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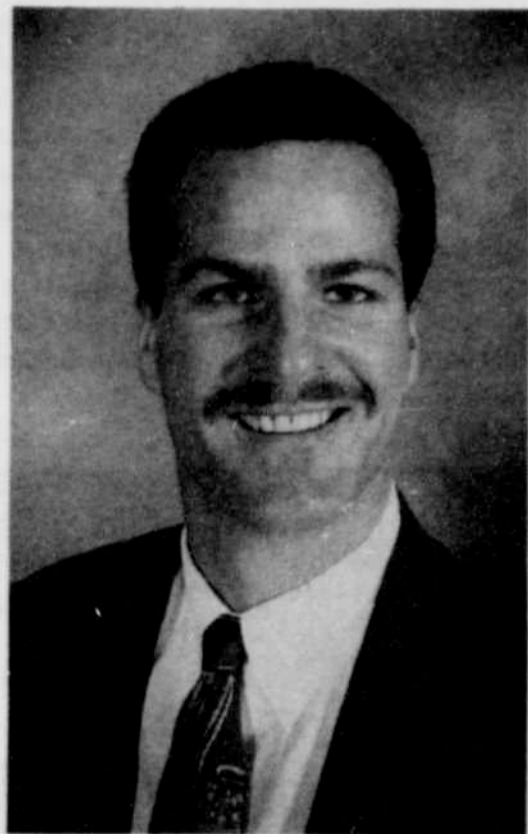
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local news

A simple question sparks brouhaha

Beaverton school's health class turned into "incident" by OCA "fact sheet"

by Martha Allen

It really was no big deal. Kids from a Beaverton intermediate school were bused to a nearby conference center for an afternoon workshop on responsible sexual behavior. All the 135 boys who attended had their parents' permission, and all the parents had a chance to preview the material their boys would see at an evening session prior to the May 10 workshop.

The sessions were put on by the Beaverton School District, the Washington County Department of Health and Human Services, and Community Youth Services. All the agencies agreed to abide by the school district's guidelines on sexuality education, which stress abstinence as the only risk-free choice for teens.

But what should have been a simple health class for kids has turned into a controversy that has attracted national attention from adults, due to the influence of the Oregon Citizens Alliance. Members of the right wing group have seized on complaints from three parents—

none of whom attended the preview session—and used them to promote their homophobic agenda.

What happened was, a group of boys saw a video called *Stale Roles and Tight Buns*, which sought to educate the kids about the images of men in the media. The film uses pictures from television advertising, magazines and other common sources to examine the way males are portrayed in the media.

"The OCA's reference to 'nearly naked men' was obviously intended to create the impression that the video contained sexually explicit photos of a homosexual nature," said Rep. George Eighmey, (D-Portland). "This could not be further from the truth. The photos were of men in swim wear, in soap ads, shaving ads, and in other poses found in typical commercials of this venue. They were not homoerotic, any more than are similar photos of women heteroerotic. All of the photos were in good taste and were intended to be used to teach the students about the sometimes false male image projected by the advertising industry."

After the film some of the kids asked questions about what they had seen, as well as other topics. The teacher, Larry Smith, was the only adult in the room with the boys after the film. Smith is on leave from the Beaverton School District to work with the state Health Department on a curriculum development project.

The question from a student which sparked all the brouhaha was a simple one—yet a question some kids may not feel comfortable asking their parents.

"How do you know if you're gay?" the boy asked. Before Smith could field the question,

another boy called out, "If you sleep with another guy."

Smith told Mark Carlton, the principal of Five Oaks Intermediate School where the curious youngsters attend classes, that he decided it was best to respond to the question by advising the boy to talk to his parents. Smith also believed it was important to correct the possible wrong impression created by the student who said that a person is gay if they have one same-sex experience.

Smith says he told the boys that having a couple of same-sex experiences doesn't mean a person is gay, any more than a couple of heterosexual experiences mean a person is straight. At no time did the teacher advocate that the students engage in one or two heterosexual or homosexual

experiences to determine their sexual orientation. Throughout the presentation, Smith says he advocated abstinence first, as the most responsible sexual behavior.

But a couple of the boys went home and told their parents about the discussion, and Carlton's phone started ringing.

The principal said that, overall, students and staff members were comfortable with the information presented at the conference.

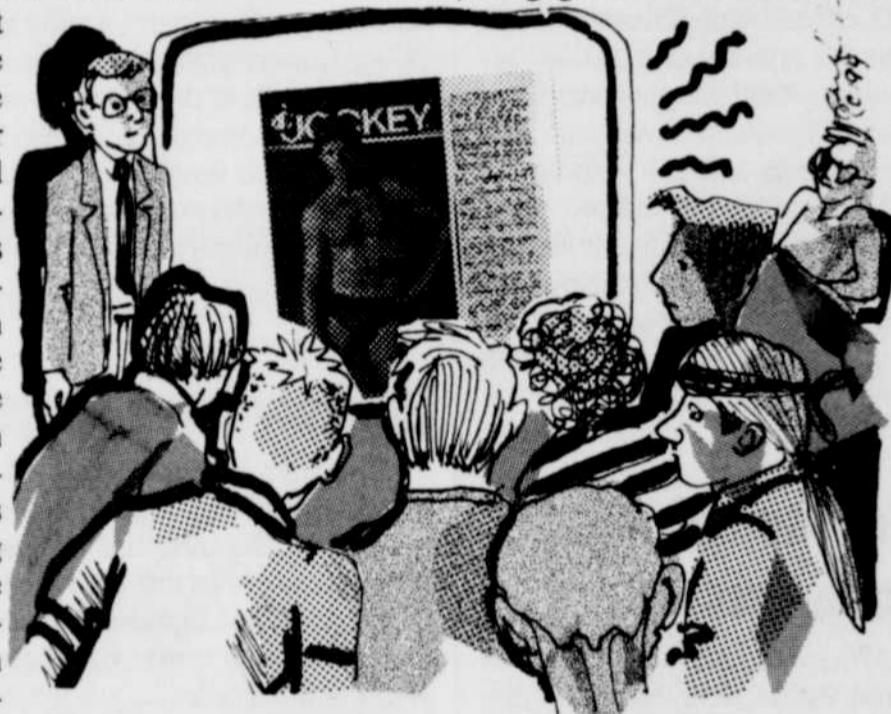
"Nearly all the information matched the district position that abstinence is the only risk-free sexual behavior," Carlton wrote in a letter to parents prompted by the calls. "However, some students were personally offended by a discussion that occurred during the question and answer period of one of the four sessions."

But Carlton is not the only one writing letters. A flier titled "Five Oaks Incident Fact Sheet" begins, "The following information is provided in the interest of protecting our children from the promotion of homosexuality in the public schools and insuring that public funds are utilized in a manner that is consistent with community standards and the law."

In addition to saying that the advertising video featured nearly naked men, the OCA's fact sheet alleges that Smith is a gay activist who advised the students on selecting the best lubricants to be used with condoms.

Smith says he answered a question from a student about using oil- or water-based lubricants with condoms by saying that oil-based lubricants can cause some condoms to break.

Eighmey says the OCA has turned a routine workshop into a problem. "There would be no incident if the OCA had not involved those who had no connection with the program, had not created falsehoods about what was presented, and had not given a platform to those who wished to misinform the public about the program and one of its presenters."



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