
**CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL
NATIONAL SPECIALTY SERVICES PANEL**

Family Channel re two episodes of the *Amanda Show*

(CBSC Decision 03/04-0486 and -0792)

Decided May 11, 2004

R. Cohen (Chair), S. Crawford (Vice-Chair - Industry) H. Pawley (Vice-Chair - Public), R. Deverell, M. Hogarth, V. Morrissette and P. O'Neill

THE FACTS

The *Amanda Show*, a satirical sketch comedy targeting a younger audience, stars Amanda Bynes, who plays different characters in each sketch. In a recurring segment called the "Girls' Room", Amanda plays the role of Amber, the leader of a small clique of girls, who mistakenly believe themselves both important and popular. The extent to which their self-assessment is unrealistic may even be judged by the fact that Amber and her pals host the "Girls' Room" show from the girls' *washroom*. Amber is surrounded by her followers, each of whom has a distinctive personality (Sheila is the aggressive person in the group, Tammy is the Southern belle, and Debbie is the "not-too-bright" girl).

In the episode which aired on Saturday, December 6, 2003 at 8:30 am, the Girls' Room sketch took place on Prom night. As their first guest, Amber and her entourage received the principal, Mr. Hozmatt. When he entered the Girls' Room, Amber asked him whether she had won the title of "Prom Queen". He informed her that the students had yet to vote and asked that the cameramen and the girls leave the room. Displeased with his request, Amber called Sheila who grabbed the principal by the arms as if they were dancing, telling him that "it's a new dance called the Flush." She then guided him to the washroom cubicle where she proceeded, it was implied, to place his head in the toilet bowl and flush. When next seen leaving the cubicle, the principal had a wet head of hair.

Shortly thereafter, two girls came into the room, screaming that the most popular boy, Jeremy, had been elected "Prom King". At Amber's request, Sheila grabbed

him for an interview in the Girls' Room. Once he was in the room, Amber interviewed him and prepared to dance with him on the apparent assumption that she was going to be the "Prom Queen". A moment later, two girls announced that Danielle Spencer had been crowned the "Prom Queen". Amber arranged that Danielle be brought into the Girls' Room. After some catty dialogue, Danielle prepared to leave to give her acceptance speech. On Amber's signal, Sheila grabbed Danielle into a cubicle for a "Flush for one" and came out holding the tiara that had been on Danielle's head to give it to Amber. Amber, freshly content, asked Jeremy to dance with her, threatening the flush remedy in the event of refusal. The sketch ended by the girls' reintroducing themselves with Sheila sneaking out from behind the cubicle's door to say: "I'm flushing Danielle Spencer's head". In the closing master shot, one could see the arm of Danielle Spencer waving to the audience from the cubicle.

In the second challenged episode, that of Friday, January 30, 2004 at 6:00 pm, a parallel plot involved a campaign for school president and another "dramatic" opportunity for Amber to impose her will by the flushing technique.

The Complaint about the First Episode

The complainant registered her concerns directly with the Family Channel on December 27, 2003. She said in part (the full text of all the correspondence can be found in the Appendix):

The episode was about the Prom at Amanda's high school and they were staging their live TV show in the ladies bathroom. During this skit, the prom queen was announced. When it wasn't Amanda, she had her "helpers" go get her [*sic*] and drag her in the bathroom. They then proceeded to flush her head in the toilet.

This is very disturbing. My son and daughter are both 9 years old and have to deal with bullying at school. The thought that flushing a fellow student's head down a toilet is funny is NOT the right message to be sending to our children.

Furthermore showing Amanda hurting another student because she didn't get the Prom Queen does not teach our children the proper morals.

Bullying is a serious issue, many children are hurt emotionally and physically, some have even been killed.

The complainant then forwarded the original letter to the CBSC on Sunday, January 11. By the time the CBSC attempted to contact the broadcaster three days later, the logger tapes of the program had been recycled. (In the normal course, the broadcaster's obligation to retain the tapes of a December 6 show would expire on the following January 3.) On January 14, after being informed of the unavailability of the tapes, and commenting on that in her e-mail to the CBSC, the complainant referred to the substantive issue of concern to her.

What I am seriously concerned with is the message that show sent to children. Bullying has taken on serious consequences, the scene depicted unsafe and potentially dangerous behaviour, both physically and emotionally. It was inappropriate for viewing by children who might be tempted to emulate this behaviour, and finally the scene was demeaning and was encouraging violent behaviour.

