



The Media Project

A Program of Advocates for Youth

Men Are from Mars...Boys Are from "Pluto" ???

Summarized Transcript

Tuesday, August 6, 2002

ROBIN SMALLEY, DIRECTOR, THE MEDIA PROJECT: Hi, I'm Robin Smalley. I'm the Director of the Media Project and, yes, I admit it...I'm a girl...or at least I was, (muffled) years ago. So, I guess I've always used that as my excuse for not understanding or relating to guys. Then I went and married one and ok, I still don't understand them! But the fact is, I would be willing to bet that many of you may be almost as clueless as I was. Because the world is changing faster than most of us realize. Don't get me wrong...hormones are hormones and guys I dated in high school were pretty much slaves to them...much to my father's panic. So sex on the brain is nothing new, but the pressures on guys today are really very different. They are inundated by powerful media messages and they live in a world of HIV/AIDS...to name just a few.

I see that many of you here today are veterans of our briefings and I welcome you...I'm so glad that you are finding the information you get here is valuable enough for you to give up a morning in your hectic schedules. For those of you who are new, let me tell you just a bit about the Media Project. With our partner, Advocates for Youth in Washington, D.C., we work with the entertainment industry in the area of sexuality and reproductive health. We're not any kind of a watchdog...the last thing we do is wag our fingers at you and tell you what or what not to do. Rather, we're here as a support system, available to provide you with information, research and referrals on a variety of issues from teen pregnancy, contraception and parent-child communication to STDs, including HIV/AIDS, sexual violence, and sex ed. These briefings are geared around topics of general interest to television writers, but we are also happy to come to your office to brief your creative teams on issues and trends that are specific to your show. We're free, we don't preach and, I'm told, we often spark ideas for storylines at moments when it seems there can't be anything new that you haven't covered! So, please call our office if you are interested in setting that up.

I've got to tell you, I've gotten quite an education in the past few weeks, talking to these incredible young men who are with us this morning. And they are incredible. Just imagine how you would react if a total stranger got you on the phone and started trying to elicit the most intimate, private details of your life. They are incredibly courageous and I have so much respect for them and we are fortunate that they are willing to share their values with you along with the details of their lives. Please understand, all of these guys come from very different places...public and private schools, inner city and the suburbs, and a variety of races, religions and socio-economic backgrounds. Among them, you should all be able to find representatives of the characters you are creating in your work. And our hope is, that as you learn about the realities of their lives, you will be able to incorporate them into your scripts, making them more honest and relevant to your audiences.

Guys, can we just go down the line and you can briefly introduce yourselves with your first names, ages, where you go to school and anything else we should know right off the top about your lives.

BERNARDO: I'm 18.

CORY: I'm 18, I just graduated from high school and will be attending Northwestern University.

ELAN: I'm 18 and involved with Teenline.

DANNY: I'm 14.

MICHAEL: I'm 16.

NICK: I'm Nick. I'm 19. I graduated from a small Catholic school. I just left Cal State Northridge to join the real world.

ROBIN: And now it is my great pleasure to introduce you to our expert moderator for this morning. Wayne Pawlowski is Planned Parenthood Federation of America's first ever Director of Training. Before that he was the Director of Training for Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington, D.C. and the Director of Counseling at Preterm, Inc., one of the oldest, non-profit reproductive health care centers in D.C. He has spent nearly twenty years working with programs providing counseling services to adolescents, women and men in both clinical and non-clinical settings. In 1995 he received the first annual "Educators Award" from the National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association. He is an acclaimed author, teacher, counselor ... and we are very lucky to have him join us today. Please welcome Wayne Pawlowski.

WAYNE: In our culture it's rare that men can sit down together and talk about what is real. What we're attempting to do today is give you some snapshots into the real lives of boys so that you can make your storylines richer, more compelling and more real for your audiences.

Our culture makes some assumptions about boys. First of all, that they are totally irresponsible. And as a part of that irresponsibility, they're responsible for unintended pregnancies. They are also responsible for STDs and the spread of HIV. They're responsible for gangs, for violence, for crime a la Columbine. What I find interesting about Columbine is that no one is talking about what happened to those two boys that created that level of anger that erupted the way it did. What is the climate and the culture that presses boys to feel so out of control that the only way they can retaliate is to kill their comrades? Culturally, we say that boys can't, won't, and don't communicate; that all they want from relationships is sex; and they're the ones that always resist using condoms. They're the ones who are the aggressors in relationships with young women; they're the ones who pressure; they're the ones who manipulate and even drug their partners so that they can have sex; they're the ones who are the rapists and abusers. And they do all this because all they want is sex, they're selfish and they have the power in their relationships with young women. One of the things I think you'll hear today is that they don't feel so powerful in their relationships with young women. In fact, from their vantage point, the girls have a lot more power than they do, and that's totally counter-intuitive to what we think and say about boys.

