Mailbox

October 1, 2001 By Staff

Ad Libbers Or Fibbers?

I just finished reading “Splitting Image” by Henry Scott (July 2001). I personally admire all those “too-healthy PWAs” in HIV drug ads. The models give me a goal to achieve: I don’t have to look sick, I don’t have to keep myself down -- the way society views PWAs. They also inspire me to keep taking my medication even when prison security makes it hard to get to the pill window.

When I was first diagnosed with HIV, I thought I should just lie there on my bunk and rot away. I was 160 pounds, with a viral load of 360,000 and a CD4 count of 112. Now I weigh 200 pounds. If I don’t disclose my status, nobody can tell that I have HIV.

Jeff Getty and the anti-ad activists say that when you look at the ads, you think of unprotected sex. If anything, the ads should make you want to use protection: That person in the ad has HIV *and* looks just like everyone else you meet and maybe even love.

I can look good, I can still make something of myself -- that is what those models say to me.

-- Jeffrey Barker, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Huntsville, Texas

When I first heard of the “uproar” in San Francisco over AIDS drug ads, I felt that this was a nonissue rallied around by people with too much time on their hands. After reading Henry Scott’s cover story, I know that’s true.

Most of us have learned to live lives that involve -- but are not overwhelmed by -- HIV. We do things outdoors. We laugh. We are keeping ourselves healthy by doing more to extend our lives. Why shouldn’t advertising show that?

I have seen the hysterical nonissues of one or two people become a catalyst for dividing the community. By attacking ads that make us feel good about ourselves, we deflect the real issues: prevention, compliance and self-esteem.

-- Tom Sullivan, San Diego

Jeff Getty has some legitimate gripes about the medication advertisements. Getty and the rest of us infected in the ’80s eagerly embraced AZT and other monotherapies because we had no choice, unlike Scott and his cronies up there on Crixivan Mountain who were “lucky enough” to be infected in the ’90s. Perhaps Getty feels, as I do, that the $4.5 billion advertising budget might be better

spent elsewhere, such as reducing the cost of medications.

Look for me up on Crixivan Mountain, Henry Scott. I'm undetectable, 487 T cells. I'll be the one wearing Depends. Want to party?

-- John A. Stevens, Via the Internet

Henry Scott's very lengthy article on HIV drug ads left out a very salient point: The American Medical Association has begun lobbying for a ban on all drug advertising. The story also lacked credible medical expertise. Of course a model is going to oppose any movement that may cut into his income, and Andrew Sullivan's credibility is questionable. I'd rather not see any HIV drug ads.

-- John Iversen, San Leandro, California

Kudos to Jeff Getty for attacking the sexual and misleading "healthy" images of men with HIV in pharmaceutical ads and criticizing *POZ* for running them. Those ads are part of a gay male culture that dangerously romanticizes anal sex and, as Walt Odets points out, has normalized HIV. This issue is discussed on my website, communities.msn.com/CockRubWarriors.

-- Bill Weintraub, Via the Internet

Shill Out

The MTV ads have understandably sparked debate ("Parody Killed the Prevention Ad," July 2001). But the question not addressed by *POZ* is why a billion-dollar Viacom subsidiary would feel the need to poke fun at itself. More and more kids see MTV as a 24-hour commercial. If MTV is to remain an arbiter of cool, it needs to make kids less suspicious -- that's what the self-deprecation is about. As a person with HIV, I find the ads disturbing. But they are an opportunity to teach. Not just about AIDS, but about how to think for oneself.

-- Pedro Angel Serrano, Host/Producer, Generation Q*, New Brunswick, New Jersey*

I don't agree that the MTV ad campaign is doing more harm than good. Considering what is at stake -- and this country's shameful response to prevention -- anything that sneaks the message in, by hook or by crook, is accomplishing more than what is being done now. I say, "Turn the creative directors loose." The educators in the trenches will thank you.

-- Barbara Lippert, President, Glyde Dams, Seattle

The Regina Monologue

To not continue the publication of *POZ* would mean my main source of knowledge and information would cease to exist ("S.O.S.," July 2001). That scares me.

More important, to keep *POZ* going means one less heroin-addicted prostitute on the streets, one less drunk going home with someone she doesn't know and one less cemetery plot filled. I have heartfelt gratitude for the knowledge, unity and dreams you have allowed me.

My way of saying thank you is my ongoing sobriety, the high school diploma I've just received and

my determination to become an HIV educator once I am released from prison. You have helped give back to society a member it can rely on and womanhood back to a lady it can be proud of.

-- Regina Perroni, Las Vegas

The Seizure Class

Thank you for Dominic Hamilton-Little's article ("Calling All Angels," July 2001). It was very encouraging to read about someone else's experiences with seizures, as I've had to put up with them for the past 12 years -- sometimes as many as three per day. To say that they're still scary is an understatement.

-- Gene Zurenda, Binghamton, New York

Word Up

My sincere appreciation for the literary selections ("All Lit Up," July 2001). I was deeply touched by Reginald Harris' "The Gift." Sharing stories of how we care for one another is as important to me as some of the meds and vitamins I take.

-- Lee F., Baltimore

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