

The Editor, Kitchener-Waterloo Record

Re: New coalition seeks smackdown on violence in the media

On January 18, you reported (*New coalition seeks smackdown on violence in the media*) the press conference held by Professor Peter Jaffe and others on the subject of media violence. While it is clear that the coalition of teachers and parents were referring to a broad range of media, including music lyrics, video games and DVDs, there was also a reference to television. Lumping all of those media together, as the coalition did, risks leaving a rather misleading perspective about the role of television.

Among other things, it was not evident that the coalition representatives were even aware of the effective steps taken by Canada's private broadcasters to deal with violence on television more than a decade ago.

Nor was there any mention of the steady decline in the complaints about violence on television made by the public, which is a fair barometer of the significance of the issue. To illustrate that point, complaints concerning violence (as a percentage of overall television complaints) have dropped fairly steadily, by 37%, between 2001 and 2006. Moreover, violence last year ranked a distant sixth as a subject of television complaints.

Since these steps benefit your readers, it is worthwhile to let them know which tools are available to them when they are watching television.

The first of these is the Watershed, as Daniel Girard reported. Broadcasters do not air programs that include any violence intended for adult audiences before 9:00 pm or after 6:00 am. No need to add one, as the coalition asserted. It's there, present and effective, and has been in the Canadian Association of Broadcasters Violence Code since 1993.

Second, there is other information provided by broadcasters to audiences to enable them to make informed viewing choices. Ratings icons run at the top of every hour and viewer advisories telling people in plain English (or French) what's coming are broadcast at the start of dramatic programs and following every commercial break.

Third, there is no gratuitous or glamorized violence on television at any time of the day or night. Period.

Fourth, there are special rules dealing with children's programming. There is not a more thorough set of rules in any country. Very little violence, whether physical, verbal or emotional can be included. Animated children's programming cannot have violence as its central theme or even suggest that violence is the preferred way to resolve disputes. It cannot encourage dangerous imitation. Nor can it even include themes that threaten a child's sense of security. No frightening special effects not required by the story line are permitted. And so on.

Fifth, private broadcasters prohibit both abusive comment and violence against women and other identifiable groups on television.

Sixth, news and public affairs programming. While assuring that, in this democracy, the presentation of the news ought not to be sanitized to hide the reality of the human condition, broadcasters must be cautious in the use of violent or disturbing footage. Moreover, it is acknowledged that video clips used in newscasts at earlier times of day should take into account the likely viewership.

And, finally, in the event that any one of the foregoing rules is breached, as Girard reported, the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council is there to deal with it. The disappearance of the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* a decade ago is ample evidence of that commitment.

So whatever the other media (music, video games and film) have or have not been doing, Canada's private broadcasters and the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council, responsible and committed, have been on the case for years.

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