We see young men as impossible to reach and resistant to our interventions, our messages, our outreach. I concur that they're resistant, but they're resistant not because they're irresponsible or bad guys, they're resistant because that's the way we've inculturated them; that's the environment we've fostered around them, and we've set it up so that if they start to give us what we tell them we want – we make fun of them and ridicule them. We want them to be sensitive and caring, and as soon as they're sensitive and caring we accuse them of being gay. We want them to communicate, but we want them to communicate about the things we think are important, not necessarily the things they want or need to talk about. They're behaving in ways that we have encouraged, and we are not there for them. Our programs are ostensibly set up to get them in so we can change their behavior and prevent them from being so irresponsible, and that's not about them. That's about another agenda and I think they all know it. Most young men are sophisticated enough that they'll give us the party line rather than what they know is real, because, for the most part, we don't want to hear what's real – it's too big, it's too scary, we don't know what to do about it.

They are having sex for sure, but they're having sex for reasons that are far more complex than just selfishness and testosterone. [Heterosexual young men] spend more time trying to prove they're not gay than any of us could possibly understand. They have pressures, fears and concerns that go totally unaddressed even while we tell them we're there for them. We aren't there for them.

I'm just going to toss it open. Any of you guys want to start with any comments, observations, thoughts about any of the things we talked about yesterday or anything that came up today?

ELAN: We all think that girls have anorexia and bulimia and eating disorders. We never expect guys to have eating problems. Which is not sticking their fingers down their throats or things like that. I think it was more taking amphetamines and things like that, because they won't get hungry and it keeps them from wanting to eat. And they work out for girls, having the goal of going for that girl, going for that person that they want to be with. Me personally, I want to be thin; I had a problem with weight when I was younger, so I always thought to myself that I was too heavy. I never was the right weight, I never was what I wanted to be. When I got to high school and I saw all the girls, I saw all the things like that, I started running. I started getting in shape. I started lifting weights. Having the goal of meeting that physical look that a girl wants was something that I pushed myself to be. Having that goal made me want to be that fit image. I don't want people to think it's just girls going through this, it's guys as well and no one addresses that. Guys care about how they look and how much they weigh; it's a big deal. That's why you see guys taking muscle enhancers.

CORY: I agree. I have it from the opposite perspective. I'm skinny. My battle is gaining weight. But not just like fat, no one wants to be fat. I work out two hours every other day. With girls, there's this image that you have to be somewhat of a big guy, a macho guy. I have friends that have different kinds of eating disorders. One of my friends is a gym freak, basically will not touch carbs, is insane about his diet. His diet would be protein shakes and protein bars, not whole foods. I felt I had to be bigger, I had to be stronger and the only way to do that is through means like this, to put weight on.

MICHAEL: I was always told I was too skinny. My parents told me to put more meat on my bones. When I hit high school, my guy friends started to work out.

BERNARDO: Teenagers use meth amphetamines, crystal meth, all those crazy drugs just to lose weight. They're snorting crystal just 'cause it makes them lose weight, makes them less hungry. Crack and cocaine are being used so bad just to lose weight. The guys look more cut on TV. The structure of a man's body has changed so much over the last 10 years. Like in order for guys to fit into it, they have to totally switch their life around from junior high when it's like, hey you're having fun to high school when bam, you got to fit that big guy. If you're not a football player, if you're not that athletic basketball player with that structure, you gotta fit one of those two. If not, you're the outsider, the outcast, and we're gonna kick you in the butt and make fun of you. You can go read your books but if you don't get a girl, if you don't fit into who we are, you're out. If you're not with the party crowd who do drugs and smoke marijuana then you're out – that's just the way it is. A big part of that is the media, people who do commercials, people who write those shows on the WB and Fox. They don't tell you what marijuana does to your body.

DANNY: Everywhere you go there's a Tommy Hilfiger ad with the guy in the vest who's completely ripped and buffed out. All the girls are staring at him and if you're sitting with a girl they just go, "Wow, look at the guy he's completely ripped. Why can't you get like that?" You see the Abercrombie and Fitch ads; every single guy has a six-pack, ripped arms, veins sticking out and buff. People don't realize how hard you have to work out, every single day. You have to do that for a living; it's really hard to get like that. On TV, every single guy is buff, and girls just look at that and guys think, wow, that's really hard to do. Guys work out, they do less school work, they do sports – it's really hard for guys to do that.

