

# Marketing Safe Sex: The Politics of Sexuality, Race and Class in San Francisco, 1983 - 1991

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# Marketing Safe Sex: The Politics of Sexuality, Race and Class in San Francisco, 1983 - 1991

## Abstract

This paper explores the growth of two AIDS organizations in San Francisco: the San Francisco AIDS Foundation started in 1982, the largest AIDS service organization in the city and one of the largest in the nation, and the Third World Advisory Task Force (TWAATF), a community based organization formed in 1985 to focus attention on AIDS in communities of color to understand both the evolution of AIDS prevention work as well as how that process elucidates the larger political landscape of the 1980s.

“Until recently gay men had as much interest in condoms as Eskimos do in air conditioning.” With this line, Les Pappas, an AIDS prevention campaign designer at the San Francisco AIDS Foundation (SFAF), opened his speech at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia. Invited to participate in one of the many conferences on the AIDS epidemic the CDC organized in 1987, Pappas geared his remarks on convincing gay men to use condoms specifically to the audience made up of public health officials and condom manufacturers. He described gay men as an all-but-untapped market, ripe for sales pitches to their particular needs. According to Pappas, SFAF had begun the hard work of increasing demand for condoms among gay men by creating alliances with gay department stores and gay bars to display condoms prominently and provide customers with information on how to use them. The AIDS service organization now needed partners to take the campaign out of the Castro, the “gay” neighborhood in San Francisco, and to a national audience. Growth like this would require two strategies: to create “culturally relevant” material, meaning campaigns that were “sexually explicit because the gay community is used to talking openly and frankly about sex;” and to “produce materials and products that are directed to the gay condom user, the gay consumer, the gay market. There are 25 million gay consumers waiting for the government and private industry to fill this demand. They will respond if you will.”<sup>1</sup>

This speech marked the culmination of a four-year effort undertaken by Pappas and SFAF to eroticize AIDS prevention, an effort that existed in opposition to two other strategies in particular: one that looked more like traditional public service announcements (PSAs) that used blander text and images to give advice to the public; the other that presented the ravages of AIDS

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<sup>1</sup> Les Pappas, "Promoting Condoms for Gay Men," 1987, p. 9, SFAF Records, Carton 21, folder "Promoting Condoms for Gay Men Speech by Les Pappas at Atlanta Conference, 1987".

in an attempt to scare people to change their behavior. Beginning with its first campaign in 1983, SFAF became one of the United States' most prolific producers of AIDS education material in general and sexually explicit campaigns in particular over the course of the decade. In so doing, SFAF fueled the development and mass production of what the organization and many AIDS activists called "safe sex" as early as 1983: AIDS prevention material in the form of posters, brochures, and other ephemera that presented sex with condoms as an erotic option for a variety of sexually active people.<sup>2</sup> SFAF worked hard to continue the struggle for gay liberation described in the previous chapter by producing prevention material that "openly and frankly" dealt with sex and encouraged condom use.

While Pappas called on condom manufacturers to produce products for the gay market, other San Francisco activists sought to describe the racial composition of that market to highlight the differences that existed among people with AIDS. Just two weeks after Pappas returned to San Francisco from Atlanta, the San Francisco Chronicle ran a front-page story entitled, "How S.F. Lost \$3 Million in AIDS Funds." Written by Evelyn C. White, a local reporter and health activist who went on to edit the Black Women's Health Book, the article suggested that SFAF did not have a system for producing culturally relevant materials for people of color in San Francisco. White explained that over the past several years, the San Francisco Department of Public Health's AIDS Office (AIDS Office) and SFAF missed three opportunities to receive funding for minority services. To illustrate the point, White quoted a member of the screening committee from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation who had recently visited San Francisco to

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<sup>2</sup> For some of the first uses of the term "safe sex" see, Ray O'Loughlin, "A Case for Closure? AIDS and the Baths," *The Advocate*, Sept. 1, 1983, 53; Ed Power, "Memo to file," Dec. 28, 1983, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 8, folder "Press Releases, 1983-4"; PWA Coalition, "Safe Sex Guidelines," 1983, p. 1, IGIC, Ephemera, folder "PWA Coalition".

review the city's grant application for \$2.6 million. The committee member, who refused to be identified by name, claimed that, "in a lot of areas, San Francisco is in the forefront of dealing with AIDS. But my interest was in helping the city develop well-rounded and well-balanced services for all people with AIDS... Looking at this as a strictly gay disease is not appropriate."<sup>3</sup> The informant was well aware of SFAF's efforts to create erotic prevention material for white gay men, but was concerned that the sexually explicit strategy would not be effective for people of color primarily because they would reject the association with hyper-sexuality.

In lieu of calling for more sexually explicit ads, the article ended with a series of quotes from AIDS service providers about how to foster initiatives produced by and for people of color in San Francisco. Jackson Peyton, SFAF's Education Director explained that, "education for specific target groups is best done by people from those groups."<sup>4</sup> Sala Udin, Director of the Multicultural Prevention Resource Center, a San Francisco organization that serviced the public health needs of people of color, and long-time African-American health care activist agreed that, "the sensitive community work that needs to be done can best be done by indigenous people."<sup>5</sup> Udin seemed to argue that sensitive need to be seen in opposition to sexual or sensual. Tim Wolfred, Executive Director of SFAF, defended the educational initiatives created for "ethnic minority communities," calling them part of "an ongoing program by the AIDS Foundation."<sup>6</sup> But he argued that money once allocated to SFAF for community work, now needed to be

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3 Evelyn White, "How S.F. Lost \$3 Million in AIDS Funds," San Francisco Chronicle (San Francisco Chronicle), March 2 1987, 1. Just three years later, White edited the Black Women's Health Book, a text that included articles by and for African American women about health care needs and advocacy. See Evelyn White, ed., *The Black Women's Health Book: Speaking for Ourselves* (Seattle, 1990).

