
CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL

NATIONAL SPECIALTY SERVICES PANEL

MTV Canada re *Bully Beatdown*

(CBSC Decision 08/09-1667)

Decided April 1, 2010

R. Cohen (Chair), A. Cardozo (Vice-Chair, Public), H. Pawley (Vice-Chair, Public),
D. Braun (*ad hoc*), J. Macdonald (*ad hoc*), F. Niemi, D. Ward

THE FACTS

Bully Beatdown is a reality program that allows victims to confront their bullies. It is hosted by Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) fighter Jason “Mayhem” Miller. Miller receives video submissions from bullying victims explaining why the program should choose their bully to be sent into the ring with an MMA fighter. Miller meets the bully and his victim. He offers the bully \$10,000 just for stepping into the ring, but if the bully loses, the money goes to his victim.

MTV Canada aired an episode of the program on April 21, 2009 at 10:30 pm. It aired the following viewer advisory in audio and video format at the beginning and coming out of every commercial break:

This program contains graphic violence and scenes that some viewers may find disturbing. Viewer discretion is advised.

A 14+ classification icon appeared for 16 seconds.

Miller introduced the premise of the program in the introduction:

My name is Jason “Mayhem” Miller and I’m a Mixed Martial Arts fighter. And in the last ten years, I’ve taken on the toughest fighters in the MMA. [Video clips of Miller’s MMA fights: jumping on top of opponent, punching, wrestling-style moves] And I’ve got 33

victories in the cage. But let me let you in on a little secret. I wasn't always this tough. Actually, I used to look like this. [Photo of Miller as a scrawny teenager] And I got picked on a lot. So if there's something I hate, it's a bully. Now, I'm going from town to town finding the biggest, baddest bully on the block. [Clips of different young men looking tough and angry, pushing people around] So if you've got a bully and want to get some revenge, I'll put him in the cage to fight two rounds with a real MMA fighter and then we'll see how tough he really is. [MMA fighter punching & kicking punching bag] Play time's over. [Scenes of men fighting in ring, kicking, punching] Now it's time for some payback on *Bully Beatdown*.

The challenged episode focussed on brothers Alan and Ryan. Although Alan was older, Ryan was considerably bigger and would bully his older brother. To "teach him a lesson", Ryan was put up against MMA fighter Tony "The Gun" Bonello. At the beginning of the program, there were scenes of Bonello hitting a punching bag and looking menacing. Miller introduced Bonello by saying "Now, I'm no Doctor Phil, but I believe all family problems should be solved with a gun. Tony 'The Gun' Bonello that is." Bonello, cracking his knuckles, then said "Since Ryan doesn't respect family first, I'm going to make him respect pain first." Miller replied, "It's time for a little family therapy, *Bully Beatdown* style."

The program then showed Alan's videotaped plea to Miller to help him get even with his brother Ryan. Alan and a friend described the situation as follows:

Alan: Please, Mayhem, help me out. I've got a younger brother who's just a terror, man. He's just a pain in my ass. He's verbally abusive, he's physically abusive and all he does is torture me. You know, he's my younger brother, but he's big. He's six foot, two hundred pounds. He's big, fast, strong. I mean, you can say one bad thing to him and he'll knock you out. I mean, it's that simple. This one time, I came out of my room and he just knocked me out. I was laying [*sic*] right here and I woke up, like, "what happened to me?" And another time I just got up and I looked at him wrong and he put my head into the wall. You know, everything Ryan does he gets away with. I think that's why he keeps doing it. You know, he's the family favourite and I'm not. This is the picture my family put up of me. And then this is the picture my family put up of him [photo is much bigger than Alan's]. Clearly there's something going on wrong.

Nick, bullied by Ryan: I went tumbling down these steps in front of tons of people, humiliated for life, pretty much, as everyone laughs at me as I fall down the stairs. It hurt. And now I got this to show for it, a scar that'll be there forever.

Alan: With all the things going on with my family, my brother, sometimes I don't even want to live here. You know, it's not even about the money. I just want my brother to learn his lesson. So please, Mayhem, help me out.

There were then scenes of Miller arriving at the brothers' home. He woke Ryan up and then explained what was going on. When Ryan agreed to compete against an MMA fighter, he expressed his confidence in the following terms:

Ryan: It doesn't matter who Mayhem's gonna put in front of me. In order for this guy to win, he's gotta bring some brass knuckles, some chains, something. 'Cause there's no bringing me down at all.