WAYNE: (doing slide presentation) I want to give you some images that will reflect what they're talking about. In the recent studies that have been done of young men and boys across the country what they're talking about is shared by the majority of our young men. Calvin Klein started the undressing of men, more and more and more. I'm going to show you the progression. We're seeing more body and less product. The body is wrapped up in that same image of what guys are supposed to be – and it's not warm and friendly. We undress them to sell breakfast cereal; to sell microwave ovens. Another thing that's happened is the incredible sexualization of boys. This didn't exist until recently. It's been around for girls and women for a long time. But doing this to boys and men is relatively new. The seductiveness goes on and on. They make it increasingly provocative. Starting from 1960, there are more and more images of the male body, buffed and undressed. The magazines market to men with articles about your gut, meaning your abs, muscle and sex. Those three words are on every cover. It's to the point where we have a whole magazine just devoted to abs. They are targeting the boys. One sample article here is "How To Unbutton Her Bra." One of the things you're going to see if you look at the other extreme is *Playgirl*. Since the 1970's the average *Playgirl* centerfold lost 12 pounds and put on 27 pounds of muscle. This reflects the same trend of giving us an unreal male body image. And we're doing it with boy's action figures. The evolution of GI Joe's body is approaching what we did with Barbie. If you took Barbie and blew her up to adult proportions, she wouldn't exist. And that's what we're doing with male action figures. We buffed the action figures. 43% of men are dissatisfied with their overall appearance. 52% are dissatisfied with their weight. 63% are dissatisfied with their abs. In the age range of boys 13-19, 41% are dissatisfied with their looks. Over here, we have what the average boy's body looks like; here is what they want to look like. What they want to look like is not what God gave them.

WAYNE: Guys, will you comment on the other images it means to be a guy.

CORY: I think it's changed from the past. A lot of people today want to be like a thug. They want to be hard. They want to be the guy who fights and can beat anyone up. It's not just the kid you would think of in the inner city, it's moved on to everyone. I think the media's played a big part in that. I see these guys in the movies. You're more masculine because you can beat up the next guy.

ELAN: I saw a fight at my high school in May. These guys in history class had been at it the whole year. They hadn't done anything, but they always made fun of each other. One day we had a sub, it turned into arguing in class. Then after class we had a break. The whole class – 28 students -went to an abandoned stairwell and formed a circle. They pushed the guys into the center. It could have been so much more bloody if someone didn't step in. I tried to turn my back and not get involved but when you see someone getting pushed around, when their hood gets thrown over their head and punched and the possibility of someone falling down stairs and really getting damaged. And the girls! They were saying things. They wanted to see a fight.

CORY: I go to private school parties. It's hard to think of a party where there wasn't a fight. People break bottles over the head. Some of the fights get big.

ELAN: I was at a party last week and four guys jumped on one guy. No one was helping this guy. And you don't want to jump in because you know they know where you work and they'll attack your car. They'll key your car – the lowest thing someone can do. They can't do anything to your face, they can't tell you what to do. I work two jobs; I care about what I have. I may live in a nice area but I'm making a living. My mom is a single parent. If someone comes and does that to me, they disrespect me and my family.

CORY: A lot of kids know how to fight. They know jujitsu. They're not taking it for self-defense. They're taking it so they can fight. They're looking for a fight and they start fights. These guys jumped my friend and put him in this hold. They knocked him out and then beat him up when he was unconscious.

WAYNE: Let's talk about what's under the fights. What is it that guys are getting by looking like they can beat up anyone they want to.

NICK: Guys want to be thugs. They emulate this cretinism. I went to a very small Catholic high school. Upper middle-class, primarily Caucasian kids. I remember a sophomore who got "Thug Lite" tattooed across his chest in Old English writing. His parents had just bought him a brand new BMW. I don't know how thug he was being by driving a BMW, but somehow, he wanted to emphasize his thugginess by having this tattoo.

BERNARDO: There's a structure you have to fit into. Like the guys in a music video. They're walking around with their gold chains, their gold teeth, they're strolling around in their Mercedes Benz with their big rims. You got to fit into that. If you don't fight, you're a wussy. At my school there's racial tension. If you don't fight, you're gonna get beat up. If you're not strong enough, or you're gay or a wuss, you're gonna get beat up. And it's on TV shows. The chubby guy is the nerd. The intelligent guys are never buff. The football players are the ones that have all the ladies. All that stuff comes from what we see on TV. I was raised by my mom, my dad, my family and TV. As a young child and teenager, TV is a big part of your life. In movies you see guns. The guns now are so easy everybody has one. It's cool to have a gun. People take them to school; they take knives to school. People get stabbed all the time in school, just because it's cool. Guys say, "I have a knife, O.K., wanna fight? I'm gonna stab you."

