

Editorial

AIDS poster for gays draws unfair rebuke

Is the public awareness poster distributed by the Cascade AIDS Project shown at right tasteless and offensive? We don't think so. David Reinhard, an associate editor for *The Oregonian*, thinks it is.

In an opinion piece printed in the July 3 *Sunday Oregonian* (and reprinted by permission below), Reinhard attacked the ad as being an insidious campaign for promoting the gay lifestyle, a "They Want You!" recruitment poster that should frighten and anger any decent red-blooded heterosexual.

His criticism of the ad campaign smacks of spiteful gay-bashing. We are appalled by the depths of Reinhard's bigotry.

As far as Cascade AIDS Project's campaign goes, some of Reinhard's criticism is valid. He contends that limited AIDS education dollars might be better spent reaching others than the already well-informed gay community. There is indeed little argument that homosexuals have been far more responsible than any other group in dealing with the virus.

Reinhard claims that because the campaign contains no "enlightening or empowering health message," it is worthless. While we would like to know exactly how much educational material on a subject as complex and touchy as AIDS Reinhard expects of a poster to be read while riding the bus, we agree that the medical knowledge the poster imparts is slim.

But is the poster worthless? We think not.

The fact remains that the gay community suffers the most from AIDS, with losses measured in more than lives. If the poster promotes anything, it is that gays need not live in isolation, alienation or fear of the disease. This is the same message that AIDS campaigns directed at heterosexuals have carried.

Is the CAP campaign offensive? Again, we think not.

Queasy-stomached heterosexuals might balk at the unarguable double-entendre in the campaign's headline, but the photo itself is pretty tame. It is certainly less graphic than certain perfume or cologne ads. Reinhard admits the men are only in "semi-nuzzle mode." It takes an active imagination to find anything repugnant about the Cascade AIDS Project ad.

What the campaign does do is treat homosexuals intelligently and fairly. It doesn't talk down to gays; it treats them on the same level as other AIDS awareness campaigns have treated heterosexuals.

Reinhard claims to have no beef against state-funded AIDS education for gays, yet he writes that society must not turn over its "public square to public endorsements of homosexuality." Apparently, Reinhard believes that homosexuals are incapable of mounting an effective campaign of their own. He would rather they be educated by a society that neither understands nor particularly cares for them.

This lack of care is nowhere more apparent than in Reinhard's musings. His criticism of a pair of two-dimensional characters becomes a strong condemnation of flesh-and-blood human beings.

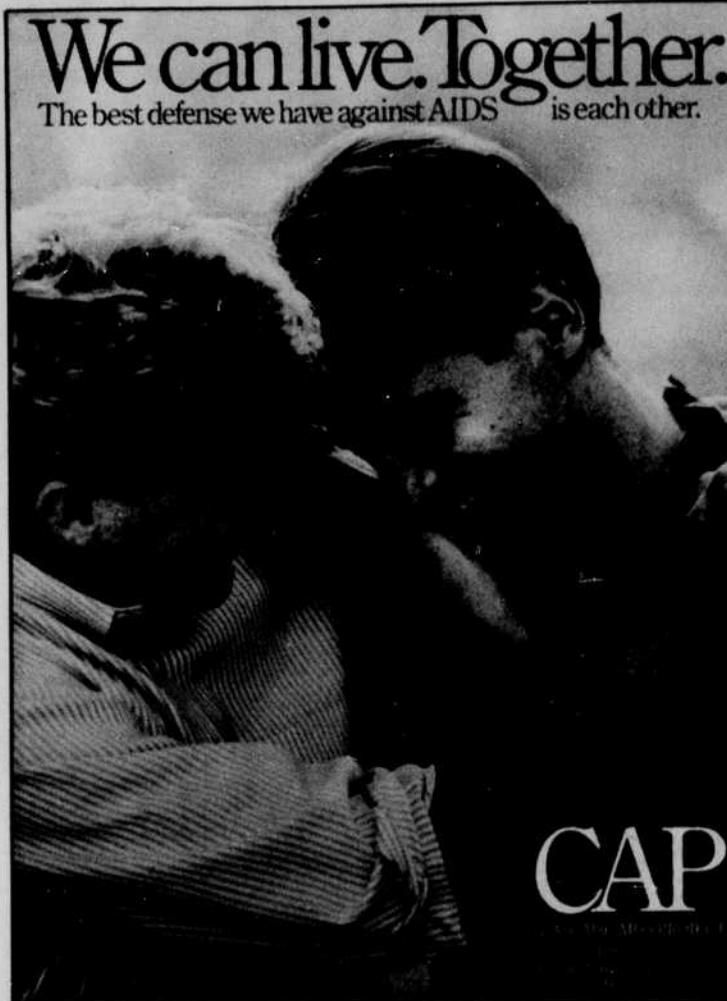
Reinhard's arguments are based on the old, old stereotype that gays "promote" their lifestyle, trying to "recruit" others over to their sexual ways. He even trots out the myth that homosexuals are also pedophiles; the poster invites "adolescents" to sample some of "life's sexual smorgasboard," he writes.

Reinhard goes so far as to suggest homosexuals are sick enough to exploit a catastrophic health plague to promote their lifestyle: "It may not get any better than this, . . . but only because of AIDS." The logic of this is questionable; if anything, the gay community has suffered from the spread of AIDS and the hysterical fear it has caused in the general public.

Reinhard pays lip service to tolerance, but writes that "all sexual orientations are not equal." He maintains that homosexuals do not deserve the same civil rights or affirmative action needed by women and blacks; yet at the piece's end he figuratively welcomes gays to "the back of the bus."