4 White, "How S.F.," 1.

5 Ibid.

6 Tim Wolfred, "Letter to the Editor," March 2, 1987, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 22, folder "Ethnic Issues".

funneled into “firms with expertise in ethnic minority research.”<sup>7</sup> He concluded that, “the San Francisco AIDS Foundation is committed to working with ethnic minority agencies to stop the spread of the AIDS virus,” but stopped short of explaining how those coalitions would actually be sustained.<sup>8</sup>

At the most basic level, these examples mark three transformations in the early history of AIDS in the United States. First, in the six years after the first report of the disease in 1981, AIDS had become an established topic of conversation in myriad venues, including the gay and national press, community-based organizations, and the federal government. The scope of these conversations suggested that a wide range of people now had some knowledge about AIDS even if they remained quite conflicted as to the health and political implications of this information. By the time Pappas delivered his speech in Atlanta and White wrote her article for the Chronicle, opinion polls showed that 99% of the population had heard of AIDS, and that there was virtually no difference among demographic categories in terms of this very basic level of knowledge. The same was not necessarily true when it came to understanding how AIDS was transmitted. People with the least education were the least likely to be well informed about modes of transmission, often believing for example, that a dirty toilet seat could give you AIDS even though public health officials regularly argued that casual contact was all but impossible.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, a

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7 Tim Wolfred, "Letter to Jerry Burns," March 4, 1987, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 22, folder "Ethnic Issues". This was the letter that the Chronicle actually published on the 6th of March. Wolfred made some minor changes to the initial letter, the one quoted above, after a conversation with the Letters Section editor.

8 Ibid., p. 2.

9 Eleanor Singer, Theresa Rogers, and Mary Corcoran, "A Report: AIDS," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 51 (Winter 1987), 581.

1985 Los Angeles Times poll found that 74% of a 2300+ sample wanted to see education pamphlets with “frank references to sexual practices” distributed widely.<sup>10</sup>

While many Americans seemed more aware of AIDS and its implications by the mid-1980s, very few recognized the growing racial disparity in the epidemic that made African Americans and Latinos over-represented among people with AIDS. While African Americans made up just under 12% of the total population and Latinos accounted for just over 6%, they respectively accounted for 25% and 14% of reported national AIDS cases.<sup>11</sup> Despite these statistics, people of all colors continued to believe that white gay men were the main risk group, in large part because identity not behavior was central to all but a handful of representations of AIDS. Beyond the misconception that certain groups (as opposed to people who did certain things) were more likely to become sick, this model also relied on the idea that there was little if any overlap between the gay community and communities of color. In other words, in a way that was familiar to many Americans, if you were gay you could not be of color; if you were of color, you were not counted as gay.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, these opening stories suggest that at the end of the twentieth century consumption was a central force in the lives of most Americans and further that it was increasingly difficult to separate consumer activity from political life. Throughout the postwar era, politicians and policymakers, in addition to the growing world of advertisers and salespeople, relied on advertising and marketing to reach their citizen-audience and convince them of their message. In the case of AIDS, Pappas went beyond simply marking a niche market

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10 Decision/Making/Information, "Public Attitudes Toward AIDS Prepared for the White House," Mar. 23, 1987, p. 75, Ronald Reagan Library, T. Kenneth Cribb, Jr. Files, Box 8, folder "AIDS [Public Attitude Toward AIDS]".

11 Amanda Houston-Hamilton, "A Constant Increase: AIDS In Ethnic Communities," Oct. 1986, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 8, folder "People of Color Caucus, 1986-1989".

12 For an argument on this worked in conjunction with response to AIDS see Cathy Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago, 1999).



of particular consumers, he suggested that gay male consumption patterns could be mobilized for AIDS prevention, a cause that required a certain amount of political consciousness.

When we look beyond the surface, however, we see the links between these seemingly independent transformations: consumption fed the idea that the AIDS epidemic was racially and sexually homogeneous and the idea that sex was the only way to make AIDS prevention effective. Pappas' speech suggested that condom producers needed to see the gay community as both a cohesive culture and a viable market of consumers with similar tastes. By arguing that being gay was akin to being an Eskimo, Pappas not only called attention to the "exotic" qualities of both groups, each with its unique sexual acts (nose rubbing and anal sex) but more importantly suggested that each group was a monolithic culture. Pappas marked all gay men as the same as each other, similarities produced through a kind of acculturation into a gay culture of sexual liberation. In doing this, however, Pappas ignored, whether intentionally or not, inequalities that existed among men. This seemingly simple metaphor allowed Pappas to call for treating gay men as a vital niche market for whom sex sold. Here, all gay men (25 million of them) had the kind of disposable income that allowed them to consume all sorts of products, a claim that had obvious appeal to condom producers but was in fact rather unlikely. By combining the image of a cohesive culture with a niche market, Pappas solidified the idea that gay men loved to shop and would use that desire to help them overcome their other more dangerous desires.

While Pappas suggested gay men were analogous to Eskimos, White's representation of communities of color, as well as those of the people quoted in the article, also implied homogeneity. Udin and Peyton used similar logic as Pappas: they suggested that people of color

not only needed to make material for themselves, but more importantly that as “indigenous people” they shared a sense and experience of culture that linked them together and removed any difference among them. Here, race served as a marker of homogeneous culture rather than sexual practices or identity.

Both of these strategies diverged from efforts undertaken by community activists described earlier, in part because here each speaker reasoned that identity was more exclusive than inclusive. In the previous chapter we saw activists who struggled over the meaning of gay liberation and the role it might play in AIDS prevention, but they did not necessarily fight over what it meant to be gay. In effect, the earlier activists laid the groundwork for expanding the definition of what it meant to be gay by focusing on a political ideology in addition to identity. But the same was not the case as the AIDS epidemic continued to spread over the course of the 1980s and many self-identified gay AIDS activists became increasingly concerned with paying attention to gay identity explicitly. While the activists described in the first chapter may have shared the sentiment that all people needed to be concerned for fellow members of a community with the people working at SFAF, a critical shift in thinking occurred here. Because gay men were homogeneous enough to be marketed to as consumers capable of buying solutions for AIDS, identity overshadowed critical differences within the category of gay and obfuscated the centrality of behavior in the transmission of the disease.