ELAN: People categorize you by ethnicity and culture. Like if you're a gangster or a preppy white boy, it shapes who you are. It's scary to think people think of you that way. But when girls approach you, they have it in the back of their head. They have that idea when they hear your voice, the way you look. A lot of it is how you make friends as well. The people you surround yourself with, who you talk to. This boy used to always pick on me when I was younger and smaller. He would ridicule me and call me names. He'd call me fag, call me everything. He saw me six months later after I got into high school and he treated me totally different because of the way I looked. He knew I was bigger, he knew I put on more weight, and he picked up on it right away. And that's scary, how differently he treated me, just on the way I looked.

WAYNE: How does this all translate into your relationships with young women? You talked about the body, how you're working out for the girls. You talked about this need to create other images like fighting so you look like a real man.

BERNARDO: [Society says] you got to have sex with a lot of girls. That was the way my dad raised me, and that was part culture, part media. You see all the movies that come out, like "American Pie," who's gonna get laid first. In school, it's about what you have and how many girls you can have sex with. That's the way it works in high school and if you don't have none of that, you're gay or you're an outsider and people are gonna treat you bad. You're gonna get beat up, you're gonna get hurt and it always comes back to violence. I don't care how people see me now, but when I was in high school I was chubbier and I had to fit into the good crowd or else I would get beat up. It's all about survival. You got to get a lot of

ladies in. Especially with the younger kids now, a lot of them have sex with a lot older girls. Girls rape guys. It has happened to my friends. Girls will come up to them and pressure them to have sex. Adults think it's always the responsibility of the guy to carry a condom, but I feel it's the girl's responsibility also. If you want to be safe, it's both your responsibilities. All a guy hears is negative things from the media. Male involvement in pregnancy is so low. They don't teach you about STDs in school, they don't teach you about contraception. All they say is, "Use a condom." They don't teach you how to use it and they don't give it to you.

NICK: Relationships in high school are all about status. People are looking for someone who will benefit them most at that time. You want an accessory - like a handbag. You want the one that goes with your outfit at the time; you want one to fit. If you don't fit one of the tiny categories that everyone wants to put you in in high school, then people will go, "What? I have to think to get to know you? I don't want that. "

CORY: I am black, white, Jewish and Native American. I have gone to small private schools my entire life. In kindergarten through sixth grade, I was the only black kid in my class. In my high school, there were three black guys. This girl I had been with before basically raped me in 11th grade. She actually initiated it. I never started anything. She came over and said, "I like you," and I said, "I don't like you." It was a mistake. She started kissing me. I said no for an hour and she would not leave me alone. She said she was not going to leave me alone until she got what she wanted. She wanted to have sex with me, but I did not want to have sex with her. I said, "Stop." I said, "I can't do this." Looking back on it now, I can laugh or whatever. If I talked to my friends back then about it, they'd call me an idiot because I had a girl and she wanted me and I didn't want her.

NICK: Guys are expected to have sex in high school. If there's no emotional feeling between you guys, and a girl wants you, you're kinda expected by your friends to have sex. If you don't, there's something wrong with you.

BERNARDO: With girls, if they say no, it's supposed to be no. But if the same thing happens with guys it's different. That ticks me off. If you're a guy, the pressure is always there: you gotta have sex. "No" doesn't mean anything at all. If they touched us where we don't want to be touched and we told the cops, they'd laugh at us. No one would take it seriously. It always happens with women who are older.

NICK: I think there's a mixed message. With girls, they're supposed to say, "No, let's take it slow and do the respectful thing." So they think when we say no, it's not genuine, it's just us trying to do the respectful thing. But really, it's genuine.

MICHAEL: Race plays a role. I've been lucky. I've been raised by two parents with good morals. It's easier for me because of my race. People treat me different because I'm Asian. If I say I have to go home to do homework, they respect me. They don't mind if I don't partake. I haven't had a girlfriend. It's harder for my friends of another race who say no to still be respected.

ELAN: High school is a game. Relationships are a game. Girls know how to play the game real well. The guys are learning how to play it. Between 14 and 18 there's a huge difference, in terms of girls and how they talk to you. Girls know how to manipulate guys. You call a girl, then they don't call back. You think you've done something wrong. You keep calling her. You're begging her. A friend of mine was going with this girl, he was always calling her, then he stopped. Then she really wanted him. She would not leave this guy's side. He cheated on her but she won't leave him. She got birth control and they had sex. He was thinking of breaking up with her, but the idea of having sex with this girl kept him in the relationship. He stayed with her to have sex. They got tested. He's two personalities with this girl. When he's with her, he's a sweet pussycat guy. Then we, his friends, come along, he's an @!#*&? to this girl, he calls her names. We say, "Why do you act differently in front of somebody else? Why do you have to prove how hard you are, how strong you are, how tough you are?" He doesn't understand that. He thinks he's a good @!#*&?. He's good when he wants to be and then he's an @!#*&? when he wants to be.