In any event, the broadcaster was able to provide the CBSC with a screener tape so that the Council could adjudicate the matter (a screener tape contains the program content only, without the interstitial elements, such as viewer advisories, classification icons, commercials, bumpers and so on. On January 16, the Vice President and General Manager of Family Channel replied in part as follows:

As you know, *The Amanda Show* is a satirical sketch comedy series targeted to children aged eight and up. The Girls' Room sketch you refer to in your e-mail is intended to be satirical and irreverent, and contains socially relevant, age appropriate humour that many children respond to and enjoy. The Girls' Room sketch pokes fun at the type of social and physical bullying many young people are exposed to, and it does so in an exaggerated, irreverent and satirical manner without ever actually depicting violent or harmful behaviour. Many television research studies have shown that children are able to discriminate between humour and more serious or dramatic content when watching television programming, and we feel that our viewers understand the comedic intent of this particular segment. The Girls' Room characters are satirical examples of girls who engage in bullying behaviour, and their actions are not in any way promoted as admirable or worthwhile. These characters are portrayed in a very unflattering manner that does not encourage or promote bullying behaviour, and we feel that viewers will recognize these characters as exaggerations of the bullies they may have encountered at one time or another. But, we doubt that our viewers would wish to emulate these bullies, since they are in no way appealing characters.

After a thorough internal review and discussion, we reaffirm our opinion of the scene. No inappropriate content is contained in this sketch and we feel it is suitable for our service, although we recognize that this type of satire does not appeal to everyone.

We do understand how serious an issue bullying is for young people. Since May 2002, Family has been a leading charitable sponsor of Bullying.org Canada, the non-profit organization that operates www.bullying.org, a Canadian Web site where kids and their caregivers can safely share their bullying experiences online and discuss anti-bullying resources. Last November, Family launched Bullying Awareness Week in partnership with www.bullying.org. Since November, Family has been airing two anti-bullying public service announcements on the network numerous times each day: a Swedish-produced spot entitled "Red Head," and another spot called "Take the Pledge," which features an anti-bullying pledge that young people can take online. Hopefully you have had a chance to view these spots on Family, and to review our anti-bullying area at www.family.ca. Family has made a long-term commitment to support the bullying issue, and we will continue to work with www.bullying.org to develop new anti-bullying initiatives in the coming year.

To provide you with further information on how we program our network, each program aired on Family undergoes an internal screening process and review by our programming department to ensure it is suitable for viewing according to our

strict programming standards. In cases where a program does not meet our standards and codes, we either choose not to air the program or we edit the program to comply with our standards. While we aim to provide high quality, entertaining programming for all members of the family according to the preferences of different age groups, not all of our programs will appeal to every viewer.

The complainant responded to this communication in the following way:

Bullying has taken on serious consequences, the scene depicted unsafe and potentially dangerous behaviour, both physically and emotionally. It was inappropriate for viewing by children who might be tempted to emulate this behaviour, and finally the scene was demeaning and was encouraging violent behaviour.

The Family Channel replied saying "The Girl's Room characters are satirical examples of girls who engage in bullying behaviour, and their actions are not in any way promoted as admirable or worthwhile." I am not happy with this reply – both my children were laughing at the episode and thought the prom queen was the "feeb" and thought it was cool what they were doing. I am uncomfortable thinking that we can portray bullying as long as it's satire.

The Complaint about the Second Episode

On February 12, having seen another episode with a similar theme, the complainant wrote again. She said in part:

On Friday January 30th - (6:00 pm) another Amanda Show episode aired depicting the same type of bullying. This time, it was regarding student elections, and they flushed kids [*sic*] heads in the toilets to convince them to vote for them.

I find this very disturbing – two times in two months, they have used this form of violence as a solution. My son is a victim of bullying at his school, and as we try to instil what's right and wrong in our children, it makes me sick that such a good channel as Family Channel would continue to show this.

I do not agree with Family Channel's explanation the first time this type of violence was displayed: "...we doubt that our viewers would wish to emulate these bullies, since they are in no way appealing characters." They are the main characters of the Amanda Show ... of course children will emulate them. I watched my kids watch these events, they think it's funny.

They also say "The Girls' Room sketch pokes fun at the type of social and physical bullying many young people are exposed to" – pokes fun? There is nothing funny about having your head flushed in a toilet, or being forced to do something against your wishes.

In specific reference to the January 30th episode (and its predecessor) I would also like to bring up the CAB Violence Code 2.0 Children's programming in particular:

2.1 As provided below, programming for children requires particular caution in the depiction of violence; very little violence, either physical, verbal or emotional shall be portrayed in children's programming.

2.5 Programming for children shall deal carefully with themes which could invite children to imitate acts which they see on screen.

