

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

AIDS info pamphlets bring out homophobia

By KALI ZIVITZ

In recent days, Columbia undergraduates have opened their mail boxes to find a glossy, blue and white-covered pamphlet about AIDS. Many students' initial reaction has been to discard the product—often right on the floor.

Those who have read the 32-page pamphlet, entitled "Information About AIDS for the Columbia Community," have reacted with everything from approval to violent homophobia.

Columbia Gay and Lesbian Alliance President Adam Rosenberg, CC'87, said he thinks throwing away the pamphlets without reading them is "a standard response to things that are put in people's mailboxes in bulk. It's not surprising but somewhat disappointing."

But some students said they resented having AIDS information placed in their boxes. "I hate to say it, but I find it unfortunate that there are these risk factors on campus who create a need for this pamphlet. They [homosexuals] should be looked at for what they are: a health risk," said student who asked that his name not be used.

Another student, who also asked not be named, said: "These are all deviant activities [in the pamphlet] and it shouldn't be the use of school funds to learn about deviant activities. It [AIDS] is a homosexual problem and it should remain as such."

The pamphlet, which details different sex acts and the level of risk they represent in terms of contracting AIDS, was the result of a year's work by a University wide A.I.D.S. committee. The AIDS committee will also release a report recommending a uniform policy toward the treatment of University affiliates with AIDS.

No students who were interviewed and who

expressed negative views about the pamphlet would go on the record with their names.

Another student also not receptive to the pamphlet explained that he didn't want his name used because, "If you put your name in the paper that probably means some guy is going to see your name and try to pick up on you."

Advisor to the Columbia Gay Health Advocacy Project (see story this page) Laura Pinsky found the negative remarks by some undergraduates upsetting. "I think it's just very sad that people have to respond in that way," she said. "It's sad verging on tragic when you think about what it means in terms of people's lives."

Rosenberg criticized the students who were disparaging about the pamphlet, saying that it's a "reflection of people's unwillingness to deal with this issue in a rational adult manner". People who refuse to read the pamphlet "want to make believe that the issue doesn't affect them. This denial is an indication of their own fear of AIDS and to a lesser extent of homosexuality."

"People are letting their homophobia, which is irrational in itself, cloud their ability to deal rationally with this health question, which is of concern to every single person who is sexually active or who is thinking of being sexually active."

Murray Sexton CC'87, conference coordinator of the North East Lesbian and Gay Student and a CGLA board member, said the pamphlet's purpose in the first place is to "allay some fears and straighten out some misconceptions" about AIDS.

"I think they [the AIDS committee] did a very professional job of sifting through the huge volumes of politically charged and hotly disputed material to bring about an up-to-date, and succinct, without being simplistic, pamphlet of essential information," Sexton added.

But not all students were negative about the AIDS pamphlet. "It's good that it was given out. There were a lot of facts and statistics that

I didn't know and it is definitely important to know about this [AIDS]," said Suzie Yoon, CC'90.

Yoon added, "I saw one guy look at the pamphlet, laugh and throw it on the bench. You'll always find people who'll do that. They just think it's always about someone with AIDS. Still I think people should be aware no matter what."

Several students criticized the close-mindedness of some of their peers.

CGLA member Jeffrey Bankoff, SEAS '90, said, "I was pissed that people threw it on the ground. I think if you have read it it would help with the paranoid attitude."

Another student, Elizabeth Rogers, CC'90, said "It's important to know this information because there are a lot of false rumors like you can get it (AIDS) from drinking fountains or toilet seats... We can't joke about it anymore. Too many people have died."

When she first read the booklet, Rogers said that her main concern was how it was transmitted. "You can be a totally unpromiscuous person and still get it," Rogers said.

Paul Hendley, CC'88, criticized his peers who refused to read the pamphlet. "I think it's scary that people should be so ignorant about what is such a grave health concern that is on the rise and no longer is exclusively a homosexual problem," he said.

According to Sexton, "this disease has killed 14,000 people. If you're living in New York City chances are someone you know is dying. Anyone who thinks it's just somebody else's problem isn't dealing with reality."

A few people had other reasons for rejecting the pamphlet. Sam Bisbee, CC'90, said "It seemed absurd to me, so I just threw it in the trash. It seems that I already knew enough about AIDS. Besides, I just didn't want to read it. It looked depressing."

One Columbia College senior of CC said, "I feel like, what more can you tell me? I have read so much about AIDS and I know so much." Another senior added that while she thought the pamphlet might be good for others,

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she knew enough about it now.



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