

The particulars of the complaint, as required in the formal complaint form, were stated in a letter dated 19 August 1985, addressed to the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand and filed in support of the complaint made to this Tribunal. In that letter Miss Bartlett stated:

"The programme purported to deal with the attitude and experience of young people who claimed to be lesbians and gay males. This programme was a blatant misuse and exploitation of young people to support the attitudes of the homosexual community who are prepared to use any media to justify their perverted life style.

In the programme, school children were portrayed as expressing their preferences for friendship and companionship of persons of their own sex, and apparently loudly claiming therefore to be 'gay', lesbians and homosexual males. It is quite normal for children before pubertal change to prefer companionship and friendship with persons of their own sex. This is neither lesbianism in females nor homosexuality in males.

It is well known that boys up to the age of 15 or 16 not only prefer male friends, but are ridiculed by their peers if they show undue interest in girls. This is normal and natural.

By the same process, girls will prefer female friendship and companionship until past their commencement of menstruation. To portray school girls on network television claiming they were lesbians because they had always preferred girl companions, is a travesty of the true situation. What they were expressing is normal and natural preferences. The programme was therefore biased against the truth, claiming perversion when any mature person with a knowledge of human development would have quickly pointed out that what these children were saying, presumably voluntarily, was not correct, but was an expression of normal experience. To make it worse, there were obviously some mature homosexual persons introduced into the programme to provide some measure of credibility.

There was no contrary view included in the programme to show up the obvious distortion of the whole programme for what it was—a misuse of innocent children to support the perverted practices of the homosexual community."

The society had first complained to the Broadcasting corporation who had not upheld their complaint. The complaint had then been made to the Tribunal. It was referred to the corporation who replied at some length, outlining the purpose of the programme and the careful consideration given to it by the producer and director of the programme.

The Tribunal, including the co-opted members, watched a video tape of the programme and considered the arguments put by both parties.

At the beginning of the programme it was made clear that the purpose of the programme was to present the feelings and views of young people who were "Growing Up Gay in Godzone". The comment was made that although there had been much public debate of what was undoubtedly a controversial issue, the feelings of people in this situation had been ignored.

The BCNZ supplied a copy of the entry in the *Listener* outlining the programme:

"The issue of homosexual law reform has stirred up strong emotions and the arguments on both sides have been thoroughly aired. But we are not just talking about an issue—we are talking about people, and their voices have been lost in the debate. Michael talks to some young New Zealanders about their lives and hopes and what it is like Growing Up Gay in Godzone."

The BCNZ also said in its letter of 23 December 1985 that:

"*Viewfinder* is a current issues programme for young adults. Its purpose is journalistic—not didactic. Its brief is to look at events of topical interest from the perspective of its target audience."

The Tribunal is of the view that the programme was aimed at expressing the views of young people who regard themselves as gay. It felt that the approach taken was to explore the feelings of these people and that the programme was neither pro nor anti homosexual debate, and therefore the Tribunal finds that there was no element of bias in the programme in the way suggested by the complainant.

The society appears to hold the view that it is not possible to present a programme that interviews people on their own terms. Just because the people interviewed are homosexuals does not mean that heterosexuals have to appear in the same programme. These people were interviewed about their feelings and such expression is valid in itself.

The society suggested that the programme was "a blatant misuse and exploitation of young people to support the attitudes of the homosexual community who are prepared to use any media to justify their perverted life style". In fact no suggestion at all was made in the programme that homosexuality was a good thing.

The society also alleged that the programme was a "misuse of innocent children to support the perverted practices of the homosexual community". The BCNZ pointed out that these "children" were aged between 15 and 19 and that all took part only after careful explanation of the possible consequences of appearing on television. The 15 year old's parents not only consented to her participation, but took part themselves. We wonder whether any of the participants, or indeed any one of that age, would accept the term "children" and feel that the society's description is hardly fair.

The society's view was the programme was biased in two ways:

1. It was biased against the truth because any one with a knowledge of human development would know that what these children were saying was an expression of normal experience.
2. Because it made no reference to the fact that young persons apparently submitting preferences to sexual relations with members of the same sex can be counselled and influenced away from such behaviour.

The society's approach to human development is not the only one. There are arguments and evidence that environmental factors are strong influences and some argue that what the society views as normal and natural may not necessarily be so.

Also controversial is the society's view that people can be counselled away from such behaviour. It is now frequently argued that sexual development is fixed very early in life, perhaps by the age of 2. This is long before any one can be counselled away from anything.

The programme showed mainly homosexuals who were happy with their lifestyle. People who were comfortable with themselves and confident of the rightness of their position for them. Undoubtedly it is not like that for many.

It also may be an aspect that is difficult to present. Those who are not happy would not be likely to stand up and say so. The programme emphasised supportive families and friends but people who had thrown their children out, or perhaps even those who had rejected friends, would not easily stand up and say so. However the programme could of course have made reference to the fact that the programme shows how it is for some but that it may be different for others.

This leads us to point out that the visual and aural messages in this programme are very different. The overall impression a casual viewer could be left with was of homosexuals who had themselves and their situations fairly well sorted, who were happy, smiling, confident. They were seen that way. However several participants were saying that things were not really quite so good. They spoke of family pressure, of praying that they would change, of not wanting to be the way they were. A particular example would be the impression the programme gave about parents of homosexual youngsters. There was some time devoted to the parents of a 15 year old girl who were very supportive of her and there were verbal comments from 3 of the young men about the lack of support that they had received from their parents. There was no visual image of unsupportive parents and the overall impression was of caring support for the children. The visual image was much stronger than the aural one.

The Tribunal is of the view that this programme, which handled a difficult subject, was done with sensitivity and perception. The programme explored the feelings of the participants. It raised questions about the topic and did not try to say "this is the right way . . .". It was journalistic and not didactic in approach.

The society considered that a less-biased programme to offset the damage likely to have been done to the large number of young persons who viewed the programme should be shown. The Tribunal is of the view that this programme would not be likely to have done damage to young persons who have viewed it.

It was sensitively presented and shown at a time when the very young would be unlikely to be watching. Also it was presented in a format which did not attempt to sensationalise and for that reason might not have held the attention of very young people for the full half hour anyway.

The Tribunal is not satisfied that the programme required a statement of other views on homosexuality. It embarked on and confined itself to some actual experiences at first hand. It did not require "balancing" material as the programme identified some of the disadvantages experienced by the participants. The issues raised by the society were outside the ambit of the programme.

In view of the publicity on television and elsewhere arising from the debate on homosexual law reform, the Tribunal does not find any need for other viewpoints to be presented on these issues.