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ISSUES

Is 'dirty-word' ruling wrong?

Allowing filth on TV makes my job as a mom much harder

By KELLI TURNER

Two judges in New York City recently made a ruling that will make my life as a parent in Nashville much more difficult.

The judges decided that it is permissible for broadcast networks to air offensive expletives when my daughter and millions of other children are in the viewing audience.

By expletives, I mean four-letter words starting with "p" and "s," words that are not fit to be printed in such a public forum as this newspaper, but these judges would have us believe are now perfectly acceptable to be broadcast on television.

In case you missed it, the judges decided that these expletives, used by Cher and Nicole Richie during Billboard Music Awards broadcasts, are fully appropriate because they were "fleeting."

Do these judges not realize that their decision affects more than the broadcast networks? They have forgotten the millions of families who have to deal with the ugly consequences.

No parent I know thinks that it's OK for their children to use offensive expletives at the dinner table, at school or anywhere else, for that matter. No one in their right mind thinks it is acceptable for offensive words — fleeting or not — to be aired during hours when children are watching television. Yet these judges have essentially slapped all parents in the

face with their decision.

I just do not see why it is so hard for the networks to keep my daughter and other children safe from graphic content on television. The networks have implemented time-delay tactics with live shows before, and there's no reason why this cannot be done in the future.



Turner

Television networks can be responsible when they want to be. Consider how quickly Don Imus was pulled off the air for his offensive comments.

Yet the industry evades responsibility for its product, the public airwaves which it uses for free, by passing the buck to parents. Countless times, I hear how parents should just hit the "off" button on their television in order to avoid graphic content. Too many times I hear how parents should rely on blocking technologies.

Because of television's pervasiveness and persuasiveness, opting out is an entirely inadequate response. When the networks produce increasingly violent and sexually graphic shows, parents are left with few places to turn for family viewing. By remaining silent, parents would have to cede their television sets — and the public airwaves they own — to lowest common-denominator programming.

In addition, research has shown that parents cannot rely on blocking technologies because the existing ratings system is inaccurate and unreliable. A recent program on CBS, NCIS, showed a horrifically violent drug scene during the 8 p.m. hour, when children are most often found in the viewing audience. And the episode did not carry the proper television rating descriptors to warn parents about the gruesome material or to allow them to block the program using V-chip technology.

This episode was rated TV-14, with no content descriptors. Based on the graphic violence, the "V" descriptor should have been used, and due to the foul language, the "L" descriptor should have been employed as well.

Yes, the networks rate their own programs and refuse to do so accurately because they cannot suffer financial consequences that full disclosure to advertisers would bring.

So, how am I supposed to watch television with my daughter when the system is clearly failing us?

My hope is that other parents will see the absurdity in the court's decision and swiftly speak out to their congressional representatives and to call on the FCC to appeal this decision to the U.S. Supreme Court. Congress already answered the people's call last year when it overwhelmingly passed a bill that increases fines to broadcasters who break the indecency law.



FILE / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cher accepts a lifetime achievement award Dec. 9, 2002, during the Billboard Music Awards show. The FCC found that she used profane language during the Fox broadcast.

Community decency standards should not be decided by two judges in New York. Shame on the judges, and shame on the networks for putting their interests above the families who they're supposed to be serving.

Kelli Turner is a mother and Nashville chapter director for the Parents Television Council. E-mail: nashvillechapter@parentstv.org.