As you can see, this episode goes against both of these codes—even the statement: “violence must not be shown as a preferred way of solving problems” – this skit showed them flushing kids heads in order to get votes.

I am not a lawyer; I am just a mother having to deal with bullying too close to home. Please don't poke fun at these victims. It's this type of thinking that lets bullying remain part of what's happening in our schools.

On February 26, the Vice President and General Manager of the Family Channel responded to the second complaint in the following terms:

We agree with you that bullying is not to be tolerated, and we would take swift action if any programming on our service encouraged children to be cruel to one another. However, after an internal review and discussion of the additional episode you have identified, we have come to the same conclusion we did with the first program, namely these segments do not violate any of the broadcast standards and codes we abide by, including the CAB's Violence Code. The Girls' Room sketches depict very little, if any, violence whether physical, verbal, or emotional. Violence is not the central theme, and we believe nothing contained in these short scenes could reasonably be considered to invite children to imitate dangerous acts they see on screen. Nor do the sketches contain realistic scenes of violence which minimize the effects of truly violent acts.

There are many ways to communicate the fact that bullying behaviour is negative and undesirable, and the Girls' Room sketches do so in a satirical and comedic manner. We believe that our viewers understand the comedic intent of these particular sketches and appreciate the humour in its outrageous characters and premise. The girls host a talk show in the school washroom, which demonstrates how unrealistic and removed from reality the sketch is.

We don't think our viewers would wish to emulate these negative characters, since they are not portrayed in a favourable manner that might make their behaviour seem appealing or admirable to viewers. Indeed, these girls have no dates for their proms, hang out in the public washroom and seem to have no meaningful friendships or interests in their lives.

Furthermore, the specific Girls' Room characters are antagonists who do not appear in any other segment of The Amanda Show. You describe the character played by the show's star Amanda Bynes as the "main character" of the Amanda Show, but in fact The Girls' Room is simply a short, infrequent comedy sketch, showcasing the comedic talents of Amanda Bynes and her co-stars. These are not lead characters in an episodic series. Unlike a regular television series, a comedy sketch by its nature does not allow for plot or character development. Nor is the purpose of a comedy sketch to educate, inform or caution the viewer.

The broadcaster maintained a consistent position on the issue of concern in its second response; since the complainant objected to the substance of the first

response, the CBSC considered that dissatisfaction as an equivalent to a Ruling Request (although not in the customary format) regarding both episodes of the show.

THE DECISION

The National Specialty Services Panel considered the complaint under the following provisions of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' (CAB) *Voluntary Code Regarding Violence in Television Programming*:

CAB Violence Code, Article 2.0 – Children's Programming

(Children refers to persons under 12 years of age)

- 2.1 As provided below, programming for children requires particular caution in the depiction of violence; very little violence, either physical, verbal or emotional shall be portrayed in children's programming.
- 2.2 In children's programming portrayed by real-life characters, violence shall only be portrayed when it is essential to the development of character and plot.
- 2.3 Animated programming for children, while accepted as a stylized form of storytelling which can contain non-realistic violence, shall not have violence as its central theme, and shall not invite dangerous imitation.
- 2.4 Programming for children shall deal carefully with themes which could threaten their sense of security, when portraying, for example; domestic conflict, the death of parents or close relatives, or the death or injury of their pets, street crime or the use of drugs.
- 2.5 Programming for children shall deal carefully with themes which could invite children to imitate acts which they see on screen, such as the use of plastic bags as toys, use of matches, the use of dangerous household products as playthings, or dangerous physical acts such as climbing apartment balconies or rooftops.
- 2.6 Programming for children shall not contain realistic scenes of violence which create the impression that violence is the preferred way, or the only method to resolve conflict between individuals.
- 2.7 Programming for children shall not contain realistic scenes of violence which minimize or gloss over the effects of violent acts. Any realistic depictions of violence shall portray, in human terms, the consequences of that violence to its victims and its perpetrators.
- 2.8 Programming for children shall not contain frightening or otherwise excessive special effects not required by the storyline.

CAB Violence Code, Article 4.0 – Classification System

C8 (Children over 8 years)

Descriptive

This classification is applied to children's programming that is generally considered acceptable for youngsters 8 years and over to view on their own. It is suggested that a parent/guardian co-view programming assigned this classification with younger children under the age of 8.

Programming with this designation adheres to the provisions of the Children's Section of the *CAB Voluntary Code on Violence*. These include not portraying violence as the preferred, acceptable, or only way to resolve conflict; or encouraging children to imitate dangerous acts which they may see on the screen.