CORY: A lot of people think of me as a player. It's not really true. I turned down six girls before I had sex. I actually wanted to have a relationship with the person I had sex with. I've gotten the image of being a player because I have a lot of friends who are girls. I happen to like girls. When people see you with girls they automatically assume I'm having sex with them. I've been with a lot of older girls. If I don't call them for a week, they're calling me. It's all about the game. I had a relationship with a 21-year-old and she initiated everything. She made it clear that she wants to be with me. She gave me her number; I didn't call her for three days. And you know how Elan was talking about his friend who's, like two

different people? I understand, 'cause if you're not hard around your guy friends, you're gonna get teased. You act differently around your guy friends than your girl friends, cause, going back to the whole fighting thing, it's about respect. You can talk about flowers with your girlfriend, but if you talk about planting rose bushes with your guy friends – you probably won't have too many guy friends. Being macho gets more respect. A lot of girls like @!#*&?. I hang out with girls; I sit there while they're getting ready to go out. They're comfortable getting dressed around me. They're like, "You're basically like a girl. We feel comfortable doing whatever around you." They do their hair, put on deodorant. They're sitting there doing their make-up. One of my girlfriends said, "We've changed you so much." I've seen both sides. I went through a phase where I wanted to be hard core, be in a gang. I got a reputation for being tough even though I've only been in one fight in my life and I was jumped. People would say, "Didn't you used to carry a gun?" If you know me at all you know that's not me. I'm an easy-going guy and wouldn't think of doing anything like that. But image gets you a lot. I have a lot of respect from a lot of people because I was supposedly this hard core guy, [supposedly] I dealt drugs, I fit these media images, especially because I'm black. I basically went along with it. I think "the Rebel," like from "Rebel Without a Cause," has really evolved into a guy who sells drugs, does that illegal thing, is in a gang. "The Jock" still exists, the hometown hero. Maybe not so much in L.A., but something like "Varsity Blues." You have to be a big guy who gets all the girls. You see all those teen shows, but most of the guys in those shows are twenty. It angers me, 'cause a 20-year-old's body is very different from a 15-year-old's body. What kind of message does that send out to a 15-year-old who wants that body? It would be nice to see a 16-year-old playing a 16-year-old. These guys don't look 16. The guy on "Dawson's Creek" has to shave twice a day to look the way he looks.

DANNY: You know the show "Even Stevens?" There's a guy who's supposed to be a 9th grader and he's like 29. He walks around with his shirt off and his chest is all hairy. And they have a guy playing an 8th grader and he's 23. They have 8th graders played by seniors in high school. The age difference is really huge. People are not casting right.

MICHAEL: Everyone is a model on shows. It makes kids think, "I want to be like them." But then you can't relate to them, they're better looking. It detracts from the show's real intent. It's not realistic. I think people want to keep it real, boys especially, but they're afraid to be themselves. They try to be a rebel, because it's what society wants us to be. Girls go for people who are @!#*&?. So the nice guys think, "What am I doing wrong?" The nice guys become @!#*&?. We're trying to fit a certain persona. To show we're real guys. Kids watch the shows and it makes them grow up faster. Then the average kids, the kids who are still kids at heart, they follow the other kids and it makes everyone grow up faster.

ELAN: The family I liked on TV was "Married With Children." They didn't care how they looked, they'd wear the same outfit over and over again, they weren't perfect. That was one of the biggest shows on TV and it was a show I grew up watching. You don't see shows like that now. People loved that family. They loved Al. He had a middle-class job and he worked every day. The kids didn't play out of character. They were playing the right ages. They were cast right. Al wasn't fit, Al wasn't tough. They had some hard issues, but they did it in a way that was comfortable to watch. And the issues weren't out of the blue. They fit into the show. I loved that show.

WAYNE: We've talked about media influences, we've talked about family influences. Nick, I'm going to put you on the spot. Would you share that story about your Dad's perception of you?

NICK: I'm a completely different guy. I'm a character. I think I take after my mom a lot, I'm very artsy and my dad is very business. My love of painting, as opposed to football or anything like that, was perceived differently. My dad convinced himself that I was gay. So when I finally did it, when I was 17, I made it a point to have sex where my dad would catch me. I wanted to dispel any thoughts in his mind of me being gay. We'd do things like leave the door unlocked so he'd know for a fact I wasn't gay.

CORY: When I was younger, I was having a bad time for awhile where I was upset, and the first thing my dad asked me was, "Are you gay?" Not like, "What's going on?" I got stuck in two directions. I'm a writer. I love writing poetry, and I want to be an actor. At the same time, I have a dad who's into sports, was a track star in high school. I've always had a sports influence in my life. I hung around girls to dispel any thought that I was gay.

