

Planned Parenthood's Joe Sperm: *Irresponsible messenger ...*

By Andrew Adams
 Oregon Daily Emerald

The majority of public opinion regarding Joe Sperm is favorable. Most people in Eugene and on campus view the mascot as nothing more than that — a mascot to usher in a new advertising campaign. He's been in a parade and several newspaper ads and even graces our mass transit vehicles.

Planned Parenthood defends their new campaign as an innovative way to make people think about how to engage in sexual activity more responsibly. They believe that when young people see Joe Sperm's smiling mug on the side of a bus, they'll be more inclined to make use of free medical exams and contraceptives.

This is ridiculous. I see Joe Sperm as a danger to young people and a bad choice of a mascot.

How can young people understand the seriousness of sex when something like Joe Sperm is so enthusiastically supported? Studies by the University Health Center show that many University students had sex for the first time when they were between the ages of 16- to 18-years-old. To me, this means they were thinking about having sex when they were likely between the ages of 14 and 15. At that age, children are looking for something to help them make the decision about whether to have sex. Going to an agency like Planned

Parenthood — which should help young people avoid sexual mistakes — and finding some cartoon that both trivializes and makes sex even more attractive will only induce young people to make mistakes.

The pro argument claims the mascot helps Planned Parenthood relate to young people. I agree, the mascot does, but in a such way that will defeat the mascot's purported purpose. Is Joe Sperm funny? Yes, he is, to college students who know the consequences of sex. But unfortunately, he also is funny to young people who don't know how emotionally damaging and physically dangerous making a wrong choice about sex can be.

Sex is not a joke. Would it be funny to have a Barry Bong or Sammy Syringe teach children about the dangers of drug use? I can't think of a better mascot to teach kids about proper sexual choices, which makes me inclined to argue that there should be no mascot to raise sexual consciousness.

The best way to teach proper sexual values is between parent and child, and failing that, through a responsible campaign that frankly lays down the potential risks involved with sex.

Using a contraceptive is a mature decision. How can Planned Parenthood expect young people to make that mature decision when they attempt to relate to them by using a joke of a mascot such as Joe Sperm?

CON

Or effective campaigner?

By Michael J. Kleckner
 Oregon Daily Emerald

Planned Parenthood has introduced its latest marketing tool and mascot, Joe Sperm, and I couldn't be happier. Joe is an accessible, joyful way to reach out to young people and educate them about the consequences of sex.

Some people have expressed concern or outrage at the Joe Sperm campaign. I find this just a bit silly, but it's a serious conversation, so I will engage it seriously.

According to its mission statement, Planned Parenthood's main concern is to provide health care services while guaranteeing each individual's right to reproductive self-determination and promoting understanding of the implications of sexuality. They want to cut

down on unwanted pregnancies and STDs. Good mission.

How does Joe Sperm help bring these goals to fruition? By appealing to younger people in a playful manner — which is how many younger people treat sex. Many teenagers have a casual attitude toward sex, many of them are uneducated about sexuality and most of these people are at risk. This is a huge public health concern.

Perhaps sex should never be treated in a light, playful manner. Perhaps it's a very serious, sacred act of love that is only to be expressed within the confines of a publicly committed relationship. And perhaps some of us just really dig on sex, y'all.

Joe is reaching out, in an admittedly

frivolous manner, to those people who treat sex frivolously. It's likely to get their attention, and then it's likely to get a few more people thinking seriously about playing safely. This is good.

The con argument claims that young people don't know the consequences of sex and that there should be no mascot to raise sexual consciousness. But this isn't dealing with the real world. In reality, teen-agers are interested in and are having sex. Parents can engage in this dialogue, but Planned Parenthood isn't a mother or a father. This is a public health campaign, and it needs to appeal to the masses.

Does Joe Sperm perpetuate trivialization of this most sacred of acts?