Miller then took Ryan to a gym for a training session. Ryan continued to exude confidence about his success in the upcoming match. During the training session, Miller encouraged Ryan to hit him as hard as he could. Miller wore head protection, but Ryan insisted, "I might knock you out on the ground right here" and "Say good-bye". After Ryan punched Miller in the head, Miller mocked him, saying "Letting Ryan punch me in the face was kind of like sticking your head out of a car window. Annoying? Yeah. Painful? Enh, not really."

Later, there were scenes of Bonello warming up for his match against Ryan. Miller described Bonello's track record and then Alan had the opportunity to explain to Bonello the treatment he suffered at the hands of his younger brother.

Miller's voice-over: This is Tony "The Gun" Bonello. He's a black belt in Brazilian jiu-jitsu and a world-renowned submission expert. Twelve of his last sixteen fights have ended by way of submission. And at six-foot-two, two hundred pounds, he's a perfect guy to take on our bully Ryan.

Bonello: Since Ryan doesn't respect family first, I'm going to make him respect pain first. [...] Any man that doesn't respect their older brother and their father deserves a beatdown.

Alan: I agree.

[...]

Bonello: Tell me what he does.

Alan: He beats me up, messes me, makes fun of me. It's like an everyday thing. I'm scared to even be at my house with him, you know? My family thinks it's funny, but I don't, you know?

Bonello: Has it always been like this?

Alan: Yeah, ever since he got bigger than me.

Bonello: Well maybe after today he'll start showing you some respect.

Alan: Yeah. He needs to.

Bonello: I'll give you my number. So if he doesn't like that after today, I can always come pay you a visit.

Alan: All right. Sounds good. [to camera] It was awesome going back there talking to Tony. I saw the look in his eye and I knew he was ready to get the job done. [Bonello practising by kicking bags held by assistant] Wow. When I saw Tony kick those bags, that hurt me. [More footage of Bonello kicking bags] It was scary actually.

Ryan was in a separate dressing room, also warming up for the fight. He was still self-assured that he would win: "Man, this guy's goin' down for a hurtin', I'm telling you. I'm pumped. I'm ready to go. I'm the real bully and I'm the real man. Ain't nobody going to beat me."

About 45 minutes into the program, the actual fighting match began. It took place in a cage similar to those used in actual MMA competitions and before an audience. Miller introduced the match:

Miller: All right. Are you guys ready to see a beatdown? [Crowd cheers] Now this is Alan. His younger brother, who's bigger, punks him, bullies him, knocks him out in his hallway. [Crowd boos] Yeah. Now it's time for some payback.

Ryan entered the cage and Miller asked him if he was "ready to get punked and bullied". Ryan told his brother "You're going to regret it", to which Alan replied, "You're going down." Bonello then entered the cage and Miller explained the rules. For round one, only grappling was allowed. The bully would start the round with five thousand dollars, but would lose one thousand dollars to his victim every time he was forced to tap out. A tap-out occurred any time a fighter was caught with either a choke, a leg-lock or an arm-bar.

Round 1 began and Bonello and Ryan used grappling moves on each other while the crowd cheered for Bonello. Miller watched from the sidelines with Alan. Miller made comments, such as announcing the names of the moves and heckling Ryan (the bully). Bonello forced Ryan to tap out three times.

Following a commercial break, Round 2 began, which consisted of kick-boxing. Again, if Ryan got knocked out or the referee had to stop the fight, all the money would go straight to Alan. For this round, Ryan was wearing boxing gloves and leg and head protection, while Bonello was wearing only gloves and leg protection. Bonello and Ryan kicked and punched each other until Bonello delivered the decisive kick that caused Ryan to go down and lose the round. Miller laughed and then commented:

Miller: That body shot looked bad, but it sounded even worse. [3 replays of body shot from different angles] It was like a semi hit a cow. I hope his insides are intact.

Alan: Ryan's always said that, uh, if anybody's going to beat him, they gotta bring weapons. And today Tony "The Gun" came in and blew him away.

Miller: Ah, he'll be all right. [...] [Enters cage] Ha, ha! Oh, that was awesome! That was awesome! [Crowd cheers] All right, man. You took your beating like a man!

Ryan: At first when I took that, uh, high kick it felt like it might've cracked the top rib. I've felt some pretty good pain, but I'd say that one by far was probably the worse pain I've taken.