Programming within this classification might deal with themes which could be unsuitable for younger children. References to any such controversial themes shall be discreet and sensitive to the 8-12 year age range of this viewing group.

Violence Guidelines

Any realistic depictions will be infrequent, discreet, of low intensity, and shall portray the consequences of violence.

Violence portrayed must be within the context of the storyline or character development.

Might include mild physical violence, comedic violence, comic horror, special effects; fantasy, supernatural, or animated violence.

Other Content Guidelines

Language: no profanity

Might have infrequent use of language which may be considered by some to be socially offensive or discriminatory, and then only if employed within the context of the storyline or character development

Sex/Nudity: none

The National Panel Adjudicators viewed a tape of the episodes of the *Amanda Show* in question and reviewed all of the correspondence. The Panel concludes that neither of the broadcasts is in breach of any of the provisions of the Children's Programming article; however, the failure to supply an on-screen ratings icon does constitute a breach of Article 4 of the *CAB Violence Code*.

Children's Programming?

The broadcaster's Vice President and General Manager has written in the first of his letters to the complainant that the program is "targeted to children aged eight and up". On the basis of the two episodes the Panel has reviewed, it considers that that assessment is appropriate. In *CTV re Power Rangers Wild Force* (CBSC Decision 02/03-0260, May 2, 2003), the National Conventional Television Panel said that

programming intended for children [...] is programming *designed for* children. It

is not simply programming *which they can watch* without injury to their sensibilities; it is programming which is tailor-made for them by virtue of its simplicity of plot, theme, language level, characters, accompanying music, production design, costumes and so on. It is not simply programming which parents believe their children can tolerate; it is programming intended to be *appealing* to them and, likely, solely to them. It may not always be definable in scientific or quantitative terms; it will, however, generally be understood by programmers and parents as palpably oriented towards children.

By its nature and on the basis of that definition, the *Amanda Show* is clearly intended for children. The Panel accepts that, in the area of children's programming, its themes place it in the over 8 (but under 12) category. Consequently, this means that the provisions of the Children's Programming article of the *CAB Violence Code* are applicable to the *Amanda Show*.

The foregoing categorization of the programming also means that the broadcaster was obliged to include the C8 classification icon at the beginning of each episode. While the fact that the logger tape for the first episode had been recycled meant that, working only from a screener tape, the CBSC was unable to assess whether the icon had been displayed on-screen, there was no doubt with respect to the second episode. No ratings icon was present. This constitutes a breach of the requirements of the AGVOT (Action Group on Violence on Television) rating system, as rooted in Article 4 of the *CAB Violence Code*.

Bullying and the Children's Programming Provisions

The Panel distinguishes between the issue of bullying in society and what was shown as a part of the plots of the two *Amanda* episodes. There was, in the Panel's view, a kind of self-deprecating, spoofing nature to the flushing actions in the two episodes. In the first place, there was in fact *no* violence. There was not even any genuinely aggressive behaviour. Those who were brought into the toilet cubicles were not dragged or coerced. They went willingly. Second, they did not appear, in the majority of cases, to be "bully-able" (to coin a term) members of the school society. They were the school principal, the Prom Queen, (under threat) the Prom King, and, in only one case, an ordinary student. Third, the incidents were presented lightheartedly, rather than threateningly, and, in the first episode, one could actually see the Danielle Spencer character waving over the top of the toilet cubicle immediately following the scene. Finally, for these purposes, it would be fair to observe that Amber and "the girls" were not portrayed with any degree of approval or admiration. In other words, there was no suggestion whatsoever that their pushy tactics ought to be emulated or even looked-up to.

In the end, the Panel does not equate the two *Amanda* episodes to the horrible social practice of bullying, which tends to be behaviour that aggressively mocks, belittles, demeans, vilifies or physically harms its victims. The Panel does not find in these episodes the harbinger of that dangerous anti-social behaviour.

This is not to say that parents watching these episodes with their children might not find some useful lessons or guidance to bring to their offspring. It is just to say that, in its review of the rules in the Children's Programming article of the *Violence Code*, the Panel finds no problems in the broadcasts. There is, first of all no violence, either actual or implied. Second, there are no themes of a nature that would threaten the sense of security of the young audience; examples of such themes are "domestic conflict, the death of parents or close relatives, or the death or injury of their pets, street crime or the use of drugs." There are no actions inviting dangerous imitation, as is anticipated by another of the Code paragraphs. All in all, the Panel finds no breach of any of the provisions of Article 2 of the Code.

