
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:

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.

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

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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.