

The Editor, St. Catharines Standard

Re: Crackdown urged on media violence

On January 18, you reported (*Crackdown urged on media violence*) 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 risks leaving a rather misleading perspective about the role of television.

It was also not evident from the story that either the coalition representatives or the reporter were even aware of the effective steps taken by Canada's private broadcasters to deal with violence on television for more than a decade.

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.

Re the broadcasters' steps, there is already a Watershed hour in place. 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 requested. It's been in the Canadian Association of Broadcasters Violence Code since 1993.

Second, there are plenty of alerts to help audiences 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 the world. 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, 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 have been on the case for years.

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