The Specific *Violence Code* Children's Provisions

While the complainant's central concern is the bullying issue, she also refers specifically to Articles 2.1, 2.5 and 2.6 of the *CAB Violence Code* in support of her position. The Panel always appreciates that an audience member takes the initiative to familiarize herself or himself with the specific terms of one of the Codes. It is, however, their view in this instance, as noted above, that, with respect to Article 2.1, there was no violence in either of the episodes. Moreover, for the reasons described above, they do not conclude that there was even a suggestion of violent action. Insofar as Article 2.5 is concerned, the Panel does not agree that there was any likelihood of imitation on the part of any child in the audience. As it observed above, the Panel considers that there was no portrayal of the flushing perpetrators as characters worthy of emulation. Even moderately discerning children would sense or know that Amber and pals are ridiculous and deserving of scorn and derision rather than admiration. There is, in this sense, no *invitation* to imitate their behaviour. Finally, since there are no scenes of violence, much less *realistic* violence, one cannot conclude that Article 2.6 even applies; however, given that Amber and her pals are, even with their techniques, unable to bring about the results which are the goal of their actions, one can hardly conclude that even quasi-violent behaviour (as the complainant would be more prepared to characterize it) is an effective method of resolving conflict. The Panel finds no breach of any of the provisions of the *CAB Violence Code*.

Broadcaster Responsiveness

The requirement that a broadcaster be responsive to the letter of complaint sent by a member of the public is considered by the Adjudicating Panels to be a significant part of the membership requirements of the CBSC. Such responsiveness is an essential part of the dialogue by which the CBSC considers that matters that trouble members of the public sufficiently to compel them to write are often successfully resolved. When accomplished in thorough and sensitive ways, such correspondence is also a way of letting the public know that

broadcasters care about their audience's concerns. In the matter at hand, the letter dealt adequately with the concerns raised by the complainant, although it did not satisfy her. That is, after all, the condition precedent to a matter reaching a CBSC Adjudication Panel in the first place. The Panel considers that the letter of the Vice President and General Manager, which has gone as far as to describe the broadcaster's involvement in, and sensitivity to, the societal issue of bullying has amply fulfilled the broadcaster's obligations in this regard in this instance.

CONTENT OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE DECISION

The Family Channel 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 *Amanda Show* was broadcast; 2) within fourteen days following the broadcast of the announcements, to provide written confirmation of the airing of the announcements to the complainant who filed the Ruling Request; and 3) at that time, 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 the Family Channel.

The Canadian Broadcast Standards Council has found that the Family Channel breached the requirements of the classification provisions of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters *Violence Code* by failing to provide an on-screen ratings icon at the start of its broadcast of an episode of the *Amanda Show* broadcast on January 30, 2004. All children's programming requires the provision of such viewer-useful information and the failure to display the icon constitutes a breach of Article 4 of the Code.

APPENDIX TO
Family Channel re two episodes of the Amanda show
(CBSC Decision 03/04-0486 & -0792, May 11, 2004)

I. The Complaints

File 03/04-0486

On January 11, the CBSC received from the complainant a copy of the correspondence she had two weeks earlier sent directly to the broadcaster (on December 27, 2003), as well as the response she had received from the broadcaster on January 5, 2004 (prior to the involvement of the CBSC). In her first letter to the Council, the complainant wrote the following:

To: Canadian Broadcast Standards Council,

Below you will see the complaint that I sent the Family Channel on December 27th, 2003. Their response was they will give [sic] back to me shortly. It is now January 11th, please let me know how long I should wait before registering a formal complaint.

Thank you.

The following is the message the complainant had sent directly to the broadcaster on December 27, 2003:

Dear Family Channel,

I am very concerned about an episode I saw on the Amanda Show, Sunday December 7th at 8:30 am.

The episode was about the Prom at Amanda's high school and they were staging their live TV show in the ladies bathroom. During this skit, the prom queen was announced. When it wasn't Amanda, she had her "helpers" go get her [sic] and drag her in the bathroom. They then proceeded to flush her head in the toilet.

This is very disturbing. My son and daughter are both 9 years old and have to deal with bullying at school. The thought that flushing a fellow student's head down a toilet is funny is NOT the right message to be sending to our children.

Furthermore showing Amanda hurting another student because she didn't get the Prom Queen does not teach our children the proper morals.

Bullying is a serious issue, many children are hurt emotionally and physically, some have even been killed. I had always thought the Family Channel was a safe channel for my children. I assumed wrong.

Before sending this complaint to the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council, I have been instructed to contact you first.

I await your reply.