After the fight, Miller asked Ryan if there was anything he wanted to say to Alan. Ryan said he was sorry and the two brothers hugged as the crowd cheered. Alan also told Ryan that he loved him and then shared his views of the experience with the audience:

Alan: It was awesome. He apologized and we gave each other a hug and it was just that we haven't had that in so long that it was, was good to, you know, experience that. And, you know, the eight thousand was pretty nice as well.

Miller then said to Ryan, “Now, don’t make me bring you back here now, all right?” and concluded the program with the comment “Alan and Ryan may never be the Jonas Brothers, but maybe these brothers can find a way to get along. So bring us your bullies and we’ll beat ‘em down on *Bully Beatdown*.”

The CBSC received a complaint dated April 29, 2009 about this program from a viewer and anti-bullying activist. The complainant explained that, as someone who had endured years of bullying as a young person, he was greatly troubled by this program’s suggestion that the solution to bullying was more violence. The complainant wrote the following, in part (the full text of all correspondence can be found in the Appendix to this decision):

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 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 per cent 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.

MTV Canada responded to the complainant on June 5, pointing out that the program carried a 14+ classification icon and viewer advisories. MTV Canada also suggested that the show could stimulate discussion about the issue of bullying. MTV Canada outlined its position as follows:

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.

[...]

[Mr. F], 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.

The complainant filed his Ruling Request on June 11 and reiterated his concerns about the program, particularly that “The program promotes money and more violence and money as the solution to violence.” He also commented on the broadcaster’s contention that 14+ was the appropriate age classification for this program:

The program is targeted to 14-year olds by the broadcaster’s 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.

The complainant also noted that “Many groups have spoken out [against] this new television program, stating it will now increase the level of bullying.” In addition, he argued that the program should be examined under the Children’s Programming Article (Article 2.0) of the *CAB Violence Code*. The complainant also included some

newspaper articles that criticized *Bully Beatdown* and excerpts from Parliamentary proceedings related to anti-bullying efforts.

THE DECISION

The National Specialty Services Panel examined the complaint under the following provisions of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' (CAB) *Violence Code*:

CAB Violence Code, Article 1.0 – Content

1.1 Canadian broadcasters shall not air programming which:

- contains gratuitous violence in any form*
- sanctions, promotes or glamorizes violence

(*“Gratuitous” means material which does not play an integral role in developing the plot, character or theme of the material as a whole).

CAB Violence Code, Article 2 – 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, 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.

CAB Violence Code, Article 3.0 – Scheduling

3.1 Programming

3.1.1 Programming which contains scenes of violence intended for adult audiences shall not be telecast before the late evening viewing period, defined as 9 pm to 6 am.

CAB Violence Code, Article 4.0 – Classification

AGVOT Classifications for English-Language Broadcasters

14+ - Over 14 Years

Programming with this classification contains themes or content elements which might not be suitable for viewers under the age of 14. Parents are strongly cautioned to exercise discretion in permitting viewing by pre-teens and early teens without parent/guardian supervision, as programming with this classification could deal with mature themes and societal issues in a realistic fashion.

Violence Guidelines

- while violence could be one of the dominant elements of the storyline, it must be integral to the development of plot or character
- might contain intense scenes of violence

The Panel Adjudicators read all of the correspondence and viewed the challenged episode. The Panel concludes that the broadcast did not violate any of the aforementioned Code provisions.

This Program as a Solution to Bullying as a Social Phenomenon

The Panel appreciates the complainant's own experience with the social phenomenon of bullying and his view of *Bully Beatdown* as a component of the solution. Simply put, he believes that such a tit-for-tat approach sends "the wrong message. [...] I don't think this is a way to prevent someone from being bullied at all." That, in other words, is where his concern begins. In the end, he believes that, "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." The message will, in other terms, provoke a result that is counter to the best social solution to an undeniable problem. He may be right. Whether he is or is not, that is not the ground on which the assessment of the program can be made in terms of compliance with the codified standards cited above. That is not the Panel's issue. The best solution to a societal problem such as bullying (other societal problems can easily be substituted in this sentence) is not a matter for the Panel to judge. As the Senior Vice-President of the Much MTV Group at CTV put the matter, "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." It is equally not the business of the CBSC Panel to determine whether the approach of a program taken by a broadcaster is right or wrong.

It follows that this Panel will focus not on this fundamental societal issue, but rather on gratuitous violence, scheduling and classification in its examination of this episode of *Bully Beatdown*.