BERNARDO: I was raised by my mom and I loved shopping. My friends said, "You're gay." It shows how you gotta prove yourself. Why do we have to prove ourselves? Prove we're not gay? The culture, the media and religion plays a big part. There's always typecasting. Black guys have guns, they're thugs. The Latino guy with the muscle shirt and bald head. The Asian nerdy guy. Being Latino, I'd fit the son of a maid or a lady working at a market in a minimum wage job. If I tried to get a job in Beverly Hills, because I'm colored, that would hold me back. Because people who are not colored have this

stereotype of who I am by the way I walk, the way I dress, and I talk with a Spanish accent. But that doesn't mean I'm going to hurt you. The media builds stereotypes in people's heads.

WAYNE: Take everything you've been talking about: the cultural messages, the media messages, the games, what your parents expect. How does that translate when you or your friends start partnering up with young women? How do you make decisions about protection? About contraception? About sexually transmitted diseases? How does it translate to real life?

CORY: A lot of guy friends don't know about STDs, contraception. They know they're out there, but don't know how you get them. With the way it's portrayed on TV, it's the dirty person who has the disease. It's not the very nice, clean-cut kid. It's the guy from the wrong side of the tracks; it's the dirty girl. A lot of girls are on the pill, so guys think that nothing will happen. They don't use condoms. Teenagers think they're invincible.

NICK: They [STDs and contraception] are thought of in a humorous sense. They're not taken seriously at all. My friends joke about having a swipe through card for STDs. It's really not funny. They all say, "It couldn't happen to me." In the beginning of a relationship people care about using protection, but when they start to get to know each other they say, "I trust you because you make me feel comfortable, we should be able to share this."

CORY: When you're in the moment you don't want to slow down and pull out a condom.

NICK: Kids can't have sex in normal places like a house. So they're in a car or park where their chances of being busted by somebody are pretty high. They don't want to have to deal with the extra 15 seconds it takes to put on a condom.

WAYNE: At this point, let's throw it open to any questions you may have.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: You've talked about acceptance of gays, yet you feel you have to defend yourself against being gay. How do you think it is for a gay boy?

NICK: Socially, it's OK, we accept you. But it's not really so. No one wants to be not open minded. I'm still afraid, because it's something different from me and that makes me uncomfortable. When you're a teen, you don't know what you are yet; you haven't a sense of your identity. It's hard for kids to accept things outside your safety zone. I think a lot of people look down on it, not because they think it's bad, but because they're afraid of it and not exposed to it.

AUDIENCE: If you heard that kind of prejudice (someone called a fag) would you join in, or stand up for it or walk away from it?

ELAN: You're gonna hear it [the word "gay"] in a derogatory way. Gay's bad. But a counselor told us it's just a partner. It's just an attraction to the same sex. It doesn't change who you are; it doesn't change what you do every day.

DEB HAUSER, ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH: I am struck by how homophobia is driving the straight kids' behavior. The underlying homophobia in society is not only making it difficult for gay men and women to feel comfortable with themselves, but it's also pushing the straight kids to defend themselves against the suspicion of being gay.

ELAN: People yell out "faggot" as something to say. You try to defend that. I've been around gay people who are called that. It's scary to hear people that I know use those words. I try to defend them (gays) but it's tough for me to defend myself, because I feel vulnerable to attack as well. They're gonna say, "You're gay, too." I say, it's a preference; it's not me, but it's tough coming from all sides.

DANNY: I just got back from Jewish camp. The thing that ticked me off the most was a couple of my cabin mates would say, "Dude, that's so gay, why are you doing that?" They would say, "You're so queer." These were all my close friends, and I was expecting them not to do that. They used, "That's so gay" and they didn't even realize they were doing that. One day I just flipped out. I started screaming at them. And four of the five guys started flipping out on them cause they hated it too, and my counselor said, "If you say gay one more time, I'm going to make you sleep outside."

BERNARDO: The media portrays gay as OK. It's OK, but I'm not gay. You know that ad where the guy is sucking the lollipop? They wouldn't have another guy in the picture with him cause that would look gay.

ELAN: In the Abercrombie ads, you never see them just calm and relaxed.

DANNY: Those ads are not directed at straight men. Those ads are directed at girls who want their boyfriends to look like that.

AUDIENCE: Danny, could you talk about the kids in your age group (14-year-olds). Are they having sex?

DANNY: I go to a small school. The minute you have sex, the principal knows. Not a lot of my friends are having sex. Some of my friends are smoking weed; some of them are drinking. We're making out and hooking up with girls but none of us is having sex. At my camp, a girl had sex. She was in 10th grade. She said she had sex with eleven boys. I have a friend who's a girl in 10th grade; she [had oral sex with] an eighth grader. She was pretty much shunned. The principal found out and her parents were called. If a guy hooks up, he's looked up to; he's congratulated. If a girl has sex, she's looked down on; she's shunned. At my school, if a girl does it, her parents are called, but the guy's parents aren't called.

