC Television has bought the rights for future broadcast in late evenings." It is rather interesting that the CBC is still fascinated with the mafia mystique. As I mentioned in my previous letter, I am involved in researching film and video by and on the Italian Canadian community. Part of my research has involved trying to view and get more information on two particular series produced locally by CBC in 1977 and 1979.

I mentioned these series as well in my last letter and they had devastating effects on the Italian community in Canada, again as I already mentioned. What I do however want to add is that after a long search that led me to CBC lawyers in Toronto and then to CBC lawyers in Ottawa I was told there was nothing in the lawsuits that prevented me from accessing these tapes and info. In March I was then referred to [...] the Manager of Visual Resources at CBC, who told me that the tapes were destroyed because of the controversy and they do not exist. Though I have however found information that contradicts [him], he is still willing to go on record that they do not exist in his library at the CBC. Again as mentioned in my previous letter, I have also uncovered information that suggests that these series, and I remind you they were billed as documentaries, and they did have a negative effect on the perceptions of Canadians towards Italians in Canada, as the Gallup Poll showedwell they were more fiction than fact.

Again what is interesting to interject is that the CBC has "destroyed" the tapes of 1977 and 1979, however is still willing to buy and air programming on this same subject in the year 2000.

To continue my list, Global, during July I believe aired its series *Bonanno: A Godfather's Story*. Somewhere on another network another mafia series entitled *Falcone* aired. Last week while *The Sopranos* was airing on BCE-CTV, *The Godfather* and its multiple parts,

were playing on CityTV.

Also, to my shock, recently I have discovered that over a million dollars in funding has been put in place for a six part series, billed as a docu-drama, on the Italian mafia in Canada. This I was told is a collaboration between the History Channel, Telefilm Canada, as well as others that I have yet to discover. This on the heels of the abusive programme *The Sopranos* is even more distressing.

This is history repeating itself. The CBC *Connection* series of 1977 and 1979 and the lawsuits and the damage to the Italian Canadian community, as more fiction than fact was presented. Italian Canadians need to remember these past programmes, as our community faces yet another "unfair" assault.

Our politicians also need to be aware that this is government money being put towards programming about .02% of the community. Has Telefilm Canada also put money aside to produce a series on those that are involved in crime from the Anglo community, the Latin community, the French community, the Jewish community, the Biker gang community, the Arab community, the Asian community, the Black community etc etc.? I hope the answer to that is Yes! If not then this too is BIGOTRY towards Italian Canadians!

This is an overwhelmingly unbalanced and negative representation. The numbers here speak for themselves.

Therefore, as you can see, in the past three months alone, this mythical mafia paradigm has been a constant negative presence, bombarding Canadian viewers over and over and over again. Again, how many mafia movies does it take before we should say Enough!! Other groups are not negatively stereotyped over and over and over again. This has to stop!

For *The Sopranos* Canadians had the "pleasure" of a daily dose of Italian defamation!

Recently the Italics Institute of New York completed a Italian Film Culture study, (information and statistics are attached), from 1994-2000. Since 1928, 1057 films have been made that have included Italian characters. Of these 1057 films, 73% of the time Italians are depicted negatively. 40% of the time Italians are represented as mobsters. 33% of the time Italians are represented as Boors, Bigots, Bimbos, and Buffoons. *The Sopranos* does all of the above!

This show and its contents as I already stated continue to expose me and all Canadians of Italian origin to hatred, hostility, humiliation, ridicule and abuse.

Again in [the CTV Vice-President's] letter to me he states, "Certainly, the characters are Italians, and many of them are criminals." If I was to substitute a few words, "Certainly the characters are Jewish, and many of them are criminals." "Certainly the characters are Blacks, and many of them are heroin addicts." "Certainly the characters are Natives, and many of them are alcoholics." I wonder how willing BCE-CTV would have been to promote and air those programmes in order to compete with the Olympics? Could you imagine a Native scenario where the father of the family is an recovering alcoholic who visits his psychiatrist and tries to deal with his dysfunctional family. It would never have been supported, so why are we continually stereotyped?!

I tried to get an answer from [the CTV Vice-President]; however, he seemed to feel it was not the same thing. He did agree with me however that the billboard advertising for *The Sopranos* that a specialty channel is displaying in Quebec was VULGAR. He was "offended" that those advertisements had been attributed to BCE-CTV. He was "offended"! The advertising and the programme are the same thing and were both created at HBO. Ethnic stereotypes are ethnic stereotypes, for Italians, Blacks, Asians, Jews, or Natives etc. We

no longer teach *The Merchant of Venice* in high schools because of Shylock and the stereotype he presents. The stereotype of the Italian mobster is our Shylock and I want him gone!