Highlighting the links among sexual practice, racial identity, activism and consumption also allows us to see that AIDS shaped and was shaped by the larger political landscape of the 1980s. On the one hand, AIDS had the potential to coalesce people who saw themselves as opponents of the right. Despite the rhetoric of consumption many of the first AIDS activists had been active in the social and political movements of the 1960s and 1970s and used their

experience in developing a response to the epidemic. Beyond seasoned activists, the effects of AIDS also engaged a new cadre of activists who may not have imagined themselves as political beings. The epidemiology of the disease brought together these disparate groups of long-time activists and newer ones. Together, they articulated a vision of the state that highlighted its role in making citizens healthy, although they sometimes disagreed over what healthy meant. In so doing, AIDS provided people who saw themselves in opposition to the right, ranging from activists who called for volunteers to care for people with AIDS to those who wanted an infusion of governmental support for AIDS – a “Manhattan Project” for AIDS, with something to rally around. Just as historians of the right have argued that the social movements of the 1960 and 1970s galvanized conservative opposition, so too can we begin to consider the idea that AIDS did the same on the left in the 1980s and 1990s.

On the other hand, because the epidemiology of AIDS looked as it did, affecting a range of differently disempowered populations, it also exposed the tensions inherent in a coalition that symbolized the state of postwar liberalism and radicalism. AIDS laid bare the inequalities that existed among these groups, even though only a few activists explicitly talked about the disparities. This made it difficult to build politically viable and successful coalitions. Instead, minority groups often pitted themselves against each other – here gay men vs. people of color -- refusing to see that these were not two distinct populations but instead overlapping ones. As other scholars have shown this exemplified a breakdown in analysis on the left, particularly by

those who engaged in what historian Lisa Duggan calls, “‘multicultural,’ neoliberal ‘equality’ politics.”<sup>13</sup>

Attention to diversity/cultural difference had emerged, according to social theorist Vijay Prashad, as a “liberal doctrine to undercut the radicalism of anti-racism.”<sup>14</sup> Focusing on identities outside of a larger systemic context made it difficult to produce material that addressed the reality of AIDS on the one hand, and the effect of economic dispossession and racial inequality on the epidemiology on the other.

To understand both the evolution of AIDS prevention work as well as how that process elucidates the larger political landscape of the 1980s in this chapter I analyze the growth of two AIDS organizations in San Francisco: the San Francisco AIDS Foundation started in 1982, the largest AIDS service organization in the city and one of the largest in the nation, and the Third World Advisory Task Force (TWAATF), a community based organization formed in 1985 to focus attention on AIDS in communities of color.

Looking at how SFAF created AIDS prevention material provides us with an opportunity to understand how the organization saw its constituents and how that vision fit into the larger historical moment where identity politics structured the response to AIDS. SFAF saw itself as a key organization in the San Francisco model of AIDS care, a model that expanded what it meant to care for people with AIDS to include providing mental health services, housing, and other basic needs such as food. This expansive model was also evident when SFAF developed AIDS prevention campaigns over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, using traditional advertising and

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13 Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston, 2003), xii.

14 Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston, 2001), 63.

marketing techniques, as opposed to what was, at the time, standard and staid public health strategies. However, SFAF's alliances with gay-identified businesses, when coupled with the content of prevention material specifically designed for gay men, first as a homogeneous group, then later as racially specific sub-groups, sometimes produced a false sense of homogeneity within the category of "gay" as well as "ethnic/racial minority," most notably by failing to address class and gender differences.

The Third World AIDS Advisory Task Force, on the other hand, functioned more like a social movement than a social marketing organization. Using volunteer laborers, most of whom had jobs in the AIDS service industry or public health field, TWAATF seemed better suited to see the differences that existed among and between affected groups. Ideologically and practically this meant that the Task Force connected AIDS to other political issues including immigration, prison reform and calls for universal health care, implicitly rejecting the San Francisco model of care for an even more expansive, political model. While some critics at the time believed this was part of a "degaying" of AIDS, many of the gay men of color, most notably the long-time Chicano activists who were part of the board, resisted this model and sought to have a simultaneous conversation about racial disparities, sexual desire, and AIDS.

Conversations about race and sex were well established in advance of AIDS's appearance in San Francisco, a city known, in the postwar era, for its progressive municipal government. The evolution of San Francisco as what one historian has called a "wide-open town" suggests that it has been both a "gay city" and a racially diverse one since the early twentieth century, long before gay liberationists and Chicano and Black Power activists agitated for change at the

local and national levels in the 1970s. This history helps us understand how and why responses to AIDS looked as they did in the 1980s and 1990s.

Over the course of the twentieth century, due in part to the in-migration of people with same-sex desires, San Francisco witnessed an evolution in gay political activism. Residents built vibrant, yet cantankerous, gay communities populated by queer public spaces such as bars and bathhouses, all of which they used as venues for political organizing. By the 1960s, San Francisco was one of the centers of the homophile movement on the West Coast, and within ten years was the heart of the gay liberation movement in particular and sexual liberation in general. In 1975, the city was home to hundreds of gay and lesbian organizations, including several gay newspapers, Democratic clubs, community-based cultural institutions, sex establishments and gay-owned businesses. Living all over the city, but most concentrated in the Castro neighborhood, gay men, most but not all of whom were white and well-off economically, and lesbians built a political and social platform that allowed them, in 1977, to elect the first openly gay public official, Harvey Milk, to the Board of Supervisors.<sup>15</sup>

Even though particular gay men seemed to have more economic power than other activists in the liberation movement, early on people of color occupied leadership positions in the struggle for gay liberation. Beginning with one of the first openly gay men to run, unsuccessfully, for elected office in 1961, Jose Sarria, a Chicano entertainer and activist, people of color have worked to gain recognition as part of this queer world. According to historian Horacio Roque-Ramirez we know that was particularly true for Chicano gays and lesbians who