BERNARDO: In my community, 20-year-old girls are having sex with junior high boys. I don't know why; I guess they like it. The pressure is always there with older girls. I know with me, the first time I had sex was with a way older girl.

AUDIENCE: When it comes to body image, what are some of the things you do to impress a girl?

ELAN: Guys are looking for abs. Last night before I was going out, I lifted. I was sore when I went out, but I lifted, 'cause I didn't want to miss a day. I lift every other day. My friend is really cut up. He lifts every day and runs cardio. He does something every day. No matter how sore he is. You feel better when you work out. It's a mental thing; it's crazy. You think you look different after you eat. Guys take carbo enhancer. They're not eating a lot. They eat cans of tuna.

NICK: Guys are just as concerned about their weight as girls. At my school, girls would have an orange and a Diet Coke for lunch. Guys can't talk about weight. I was a chunk in high school. I didn't get girls and felt really low. I decided to stop eating. I smoked, took methamphetamine, and dropped 25 pounds in 3 months. I can't talk to friends and say I'm anorexic, but I can say I have a drug problem.

DANNY: If all you're eating is a power bar, and it tastes like @!#*&?, that's an eating disorder. Those bars look like @!#*&? too. The only good protein bar is the one made for women, "Luna." People think, "Wow, you're eating a bar made just for women." But they taste pretty good. At my school, a lot of girls eat an orange and Diet Coke for lunch. My sister was anorexic. Guys deal with anorexia too.

AUDIENCE: Did you like the skinny girls?

ELAN: It depends. Personally, I don't like skinny girls. I like a little meat on their bones. I love girls' personalities. But the attractive part is always there as well. When you see a girl at a club, you're not thinking about her personality, you're seeing what she looks like. The first look, the first time you meet eyes with them, you think they're the one, for however long you want to be with them. You just have looks to go on.

DANNY: An anorexic girl is probably one of the ugliest girls. When you see her rib cage, when you see her bones, that's disgusting.

MICHAEL: Really skinny girls are looked down on. Made fun on. Guys don't want girls who are too skinny.

AUDIENCE: The definition of masculine seems to get more and more narrow. Could you define "masculine?" I'd like your definition of "@!#*&?" as well.

CORY: Treat women like dirt. When you're good, you have to be good. But then you're not nice to them, don't pay attention to them. The whole male chauvinist thing.

NICK: I think with being called an @!#*&? or the gay word, there's ambivalence. A lot of guys think, hey, whatever, it doesn't really affect me that much, I'm not going to marry her, she just looks good. They're not genuinely trying to be an

@!#*&?, they just know that this is an empty, meaningless relationship and they're just trying to look good, look cool. There's no emotional aspect so they have this "who cares?" attitude.

BERNARDO: The way I see it, for a guy to be called an @!#*&?, the girls don't like that guy. He's the bad boy, the ghetto guy, a thug. There's sexism. It's all right if a guy opens a door for a girl, he'll pull out a chair, but that's another show of sexism. It's like, sure I'll pull out the chair for you. What does that show, it shows you're weak. I'm a really nice guy to girls. But sometimes they say, "You're too nice."

DANNY: I play volleyball. People feel it's a gay sport. I tell people I play volleyball and they look at me and I'm like, "Abercrombie & Fitch." They look closer and I'm actually matching. And they go, "Oh my god, he's gay." And I say, "No offense, but have you ever looked at a volleyball player?" These guys are as buff as an Abercrombie & Fitch guy. 6'6", 6'4" and 2% body fat. They're all muscle. These guys could probably beat up any other athlete in the world, except for maybe, a boxer or Shaq. There are some volleyball players, I guarantee you, could beat up any basketball players.

ELAN: I'm on the tennis team at school and I've played since I was 11 or 12. When I tell my friends I'm a tennis player, they give me the gay routine. And I say, "Get out on the tennis court with me. Play a few sets with me. You probably can't move around as long as I can." My freshman year I ran cross-country. I remember once at practice this football player was taunting us, "Cross country are wimps, are nerds." Our coach went off on him. He made him apologize. It's an art to run, it's an art to play football. But no one understands how much dedication each one of those takes to be good at.

DANNY: No one understands how hard it is to run on sand.

WAYNE: I just want to observe that the unstated assumption here under the maleness is that if you're that volleyball player, that wrestler, the tennis player, as long as you can beat up someone, you're not gay, and we're back to that theme yet again. As if a gay person couldn't beat up somebody.

AUDIENCE: How prevalent is alcohol at parties?