***Bully Beatdown* Violence: A Problem?**

The Panel finds this episode of *Bully Beatdown* a bit unusual in terms of its customary parameters for dealing with violent content on television. It does, after all, sanction or condone the use of violence in a rather controlled circumstance. As the broadcaster representative explained in his letter to the complainant, "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.” He added that the intention of the show was “to instill a sense of empathy in the bully” but that he did not feel in any way “that the show supports or promotes violence or retaliation on the part of victims of bullying.” In terms of Article 1 of the *Violence Code*, the Panel agrees with MTV Canada; it does not consider that the challenged episode in any way *promotes or glamorizes* violence. It attempts the opposite, namely, the criticizing of bullying violence. Thus, although, technically speaking, the violence in the episode is *sanctioned*, it is not sanctioned or endorsed in a way that can be said to be equivalent to promoting or glamorizing that aggression. Whereas bullying itself is a form of violence or fighting *without* rules, this program was a form of violence or fighting *with* rules (that is, the bully consented to participate, had a training session, followed the MMA rules, and was wearing protective gear). In the view of the Panel, that controlled, remedial, unsupportive approach to violent content does not fall afoul of Article 1 of the *Violence Code*.

As to the scheduling issue, the Panel considers that the extent of the violent content was far from the threshold of adult-only violence that would relegate such a broadcast to a post-Watershed time period. In that sense, there seems little purpose in citing earlier decisions in which Panel assessments of iffier content were at issue. *Bully Beatdown* was, in any event, broadcast comfortably after 9:00 pm and no scheduling issue even arose.

The Panel also wishes to point out that, although the complainant specifically raised the issue of Articles 2.5 and 2.6 of the *Violence Code* as entirely pertinent to the *Bully Beatdown* approach to “this kind of programming”, those standards do not apply. Article 2 only applies to programming targeted at *children*, that is to say, persons *under* 12. While the Panel considers that an important target audience for this program may well be *youth* (as well as parents, of course), it is adolescents, not young children. Thus, although the examples of the two standards may appear relevant by virtue of their content, they are not applicable by reason of their intended purpose.

As to the classification issue, although some types of non-fiction programming are exempt from classification, *Bully Beatdown* is not, since it falls into the genre of reality programming that does require rating. As noted above, MTV Canada rated the program 14+, which would allow for “intense scenes of violence”. Given the Panel’s views on the moderate nature of the violent content discussed two paragraphs above, it does not consider that a higher rating would be required. In fact, the Panel considers that its earlier decision in *TSN re an episode of WWE* (CBSC Decision 02/03-1656, May 11, 2004) is apposite. In that challenged episode the broadcast featured wrestling matches as well as behind-the-scenes antics which included a scene of threatened violence with gasoline and a lit match. This Panel determined that a 14+ rating would have been

sufficient for that episode. (The Panel notes that, although sports programming is usually exempt from classification, due to the “hybrid” nature of the program, WWE broadcasts require a rating.) In a more extreme precedent, namely, *CHMI-TV re the movie Double Team* (CBSC Decision 99/00-0372, May 5, 2000), the Prairie Regional Council considered a complaint concerning, among other things, the PG rating of this Jean-Claude Van Damme movie. The movie was “replete with fighting, explosions and gunfire,” but had been rated PG by the broadcaster. The Panel disagreed with that rating; it would, however, have chosen 14+, and the level of violence in that film was considerably higher than that in the matter at hand.

In the end, although sympathetic to the complainant’s concerns about the best societal solution to the bullying problem, the Panel finds no breach of any of the foregoing standards as a result of the type, timing, or advisory choices regarding the violent content of the challenged episode of *Bully Beatdown*.

Broadcaster Responsiveness

In all CBSC decisions, the Council’s Panels assess the broadcaster’s responsiveness to the complainant. In the present instance, the Panel finds that the response of Much MTV Group’s Senior Vice-President was thorough and focussed on the issues that concerned the complainant. Moreover, the response was sensitive to the issue of bullying and the role of the complainant as an advocate of anti-bullying programs in society. All in all, the Panel concludes that the broadcaster has delicately and thoughtfully fully met its responsiveness responsibilities of CBSC membership on this occasion.

This decision is a public document upon its release by the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council. It may be reported, announced or read by the station against which the complaint had originally been made; however, in the case of a favourable decision, the station is under no obligation to announce the result.

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.cbcs.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.cbcs.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.