Gay Guys Hated the ’Trust Him?’ HIV Campaign, So They Rewrote It. HaHaHa!

June 17, 2015 By Trent Straube

One of AIDS Healthcare Foundation’s new billboards.

Apparently the AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) hasn’t pissed off enough people in the HIV community. Amid its much-maligned anti-PrEP crusade comes another campaign that’s sure to raise more eyebrows than awareness.

Launched this spring in Los Angeles and now spreading to other cities, a series of billboards aims to shed light on the health risks of infidelity. The billboards depict various couples in bed, with one person looking distraught and guilty as the other stares at him or her with an accusatory glare. The headline reads “Trust Him?” or “Trust Her?”

To underscore the infidelity angle, the images feature recurring models paired up as different couples, including those that are gay, bisexual, straight, black, white and Latino (that’s the one nice thing I can say: At least it is diverse). For example:

In the campaign's press release, AHF president Michael Weinstein states, "While infidelity is nothing new, the level of risk in contracting STDS from bed-hopping partners is at an all-time high. We want to remind couples that STDs linger around much longer than a wandering eye and that secret sexual experiences can often produce much more than what one bargained for."

Talk about fear-mongering and slut-shaming. Actually, it's not slut-shaming, it's worse: partner-shaming.

The goal of the campaign, according to the press release, is to "encourage honesty and transparency in sexual relationships and promote testing for HIV and STDs."

I agree that this is a worthwhile goal, especially when some reports show that as much as 60 percent of HIV transmissions among gay men, for example, come from intimate partners and not anonymous flings--in other words, lots of people get HIV from their husbands instead of hookups.

But what's the best way to foster open discussion about sexual practices between partners? Certainly not by starting from the place of distrust and fear that this campaign promotes. The "Trust Him?" line of thinking is accusatory and stigmatizing. And the campaign does not even address the complex issue of infidelity. Simply getting an HIV test will not solve the problem. (By the way, which partner is supposed to get the test, and at what point in the relationship?)

The campaign is not helpful.

And I'm not the only one who thinks so. I've read several Facebook posts slamming the billboards

and posters. Best of all, several folks have appropriated the campaign images, deleted the original wording and added their own text above the distraught gay couple.

Trust me, the results are hilarious:

The original poster, now appearing in San Francisco public transportation hubs.

Facebook / Aaron Baldwin.

Facebook / Alan Rafael Delamora.

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But let's end on an clean, upbeat note. Not all of AHF's billboard campaigns have been such a mess. In January 2014, I wrote about billboards in South Los Angeles that showed two black gay men embracing on the beach with the text "Our love is worth protecting. We get tested."

The brainchild of In the Meantime Men, that campaign was also funded by AHF. Read more details here and check out the billboards below:

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