



The Media Project

The Entertainment Industry's Resource on Sexual Health

Teens Do It ... But Can You Show It?

A Discussion regarding Television, Sex, and Censorship

Summarized Transcript

Thursday, January 27, 2005

Moderator: *Liz Tigelaar*

Speakers: *Angela Randazzo, Melissa Havard, and Dr. Belzer*

Panelists: *Tom Bourgeois, Barbie Kligman, Olivia Cohen Cuttler, Kristen Newman, Ken Topolsky, Ed Yeager, Kashmere, and John*

ANGELA: It's good to see you; we are overwhelmed by the response, so much so that we ran out of food. Next time we will send out for pizza. But it really is wonderful to have you all here this evening. I would like to welcome our distinguished panel, our moderator, and the teens who agreed to spend this evening with us. So without further ado, let me introduce Melissa Havard of the Media Project, our co-sponsor of this event. She will introduce everyone to you. Thank you

MELISSA: Hello; welcome. Can you hear me? Welcome to *Teens Do It, Can You Show It? A Discussion regarding Television, Sex, and Censorship*. I am the new (well not quite so new; I've been there six months) Director of the Media Project, and I am so amazed by this fabulous turn out. I used to be the director of the CDC office on smoking and health, and we did briefings and like half the number of people [turned out]. And so, I go from tobacco, umm huh, to sex, and look at the turn out! It's great! I am glad you could be here. A couple of housekeeping items before we get started. Please make sure you give us your feedback forms before you leave tonight. That helps us determine what kind of briefings we can do in the future, by hearing from you. So that's one, and in keeping with tonight's spirit and to not interrupt the panelists, would you kindly put your cell phones on vibrate, or whatever else? Just put them into silent mode. Thanks.

Before I get into the Media Project and give my two-minute spiel, I would like first to take the opportunity and thank all of our sponsors and the people that have helped us tonight. It is important that we recognize them. First of all, a special thank you to Angela and the Committee of Women's Writers for hosting and sponsoring us tonight. This group has provided tremendous support to the Media Project, and I want everyone to know that; so, thank you, Angela. Thank you to Rebecca Weiker for all her hard work and to the Hollywood Teen Community Project and our co-sponsor, and the fabulous kids that came tonight. After the formal part of our briefing, the kids will be in the room across the hall there and available to you to talk to, to answer questions, and get ideas for stories. It is a really good opportunity. I would love for you to go by and say hello, and I would also like the kids, young adults, to raise their hands. So, we have plenty of them here tonight. So, thank you guys for coming tonight. I appreciate it.

Special thank you to Liz, our moderator and to my panelists: Ed, Ken, Tom Olivia, Kristen, Barbie; and our student panelists: Kashmere and John. I appreciate your volunteering your time to be here tonight (after I bugged you and bugged you and twisted a lot of arms). Thank you to Dr. Belzer, who will be speaking shortly, from the Division of Adolescent Medicine at Children's Hospital; and to Consuelo Flores, of course, from the Writers Guild, for your support; and to our friends at Trojan Condoms and Adam Horowitz from Condomania, who keep us supplied with plenty of condoms and handouts for our briefings. I am sure that when you opened it, you found lots of little surprises in your pack, so enjoy! Thank you to my fabulous staff at the Media Project, without whom I could do nothing: Magaly, Stacy, Lyndsay, and our new intern from London, England, Jessica.

By a show of hands, how many of you are not familiar or have never heard of the Media Project? Okay, my husband is raising his hand! Well briefly, we are an LA-based, non-profit organization, a program of Advocates for Youth, a larger

nonprofit located in Washington DC. We work with TV writers and producers in the areas of sexuality and reproductive health and rights. We are absolutely free. We are the one-stop shopping, so to speak, [for the creative community] on teens and sex or both. Many of the panelists here have used us before, worked with us before.

We offer a hotline service, for those of you who call at 5 o'clock in the afternoon because you are shooting tomorrow. If you call and say that this is a hotline call, we will drop everything and help you. We love those calls, even though they usually come at around 4:45 in the afternoon, when we are trying to pack everything up for the day. In addition, we have a fax blast. We are now doing [fax blasts to] 34 shows a month, where we provide research and story ideas that we get from the news, tailored towards specific programs to help them with their storylines. If you would like to be part of that please let us know, and we would be happy to add you. We will come to your office and provide tailored briefings, and we usually bring free condoms and cookies, so it's a great deal. If you can't come to us, we are happy to come to you. And each year, we recognize the creative community for outstanding work [with] the SHINE awards. SHINE stands for Sexual Health IN Entertainment.

