
APPENDIX

CBSC Decision 08/09-1667 MTV Canada re *Bully Beatdown*

The Complaint

The following complaint dated April 29, 2009 was sent to the CRTC and forwarded to the CBSC in due course:

Re: Complaint Against MTV Canada, regarding *Bully Beatdown*

To Whom It May Concern:

On Tuesday, April 21, 2009 at 10:30 ET, MTV Canada aired their first episode of *Bully Beatdown* across Canada. The intention of this program is to allow victims of bullying to “get back at their bullies”. As someone who endured bullying for 11½ years due to the fact that I have Cerebral Palsy and walk with a limp, I can’t support MTV’s decision to air this program. I endured 11½ years of bullying, from being pushed and shoved to death threats to two female students who were sisters burning the back of my neck on the way to school in Grade 9.

I would like to ask that an official investigation be done by the CRTC about this program. According to a CTVglobemedia News Release for MTV, “Bullies beware – karma is a bitch”. From executive producer Mark Burnett, *Bully Beatdown* helps victims enlist the help of host and pro-MMA fighter Jason “Mayhem” Miller to give their bullies a taste of their own medicine.

The site says it gives the victims the “satisfaction of seeing their bully face someone who can make him suffer for his past actions.”

One would ponder why such a show would be put on the air. It shows that if you’re a victim, a bullying [*sic*] fighting back is the way to prevent it from happening in the future, and that is the wrong message. I was asked by a reporter if I would have fought back by putting the bullies in the ring when I received death threats, and my answer was simple – no. I don’t think this is a way to prevent someone from being bullied at all. As someone who has been an anti-bullying activist for 4 years since I spoke out about the issue and received national headlines for saying we needed changes put in schools with programs and prevention, many people also agreed with this.

According to a study done by Statistics Canada, the following statistics have been issued regarding violence amongst youth:

- 29% of girls aged 12 to 13 reported being involved in some type of aggressive behaviour, including such things as threatening someone and getting into fights, compared to 56% of boys aged 12 to 13.
- Children who reported being bullied at school were more likely than those who were not bullied to be aggressive.

- Ten percent of 12- and 13-year olds who were never or rarely bullied reported high frequencies of aggressiveness, whereas 20% of 12- and 13-year olds who reported being bullied a lot were involved in high frequencies of aggressive behaviour.

These statistics are both alarming and surprising, and with the television show *Bully Beatdown* more and more youth will get the message that violence is okay, and it is not a concern to have bullies put in a ring and beat up by a trained martial arts artist.

I would like to ask that you please contact me by return mail outlining the steps the CRTC will take to correct this matter.

Broadcaster Response

MTV Canada responded to the complainant on June 5:

Thank you for contacting MTV. I am responding to your email forwarded to MTV by the CBCSC on May 15, 2009 in which you express concern about the show *Bully Beatdown*.

Before I address your specific concerns, it should be noted that MTV (Canada) producers, programmers, schedulers, and on-air presenters follow the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' (CAB) *Code of Ethics, Equitable Portrayal Code for Radio and Television Programming*, and *Voluntary Code regarding Violence in Television Programming*, as well as our own programming policy. (If you would like to view the CAB codes, you may do so at www.cbsc.ca).

In your letter, you express particular concern regarding the premise of the show *Bully Beatdown*. As you know, the show tells the story of bullying victims who have enlisted the help of host and pro-Mixed Martial Arts fighter Jason "Mayhem" Miller to give their bullies a taste of their own medicine.

MTV is a non-conformist, unconventional television station that pushes boundaries while adhering to the aforementioned broadcast codes. Our goal is to engage conversation on a range of issues of interest and relevance to our audience, not to decide who is right or wrong.

In the spirit of engaging healthy discussion and raising awareness about youth-relevant issues, we believe this show encourages viewers to acknowledge that bullying is in fact a very real concern for many people of all ages, genders and sizes. The story unfolds to share the two sides of bullying, thereby encouraging audiences to better understand both the struggle of victims and the psyche of bullies.