The viciousness of Reinhard's commentary and its appearance in *The Oregonian* is hardly surprising, but it is discouraging and tiresome. Remember this is the same newspaper that refuses to print condom advertisements, because publisher Fred A. Stickel believes to do so would promote promiscuity.

We are sad that *The Oregonian* chooses to maintain its 19th Century standards of morality, and we challenge the view that homosexuals, through their so-called aberrant sexuality, deserve less of anything — civil rights, respect or advertisement space — than their heterosexual peers.



What's wrong with this picture? The new Cascade AIDS Project awareness campaign, directed toward gays, has apparently offended some Portland citizens, including an associate editor of *The Oregonian*.

CAP posters like this have appeared on Portland's metropolitan transit service, Tri-Met.

AIDS prevention or gay promotion?

Good morning. On the street where you live, the public world makes its wake-up call with the appearance of the Tri-Met bus. These days, easing into the public square on the way to Fareless Square is a more jarring experience because of the boys on the bus.

These two fellow commuters ride downtown with you on the poster just behind the Tri-Met

Commentary by David Reinhard

driver. Smiling, arms around one another, the two young men just up ahead — healthy and handsome as the new day — are a world away — their own world and the world of the ad's creators.

It's not Millertime in this poster. This is no lyrical American tribute to softball or bass fishing and the high-fiving male camaraderie that the advertiser's brew only makes heartier.

It may not get any better than this for my two one-dimensional fellow travelers, but only because of AIDS. These two men are homosexuals, or gay. Each one's eyes smile deep into the other's. The arms of one are around the other, the cuddlers in semi-nuzzle mode. "We can live. Together," say large letters atop the poster.

The poster is the work of the Cascade AIDS Project whose telephone numbers are listed at the bottom right of the picture. But it is a part of our state Health Division's larger AIDS education program. Oregon taxpayers will pay up to \$10,000 to have this poster appear on public transit, billboards and family newspapers.

It should appear nowhere in public, save some gay publications. The poster is less about AIDS protection than gay promotion. The poster is tasteless and offensive.

How so? Begin with the

poster's AIDS message. What is it? That's a good question that remains a good question well after a reading of the poster's copy. It goes:

"Most gay men have responded to the threat of AIDS positively and responsibly. But the disease is going to be a fact of life for years to come. It's becoming ever clearer that we need each other to meet and overcome this challenge. Because together we can do more than survive. We can live."

Just what does all this mean? How does it further AIDS awareness? There is no argument here with state-funded AIDS education for gays, although it's difficult to believe there's a homosexual man still alive who needs public education on AIDS, particularly one who reads newspapers. If there is, this Hallmark message offers little help.

Education is about all we have right now to fight this killer. It has proved especially effective in limiting the epidemic among homosexual men. But where's the education in this poster? It's a waste of the state's limited AIDS education dollar.

The utter absence of any enlightening or empowering health message makes the subliminal message of this poster all the clearer. The Cascade AIDS Project poster is all mood — the mood of a valentine to homosexuality.

Some might claim the poster is nothing less than a recruitment poster for gay men. They miss the point. Pictures of two males in romantic embrace filling the public square are more insidious. The boys become part of the background music of our day — Muzak with a message. That state-sponsored message is that sexual congress with the same sex is simply one of the selections adolescents make at life's sexual smorgasboard. Heterosexuality or homosexuality — society

doesn't care.

But of course, society very much cares — and should care. All sexual orientations are not equal. Would a poster featuring an embracing heterosexual couple be as offensive as the Cascade AIDS poster? A thousand smoky heterosexual love scenes in cigarette advertisements say no.

But let us be clear: A society that promotes heterosexual love need not persecute homosexual lovers. A just and healthy society will not have homosexuals cowering in closets, but neither will it give over its public square to public endorsements of homosexuality.

Increased tolerance of homosexuality is an altogether civilizing — and recent — development. But, as writer and educator Allan Bloom makes clear, societies and individuals must first value something for tolerance to be a virtue. Acceptance of homosexuality is not approval — the approval that is implicit in making it just another option, an approval implicit in a poster that, bereft of any other message, seems to exploit a serious health crisis to further a lifestyle that most find in one way or another repugnant.

We — homosexuals and the larger community — can live. Together. But not quite on the terms of those who are trying to make homosexuals into the latest group — after blacks and women — needing civil rights liberation and affirmation from a repressive society. The Cascade AIDS poster is a small part of that larger misbegotten struggle, not the struggle against AIDS.

Good morning, these posters people say to the larger community. Good morning and welcome to the back of the bus.

David Reinhard is an associate editor of *The Oregonian*. This commentary appeared in the July 3 edition of *The Sunday Oregonian*, and is reprinted by permission.

Thursday, July 7, 1988

Oregon Daily Emerald

P.O. Box 3159, Eugene, Oregon 97403

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published Tuesday and Thursday during the summer by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, 97403. Daily publication resumes with the fall term.

The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices at 300 Erb Memorial Union. The Emerald is a member of the Associated Press.

The Emerald is private property. The unauthorized removal or use of papers is prosecutable by law.

Editor Aaron Knox
News Editor Carolyn Lamberson
Editorial Page Editor Thomas Prowell
Photo Editor James Marks

Associate Editors

Politics/Higher Ed/Admin Paula Green
Student Govt/Activities Tom Prowell

General Staff

Advertising Director Susan Thelen
Classified Manager Kelli Mason
Production Manager Michele Ross
Advertising Coordinator Sandra Daller
Assistant to the Publisher Jean Ownbey

Newsroom.....686-5511
Display Advertising.....686-3712
Classified Advertising.....686-4343
Production.....686-4381
Letter Perfect Graphics.....686-4381
Business.....686-5511