Finally we are doing something unique, and this is sort of an official announcement. I did a media interview yesterday, and this should begin happening in March. We are starting a monthly e-mail alert in the spring of 2005, tentatively called TAKE P.A.R.T., Positive Action for Responsible Television. Take P.A.R.T. will provide examples of shows and network affiliations that have done a fabulous and responsible job in addressing sexual health and reproductive rights. It is kind of like taking the SHINE awards and mass marketing them on a very user-friendly national scale. We will provide the e-mail info and sample letters that people can send with a click of their mouse and we will encourage communication to network executives as well as to the FCC. We will offer positive reinforcement and not complaints—an alternative voice, if you will, to what is currently out there. There is more information in your packet on how to get this alert and how to reach us; so, please let us hear from you.

Our topic tonight is *Teens Do It ... But Can You Show It?* Did anyone see the Katie Couric special last night? Obviously the topic is very timely and it is quite personal to me. Not only am I a professional in [the field of] health, I am also the mother of a fabulous teenage daughter! Say hi, Katie. Yeah! That just earned me mother of the year award!!! On the one hand, federal funding of sex education has ceased to exist, unless the curriculum is abstinence-only-until-marriage. And a recent study by the office of Congressman Henry Waxman shows that in 11 of the 13 most widely used abstinence-only curricula, numerous examples of medically inaccurate information are being taught—things like you can get HIV from tear drops, that condom failure rates are as high as 30 percent, that you can get pregnant through genital touching, and that half of youth who are HIV positive are gay. None of this is true. Moreover it kind of makes you think, if you are a gay youth and the only message you are hearing is 'wait until marriage' and you can't legally get married, then what are you supposed to do? And how are your health needs being addressed? Is this discrimination?

In addition, indecency complaints to the FCC have skyrocketed. Networks have had to pay significant fines over the past couple of years, and there is a real climate of concern as to what constitutes decency, and equally important who decides? Top this off with the fact that teens cite television as one of their top five sources of information about health, and we have quite a dilemma. If teens are getting inaccurate information in the classroom and television shows that might give them important information (like how to prevent HIV or teen pregnancy) are under a microscope, then how do writers address the issues that are so very important to young people? This is a great link to Dr. Marvin Belzer who is going to speak briefly about current adolescent trends in the media. Dr Belzer is Associative Professor of Pediatrics at the USC School of Medicine, and the medical director of a risk reduction program in the Division of Adolescent Medicine, Childrens Hospital of Los Angeles. He is also a fabulous friend and resource to the Media Project. Please welcome Dr. Belzer.

DR. BELZER: Thank you, and I have my 'cheat sheet' here, just in case I need it. Well it is amazing how many people are here, and I thank you for inviting me to come here. Now I was thinking about what I was going to say on an airplane last weekend, just trying to put my thoughts together. Melissa said, "You have to talk about trends and adolescent sexuality in 10 minutes; and we also want to talk a little about the media." I was like, "That's about three hours worth of talk!" So I apologize if I go too short or too long. I will try to give you some things that I think are really important and, even though they asked me to speak about trends, I promise to give what I think is three statistics, because I don't think that anybody wants to hear statistics.

So, the first thing is what is happening with adolescent sexuality? And there is probably some good news going on that we should, at some level, be proud about. Number one is that the average age of initiating sex has actually gone up. We call that a good thing. We don't want them to have sex too young. The bad news is that it has probably gone up from, like 16.3 on average to 16.6 on average. But it is the right direction, because for the decades of the 70s, 80s and 90s, the age kept getting younger and younger and younger. The second statistic that I think is much more impressive is that rates of condom use have gone up. [In] the 80s (kind of before the AIDS epidemic), if you asked teenagers in surveys, "How many of you had sex and used condoms the last time you had sex?" the average was about 35 percent. Now the rates in the same national surveys are 61 percent, so that's really good news. The last piece of good news and the last statistic is that rates of pregnancy in teens have gone down. Gone down [in numbers] from a little over a million to probably 850,000 last year. That is still 850,000 teen pregnancies, most of which are unplanned pregnancies. So we have a lot of work to do, but we still should be proud of the things that we are doing, and keep up the good work.

There is some interesting information, I think, from the President and from the right wing establishment about ... well, it is that all this abstinence-only push is what has got the pregnancies down. The reality is that, if you look at it statistically, what has got the pregnancies down is the increased use of contraception and condoms and a little bit with the change in age for [first sex], but not too much. That's my statistics for today, and if you want more you can come, and I will talk for hours and hours.

