

BEFORE THE BROADCASTING STANDARDS AUTHORITY

Decision No: 1997-132

Dated the 16th day of October 1997

IN THE MATTER of the Broadcasting Act 1989

AND

IN THE MATTER of a complaint by

D L HURNDELL

of Auckland

Broadcaster

TV3 NETWORK SERVICES

LIMITED

S R Maling Chairperson

L M Loates

R McLeod

J Withers

DECISION

Summary

The character Razzo in the joke segment of *Off The Planet* said: "Roses are red, violets are blue, I'm a schizophrenic, and so am I". The episode of the programme complained about was broadcast on TV3 at 5.30pm on 26 June 1997.

Mr D L Hurndell complained to TV3 Network Services Limited that the joke was insensitive, in bad taste and incorrect. Schizophrenia, he wrote, was not a split personality problem as the joke portrayed, but a serious mental illness affecting many people. He also considered that the item was inappropriate for children who might have been watching.

In response, TV3 maintained that the joke was mild-mannered and played within an established joke segment. There was no possibility, it added, that the comments made by "Razzo" would be accepted as fact and it declined to uphold the complaint.

Dissatisfied with TV3's decision, Mr Hurndell referred the complaint to the Broadcasting Standards Authority under s.8(1)(a) of the Broadcasting Act 1989.

For the reasons given below, the Authority declines to uphold the complaint.



Decision

The members of the Authority have viewed the item complained about and have read the correspondence (summarised in the Appendix). On this occasion, the Authority determines the complaint without a formal hearing.

An episode in the series *Off the Planet*, broadcast on TV3 on 26 June 1997 at 5.30pm, featured the character Razzo at the end of the programme, saying as a joke: "Razzo to the big cheese. Roses are red, violets are blue, I'm a schizophrenic and so am I."

Mr Hurndell complained to TV3 that the joke was insensitive and wrong. He explained that schizophrenia was not a split personality disorder as the joke portrayed, but a very serious mental illness which affected many people. Making jokes about the illness was in bad taste, he argued, especially when young children would be the main audience.

TV3 considered the complaint under standards G2 and G12 of the Television Code of Broadcasting Practice. These require broadcasters:

- G2** To take into consideration currently accepted norms of decency and taste in language and behaviour, bearing in mind the context in which any language or behaviour occurs.
- G12** To be mindful of the effect any programme may have on children during their normally accepted viewing times.

TV3 in declining to uphold the complaint advised that it was obvious that the joke was intended as a gag and was not reality. Moreover, it was broadcast in the normal joke segment of the programme. It considered the joke to be mild-mannered and to contain no material harmful to a child viewer.

When complaining to the Authority, Mr Hurndell reiterated his concern that the programme treated illness as a joke, and he was particularly concerned that this occurred during a children's programme.

The Authority acknowledges Mr Hurndell's concerns. However, it is unable to uphold a breach of either standard G2 or G12. Its view is that there was no intention in the broadcast to denigrate or offend schizophrenia sufferers. The Authority considers that the joke has to be seen in its context, and it agrees with TV3 that it did not contain material harmful to children who may have been watching at that time.

For the reasons above, the Authority declines to uphold the complaint

Signed for and on behalf of the Authority



Sam Maling
Chairperson
 16 October 1997



Appendix

Mr Hurndell's Complaint to TV3 Network Services Ltd - 27 June 1997

D L Hurndell of Auckland complained to TV3 Network Services Limited about a joke told in the episode of the series *Off The Planet* which was broadcast on TV3 on 26 June 1997 at 5.30pm. The joke stated: "Razzo to the big cheese. Roses are red, violets are blue, I'm a schizophrenic, and so am I."

Mr Hurndell complained that the joke was insensitive and wrong, stating:

This programme is a quiz show and the participants have to have their facts correct so I feel the producers should have their facts right as well. Schizophrenia is not split personality as this joke portrayed but is a very serious mental illness which affects quite a few people. I feel that jokes about any illness whether it be cancer, heart disease, or whatever are in bad taste and should not be portrayed anywhere, especially where children are the main audience.

TV3's Response to the Formal Complaint - 25 July 1997

TV3 considered the complaint under standards G2 and G12 of the Television Code of Broadcasting Practice.

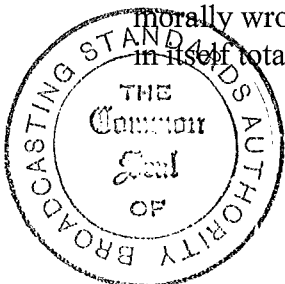
In reference to standard G2, TV3 reported that the joke was made in the context of an established joke segment within the programme. It advised that it was obvious that the comments made by "Razzo" were intended as a gag, and were not reality. As the joke was mild mannered and contained no indecent swear words or themes, it declined to uphold the complaint as a breach of standard G2

In respect of standard G12, TV3 did not consider that the joke contained any material which was harmful to a child viewer. Razzo's own demeanour (as an unrealistic looking green alien), it maintained, ensured that what he said would not be taken seriously. It declined to uphold the complaint.

Mr Hurndell's Referral to the Authority - 7 August 1997

Dissatisfied with TV3's response, Mr Hurndell referred the complaint to the Broadcasting Standards Authority under s.8(1)(a) of the Broadcasting Act 1989.

In relation to standard G2, Mr Hurndell commented that to make fun of any illness is morally wrong and indecent, and to portray schizophrenia as a "split personality" was in itself totally wrong.



In relation to standard G12, Mr Hurdell advised first, that children do take things seriously and would believe Razzo's comments, and secondly, to treat an illness as a joke meant that children would also treat that particular illness as a joke.

TV3's Response to the Authority - 18 September 1997

TV3 advised that it did not wish to comment further.