On a final note, I want to tell you about my real Italian Canadian family as well as recount a real incident that took place in my professional life that will show you how the myth being taken as real, does cause real hurt and real hostility.

On March 31st of this year, at five in the morning, I was at the Heart Institute in Ottawa with my mother, Amalia, helping her to bathe in preparation for her triple by-pass which was going to take place within hours. We cried and we laughed. My mother is fine today and is recovering beautifully and is back tending her two gardens in Canada: her family and her vegetable garden. She is 73 years old and is a very strong woman. She is also one of the kindest and most generous people that I know. She is always ready to give all that she has, not only to her family but to others as well. Even in the days before her surgery, I spent much of my time with her, and she was busy giving me instructions on what she wanted me to do for her if she did not make it through. All of it centred around the needs of her four children, her grandchildren and her husband. My mother is a very creative person; I am an artist today because of her creativity. As children my mother made so many things for us ... our toys, our clothes, our food. One of my favourite memories is sitting on the floor beneath my mother's sewing machine as she made yet another outfit for one of my dolls. Today she still makes her own bread. She also spends as much time as possible in her garden, which is probably her most favourite place on earth.

Life in Canada, especially in the beginning, for my mother and for all of us, was not easy. She made a life for herself and for all of us inside her home. My mother built a career as a caregiver, first of all raising her own daughters and nieces and nephews, and then bringing into our home children from various cultures and embracing them as her own. The outside world she encountered was not a friendly place. One of the more violent incidents I recall, and this image is still with me today, was of my mother's bleeding leg. She was out on the roof hanging laundry. I was with her. For some reason, rocks were thrown at my mother. One struck her leg and it began to bleed. These rocks were thrown for no other reason than that we were immigrants and we were different. That was one of my first encounters with bigotry and the violence it can lead to. I remember my mother shouting out to those that attacked. She was defending herself as well as her family. However it had its effect. After that incident, as a child, I remember being afraid to leave the house because I too might encounter rocks being thrown at me. In my child's mind, I did not understand what this was all about yet it stayed with me.

My father, Antonio, is 86 years old. Recently he has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. This added to other health issues, also again made us cry and laugh. My father is a wonderful storyteller. This comes from the oral tradition that is Part of my culture. One of my favourite memories is that of all of us sitting around the kitchen table while he would tell us jokes and stories from the "old" country. It seemed like a wonderfully magical place to me, such that I did not understand why my parents left. Of course it was not until years later that I was to better understand the poverty and hunger and devastation in Italy that brought many southern Italians, during the years after WWII, to choose emigration in search of jobs, food and a life.

My father is also a man who loves to read. This too is a quality I inherited from him. He has always believed in education, as many immigrants do who put their faith in it, as they encourage their children to make better lives for themselves. My mother, would probably have become a teacher in Italy, and she also bought us many second hand books, so reading was always encouraged in my home. One of my father's first jobs in Canada was working at the "Grill" restaurant at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa as a busboy/waiter. As you know the Chateau Laurier sits right next to Parliament hill and in those days, the late 50's and 60's, it was the place where the MP's and politicians came to eat their lunch and discuss the issues of the day. My father has some wonderful stories to tell of his encounters with these men of "power". My father loves politics and even to this day in my family it always results in passionate debates. However when my father worked at the Chateau Laurier, I am sure, because of his broken English, he probably could not understand or even participate in any of these discussions

at the restaurant but through some of his stories you could have sensed his excitement as he felt he was somehow connected to all the important decisions being made in Canada. However, his own passionate involvement was reserved for his discussions with his paesani from Italy. Nonetheless my father has some wonderful stories to recount as well as some awful stories to tell of his time there. He tells me that his employer treated the employees very badly. Most of them were immigrants like my father, trying to make their way in a new country. According to my father, his employer was always pushing them to work faster and faster, even calling them derogatory names and insulting all the immigrants that worked there. Some of this was even done out in the dining hall. The politicians who were being served needed to get back to their "more important" work on parliament hill so the servers needed to accommodate their needs. It's interesting how my father does not have any stories to tell of any politicians coming to his defence and helping him with the bigotry that he and his colleagues faced. Instead my father had to work faster, bite his tongue, absorb the insults and serve these politicians their meals and clean up after them. I try to imagine what that kind of humiliation and derision must have done to a man in his forties who was treated so badly. I remember my father's exhaustion when he would come home. Not only was it a physical exhaustion but it was also psychological. Many more things make sense to me today. There was no one to turn to for help at the time. Instead my father, became a little harder, lost a bit more of his self-esteem and felt the shame of what bigotry does to the human soul. He, like my mother, like many other immigrants, suffered his shame and humiliation in silence.