NICK: In early high school, my mom knew there was going to be drinking and she knew it was cool and rebellious. She said, "I know you guys are gonna drink and I'm gonna be there, I'm going to watch you, I'm going to take care of you. I'm going to watch over you and make sure everything is safe. I'm going to be there in case you guys drink too much. I'm real. I know that drinking goes on, I know that smoking goes on. But if you're going to drink, drink while I'm around, so that a responsible adult can take care of you." She was a responsible watchdog as opposed to an enabler.

BERNARDO: At any party, there's drinking and a lot of alcohol. Like, we're gonna get three kegs and get trashed. Parents should tell kids about the affects of alcohol on their bodies, talk about what they're going to do if something happens instead of, "Don't drink." Kids are going to do it anyway; they'll just do it behind your back. Parents think kids aren't going to drink but they will. It's better to say, "I'm here if you need a ride home."

AUDIENCE: What show do you think accurately portrays kids?

CORY: The movie "Kids." It had the drinking and the drugs. I remember watching an episode of "Dawson's Creek" and they were taking ecstasy and the pills looked like sweet tarts, like candy. It's not realistic; the parties aren't realistic.

ELAN: "Moesha." They went over issues. One of them was about having sex and using condoms. It was great. That show had relevancy. Going back to alcohol at parties, people use it not just as a social thing but because it eases tension. It's liquid courage. When you're drinking, you think you can go for anything. You don't hold back. "A drunk man's words are a sober man's thoughts" are what a lot of people say. When you're drinking, a lot of things you're thinking might come out.

NICK: I like "Boston Public." I think they do a good job of portraying the struggles that kids go through. It's really well written. My main quirk with all these shows is the parties. I have never been to a high school party like the ones on TV. I want to find out where, exactly, these parties are. Parties in Los Angeles get broken up at eleven o'clock. It's like 50 kids with a keg, and everyone's chain smoking, and that's a party. There aren't mansions where kids are dancing around and jumping in the pool, and the kids on the jet skis come by with their beers.

WAYNE: We only have one minute left so I'm going to ask you guys if you have any parting thoughts, anything you want to say that didn't get said?

DANNY: If you are parents of teenagers, talk to your kids. Don't rely on your school's health program. I know more about STDs and drugs than they teach you at school.

BERNARDO: Parents should be a friend. Like if kids try marijuana, don't yell at them. Talk to them and ask them why they did it. Explain how it affects you.

MICHAEL: I would encourage the media to portray kids as they really are.

NICK: My biggest pet peeve is people in the media trying to capitalize on fear, fear of kids. Making kids out to be criminals; kids are the ones selling drugs; kids are doing this; kids are doing that. Well, adults are making the drugs kids are selling. I've had old women shriek at me when I wanted to help her out to her car. I don't want adults to be afraid of me. I'm going to raise my kids to be good people and have a genuinely good heart. Most teenagers I know out there are good people and have a good heart; they're not criminals.

CORY: I wish TV wouldn't be so naive. I wish the people who were writing shows would come and talk to us. I'd tell you how it is. Parents, the media, are so naive. I have stories you'd be shocked about that aren't common. Writers need to do more field research. It's different now than when they were teenagers. The one show I feel has really captured where the media has gone the last few years is "The Real World." It started out as an experiment, now if you look at it – they're all basically models. They're all buff, they're all beautiful.

ELAN: Where are teens going to look? Who are we going to look to? Where else do we have to go other than the media? Books? Maybe. Parents? Yes. Where do parents get what they know? From the media. Bernardo says his TV is one of his siblings. Anything you do will be helpful.

ROBIN SMALLEY: I had a whole spiel about the power of the media...but they did it already. The fact that you're all here shows that you are aware of the power that you have and you are concerned about wielding that power responsibly. Now I hope you are all so inspired that you're going to run back to your offices and create brilliant and compelling stories on teen boys and their emotional and sexual health!

Thank you so much Wayne. Your expertise and rapport with the guys were invaluable and we appreciate your participation. And you guys...you're the best. Telling the truths about your personal experiences isn't easy and you are the heroes of the day. And thank you to the wonderful Media Project staff...Kerrie Preston who makes everything run without a hitch, Magaly Holtz who heads of our Spanish TV initiative and the newest member of our staff, Sandra Harper whose contributions have already made our lives easier.

If any of you would like the opportunity to talk further with a panel of teens or experts about any sexuality issues of particular interest to your shows, please feel free to call me at the Media Project. And if you are writing a script or considering a storyline that deals with sexual health, please utilize our HELPLine. We will drop everything to get you the information you need, when you need it. Also, we have included a SHINE Award application in your packets. We hope you will all attend the Awards this year on Oct. 19 at the House of Blues. It will be loads of fun, is our only fundraiser of the year and is a wonderful way for you to show your support. Lastly, before you leave, please take a moment to fill out the evaluation forms in your packets...it is our best way to find out if we are serving your needs and what we can do for you in the future. Thank you all for being here and we'll see you again next time!