Next, I am going to tell you a little bit of a story that I think illustrates one of the big problems with teenage sexuality. So, I had a patient who came and saw me a couple of months ago. Her name is Maria and she was 17-18 years old. I first saw her a couple of years ago, when a patient of mine who was HIV-positive bought her in and said, "Dr. Belzer, this is my girlfriend and she is pregnant." So, he told her, once she found out that she was pregnant, that he was HIV-positive and she was very worried. We talked to her and tested her and God willing, you know, she was HIV-negative. We were really happy about that; and she got through her pregnancy. She did really well, and she had a really healthy baby, and she would come and see me every three to six months and get HIV tests. We would keep trying to reinforce to be safe and all that kind of stuff, and they said that they were. But two months ago she came back to me with the same thing; we did another HIV test on her; and she went on her merry way. Lo and behold, a few days ago I get a laboratory result [for someone who is] HIV- positive and nobody knows who this patient is. It turns out that she goes by a different name, so I did not recognize her [as the same patient] and she had seroconverted to HIV-positive. So you know, I called her up and told her the news. She was, obviously, very upset. But I said, probably not on her first visit, but at the second visit, "Why was it that you didn't use condoms? I must have seen you 10 times in the last two years, and every time you came in, I asked you if you were using condoms and said how important it was. Why didn't you use them?"

She and her partner turned to me and the answer I got was, "We don't like condoms." And you think, "You have a young child; your partner is HIV-positive. What could be stronger, more compelling reasons to use condoms, whether you like them or not?" This made me think about adolescence and what is going on with them and what our real mission is. In Western Europe they have tackled this problem of condom use by media blitzes and by being very, very open about condoms and making condoms the norm. When kids think that the norm isn't to use condoms and the norm is to be spontaneous and that's the image that they get from the press and from the media; that's the image they get from their friends, it [using condoms] just becomes a burden. We know that sex may be a little less fun with condoms; but, you know, it's not bad with condoms. And a lot of people like sex with condoms, and there is a lot to gain by [using them].

But I wanted to talk about, for a second, why youth put themselves at risk. I will probably miss a few categories but I want to talk about a few of the [reasons]. One of them is, of course, that youth are in denial, youth are into risk-taking, and youth feel invulnerable. This is important for adolescents; this is programmed into their brain; this is how they learn to be adults—by taking risks and learning stuff. So, we have to understand that they are going to take risks and not assume that we can tell them to never take risks. Another, especially nowadays, is that their parents are very uninvolved. Parents are much busier; both parents are working. Parents still don't feel comfortable talking to their teens, for whatever reasons, even though parents who have teenagers now grew up in the 60s and 70s and 80s and probably had premarital sex. So, it is one of these big opportunities that we have to demonstrate to parents how they can communicate and how they can be open, to tell them how to do it without being annoying.

People always ask me, "How do you manage with all those teenagers in adolescent medicine? I can't stand them when they are my own!" And I say, "Well, I don't have to go home and live with them." So that is the problem for parents: they

have to be parental and, in some sense, that is going to make their kids mad at them. But there is a way to demonstrate really good communication, openness. You give them the skills and they can go from there. What else? The media—we have to blame the media, which gives mixed messages to teens. I think that the media gives a lot of good messages and the media gives a lot of bad messages, especially the commercials and that’s a tough thing. I don’t know how we counter that. So I think that those messages are going to stay.

One thing we don’t talk about much (or I don’t think I have seen much on TV) which is really important for teenagers, is the power imbalances in their relationships. When we think of young women and who they are talking risks with, it is very important to know that most of the people they are taking risks with are older men, three or five or ten years older. When we look at our HIV-positive teens, on average their partners were six years older. You know, they don’t have the same power. They don’t have that same ability to say, “No. I don’t want to do this.” “No, I don’t want to do that.” “I have money to support myself.” “I want you to use condoms.” There is a lot of violence involved in these relationships; so, I think there is a good example to the media to provide good stories. The last reason that a lot of young people take risks is that many come from a place where they have no hope and the answer to this is, obviously, let’s have an end to poverty and an end to single parents. That’s not reality, but if we can figure out ways to give youth positive role models we will really make a difference.