As a teenager, I tried to reject the gift of my Italian heritage that my parents gave me, because of the shame that the outside world brought into my home. I tried to assimilate because I did not want to be violently attacked as my mother had been, nor did I want to be humiliated as my father had been. I too looked on them as the cause of my problems as I too encountered bigotry in the streets, as we were called derogatory names and told to go back where we came from. Instead of rejecting the bigotry, I too tried to deflect it.

Today I recognize and accept the greatest gift that my parents have given me: my Italian culture and heritage. They have passed this to me and entrusted me with its care and nurturing. This letter is my attempt at trying to defend and protect it from its continuing perversion in mainstream media.

We are a good family, not a perfect family, but a good family. We are pretty similar to all the other Italian Canadian families who came to Canada in the second wave of immigration after the war, in order to build new lives and especially to give their children opportunities that could not be had in Italy's south. We, like most families, have had our share of difficulties and disappointments, however we have also had many successes despite the obstacles that have been placed before us. More importantly we are still together. My parents despite what they encountered in Canada, raised four daughters, Maria, Natalina and Rosalba. We are all university educated, and all with professional careers. I have three brother-in-laws, Keith, Sadegh and Tony, one Scottish, one Iranian, and one Italian. They have added different cultural riches and dimensions to our family. I have five nieces and nephews David, Madeline, Iden, Nicholas and Lucia. This letter is being written as much for them as it is for me.

I do not have children of my own, however over the past ten years I have been entrusted, for short periods of time, with the lives of almost 1600 children that belonged to other people. I am proud of the work I have tried to do. It has not been easy to teach these children with all that is happening in our society. However I have cared for, cried with, laughed with and loved to the best of my ability. I know it has not been easy to even make a difference in the lives of these young people, and I know I have made many mistakes, however I am proud of the fact that I have continued to try.

As you know from my original letter, I am presently involved in research on my own particular Italian Canadian culture. It is the results of this research that has pushed me to get involved in this protest, as I know that Italian Canadian artists have been hurt by the bombardment of this untrue ethnic stereotype, also taking it as reality instead of the myth that it is. However it is not only my research that

pushes me forward, but also my own recent and personal experiences with bigotry.

In closing I want to relate an incident that involved a specific bigoted attack on me in my recent professional life, that resulted in my having hostile and abusive comments directed at me. I am sure this "real" incident in my "real" life will show you that the mythical perceptions of all Italians being connected to the mafia does hurt real people.

My last year teaching high school was a particularly productive year, despite the various and devastating changes that education is going through. I was instrumental in initiating a number of new activities both with students, as well as with teachers. One of the events that I am most proud of has to do with an art contest that the City of Ottawa sponsored "Visions of a world free of Racism".

Many of my students submitted artworks with absolutely beautiful visions. Our students won 13 of the top awards and a number of the artworks were framed and now hang in various offices in City Hall.

During the fall of 1998, a couple of colleagues posted, on a Conference internet site, created by our Board and to be used for discussion amongst ourselves, an offensive joke that dealt with the mafia. I pointed out to these two colleagues that I found the joke offensive. They both recognized their error and apologized. Unfortunately it did not end there as a number of other colleagues entered the discussion, most making fun of me and the fact that I should lighten up and not take offense at such a mafia joke because after all Italians and the mafia are one. Many referred to the images they had seen on "television". I would not accept their interpretations and perceptions and stuck to my points of this being an untrue ethnic stereotype and of ethnic joking being inappropriate, for my Italian culture as well as anyone else's. Sadly through the following months, the discussions turned to harassment, both directed at my Italianness and as well at my being a woman who was refusing to be silenced. Though I left the matter of the ethnic joke behind me, feeling that I had made my points, anytime that I posted something, there would however, always be a critical comment made by someone else.

This went on for months and later, sometime in March /April '99 as I continued to participate in other discussions and postings, as was my right to do, eventually the postings became more abusive and hostile and were personally directed at me. I therefore took the next step which was to file a formal complaint, against two colleagues in particular, with our Superintendent. Within minutes of my complaint being filed, action was taken. The two colleagues had their privileges revoked as well as other censures. Our "0" Tolerance policy is very clear. Ethnic joking is inappropriate. Harassment through humiliation, abusive comments, hostility, and belittling because of ethnic origin, gender, etc. is unacceptable. We all have a right to a harassment free workplace and community.