The premise of *Bully Beatdown* is to ask bullies to see how they measure up after taking on someone of their own size, showing these bullies how silly they look when they are no longer the dominant person in a situation. The result is that loud, cocky and aggressive bullies appear weak, unconfident and defensive.

By asking the bully to face a trained martial arts fighter, *Bully Beatdown* is intended to instil a sense of empathy in the bully by asking him to face someone who might cause him/her fear or anxiety – much the way his/her victim is made to feel. The show depicts martial arts fighting as a skill that requires patience, tolerance and respect, and shows professional fighters who do not use their skill or power in vain. We in no way feel that the show supports or promotes violence or retaliation on the part of victims of bullying. Our hope is that the

content of this program urges bullies to think before lashing out in a violent way, while entertaining our audience.

In compliance with the CAB codes listed above, we have assigned the show *Bully Beatdown* with the AGVOT (Action Group on Violence on Television) 14+ classification code, which allows for “mature themes” and for programming that “contains themes or content elements which might not be suitable for viewers under the age of 14.” Under this classification code, “parents are strongly cautioned to exercise discretion in permitting viewing by pre-teens and early teens.” The 14+ AGVOT [icon] also informs viewers that programming “could possibly include strong or frequent use of profanity” and may include violence as “one of the dominant elements of the storyline.”

The 14+ AGVOT [icon] appears in the top left hand side of the screen at the top of the show and after every commercial break to advise viewers on upcoming content. (For more information about the AGVOT classification system, please visit www.cbsc.ca/english/agvot/index.php).

In addition to the 14+ AGVOT [icon] on the particular program, we also tag the show with a viewer advisory that states: “This program contains graphic violence and scenes that some viewers may find disturbing. Viewer discretion is advised.”

[R.], we appreciate your personal struggle with bullying and the hardship you have endured. We commend you for your efforts to continue raising awareness on this issue and speaking on behalf of youth in this country. It takes a special person to pursue what they believe in and support important causes.

We too are advocates and champions of youth-relevant issues, including our support of Kids Help Phone, a counselling line that quite often addresses the needs of youth who are victims of bullying.

We certainly hope that this letter has helped you better understand our rationale behind airing the show *Bully Beatdown* and thank you for your feedback.

Additional Correspondence

The complainant submitted his Ruling Request by regular mail and dated it June 11 along with the following letter:

To Whom It May Concern:

On June 5, 2009, I received a response from [Mr. S.], the Senior Vice-President of Much MTV Group, in regards to the letter sent to the CBSC on May 15, 2009. In my letter to the CBSC, I outlined that I feel the show *Bully Beatdown* has violated some of the standards set by the CBSC.

The television program endorses the following practices:

- 1) The program promotes money and more violence and money as the solution to violence.
- 2) The program is targeted to 14-year olds by the broadcasters own admission. A key group among whom bullying is a big problem, it is alarming that 4 kids are bullied,

one out of 5 kids are the bully and that 282,000 high school kids are attacked each month nationally across Canada. These stats are both alarming, and need to change and the practices by MTV Canada with their television show *Bully Beatdown* are not assisting with this matter.

- 3) The CBSC Codes sections 2.5 and 2.6 specifically address this kind of programming and I feel the CBSC should sanction the broadcaster for such a horrible concept that completely flies in the face of every professional opinion you have. Many groups have spoken out [against] this new television program, stating it will now increase the level of bullying.

In a CBC article, MTV Canada has outlined that their target audience is males and females 12 to 34. This is in violation with the following sections of the CBSC code:

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.

Also applies

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.

As outlined in this letter, I would like to ask that the CBSC formally start an investigation into MTV's show *Bully Beatdown*.

The complainant attached news stories about the program *Bully Beatdown* and copies of Hansard Parliamentary proceedings relating to efforts to combat bullying in society.