I wanted to talk about a couple of things that you might want to write stories about, and I already talked about a few of them. The first is parental communication. You know, it can be good and interesting and really true stories. Not too many people are going to be against doing that kind of storyline. The second one is a little bit harder; it is condom acceptance; it is that normalization of use of condoms. I think the way to do that and it has been done in the movies before, is just show the condoms by the side of the bed. You don’t have to talk about it. Have people see that that is what these important, pretty people and stars are doing. I already talked about power and balances. I want to talk the last minute on healthy sexuality. I don’t think that we talk about this very much. I think that everybody believes that all teens think about is sex, and that there is nothing we can do to stop teens thinking about sex; it is just programmed into them. The second thing is we really don’t want adolescents not to be sexual; what we want is for them not to have sexual intercourse until they are ready. So, what we need to do is teach them what sexuality is all about. The key things that I could think of are that, if you can have sex in the context of a positive relationship, that’s the start of having healthy sexuality. And I am not defining what that relationship is; I am not saying it is marriage; I am not saying that you have to have been dating them for six months; but you have a positive relationship with your partner—male or female. After that comes the ability and responsibility that, if you are going to have sex in that positive relationship, to do it in a safe manner that prevents unwanted pregnancy and unplanned STDs and HIV. So stories that relate to [healthy] sexuality are really the way to go. The negative messages that we sometimes like to give (this poor kid got AIDS; this poor kid got pregnant; this poor kid got an STD) don’t work. Sometimes, we think that we are going to shock them and scare them into doing the right thing; but it doesn’t work. So, giving them a little more positive, giving them a little more credit will help them be healthier. I thank you for your time.

LIZ: I just wanted to start out by thanking the Writers Guild and the Media Project for having this event, and I am really excited. We are going to start by showing four clips of *Degrassi High*, two each from two episodes.

Okay, before we discuss the clips, I just want to bring on and introduce our panel. Co-Executive Producer of *Still Standing*, Ed Yeager; Ken Topolsky of *Kevin Hill*; Olivia Cohen Cuttler of ABC Standards and Practices; Tom Bourgeois of CBS Standards and Practices; Kristen Newman, writer and producer on *That 70’s Show*; Barbie Kligman, writer of *Jack and Bobby* and *Everwood*; and our teen experts: from the Hollywood Teen Community Project, Kashmere; and from Oakwood High School, John.

Before we speak to the panel, I would just like to poll the audience really quickly. One of these episodes didn’t get aired in the U.S.; one you probably could tell was from the 80s, (’89); and the other was from 2004. I just wondered how many of you thought the first one did not air in the U.S. and how many of you thought the second one? I would just like to go down the panel, starting with Ed. Just tell us your reaction and why you might think that.

ED: Well, I didn't think that it was very funny, not a lot of laughs there. Uh, let's see, I think that the second one dealt with stuff that might have kept it off the air; I don't know. Both of my kids watch *Degrassi*, the one that is on now and I am blown away by the subject matter. It is continually this level of stuff. I have no answer.

KEN: He's a comedy guy. I didn't think it was dramatic! I think it was the third one, the idea of the doctor counseling a young person so openly, seems to me that it is not in the agenda of the FCC.

OLIVIA: Well, you know [that] I know; so I don't want to vote. Just from the standpoint of the first one, the standard for us is always exposition, not advocacy. The first one had both sides of the story and that is generally what we are looking for. I thought that the second series of clips, and my daughter watches *Degrassi* too, even at college, I think the second one didn't have as much of that exposition as the first one did.

LIZ: By exposition, you mean the fair and balance?

OLIVIA: That both sides of the story was there a little bit. To me, I would have said it was acceptable, because it did have one side of the story and the other side of the story.

TOM: I am going to cop out and say that, without the total context of the episode, it would be hard for me to make a judgment. I would hazard a guess that it was likely the second one that didn't air. You know you bring up [that it] didn't air and I just want throw a wrinkle into this discussion. This is about the auspices of airing. I am not sure how many people here know the difference between broadcast and non-broadcast television. That certain carriers of television signals have to be licensed by the FCC, that licenses can be removed and that licenses can be challenged, for any number of reasons, that can include [in]decency complaints, complaints about advocating points of view that are not felt to be consistent with community standards. MTV, VH1, HBO these kinds of outlets can be 'unregulated' in terms of content. So when you ask the question where it did not air, I am assuming you are asking which one didn't air on broadcast TV?

KRISTEN: I would guess the second one, just based on the year, 1989 and 2004. We are going backwards. The FCC, I feel, is focused on the wrong events, just like the administration is. The word 'morality' I feel like they have tied exclusively to sexuality, so they worry about bad words and in Fox's case an animated butt that had to be blurred, that wasn't blurred a few years ago. Instead of larger morality issues like *The Swan*—three of the contestants were on suicide watch, but they just keep making more of those and care about when somebody says 'bitch' or teen pregnancy. So I would just go with the second one, based on the year.

BARBIE: I think I am going to go with the first one. Well, the first one affected me more, just in terms of the portrayal. I mean what could be more scary than being 16 years old and being pregnant, and standing there and having all these people descend on you? And yet, I think, as we move towards a government trying to reverse *Roe v. Wade*, the second part of the first one is almost something they would let on the air because it basically says don't have an abortion, ever. So, I am not sure, but I felt like the first set.