These were educated people that uttered these abusive comments and harassed me. Yet they exhibited the same ignorance that BCE-CTV is exhibiting. This was my "real" life that was affected by the perceptions of this continuing defamation of my heritage in the media. Television and its power have given this message. It was thrust upon me and I refused to accept it. I was humiliated and I refused to accept it. I cannot tell you how difficult those days and weeks were, my hands and body shook each time I turned on my computer to check my mail, fearing another abusive and aggressive message. Others criticized the fact that I complained and posted other messages. It took a few more weeks for everyone to let it go. I found myself looking over my shoulder when I walked to my car and started making sure not to stay at work beyond darkness because I was made to feel fear. I remember that fear, it was the same fear I felt when I was a child and my mother had stones thrown at her. I expected and demanded equal respect and I was told that it was not going to be forthcoming. I had to fight the shame and guilt of feeling that I "caused" the escalation of these attacks because I refused to be silent and refused to be defamed by this untrue ethnic stereotype. I refused to walk away. This was psychological abuse and hostility directed at me that led to my feeling afraid for my personal safety. As you are discovering through these complaints against this offensive show *The Sopranos*, there are others who have been "persecuted by this stigma."

We need your help to stop it.

BCE-CTV has refused to accept their responsibility in choosing to add this “kind” of violent and bigoted programme to Canadian television. *The Sopranos* will not be interpreted by Canadians as a story about the “human condition”. They will, like the 314 stories that came before, connect Italians with organized crime. In *The Sopranos* this connection is brought to a new low as Italians are portrayed as mobsters, bigots, boors, buffoons, and bimbos. *The Sopranos* and the money spent on marketing it in the United States, has already resulted in an increase in the percentage of Americans who connect Italians to organized crime. This connection was established forcefully with *The Godfather*, film in 1972. With all the positive contributions Italians have made in Canada and the United States, this percentage, instead of diminishing, is on the increase, as this untrue ethnic stereotype continues to be used to make money and continues to use real Italian Canadians and Italian Americans as scapegoats. It is one of the last untrue ethnic stereotypes that needs to be tossed into the pile with all the other bigoted and untrue ethnic stereotypes of other groups.

Therefore I write to you in honour and respect for my parents, as well as for my family, as we deal daily with the fragility of life. For all that my parents have given to us, for their hard work and especially for their positive contributions and loyalty to their adopted country Canada.

I write to you in honour and respect for myself and all that I have contributed to this country thus far, both as a teacher and as an artist. I write to you to honour my nieces and nephews and all that they will definitely contribute to Canada. And especially I write to you in honour and respect of my Italian culture and heritage that has been entrusted to me.

I do not believe that any Canadian of Italian heritage deserves to feel the shame, hostility or humiliation that this wall of stereotype has caused and will continue to cause if it is not challenged. I also know, like my parents of years ago, that even today, the humiliation and shame and damage that this untrue ethnic stereotype continues to throw on Canadians of Italian heritage, is often dealt with in silence. I try not to live my life in fear, however even now I am afraid as I write this letter as the painful memories of my recent experience resurface.

I want my rights respected and I want my ethnic heritage to be respected equally as that of other groups, no more, no less. I am a Canadian of Italian heritage. As it is entrenched in our *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, my ethnic heritage is protected. I look forward to the actions that will put meaning to those words.

II. Broadcaster’s Response

The broadcaster’s reply to the above complaints varied but included some or all of the following paragraphs. The broadcaster replied on September 26, October 12 and October 23, 2000 with the following:

CTV is in receipt of your communication with the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC). Thank you for taking the time to express your concerns regarding our broadcast of *The Sopranos*.

CTV broadcast *The Sopranos* because it is an excellent, award winning, critically acclaimed drama that we see as an imaginative story about families and the “human condition.” Certainly the characters are Italian, and many of them are criminals. But the genius of the series

is that it draws the universal out of the particular so we see some of the Sopranos' life in all our lives.

CTV recognizes that *The Sopranos* is controversial among people of Italian background. Some disapprove of the program. Others, including the show's creator and its Italian cast members do not.

We do respect your opinion. But we agree with those critics who say *The Sopranos* is an excellent drama and respect it for its artistry. It has earned these laurels precisely because it is not stereotypical. We cannot censor this drama because some people believe, however sincerely, that the program sends messages they abhor.

The Sopranos does contain violence, sexual scenes and coarse language. To alert viewers, we ran on-air advertising spots strongly advising viewer discretion. We also ran an advisory at the top of the program, as well as after the first commercial break. The following was the exact wording of the advisory:

This program is not intended for children. It contains scenes of violence, extremely coarse language and nudity. Some adults may be offended by the content. Viewer discretion is strongly advised.