The broadcaster then emailed the following message on January 5, 2004:

Dear [...],

Thank you for your email. Your comments and concerns have forwarded to the Programming Department for the review and we will get back to you with a response shortly.

On January 14, the Correspondence Officer at the Council provided the complainant with general information about the CBSC's procedure in handling complaints and of the fact that the logger tapes were no longer available because the complaint had been made too late.

The complainant sent the following email to the CBSC on the same date:

Dear [...],

I thank you very much for your quick response. I am aware of the CBSC, and its self-regulatory process. I am, however, concerned with the fact that something like this is allowed to "slip through the cracks". I sent the concern originally December 27th, which was within the time limit. Their response to me came on January 5th - which is still within the time period (the 28th day). Does this mean that all a broadcaster has to do is wait for the 28 days to pass, and then they have no fear of complaints?

As an advertising law and broadcast management college teacher, I do understand what is involved with a complaint. This is a national show, and a copy of the show can be easily traced from its source. What I am seriously concerned with is the message that show sent to children. Bullying has taken on serious consequences, the scene depicted unsafe and potentially dangerous behaviour, both physically and emotionally. It was inappropriate for viewing by children who might be tempted to emulate this behaviour, and finally the scene was demeaning and was encouraging violent behaviour.

I have heard nothing from the people at the Family Channel specifically regarding this disturbing show which is the most upsetting [*sic*]. I do hope you will reconsider looking into this matter, since it was submitted to Family within the appropriate time period. I would hate to think that if we just procrastinate in dealing with an issue we can get away with inappropriate programming.

Thank you

File 03/04-0792

The same complainant sent another complaint dated February 12 about a different episode of the same show to Family Channel, CBSC, and the Canadian Safe Schools Network:

Dear [...] (Family Channel), [...] (CBSC) and the Canadian Safe Schools Network.

In December I had put in a complaint about the Amanda Show episode, featuring sticking kids head [*sic*] in the toilet and flushing it. CBSC said my complaint was too late to act on – Family Channel's response is below.

On Friday January 30th - (6:00 pm) another Amanda Show episode aired depicting the same type of bullying. This time, it was regarding student elections, and they flushed kids [*sic*] heads in the toilets to convince them to vote for them.

I find this very disturbing – two times in two months, they have used this form of violence as a solution. My son is a victim of bullying at his school, and as we try to instil what's right and wrong in our children, it makes me sick that such a good channel as Family Channel would continue to show this.

I do not agree with Family Channel's explanation the first time this type of violence was displayed: "...we doubt that our viewers would wish to emulate these bullies, since they are in no way appealing characters." They are the main characters of the Amanda Show ... of course children will emulate them. I watched my kids watch these events, they think it's funny.

They also say "The Girls' Room sketch pokes fun at the type of social and physical bullying many young people are exposed to" – pokes fun? There is nothing funny about having your head flushed in a toilet, or being forced to do something against your wishes.

In specific reference to the January 30th episode (and its predecessor) I would also like to bring up the CAB Violence Code 2.0 Children's programming in particular:

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2.5 Programming for children shall deal carefully with themes which could invite children to imitate acts which they see on screen.

As you can see, this episode goes against both of these codes—even the statement: "violence must not be shown as a preferred way of solving problems" – this skit showed them flushing kids heads in order to get votes.

I am not a lawyer; I am just a mother having to deal with bullying too close to home. Please don't poke fun at these victims. It's this type of thinking that lets bullying remain part of what's happening in our schools.

I hope I have done all this right this time, within the right time.

Thank you

II. The Broadcaster's Response

File 03/04-0486

The broadcaster sent its response to the first episode on January 16, which read as follows:

Sent on behalf of Mr. [...]:

Dear Ms. [...]:

Thank you for taking the time to e-mail Family Channel with your concerns regarding a segment contained in the comedy series The Amanda Show. Your complaint was received by Family's customer care department on December 27, 2003. We apologize for the delay in responding to you, however our offices were closed for the holiday season, and therefore your response was not reviewed until January 5, 2004. Furthermore, Family's senior management team always reviews complaints of this nature, and this process can sometimes take a number of days to complete depending on the availability of certain key team members.

To clarify the date this program aired on Family, the episode of The Amanda Show that you refer to in your e-mail actually aired on Saturday, December 6 at 8:30 am ET/PT, one day before the date mentioned in your e-mail.