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<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950-1994* (Chicago, 2002); Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley, 2003); John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, Second Edition ed. (Chicago, 1998).

struggled to balance their identities in both the Chicano movement and the gay and lesbian liberation movement when they formed the Gay Latino Alliance (GALA) in 1975. Roque-Ramirez argues that GALA, as a local social movement, “integrated racial, gender and sexual politics.”<sup>16</sup>

In addition to its lure for sexual and gender outlaws since the early twentieth century, San Francisco has also been a racially diverse, yet often segregated, city with substantial communities of color. Fueled by immigration from across the Asian continent as well as Latin America, San Francisco was, and continues to be, home to large and diverse immigrant communities that include new immigrants as well as second and third generation families. By the late twentieth century, San Francisco was one of several “majority-minority” cities, places where whites accounted for fewer than half of the city’s residents. Over the course of the 1980s, the Asian and Latino populations of the city grew substantially, and while neither “Asian” nor “Hispanic,” the categories used by the census account for the tremendous diversity within each category itself whether in terms of nation of origin or length of time in the US, we know that these heterogeneous communities, along with a smaller community of African Americans who arrived in San Francisco in the postwar era, shaped the life of the city.<sup>17</sup>

The municipal government, characterized as one of the more politically progressive cities in the nation, or what one scholar has referred to as the “left coast city” was and was not able to

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16 Horacio N. Roque Ramirez, "That's My Place!": Negotiating Racial, Sexual, and Gender Politics in San Francisco's Gay Latino Alliance, 1975-1983," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12 (April 2003), 225.

17 For an analysis of race in San Francisco see Richard DeLeon, "San Francisco: The Politics of Race, Land Use, and Ideology," in *Racial Politics in American Cities*, ed. Rufus Browning and Dale Rogers Marshall (New York, 2003). For work that considers African-American activism in Oakland, the center of the Black Power movement, see Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, 2003).

respond to its diverse population.<sup>18</sup> The state's vision of services did not always attend to the needs of its citizens equally. No where was this more true than in terms of police surveillance of bars and commercial establishments, particularly those that catered to people with same-sex desire and non-normative gender identities in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> This began to change over the course of the 1960s and 1970s as the state responded to the demands of gay liberationists, but the surveillance impulse would return again in the debates over whether to close the gay bathhouses in response to AIDS. When it came to how the municipal government dealt with providing service for people with AIDS, the city functioned as much as a funding source as a direct service provider. The AIDS Office, housed in the San Francisco Department of Public Health, disseminated funding to groups such as SFAF to create prevention material. This gave the state control of content without making it intellectually responsible for what was produced.

Despite its relatively unique status as a city with significant racial and sexual diversity and an active municipal state, few scholars have acknowledged the role of race and class inequalities in discussions of the city's importance in the origins of the AIDS epidemic in the United States. More often, the San Francisco's seemingly homogenous gay community is described in conjunction with the local government as the reason the AIDS epidemic looked as it did.<sup>20</sup> The longer and more complex historical trajectory of San Francisco, however, suggests a different story. While the overwhelming number of people originally affected by the disease

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18 Richard DeLeon, *Left Coast City: Progressive Politics in San Francisco, 1975-1991* (Lawrence, 1992).

19 Boyd, *Wide Open Town*.

20 For this kind of claim see Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York, 1987). For criticisms of Shilts see Douglas Crimp, "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, ed. Douglas Crimp (Cambridge, 1988); Douglas Crimp, "Randy Shilts' Miserable Failure," in *A Queer World: The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Martin Duberman (New York, 1997). While Crimp argues that Shilts had a great deal of internalized homophobia, he does not explicitly address race in his critique.



public health officials would recognize as AIDS were white, openly gay, and economically well-off, an examination of the first cases of AIDS indicates a more diverse epidemiology, one that is more similar both to the city's demography and the state of the epidemic described by White in 1987. According to medical geographer, Michelle Cochrane, the first twenty-four cases of people retrospectively diagnosed with AIDS in 1981 suggest that "surveillance practices and politics jointly produced and continue to produce representations of the AIDS epidemic that overly simplify the demography of risk for acquiring the disease."<sup>21</sup> In three of the first nine cases, public health workers overlooked intravenous drug use in favor of homosexual identity, including the case of the one African-American man whose bisexual behavior eclipsed his drug use. In addition to allowing gay identity to over-determine risk created by drug use, public health workers also disregarded the fact that seven of the nine men lived close to or at the poverty line, economic circumstances that severely compromised their health as well.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the reality of the first cases of AIDS, the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, first known as the KS Foundation (reflecting one of the primary symptoms of AIDS, a cancer called Kaposi Sarcoma), opened its doors in 1982 to serve self-identified gay men. Much like its New York counterpart, Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), SFAF provided some of the first, and at the time only, services for many of the gay men affected by the mysterious symptoms of a disease not yet called AIDS. And like GMHC and other community organizations, the organization relied almost entirely on volunteer labor to provide service to people with AIDS in 1982.<sup>23</sup> A mix of health professionals, local gay politicians, and gay community members all

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21 Michelle Cochrane, *When AIDS Began: San Francisco and the Making of an Epidemic* (New York, 2004), xxiv.

22 *Ibid.*, 55-83.

23 "Kaposi's Sarcoma Foundation Opens," *BAR*, July 1, 1982, 4.

volunteering their time, the organization's workers used whatever influence they could to procure resources in the early fight against AIDS.<sup>24</sup>

As the organization's priorities began to take shape in 1982 and 1983, efforts at preventing the spread of AIDS became a main concern. Central to these prevention goals, SFAF workers wanted to get gay men to use condoms. Before the mid 1980s, condoms had been marketed exclusively to heterosexuals.<sup>25</sup> Their success as barriers to the spread of STDs placed a distant second to their effective birth control design, except in the army where as early as WWI officials tried to convince men to use condoms in the fight against venereal diseases.<sup>26</sup> Like Eskimos and air conditioning, few gay men considered the condom a necessary component of their sexual lives. Their refusal to use condoms was made understandable given the lack of scientific study on condoms and AIDS. It was not until 1985 that scientists confirmed that condoms successfully prevented the spread of HIV.<sup>27</sup> Even this research did not convince key members of the Reagan administration that condoms were effective in prevention efforts, a stance taken up in the next chapter.