KASHMERE: I enjoyed both of them. I think that the first one is more realistic because at school we do have discussions about abortion, like, just open discussion sometimes. But I don't think that one would be aired because it was so blunt and harsh. And they want us to sugar coat it nowadays to make it seem 'sweet'. And that one was kind of blunt, like "Don't have an abortion." The second one was good, but I don't think that they would recommend a doctor talking to a teenager like that.

JOHN: I don't quite see why either of them wouldn't air. I mean maybe the FCC just has something against Canada. I feel like TV shows deal with a lot of issues that are more touchy than this, so I can't really see why either of them wouldn't get broadcast.

LIZ: Okay, well it was the second one that didn't air in the U.S. But I think that all those answers were very insightful. Just staying on this topic, I would like to ask Olivia and Tom, specifically, what advice would you give to writers who want to tackle a topic such as abortion or something equally as controversial in order to successfully get it on broadcast television?

OLIVIA: Well we give this advice all the time, and what I said earlier about exposition rather than advocacy is really my rule of thumb. We tackle issues of this kind in our shows all the time. Ken has most recently worked with us, and we have a show on right now called *Life as We Know It*; and there could not have been more blunt discussion about teenage sexuality and teenage angst about sexuality on the air. Our creators were given tremendous license to deal with subjects ... from a male performance problem in a 17-year-old boy to a kid having an affair with his teacher that was all but on the screen. In every instance, (to the condom point) there were condoms. So the answer is [that] the way to get it on the air is to make sure it is a balanced picture that is informative, that doesn't offend, and that doesn't get out in front of the audience. To your point (to KN), I want to tell you, you feel the way you do about all the 'morality' that is going on; but I am telling you (and I say this to writers everyday)—you live in a bubble. How you feel, how I feel, how all the people in this room feel, we live in a bubble in LA, in New York, in the urban hubs that people who write and create just swarm to. The way you see, the notes coming back to you, is what our audience is saying to us. The people that watch, you want to say the red states and the blue states, [but] you don't have to go very far. You can go 15 miles east to Chino and, I am telling you, [these are] the people that are watching network television in particular, and they do have a very different standard when they flip on CBS than they do when they flip on VH1. They don't want to see some of the things that you think that they should see.

KRISTEN: The White House neither.

OLIVIA: It is not the White House. They are reflecting a reality. They are not making it up. We hear from them all the time. I say this all the time—it is show **business**. I know nobody likes to hear it, but it is, and we cannot get too far out in front of our audience, or we won't have the audience that we are looking for. So it is a really tough balance. So that is what I would say to writers: be aware and you can do whatever you creatively see as your vision.

ED: Let me get this. When you were talking about that drama, *Life as We Know It*, did you get letters especially from audience members on that show?

OLIVIA: No one watched it.

ED: It seems like in a drama, you can do stuff like that, and the audience is more receptive to it. Whereas on a sitcom, if you do something that is touching [on sensitive topics], we get tons of letters.

OLIVIA: No I mean we did.

KEN: I don't find that to be true. I mean, look at *Seinfeld*; look at many shows. I think that the kind of thing that I object to is the sense that it is our job to send a message, to choose a message, or anything like that. Our job is to entertain. It's like Bill Mar the other night said, "We are not pundits or comedians. We are entertainers, and we look at things simplistically." If I say choice, everyone would say choice is good. If I say red, everyone would say red is bad. So life ... life is bad? No life is good. In our world, we hear things, but I have heard from executives. We were about to do an episode of *Party of Five* that would let Neve Campbell's character have an abortion and, for several reasons, that did not happen. I will talk to you about that if someone is interested, but I really find that we tend to be a little simplistic. We push agendas that oftentimes aren't about entertainment. And what we have to do in drama is portray honesty and honest characters, and when we go beyond that, we are being dishonest. So I found those clips offensive. I found them offensive because there was nothing honest about them, except for the third piece with the doctor talking. You have to go away because you are Hispanic—that is kind of what I saw. Anyone that protests something because they have a point of view is a 'crazy.' I protested Vietnam; was I a crazy? You know we just have to be honest and when we start talking about messages and what is the right message, the right message is an honest message.

TOM: I would second what Olivia said about exposition and exploration of issues rather than advocacy. I would throw in a personal caution (my personal politics notwithstanding) that if other people more or less left of center (like me) want to talk about tolerance, [then] we had better not be hypocrites. That is to say, I find an offensive degree of demonization of the red states and the red point of view in this community. I find it positively offensive, and it doesn't work commercially, and it doesn't work artistically. I am also going to mention another constituency (aside from the audience) that makes the matter even more [complicated]. Well I will mention two: affiliates which are often managed by very straight-laced people and advertisers. Look at the article in today's business section of the LA times that cites the Bacardi ad as being

adduced in a lawsuit by some parents, a wrongful death suit, involving the death of their daughter, who was killed by an 18-year-old drunk driver. What they are alleging in the suit is that the photograph of a Bacardi print ad, that such print ads irresponsibly invite underage people to drink. When it comes to commercial television, whether broadcast or non-broadcast, if you have commercials on the air, you are listening to your advertisers, for better or worse.