As you know, The Amanda Show is a satirical sketch comedy series targeted to children aged eight and up. The Girls' Room sketch you refer to in your e-mail is intended to be satirical and irreverent, and contains socially relevant, age appropriate humour that many children respond to and enjoy. The Girls' Room sketch pokes fun at the type of social and physical bullying many young people are exposed to, and it does so in an exaggerated, irreverent and satirical manner without ever actually depicting violent or harmful behaviour. Many television research studies have shown that children are able to discriminate between humour and more serious or dramatic content when watching television programming, and we feel that our viewers understand the comedic intent of this particular segment. The Girls' Room characters are satirical examples of girls who engage in bullying behaviour, and their actions are not in any way promoted as admirable or worthwhile. These characters are portrayed in a very unflattering manner that does not encourage or promote bullying behaviour, and we feel that viewers will recognize these characters as exaggerations of the bullies they may have encountered at one time or another. But, we doubt that our viewers would wish to emulate these bullies, since they are in no way appealing characters.

After a thorough internal review and discussion, we reaffirm our opinion of the scene. No inappropriate content is contained in this sketch and we feel it is suitable for our service, although we recognize that this type of satire does not appeal to everyone.

We do understand how serious an issue bullying is for young people. Since May 2002, Family has been a leading charitable sponsor of Bullying.org Canada, the non-profit organization that operates www.bullying.org, a Canadian Web site where kids and their caregivers can safely share their bullying experiences online and discuss anti-bullying resources. Last November, Family launched Bullying Awareness Week in partnership with www.bullying.org. Since November, Family has been airing two anti-bullying public service announcements on the network numerous times each day: a Swedish-produced spot entitled "Red Head," and another spot called "Take the Pledge," which features an anti-bullying pledge that young people can take online. Hopefully you have had a chance to view these spots on Family, and to review our anti-bullying area at www.family.ca. Family has made a long-term commitment to support the bullying issue, and we will continue to work with www.bullying.org to develop new anti-bullying initiatives in the coming year.

To provide you with further information on how we program our network, each program aired on Family undergoes an internal screening process and review by our programming department to ensure it is suitable for viewing according to our strict programming standards. In cases where a program does not meet our standards and codes, we either choose not to air the program or we edit the program to comply with our standards. While we aim to provide high quality, entertaining programming for all members of the family according to the preferences of different age groups, not all of our programs will appeal to every viewer.

We hope that this response clarifies the care Family takes to provide entertaining programming that is suitable for all members of the family.

Thank you for your interest and for taking the time to voice your concerns.

File 03/04-0792

Family Channel acknowledged the second complaint in the following message dated February 13:

Dear Ms. [...],

Thank you for your e-mail regarding the episode of the Amanda Show you recently saw on our network. We at Family do take bullying very seriously, and I have forwarded this to our senior management team to review your additional concerns as quickly as possible. We will respond to you no later than February 25. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any other questions or concerns.

Best regards.

On February 26, the broadcaster provided the following response to the second complaint:

Re: Your correspondence dated February 12, 2004 concerning the Amanda Show (CBSC File Number C03/04-0792)

Dear Ms. [...]:

Thank you for your further correspondence regarding the comedy sketch series The Amanda Show.

Your recent e-mail refers to an additional episode of The Amanda Show that aired on Family on January 30, 2004 and also contains an instalment of The Girls' Room, which is a short recurring segment contained in some episodes of the series. You raised similar concerns as in your first e-mail to us - you feel this segment promotes tolerance for bullying.

We agree with you that bullying is not to be tolerated, and we would take swift action if any programming on our service encouraged children to be cruel to one another. However, after an internal review and discussion of the additional episode you have identified, we have come to the same conclusion we did with the first program, namely these segments do not violate any of the broadcast standards and codes we abide by, including the CAB's Violence Code. The Girls' Room sketches depict very little, if any, violence whether physical, verbal, or emotional. Violence is not the central theme, and we believe nothing contained in these short scenes could reasonably be considered to invite children to imitate dangerous acts they see on screen. Nor do the sketches contain realistic scenes of violence which minimize the effects of truly violent acts.

There are many ways to communicate the fact that bullying behaviour is negative and undesirable, and the Girls' Room sketches do so in a satirical and comedic manner. We believe that our viewers understand the comedic intent of these particular sketches and appreciate the humour in its outrageous characters and premise. The girls host a talk show in the school washroom, which demonstrates how unrealistic and removed from reality the sketch is.

We don't think our viewers would wish to emulate these negative characters, since they are not portrayed in a favourable manner that might make their behaviour seem appealing or admirable to viewers. Indeed, these girls have no dates for their proms, hang out in the public washroom and seem to have no meaningful friendships or interests in their lives.