I understand your reaction to the content of *The Sopranos* but we cannot censor this program because some people believe, however sincerely and strongly, that it contains messages inappropriate for television viewing. There are many viewers who have expressed that they would have been equally disappointed if we had edited the series.

Although we'd regret losing you as a viewer for this show, we understand and respect your right not to watch if you find the program offensive. For your viewing information, *The Sopranos* will be on CTV at 10PM every night except Saturdays for two straight weeks. After 9 p.m. is considered by the industry and the CRTC to be adult viewing time. We hope you will return to CTV after its conclusion.

Thank you again for taking the time to express your concerns. Viewer reactions are always valued.

III. Additional Correspondence

The ruling request of October 27, 2000 for the complaint in CBSC file 00/01-0198 was accompanied by the following letter:

To whom it may concern,

I'm sorry. I cannot accept the explanation that CTV gave me concerning the coarse, demoralizing show, *The Sopranos*.

I don't care if *The Sopranos* won a billion awards. The show won awards in the states. This is Canada. We have a mind of our own. Not only that, explaining to me that the show would be ruined if

they bleeped the “F” word out is totally ridiculous. The advisory that CTV ran beforehand means nothing to me; and, if they really knew their audiences, CTV would know that an advisory will not stop people from watching a show that might harm them. It is the responsibility of the station to monitor what they feed their viewers. Radio stations have to follow these guidelines. A broadcaster would be fired if he said the “F” word on air -- a newscaster on CTV news would be fired as well for saying the “F” word. What is going on here?

In other words, it’s okay for CTV to allow a show like *The Sopranos* on the air because it depicts real life. Well, let’s let it all out of the bag then. Show other criminal acts like “the life of a pedophile” - - that’s real life. Or let’s see a rape in progress. It happens all the time. Where will the line be drawn? Who’s going to be the one to *stand* against such filth? Does it really come down to ratings and how much money CTV can make?

The CBSC also received the following reply dated October 28, 2000 from the complainant in CBSC file 00/01-0174:

Thank you for your letter, dated October 23, 2000 regarding my letter on *The Sopranos*. In your letter you write, “we cannot censor this program” and “there are many viewers who have expressed that they would have been equally disappointed if we had edited the piece”. What about us, you do not mind to disappoint us, by not having edited the piece? Us Christians, who are offended that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is used in vain?

When I called CTV, someone told me that you had received letters and calls, regarding *The Sopranos*, 5 to 1 in favour of airing season two and three. By your own definition, we are a minority, otherwise you would have disappointed the viewers in favour of *The Sopranos*, instead of us.

Many of your own programs at CTV tell us that it is an offence today in Canada to “DISCRIMINATE”, to “RIDICULE”, to make “FUN OF”, or to “SLANDER” minorities. You are therefore going against your own code of “ETHICS” if you allow the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to be misused, or made fun of, or used as a profanity, and dismiss this as “FREEDOM OF SPEECH”, since we are a minority.

In one scene of *The Sopranos* they use the F... word in front of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. All in the name of “FREEDOM OF SPEECH”. May God forgive us. What if *The Sopranos* had put this F... word in front of Mohammed, would you have disappointed your viewers, and not edited the piece? Of course you would have to have it edited, because now it is not more “FREEDOM OF SPEECH”, but “SLANDER”, and you would not dare to have this aired on any program, without risking to have CTV shut down permanently.

Is it not amazing how it is “FREEDOM OF SPEECH” when the name of our Lord Jesus Christ has been blasphemed against, and “SLANDER” when the same blaspheme is used against the name of Mohammed.

Also if *The Sopranos* had put the F... word in front of the name of a gay person, would you have disappointed your viewers, and have it edited? Again, of course you had it edited, because it is again “SLANDER”, and if aired you would have a law suit on your hands. So it seems, that we have double standards here, and I expect an apology, for the blaspheme against my saviour Jesus Christ.

Finally, the following reply dated November 2, 2000 accompanied the ruling request sent to the CBSC by the complainant of CBSC file 00/01-0156:

I understand, by reading the response to other complaints sent to the CBSC, that shows shown after 9pm can include nudity, violence and obscene and profane language. I cannot agree with the broadcaster's response that because other people want and like to see and hear obscenity in Canada that the broadcaster cannot censor the program. I would like to see the standards set for broadcasters to reflect that of the majority of Canadians who do not want to see and hear shows like this one filled with obscenity and profanity. Thank you for considering my complaint.