Without scientific studies that confirmed reduction of risk when men used condoms, SFAF turned to gay liberation to help convince gay men to use condoms. SFAF exploited the

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24 For information on the early structure of the SFAF see UC Berkeley's Regional Oral History Office's "Oral Histories on the AIDS Epidemic in San Francisco" Series. In recent years several scholars have turned their attention to the evolution of AIDS service organizations in particular, and AIDS work in general, to argue that groups such as SFAF and GMHC became increasingly professionalized over the course of the 1980s. This professionalization had a deleterious effect not only on the services the agencies were able to provide, but also erased the political radicalness from the organizations. See Cindy Patton, *Inventing AIDS* (New York, 1990). I have not been able to engage in an analysis of GMHC because the records of that organization have yet to be processed by the New York Public Library. For an account of GMHC that suggests the critical role of gay men in the organization see Philip Kayal, *Bearing Witness: Gay Men's Health Crisis and the Politics of AIDS* (Boulder, 1993).

25 I am indebted to Paula Treichler's preliminary work on the history of the condom, "Rethinking the Condom." Paper and presentation delivered at the Rutgers Institute for Research on Women, April 9, 2001.

26 Allan Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States Since 1880* (New York, 1987).

27 "Condom Results Crucial in AIDS Fight," Dec. 17, 1985, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 8, folder "Press Releases, 1985-6".

lack of medical attention to AIDS as a way of convincing men to look beyond the medical establishment for responses to the health crisis. In some of its first actions as an AIDS service organization (ASO), SFAF's Board of Directors sought to utilize public spaces that symbolized gay liberation, the bathhouses, to launch both condom distribution and education campaigns about how and why gay customers should use them. Echoing the strategies of community activists like Michael Callen and Richard Berkowitz in New York City and Tom Smith in San Francisco, SFAF focused on providing condoms to gay male bathhouse patrons and using gay public spaces such as bars, baths and retail stores as a delivery system for distribution.

In August 1983 the board authorized Ed Powers, the acting Executive Director, to work with bathhouse owners to develop education campaigns that would be displayed in the gay baths. At one of the first gatherings of SFAF staff and bathhouse owners held in the last weeks of 1983, Powers asked the owners to pass out a condom to each patron entering the bath as well as have free condoms available throughout the location. To help men learn how to use condoms, Powers called for "safe sex" parties, where men could learn about condom usage and how to negotiate with their sexual partners. He hoped to see "Concerned Porno Stars" create fun demonstrations, showing men how to choose the right condom as a safe sex slide show created by the gay liberationist physician Tom Smith ran in the background.<sup>28</sup> Powers wanted SFAF to create materials and owners and employees at the baths to disseminate them.

SFAF sought to change the location of health education campaigns from doctors' offices to bathhouses. Les Pappas, the AIDS prevention educator cited at the beginning of the chapter, recognized that health education needed to happen where men were, not in unfamiliar locations

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<sup>28</sup> Ed Power, "Memo Re: Bathhouse Education Campaign," Aug. 18, 1983, p. 1, folder 1, Carton 1, SFAF Records (UCSF); Power, "Memo to file," p. 1.

like clinics, and that prohibition of specific activities would never work. He also argued that banning sexual activity in the baths, a policy that was a real possibility given the demands by many different groups to close the bathhouses in the first half of the decade, would force men to practice unsafe sexual behavior elsewhere far beyond the reach of activists and educators.<sup>29</sup> At least at the baths, Pappas reasoned, SFAF had the chance to affect change through the circulation of erotic safe sex material.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time that SFAF began to develop AIDS prevention material steeped in the language and practice of gay liberation, the organization was also made aware of the ineffectiveness of white gay men educating gay men of color, particularly black men. In August 1983, Billy S. Jones, a member of the East Bay Chapter of Black and White Men Together (BWMT), an organization formed in 1980 in an attempt to fight racism within gay communities, submitted a letter to the Board of Directors. In it Jones made a strong case for considering the consequences for using an exclusively pro-sex argument in AIDS prevention material. He wrote, "Unless I am out of touch with my brothers and sisters of color, many believe that AIDS is a white gay male disease stemming from unusual, bizarre, excessive, and permissive sexual behavior practices."<sup>31</sup> The Board received Jones' letter at the same meeting where it authorized Powers to collaborate with business owners. But Jones called for a very different collaboration than Powers: he wanted to see SFAF work with several of the established groups, including BWMT and the National Coalition of Black Gays to create campaigns for communities of color in general and gay communities of color in particular by moving away from an exclusive focus

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29 For a useful analysis of the bathhouse controversy see Ronald Bayer, *Private Acts, Social Consequences: AIDS and the Politics of Public Health* (New Brunswick, 1991). (Might put some discussion of this in the book's intro.)