Furthermore, the specific Girls' Room characters are antagonists who do not appear in any other segment of The Amanda Show. You describe the character played by the show's star Amanda Bynes as the "main character" of the Amanda Show, but in fact The Girls' Room is simply a short, infrequent comedy sketch, showcasing the comedic talents of Amanda Bynes and her co-stars. These are not lead characters in an episodic series. Unlike a regular television series, a comedy sketch by its nature does not allow for plot or character development. Nor is the purpose of a comedy sketch to educate, inform or caution the viewer.

While we aim to provide high quality, entertaining programming for all members of the family according to the preferences of different age groups, not all of our programs will appeal to every viewer. Each child is unique, therefore we encourage parents and caregivers to supervise and discuss their children's television viewing at all times. Naturally it is the responsibility of each parent to determine what is or is not suitable for their own child to watch.

Family was licensed by the CRTC to offer entertainment-based programming to children, youth and families. We seek to provide our audiences with the best in comedy, dramas, movies and other entertainment, but it is not part of our mandate to broadcast educational programs. However, we do understand how serious an issue bullying is for young people. As outlined in our first response to you, Family has made a long-term commitment to support the bullying awareness issue, and we will continue to work with www.bullying.org to develop new anti-bullying initiatives in the coming year.

We have provided the CBSC with the necessary tapes to review both segments of The Amanda Show, and we look forward to further discussion with you and the CBSC on these comedy sketches.

Thank you again for taking the time to voice your concerns.

Sincerely,

III. ADDITIONAL CORRESPONDENCE

The broadcaster sent the following email to the complainant on January 16 (which was also forwarded to the CBSC):

Sent on behalf of [...]:

Dear Ms. [...],

You will have already received our response to your initial e-mail and programming concern, but we wanted to assure you that we do not "procrastinate in dealing with an issue," as you stated in your second e-mail to the CBSC, which was also copied to us. Your e-mail was sent on December 27, 2003 when our offices were closed for the holiday season, therefore your complaint was not actually received until January 5, 2004, at which time it was reviewed by our senior management team. On January 5, 2004 you did receive an e-mail from our customer care team, stating that your complaint had been received and had been forwarded to our programming department for review.

Family is required to keep logger tapes for all programs broadcast on the service for 28 days, under CRTC regulations. However, as members of the CBSC, Family will retain logger tapes for longer periods following a request by the CBSC. Unfortunately, in this particular case, the CBSC request to hold this particular logger tape was only received on January 14th, which was too late to provide the CBSC with the record of what actually aired. We are able to and will gladly provide the CBSC with a VHS screening copy of this particular program if requested.

Best regards,

After receiving the broadcaster's response, the complainant sent the following message to the CBSC on the same day:

concern: The episode was about the Prom at Amanda's high school and they were staging their live TV show in the ladies bathroom. During the skit, the prom queen was announced. When it wasn't Amanda, she had her "helpers" go get her [*sic*] and drag her in the bathroom. They then proceeded to flush her head in the toilet.

This is very disturbing. My son and daughter are both 9 years old and have to deal with bullying at school. The thought that flushing a fellow student's head down a toilet is funny is NOT the right message to be sending to our children.

Furthermore, showing Amanda hurting another student because she didn't get the Prom Queen does not teach our children the proper morals.

Bullying has taken on serious consequences, the scene depicted unsafe and potentially dangerous behaviour, both physically and emotionally. It was inappropriate for viewing by children who might be tempted to emulate this behaviour, and finally the scene was demeaning and was encouraging violent behaviour.

The Family Channel replied saying "The Girl's Room characters are satirical examples of girls who engage in bullying behaviour, and their actions are not in any way promoted as admirable or worthwhile." I am not happy with this reply – both my children were laughing at the episode and thought the prom queen was the "feeb" and thought it was cool what they were doing. I am uncomfortable thinking that we can portray bullying as long as it's satire. The show was contacted within the 28 day deadline – and the [*sic*] do have a tape which they have offered to let the CBSC review.

The CBSC's Executive Director wrote to the complainant on February 18 informing her that the Council would be able to investigate her complaint on the basis of the screener tapes which the broadcaster had agreed to provide.

The complainant responded the following day, on February 19, with the following email:

Thank you Ms. [...], this is good news and appreciated.

Please be advised that the same type of act was replayed again January 31st -- (not the same show, another show with flushing kids [*sic*] heads in the toilet). I have also put in a complaint with family channel and CBSC on that one. Please let me know if you need a copy of that complaint as well - or if you already have a copy (a copy was also sent to the safe schools network).

Again, I appreciate all your help.

Thanks.