

February 3, 2007

Mr. Ron Cohen
National Chair
Canadian Broadcast Standards Council
P.O. Box 3265, Station D
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6H8

Dear Ron:

With regard to your January 29, 2007 column in the Toronto Star -- Much has been done to curb violence on TV -- I would like to offer the following comments.

Your statement that "Canada's private broadcasters have long since taken charge of the issue of violence on TV" is indisputable, and we can lay the blame for that squarely on the shoulders of federal politicians, who were busily studying their fingernails while this was taking place. The result of this hands-off attitude was highlighted by Bloc MP Bernard Bigras during the January 30 debate in the House of Commons on Bill C-327:

According to an analysis conducted by the Centre des médias at the Université Laval in December 2004, acts of physical violence on television have risen by 286% in ten years; and 81% of violent acts occur in programs beginning before 9 p.m.¹

In your column, you made several sweeping generalizations that I'm sure astonished anyone who actually watches TV in Canada, for example, "Broadcasters do not air programs that include any violence intended for adult audiences before 9 p.m. or after 6 a.m. ... broadcasters view that early part of the day as a comfortable haven, free from adult-themed broadcasts, for Canadian families."

I would like to point out that History Television is broadcasting *CSI: NY* at noon and 7 pm, while Showcase broadcasts *CSI* at 4 and 5 pm on Sunday afternoon. The following excerpts are from a Globe and Mail article on *CSI*:

There are roughly 45 queasy journalists standing around what *CSI* creator/producer Anthony Zuiker is jovially referring to as "Spatula Man." In other words, a dead guy who was flattened when a shipping container was dropped on him in a new episode of the spinoff series *CSI: NY*. The hapless dock worker -- made out of rubber and urethane foam -- has his hands raised in a flimsy attempt to ward off the blow. **Blood and gore is everywhere, mingling with broken ribs that look like someone's particularly gruesome takeout dinner left over from the night before.**

A scene too lifelike by far, a few seasoned hacks look like they're having trouble keeping down a lavish breakfast...

¹ Statements made by Bernard Bigras, MP, as reported in Hansard, House of Commons, January 30, 2007

We tour the morgue, the crime lab and the reconstruction room. **Back in the autopsy room, Spatula Man is joined on a steel gurney by two neatly severed feet (one has gangrene), two disembodied hands and some brain fragments.**

With some 60-million viewers a week (the majority for the original *CSI*) tuning into the three *CSI* series...**it's the bloodiest crime drama that audiences apparently can't get enough of. "The amount of gore that we get away with on our show is kind of astounding," says [Gary] Sinise**, Oscar-nominated for his supporting role in *Forrest Gump*, and who now works on a program that buys dead pigs so the show's makers can better gauge realistic blood force. **"I think it is too much."**² (emphasis added)

For the premiere of *CSI* back in 2002, creator and executive producer Anthony Zuiker said, "We elected to cut over the forehead [of a corpse], pull off the face and have spattering blood on our assistant coroner. That was our way of saying, 'Hey, we're going to push the envelope this year. Welcome back. Things are gonna be a little edgier.'"³

Splattering blood, brain fragments and severed limbs across the screen is the Showcase and History Television approach to providing the "comfortable haven" for families idea that you presented to the Canadian public in your Toronto Star column. What family would that be, Ron, the Manson family?

Then there was this statement: "In addition, there is no gratuitous or glamorized violence on television at any time of the day or night. Period." Please see the above re *CSI*, and I would also point out that Canadian broadcasters have shown these brutally-violent movies: *The Cell*, *Seven*, *Scream*, and *Silence of the Lambs*. Have you ever watched *Scream*, Ron? I have. It's a bloodbath, especially the last 15 minutes, and the target market is teenagers. Plus, the digital all-horror TV channel, *Scream*, shows slasher films such as *Prom Night*, *Prom Night III: The Last Kiss*, *Prom Night IV: Deliver Us From Evil*, *Leatherface: Texas Chainsaw Massacre III*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation*, *Massacre at Central High*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, *April Fool's Day*, *My Bloody Valentine*, *Friday the 13th*, *Friday the 13th Part II*; *Friday the 13th Part III*, *Friday the 13th Part V: A New Beginning*, *Friday the 13th Part VI: Jason Lives*, *Friday the 13th Part VII: The New Blood*. The majority of these films are reviewed in a book called *The Official Splatter Movie Guide*⁴. They're sometimes called "splatter" films because of the blood splattering all over the place.

Considering that Howard Stern is back on Canadian radio, courtesy of the CBC and Standard Broadcasting, your statement that broadcasters prohibit abusive comments about women and other groups probably caused much snickering on their part. In fact, a CBSC decision on Stern included this description of his show when he was on regular radio:

Stern's remarks relating to French-Canadians were, in fact, only an example of his casual attitude toward abusive commentary directed at identifiable groups by virtue of their race, gender or sexual orientation. There is a regular flow of racial, homophobic or

² *Esprit de corpse*, Globe and Mail, March 19, 2005

³ *New Gore Values*, Newsday, November 3, 2002

⁴ *The Official Splatter Movie Guide*, by John McCarty, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1989

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gender-related offensive comments, some of which are brief digs, and others of which extend to longer discussions.⁵

I recall when Stern was on radio station Q107 in Toronto, two of his favourite web sites, to which Q107 was hot linking, featured bestiality, and teenaged “runaways” – girls of course – being sexually abused and tortured⁶, a situation I reported to the Toronto Police Service. Then, there were the comments Stern made following the shootings at Columbine high school in which he mused about whether the killers had tried to have sex with any of the girls during the attack because some were attractive. And yet, here he is, back on Canadian radio and without the FCC breathing down his neck, which leaves him free to be more sexually abusive and disgusting.

One final point. You state that complaints filed with the CBSC about violence have decreased 37% between 2001 and 2006 and that should be viewed as a “fair barometer” of public concern. In contrast, a 2002 poll conducted for Family Service Canada and the Canadian Council on Social Development found that 83% of parents were concerned about the violence their children were absorbing from television, music videos and movies.⁷ Given that concern, maybe the complaints have dropped because people have come to realize the futility of the CBSC process.

I will close with this statement from your column: “In any event... readers should be aware of the fact that Canada’s private broadcasters and the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council have been front and centre in effectively controlling this issue for years.”

You’re absolutely right, Ron -- no argument there. Unfortunately, it’s been to the detriment of society.

Sincerely,



Valerie Smith

Cc: Bernard Bigras, M.P.
Ontario Public School Boards Association Media Violence Committee
Media violence activists

⁵Canadian Broadcast Standards Council Decision 97/98-0001+ and 97/98-0015+, October 17/18, 1997

⁶ *Stern radio shuns Web link to sex*, Toronto Star, March 26, 1998

⁷ School bullies, TV violence top list of parental concerns, Globe and Mail, June 27, 2002