30 Les Pappas, phone interview with author, June 5, 2001.

31 Billy S. Jones, "Memo to AIDS/KS Foundation, et. al.," July 21, 1983, p. 1, folder 1, Carton 1, SFAF Records (UCSF).

on gay liberation. His demands also called attention to a small but growing network of black gay male activists who interpreted the interconnections between race and sexuality.<sup>32</sup>

About ten months after the meeting where Jones sought to draw the board members' attention to the importance of addressing racial difference, SFAF produced one of its first explicitly erotic posters called "You Can Have Fun (and be safe too)." The poster pictured two naked men holding each other – one white, one black – and explained that sexual activity was still possible, and even exciting in the age of AIDS.<sup>33</sup> [Image 1] Even though the poster did not show a condom (as subsequent ones would) it did tell men to use them and their "imagination." In its initial run, the Foundation printed 2,000 copies in January 1984, and distributed them to each bathhouse in the city.<sup>34</sup> While there is no evidence of explicit attempts to distribute the poster to bars frequented by African-American men, the representation suggests that SFAF campaign designers recognized the that the gay community was not racially homogenous.<sup>35</sup>

While SFAF continued to talk about the need to represent diversity in gay communities, the organization's focus shifted from a public education strategy that explored difference within gay communities, to one that tried to contain difference and use it as a marketing strategy. Just a few months after the poster, SFAF consciously began to engage in social marketing, a process that used traditional advertising and marketing techniques to convince gay men to use condoms. In May 1984, the Research and Decision Corporation (R & D), a San Francisco market research

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32 For contemporaneous examples see Joseph Beam, ed., *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology* (Boston, 1986); Essex Hemphill, ed., *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men* (Boston, 1991). Might also include Audre Lorde here. Could expand footnote to include current literature i.e. Reid-Pharr, Cohen. Clarke, etc.

33 Ed Power, "Bathhouses/AIDS Education," Feb. 20, 1984, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 8, folder "Press Releases, 1983-4".

34 "You Can Have Fun (& be safe too)," 1984, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 19, folder "You Can Have Fun...".

35 For an analysis of the use of interracial couples in early AIDS prevention see Nancy E. Stoller, *Lessons from the Damned: Queers, Whores, and Junkies Respond to AIDS* (New York, 1998).

firm, donated \$5,000 worth of services to the SFAF to study gay and bisexual men's knowledge about the AIDS epidemic and continue the project of condom education. R & D marketers would recruit enough men for two focus groups, and then question the participants about their sexual practices. This experiment was the first time "traditional market research techniques [were utilized] to study gay male sex practices, sexual lifestyle and attitudes toward AIDS and safe sex."<sup>36</sup>

The changing nature of marketing in the postwar era made it possible for SFAF to consider marketing's value for public health initiatives. In her work on postwar mass consumption, Lizbeth Cohen argues that by the 1960s retailers no longer relied on mass marketing to gain consumers for their products. Instead, they articulated what came to be known as segmented or niche markets. This meant that more often than not, advertisers created specific campaigns for specific demographics, for example, marketing to women or African Americans. This development, when coupled with the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, produced a "new commercial culture that reified -- at times exaggerated -- social difference in the pursuit of profits, often reincorporating disaffected groups into the commercial marketplace... [Marketers] embrace of market segmentation [after the 1950s] let marketplace recognition to social and cultural divisions among Americans, making 'countercultures' and 'identity politics' more complex joint products of grassroots mobilization and marketers' ambitions than is often acknowledged."<sup>37</sup>

Marketing and public health initiatives had overlapped before. Over the course of the 1960s and '70s, population control advocates tried to use similar marketing techniques to those

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36 "SFAF Receives Research Grant," May 7, 1984, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 8, folder "Press Releases, 1983-4".

37 Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York, 2003), 309.

Cohen describe to sell products deemed a social good. According to social marketing expert Richard Manoff, social marketers borrowed research techniques from "anthropology, sociology, social psychology, communications theory... They provided a capability for insight into group behavior and motivations, target audiences, and attributes, and for designing responsive message and media strategies."<sup>38</sup> Birth control advocates were the first to use social marketing to promote public campaigns to reform sexual practices in the name of the greater good. In his description of the first attempts to encourage condom use in India in 1964, Philip Harvey recounts how a group of academics, government officials, local businessmen and Ford Foundation population experts produced "Proposals for Family Planning Promotion: A Marketing Plan."<sup>39</sup> The document provided a blueprint for how to encourage the use of condoms and then plan for the proper distribution of them. Harvey claims that public health workers continued to use the marketing plan for the next several decades in birth control efforts as well as public health campaigns.<sup>40</sup>

SFAF's AIDS prevention plans self-consciously built on the work that been done in the developing world to encourage condom use. In 1984, SFAF hired Sam Puckett, a former advertising executive, to spearhead its social marketing campaign.<sup>41</sup> He continued efforts to develop public displays such as posters, flyers and other ephemera in conjunction with focus group testing. Working with Puckett, Les Pappas argued that he modeled his projects on birth

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38 Richard K. Manoff, *Social Marketing: New Imperative for Public Health* (New York, 1985), 6. For another contemporaneous source on health marketing see Troy Festervand, "An Introduction and Application of Focus Group Research to the Health Care Industry," *Health Marketing Quarterly* 2 (Winter-Spring 1984-5).

39 Philip Harvey, *Let Every Child Be Wanted: How Social Marketing Is Revolutionizing Contraceptive Use Around the World* (Westport, 1999), 4.

40 Imperialist implications, a way of talking about family planning without talking about women's rights. How much of a critique here before moving on? Might use this as a way to foreshadow chapter 4 on Ford Foundation

41 Stoller, *Lessons from the Damned*, 45.

control efforts undertaken in the developing world, a practice he learned while in the Peace Corps.<sup>42</sup>

Before developing a specific campaign strategy, whether it was the images that would appear in a poster, or the text that would surround it, SFAF conducted a series of focus group sessions. With the help of R&D staff, SFAF workers solicited people from the campaign's target audience, usually gay men, at least at first. SFAF staff then presented recruits with a series of ideas for the campaign. The group would discuss the various campaign possibilities, occasionally making suggestions for changes. The marketers would then ask the participants to vote on which idea they liked best. SFAF took the information from the group and used it to create two or three possible campaigns. R&D would then find another target audience group to vet the mocked-up designs.<sup>43</sup>

With the ability to market its safe sex ideas, SFAF returned to gay-owned commercial establishments hoping to find an outlet for its message. But in so doing implied that gayness required a certain class status. In an alliance almost identical to the one created with bathhouse owners two years earlier, SFAF forged connections with gay business owners in San Francisco to sell condoms to gay men. One of the most successful, according to SFAF public relations material, was with Mark Christofer, co-owner of The Obelisk, "an exclusive Castro gift shop." Christofer agreed not only to display condoms for those who shopped in his store geared to a particular class of gay men as well as men who actively defined themselves as gay, but he did so

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42 Interview with Pappas. Pappas left SFAF in the early 1990s to form his own social marketing firm called, Better World Advertising. Now, SFAF and other progressive groups contract Better World to create advertisements and educational campaigns for them.