The note of caution I give in these arenas is often not demonizing one side of an argument. I would cite the CBS television show that was on in the 2003-4 season, called *Twelve Mile Road*. It incidentally involved the pregnant teenage daughter of our protagonist. The boy who impregnated her came from a family that was self-identified as Church of God, and the boy's parents were adamant that the kids see through the pregnancy. The girl's parents were cosmopolites (former Seattle media executives who became farmers). That movie [showed] a beautiful, humane, mutually compassionate conversation between Tom Selleck as the father wanting the girl to abort and the counterpoint father of the boy. The upshot was they had the kid. Cynics would say, well you showed it on the network, because they had the kid.

A couple of wrinkles—people have mentioned condoms on the bedside table. That's do-able. I suppose another option is natural conversation between the participants about [condoms] and in the context of their relationship, which can be done dramatically and perhaps tenderly. On Ed's show (and this episode aired last year) was a bad parents' episode, and its final bit was a little grace note between Bill and his son, where Bill gives Brian a condom.

ED: You know, that was an interesting thing. I am the only one with teenagers in my writing team. The thing was, Brian had swiped a condom from his dad because he was going to have a girl over later, and just in the event that he would need it, he wanted to have it. The parents came home earlier than expected and Brian comes downstairs and the girl is there, but they hadn't done anything. The father realized that is why he had the condom. Previously, he had said that he needed it for a friend, very sitcom! However at the very end, the parents say "Look, we want you to be prepared; we want you to be safe; we think you are too young." You know, they said all that good parenting stuff. Essentially, they were going to say "Son, give us the condom." And the son was going to give back the condom and walk away. I was the only one that said, "He can't give back the condom. That's insane! Bill's got to let that kid have a condom. Whether Brian uses it now or years from now, Bill has to give that kid a condom." I was all righteous and everything. But the thing was that, in my own life, I hadn't even done that with my own kids! At this time, I think that my daughter was 15, so I went to the store and I was going to get my daughter condoms, because a sitcom had told me what to do. There is nothing like going to a drugstore to buy condoms for your daughter. You are trying to find a box that doesn't say something like, 'ultra pleasure' or something.

OLIVIA: But there it is, you are a hip, happening kind of dad, you are an entertainment industry success story, and you have the same issue—which is as a parent, as a parent of a 15-year-old daughter there is something that makes you feel uncomfortable, and there is ... it is a natural discomfort. My kids are older, and we had frank discussions all the time about this. It wasn't about sitcoms, it wasn't because of drama, it was because this is what we believe. But the fact is that it is tough for people. And I think you are right. What they see on television as being normal, if it's okay for our television friends, then maybe we can think about it a little, too. I don't presume to intrude on the creative process either, the money or the doing of it; but the fact is that there are many ways to deal with leaving condoms around. On *Life as We Know It*, two of the characters who were thinking about having sex together went into a drugstore, and they were kind of joking and having a funny time talking about florescent condoms and what do you supposed these taste like. You know, they did it all and still nobody watched.

LIZ: Just going a little bit on what Ed was saying, Kashmere and John, I just wanted to know, have you ever watched something on television, maybe with your parents or alone, and has it ever prompted you to have a conversation or anything like that?

KASHMERE: Well, I have a very open relationship with my mom about sex; so, when I was young she already opened the doors. I remember when I was starting junior high there would be stuff on television and she would ask me, "Are you having sex yet?" and I was like, "No, mom. Ugh." But once I hit high school, I was, like, a lot more open and was like, "Mom, how do you do this?" or "How do you do that?" or "How can you improve it?" She is very open; but yeah, it would usually come from a movie or TV, like *That 70's Show*.

JOHN: I am very open with my father, not as much with my mom. Often, the conversations that happen are not with me going to them, but with them coming to me. The conversations can get uncomfortable, but yeah they happen. It's normal for parents to be somewhat interactive with their kids about it. I mean, whether it's them saying it or offering advice, but, yeah, conversations like that do happen.

LIZ: Right, And I don't know if this was said or whether it's in the program, but I just wanted to know how old you guys are and what grade you are in.

KASHMERE: I am a junior and I am 17.

JOHN: 10th grade and 16 next month.

LIZ: Tom and Olivia, how do you think things have changed post Janet Jackson and the Super Bowl fiasco?

