

2016-27: Andrew Pak vs Toronto Star

For immediate release

The National NewsMedia Council has dismissed a complaint about offensive language in a May 16, 2016, Toronto Star column, “Gunning down pregnant mom a new horror on killing street: DiManno”.

Complainant Andrew Pak objected to columnist Rosie DiManno’s use of the word “dick” in reference to a Toronto police detective, saying he knows the meaning of the slang term but thinks the majority of readers would not. The complainant says that to the unsuspecting reader, the word is “demeaning” about police. The complainant feels the paper “dislikes police” and should be more conscious of its words.

The paper’s public editor responded by saying the Oxford Canadian dictionary defines "dick" as slang for detective. She said that as a slang term, it is not considered derogatory, nor did the writer intend it to be demeaning to police. She also referred to the Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang, noting 19th century English incorporated Romany words, including the word "dik," meaning "to look, to see."

The paper noted that as an opinion writer with wide latitude to express her own views and choose her own words, the columnist has considerable freedom to express her views in terms that some might find offensive.

The NewsMedia Council found the column focuses on shooting deaths in a neighbourhood that has become known for gun violence. In particular, it looks at the shooting of an apparently innocent pregnant mother and at public response to violent crime. The word “dick” was used to describe a homicide officer “pleading for information” in the face of general public indifference.

In dismissing the complaint, the NewsMedia Council found use of the somewhat dated slang word is not a breach of journalistic standards in the bluntly descriptive style of the column. Reading the word as demeaning is not reasonable given the overall tone of the column.