43 "SFAF Receives Research Grant."



with “‘designer’ condoms” arranged in a “predominant and classy display.”<sup>44</sup> The Foundation hoped this strategy would eliminate some of the barriers gay men experienced when buying and using condoms. If a hip store sold the product, it would become more hip to use the product. Christofer confirmed this idea. “‘Our store has a long standing commitment to do what we can during this crisis, we feel that every responsible business should respond to the concerns of its community – it's good business morals. Also, the condoms we are selling make great gift items.’”<sup>45</sup>

The consequences of the rhetoric of consumption and the use of marketing as a form of political mobilization, were more far reaching than simply increasing the number of people who heard SFAF prevention messages and bought condoms. Even as the organization recognized race as a feature of the gay community, because it necessarily defined that community as a homogenous market, the implications of racial and class-based difference were lost on the market researchers or businessmen who volunteered their time for the cause. In the case of the condom display at the Castro store, those who could not afford the product or did not frequent such store had few solutions in this model. The display did little to help gay men who lived outside the Castro, bisexuals, men in the closet, or any men who lacked the disposable income to purchase “gift items” from “exclusive shops.” Latino Studies scholar Jose Quiroga argues that the development of gay toy stores, many like the Obelisk, replaced more political spaces such as bookstore with “a more openly commodified ‘lifestyle’ commercial enterprise.”<sup>46</sup>

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44 "Local Businesses Support Action to Make Condoms Readily Available," April 29, 1985, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 8, folder "Press Releases, 1985-6".

45 Ibid.

46 José Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America* (New York, 2000), 172.

Whether or not SFAF knew the full effect of racial and class inequalities among its clients, in 1985 the organization began to talk more openly about the need to address the experiences of people of color. Three efforts symbolize this initiative: SFAF tried to hire a more racially diverse staff; it collected and analyzed statistical evidence on the intersections of race and sexuality in the AIDS epidemic; and it continued to reach out to communities of color.

While SFAF had several people of color on staff within its first few years of operation, by 1985 Board members began to express concern about the need for a more diverse staff to enact initiatives in communities of color. At a May 1985 meeting, the Board talked about its “commitment to 3rd world outreach” that was “strong and unquestioned,” but also claimed that the agency did have not enough staff members to realize the commitment.<sup>47</sup> To begin to address this lack, the Foundation hired several gay men of color, most notably two Chicano men, Ernesto Hinojos, a public health worker hired in 1984 to work on campaign development and Hank Tavera, a long-time Chicago activists and performer, who joined the staff around 1985 in the Client Services Department.<sup>48</sup> Over the course of the next half a dozen years, these men would play important roles in the organization as advocates as well as function as activists outside SFAF.

At around the same time that the Foundation hired Hinojos and Tavera, staff members began to talk about the statistical evidence that called attention to the intersections of race and sexuality in the AIDS epidemic. The statistics both concerned and motivated them. Just a few months after he arrived at SFAF, Hinojos tried to compare evidence he had from the census indicating what percentage of the population was made up of people of color with the percentage

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47 "Board Minutes," May 16, 1985, p. 3, folder 3, Carton 1, SFAF Records (UCSF).

48 I am currently trying to locate Ernesto Hinojos to interview him. Tavera died in the late 1990s but his performance work has been written about. (need citation)

of people of color reached by the work SFAF did with R and D marketers. His notes suggested that while African American accounted for 13% of San Francisco's population, only 4% of the people R and D reached were black.<sup>49</sup> As Hinojos puzzled over the disconnect between the city's demography and the Foundation's work, the overall statistics of AIDS among people of color in the city provided some solace. Between 1984 and 1986 the percentage of Blacks and Latinos with AIDS increased from 4.3% to 6.5% and 6.2% to 6.6% respectively, while the number of Asian and Pacific Islanders reported to have AIDS remained at a fraction of one percent. Even if there was significant undercounting of women and children with AIDS, groups that were statistically more likely to be majority people of color, these numbers were quite low in comparison to the national statistics, where government figures suggested closer to 40% of new AIDS cases were among people of color. While public health officials regularly noted these kinds of statistics, it is not clear that knew why this was the case.<sup>50</sup>

Regardless of the significance of the statistics, SFAF staff responded by trying to reach out to communities of color, in particular with "Third World Gay or Bisexual Men." SFAF placed advertisements in the Bay Area Reporter calling on "Third World Gay or Bisexual Men" to join its focus groups. [Image 2] Using material devoid of sexual content, staff members handed out flyers asking for participation in neighborhoods beyond the Castro, including the

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49 Ernesto Hinojos, c. 1985, not yet processed, Carton 22, SFAF Records (UCSF).

50 See the AIDS Office 1986 Report. "San Francisco has a unique opportunity to avoid some of the dimensions of the East Coast's experience with AIDS. People of color and women show up in much higher proportions in the arithmetic of AIDS on the East Coast. In San Francisco, the number of cases of AIDS among these groups is still relatively small." Jeff Amory, "1986 AIDS Plan: Final Report," Dec. 16, 1986, p. 2, AO Records, Carton 3, folder "1986 AIDS Plan: Final Report".