TOM: Janet Jackson is an outstanding instance, kind of a point of critical mass in the culture. I will say from a very selfish, bureaucratic point of view, Janet Jackson was the gift that keeps on giving because the department that I have been in for 20 years and has done nothing but shrink and diminish, and now it has increased by three people. It's hard for me to kind of compartmentalize and approach the question from a professional perspective versus a personal one. Personally, I would observe that this culture, and this won't come to a surprise to anyone, is gaga for sex. This culture is so nuts over sex, it's hardly to be believed [and yet] listen to the hue and cry arising from the heartland about decency.

Janet Jackson brought up something very peculiar in Americans' attitudes about sex and sexuality, which is that a mammary gland, displayed in a non-sexual context, could nevertheless be seen as so salacious. Had the audience been European, Australian, South African, it wouldn't have had that response. So you know, there are peculiarities that attend the American character and the American experience that are deeper than this panel can get into, and Janet Jackson somehow managed to touch on so many of those things. Really, and I think that Olivia will agree with me, hypocrisy and repression are not just the lifeblood of our livelihood. Americans are peculiarly 'out there' about sex, their advertising is replete with it, Internet porn is a big industry, and over-the-counter porn is a big industry. Yet we hear more of these straight-laced attitudes. I guess there is a field day for a social psychologist to have with this culture. Things have changed in the sense that the FCC has had issues in indecency, and some interests groups like the PTC have, in this climate, been emboldened to be more on the attack against broadcast television than they have been previously. Certain factors, touching on the subject of indecency, are much more scrutinized by more levels and different levels of network management, and in some cases, the creative community, than they were before. In a sense, it has changed the business climate. Just to end this on a light note, I have heard that the theme of this year's Super Bowl halftime show is going to be 'keep your shirt on.'

LIZ: I would love to just go down the panel, starting with Ed, to kind of talk about what you think the media need to do to improve awareness. I mean, we have touched on it a little bit, in terms of pregnancy prevention and the sexual health of teens, what do you think needs to be done in the future, if anything?

ED: I think that it is going in a good direction. I have always watched television with my children. They are both girls, and they are both teenagers. I am so happy with all the stuff that I don't have to discuss with them. I mean from *Degrassi*, the stuff that they watch is very straightforward, and it's pretty honest and it is pretty good. My kids have always loved *Will and Grace* and they love those characters and there is nothing uncommon about gay people to my children, as opposed to when I was a kid, when it was something that was never discussed or spoken. Even condoms—when I was a kid, condoms were a little smirking joke thing you never heard of or saw. But that is kind of the odd thing about the generations, I was raised in the 60s and 70s, and we were supposed to be the generation of love. And here we are, as adults, trying to be so damn restrictive to our children and what happened to this 'free love' thing that we had? How can we expect our kids not to have the same desires that we had? It's nutty to try and impose some kind of standards that weren't imposed on us. But to answer your question, I think that TV is doing a darn good job.

KEN: I was on a plane back from Toronto on Friday night and *Two and a Half Men* was on, and it was the end of the flight, and I had nothing left to read. [I] put on the headphones, and Charlie Sheen turned to John while they were having a beer and said, "When was the last time you had ___ with a woman?" It was brilliant. That is, sort of, leading into that we

need to be honest; we don't demonize; we don't over-sell things. When we discuss things, it needs to be organic. It's going to sound weird [but] you can't shove a positive message in people's face and expect them to pay attention to it. It's not why they watch us. People watch television because they want to see themselves. Movies are about myth and legend and [being] larger than life. They have a beginning, middle, and end. Any of us can be a character in any of the shows. You can be a character in *Jack and Bobby*, and we look to the characters on our TV shows as we look to ourselves. And you don't, in the wrong context, stop and have a conversation about what is the proper way to deal with this sexual issue right now. It's inorganic, and the audience wouldn't believe it. You have it in the right place; you keep it honest, and you keep it organic. And I think there has been a movement in the last 10-12 years to do that, to have honest discussions—characters that talk about these things in the right circumstance. The wrong thing to do is to do *Degrassi High* because audiences won't believe it. In a classroom, it's one thing; in a one-hour drama, it's another. So, keep it real.

OLIVIA: Well, I think we are doing a really great job, too. We have stuff all over our air that speaks to all of these issues. In a comedic context, we dealt with it in *My Wife and Kids*, the show that has been on for four years. We did a masturbation episode, and that was in the second season. The only thing that we changed was the Victoria Secrets catalog, as they were not paying us. But I think it is there. I think Ken is right. It has to be organic or it fails. But I think that it is going in a really good direction; I think that it is honest; and I think that the people respect us for it. The thing is we (standards) are often seen as Satan; but we often say, put in the representation of the condom [or] don't make all of the nannies Hispanic. I mean, there are a million little things that we will tell you people that you are not even thinking about, because you are just writing, and we are, like, "There is a greater issue here that we want to see addressed." And I see sexuality as a part of that, responsible sexuality. I mean in *Life as You Know It*, before the 16-year-old went down on the hot teacher guy, she waved a little condom in her hand.