PRO

Yahoo! ads raise concerns

It is with great disappointment that I write in regards to the Yahoo! inserts advertised in the Emerald. Familiar with poor judgment in the media industry, I performed the standard action of voicing my objections to the homophobic and sexually assaulting nature of the campaign. I called Becky Merchant, the advertising manager for the Emerald, to determine how the advertising staff came to the conclusion that these ads were acceptable. Although Merchant admitted that she herself knew there was a problem with the ads, she also stated that it is not her role to influence advertising decisions made by student staff. Thus, the advertising department collectively agreed that although the ads were "stupid," they did not find it obviously offensive or stereotypically denigrating.

This brings me to two critical concerns. First, it is very disheartening to realize that our society has regressed to such a base level; viewing women as sexual objects is so common, it's

not wrong any more.

Today we are appalled at a school shooting. If it happens more frequently in the future, will we become equally desensitized and shrug it off in the same manner? I think not. Or would

GUEST COMMENTARY

Erica Fuller

we?

What about rape? Sexual harassment? Gay bashing and hate crimes? General violence? What's the difference? Where and when do we draw the line and demand that it is no longer acceptable?

These questions lead me to my second concern. I serve a similar role as Merchant: I am a hired professional responsible for serving the educational needs of students. When a potential conflict arises, it is expected that I take advantage of

the "teachable moment" to facilitate recognition and a clear understanding of the issue. Further, it would be more than reasonable to make a strong recommendation as to the most appropriate course of action. If the students in the advertising department did not see a problem with these ads, then it was the job of the qualified "professional" to seize the opportunity to educate them. Not doing so is belligerently irresponsible. Merchant missed that moment, and as a result, a large population on this campus has been subjected to vile debasement and objectification of their womanhood and sexuality.

I was prepared to begin this school year without the customary cynicism towards student journalism. After this affront, however, my relationship with the Emerald will proceed with considerable caution and distrust of their ability to produce responsible journalism.

Erica Fuller, M.P.S. is the director of the Multicultural Center.

Letter to the editor

Build a culture of respect

The white flyers inserted in the Oregon Daily Emerald this week, paid for by Yahoo! and published as advertising by the ODE, brought many calls of concern, outrage, anxiety and anger to offices in student affairs. Students, student leaders and student-affairs staff who read the Emerald reacted negatively to the ads. The ads seemed to these readers to be in poor taste, offensive and an affront to the culture of respect we seek here that honors the rights, safety, dignity and worth of every individual. In addition, most readers who spoke to my office found the ads crude, ineffective and obscure in their advertising message.

The University has a strong tradition of freedom of thought and expression. The Oregon Daily Emerald has a long history as an independent newspaper on this campus. The ODE editorial staff and advertising staff func-

tion independently. It is my hope that these staff also function collaboratively with sensitivity and support for the community we build together here. Ads such as these do not affirm our community standards of respect for the rights and well-being of all members. Rather than promoting diversity of opinions, ideas and backgrounds, these ads promote feelings of bigotry, intimidation and insult to much of the readership. ODE — you can do better. Please join us in building, not breaking, our culture of respect.

Anne Leavitt
 University of Oregon Associate
 Vice President
 & Dean of Students

CORRECTION

The story "Governor speaks to revive student voting vitality," (ODE, Sept. 26) should have said that ballots for the November election will be mailed to voters on Oct. 20. The Emerald regrets this error.

THE WEEK IN THUMBS



To a BIG voter registration effort

The ASUO brought a host of local politicians to campus on Wednesday to boost student voter registration. In addition, the student executive office is building the world's largest ballot box to draw attention to the effort.

To sharing the tunes, man

The Grateful Dead has always protected its copyright interests. But the Dead's only concern is ensuring that no one else profit from the music. So they didn't sue Napster. Groovy, dude.



To saying one thing and doing another

At Monday's City Council meeting, Mayor Jim Torrey prodded councilors to make a decision on the ordinance banning smoking in bars, taverns and bingo parlors — and then cast the tie-breaking vote to postpone voting on it.

To teaching kids with M&Ms

Millions of books have been sold to parents and teachers in recent years that are teaching children hand-eye coordination, reading and math by imprinting their brains with brand names and logos.