TOM: I see progress on a number of fronts. I think that a lot of conscience has been raised in the times that I have been doing standards ... kind of an important 20-year period in the evolving medium of broadcast television. A lot has changed, in the sense that the real consequences of various kinds of activities can be seen as sensitive and [are] the kind of things we send notes about ... [for example] the real consequences of violence. I have been to my management and specified instances and advocated that somebody's rather gory depiction is given latitude to be shot. Why? Because I don't think that a depiction equals endorsement. This is where I think a lot of the right wing interest groups make a dire mistake. The PTC, I think, makes a dire mistake because they are saying that television is depicting this and, therefore, endorsing it. Excuse me! CBS depicted 20 to 30 murders, even excluding *CSI*. Does that mean we advocate murder? No, that's hogwash! Depiction does not equal advocacy. But what is the responsibility incumbent on the person depicting? It is a responsibility to see a given set of circumstances or actions through to the consequences. So, if we depict drinking or drug use, there ought to be a scene about consequences. If we do a scene on sexuality, there ought to be a scene on consequences. I think that if there is one area in which, in respect to sexuality, television is still deficient [it is this]. I think that it is all well and good that STDs are addressed, that unwanted pregnancies are addressed, and it is good that moral issues are discussed with respect to sexuality. But I think that one thing that is undersold, particularly with respect to young men, is the notion that sexual entanglement is very emotionally fraught, even if it is casual, sometimes especially if it is casual. One thing I would like to see explored more is, maybe less of the STD scare, and to focus more on the human ramifications of being sexually active.

BARBIE: So, you don't watch *Jack and Bobby* either?

TOM: No, I think that the emotional aspects of sex need to be explored more while we worry about all this physical stuff.

KRISTEN: I agree that I think that there is a lot more out there. I came up in the generation where a group of us would gather round ... Judy Blume's *Forever*, page 54, was like "Oh my god, they name penises." [For sex education] Judy Blume was kind of it and a couple of pages in the dictionary. Now there is the Internet and television. I have little siblings that learned about masturbation when watching my episode for the first time. Ultimately, it comes back to what I said before. I think that you are right that standards and practices is not asserting some kind of regulation on us that is not backed up by a large majority of the people in this country. I just wish, from the deepest, darkest part of my heart that the moral values of the country would change, and that sex would not be the most scary, horrible, immoral thing to talk about.

BARBIE: Okay, since no one watches *Jack and Bobby*, it is interesting because one of the things that we have tried to do is have people do what they should be doing and then show the repercussions. It is interesting for kids who are watching you make that mistake or might make that mistake and not realize what would potentially happen. It was great to work on a show where someone had her first time because she was, like, “Well, it’s not going to get much better than this” and the guy who had his first time with her had really strong reservations about it. It was very much a role reversal in that relationship. You know it was there, and he wanted it, and the peer pressure that guys feel, “How can I possibly say no when Missy wants to have sex with me?” There are other things coming up (without ruining anything for that second row right there) like someone having sex in the moment and being forced to take the ‘morning-after’ pill.

I have a friend who had the most horrific experience. She had sex. She used a condom. The condom broke. She took the ‘morning-after’ pill. She threw up for four days, and she was still pregnant. Ultimately, I think she did have an abortion. We do try to do things that are responsible; but by the same token, in Ken’s defense from earlier, when you are sitting in a story room, and you are hitting a wall, and you are trying to find something that is interesting, and you don’t think it is ever going to come, and you have done 18 episodes already, and you are bored, and you hate everyone, and you want to die, the last thing you are thinking about is “Well, how do we work the condom into that?” It’s not that you don’t care; it’s not that you don’t want to be responsible; it’s that you want to go home.

KASHMERE: Well, I basically said earlier what I thought should be included. But as I have listened to the writers and they have said that the condom thing isn’t really working for them, maybe I guess different people have different effects from the ‘morning-after’ pill. I have taken it, and I didn’t throw up and I am not pregnant. But I agree with Tom, just show the consequences of what can happen if they do or don’t use a condom. But you guys want to keep your viewers, so I don’t know.

JOHN: I think that TV shows need to be realistic, and so I guess what I would like to see is emotional investment from the male side as well as the female side. I would like to see homosexual relationships questioning sexuality of both males and females, seeing and dealing with discrimination, and working through it. Seeing these things would be really helpful for those who are going through it.