Tenderloin and the Western Addition, neighborhood that each had large communities of color and significant numbers of people living in poverty.<sup>51</sup>

But recognizing race, and attempting to include people of color, did not necessarily produce an anti-racist approach that was capable of overcoming the barriers to educating the whole community. In an internal memo from Bernie Wagner, the SFAF staff member in charge of media relations to the City's AIDS Office, Wagner wrote: "In the process of designing a visual message for Third World Communities/IV Drug users/HTLV3. Why? It was discovered that this population does not read the daily newspaper, watch a lot of television or listen to radio programs unless there is 99% music and no talking. Research shows that ethnic communities need a simple, colorful, visual image to give them a message about AIDS/HTLV3/drug abuse. Pictures are probably very meaningful. This is still being discussed."<sup>52</sup> In effect, Wagner condensed several different racial groups into one and then reiterated the idea that they shared inherent cultural characteristic that required simplistic marketing.

It is possible to see the influence of these complex and sometimes contradictory assumptions in some of SFAF's first attempts at sexually explicit outreach campaigns for gay and bisexual men of color. In 1985, SFAF organized one of the first focus groups conducted with gay men of color for the poster "Affection is the Best Protection."<sup>53</sup> The organizers asked eight men – five African Americans, one Native American, and one Latino – to look at and then discuss the campaign. The group was educationally diverse, but the men with advanced degrees were the most vocal about the inappropriateness of the campaign. One man disliked the

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51 In addition to general outreach to communities of color, SFAF built connections specifically with the Latino community through attempts to develop bilingual education material. See RN 1656, 1651, 1652.

52 Bernie Wagner, "Memo to Tom Mossmiller," Aug. 28, 1985, p. 1, not yet processed, Carton 22, SFAF Records (UCSF).

53 Unfortunately, no copy of the poster is in the archives.

“stereotypical notion that Third World people needed simplistic materials.” The poster offended him because he believed the creators assumed that most people of color lacked education. He suggested that, “maybe you just need brown/black faces – the language doesn't necessarily need to change.” Others in the focus group spoke even more directly to the issue of perceived racial difference, saying that “technicality should be avoided and the text should be limited – ‘white boys don't read either.’”<sup>54</sup> The men in this focus group seemed more interested in pushing the Foundation staff to see gay men of color as similar to white gay men because of class similarities. That is, their social class status as educated people made white men like them and vice versa.

Leaders of “minority communities” expressed resistance to SFAF’s work that was both similar to and different from the gay men of color focus group. Interviewed over the course of three days in 1986 as part of the Foundation’s “overall heterosexual risk study,” (once again confirming the idea that people of color were more likely to be heterosexual than homosexual) the twenty-eight participants provided SFAF staff and consultants with their opinions about a wide-range of topics including, diversity within and among communities of color and what it meant to define gayness in such a way as to exclude men who did not consider the same relationship between identity and behavior.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to a conversation about heterosexuality and AIDS, the “prominent community members” also tried to describe what “gayness” looked like and in turn raised concerns about using an historically specific representation of gay liberation to define a kind of trans-historical

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54 "Report on Focus Groups: Third World Gay and Bisexual Men," 1985, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 19, folder "Report on Focus Groups: Third World Gay and Bisexual Men".

55 Larry L. Bye, "Memo to SFAF," Aug. 1, 1986, p. 1, not yet processed, Carton 22, SFAF Records (UCSF).

gay identity. “Some minority gays deny the reality of AIDS, believing it to be associated with promiscuous white homosexuals. Many of these men perceived gay community institutions as racist, insensitive, or irrelevant to their lives... Asian gays believe themselves to be less promiscuous and hence not at risk. Some even believe they are immune to AIDS.”<sup>56</sup> Instead of claiming a gay identity, participants drew a sharp distinction between behavioral practices and identity. “Large numbers of... Blacks and Latinos...do not even consider themselves to be homosexuals, although they frequently have same-sex partners. These men are not being reached by risk reduction programs targeted at openly gay men, because they do not read gay publications and are not integrated into the predominantly white gay male subculture.”<sup>57</sup> The distinction they drew between identity and behavior contained two distinct arguments: first, practicing certain sexual behaviors did not necessarily mean someone identified as gay; second, claiming a gay identity did not translate into practicing certain sexual behaviors.

Unlike the gay men of color, several participants, who did not identify as openly gay, criticized SFAF for how it dealt with racial stereotypes in its prevention materials, focusing particularly harsh criticism on the sexually explicit materials. They thought the campaigns failed to acknowledge, “cultural taboos about sexuality [that] had to be respected if minority audiences were to be reached.” Ultimately, the people interviewed found that the SFAF material fed “stereotypes about who is at risk for AIDS.”<sup>58</sup> The focus group members seemed concerned that by associating people of color with sexual imagery, SFAF bought into and ultimately recreated stereotypical ideas that people of color were hypersexual.<sup>59</sup>

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56 Ibid., p.2.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., p. 5.

59 These community leaders used similar strategies to those employed by the Black Baptist women Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham describes in *Righteous Discontent*. See chapter, “The Politics of Respectability” Evelyn Brooks

Beyond the shared concerns about an attack on black respectability, the community leaders were also very troubled by what they now saw as a regular link between people of color and drug use. While scholars have described the controversy that erupted in some Black communities when activists attempted to implement needle exchange programs, the people at this focus group were more interested in discussing the class difference that existed among drug users and how that influenced their practices. They reasoned that poor people who used drugs on the street were more likely to benefit from needle exchange programs than middle-class users who might see themselves as immune to this mode of transmission.<sup>60</sup>

After detailing a strong critique of SFAF's work, the focus group participants suggested an alternative method that would encourage more dialogue and grassroots response. Instead of using the marketing technique of data extraction, they called for the use of "ethnographic research methods that rely on participant observation rather than survey research techniques. Nearly everyone agreed that cultural norms prohibit easy discussion of sexual behavior and that this would be a difficult problem, especially with older, more traditional, less-well assimilated individuals in the Asian and Latino communities."<sup>61</sup> By creating a space for more interpersonal communication and open channels of discussions among people with AIDS at the same time that

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Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 185-230.

<sup>60</sup> Bye, "Memo to SFAF," p. 3. For an analysis of resistance to needle exchange see Cohen, *Boundaries*.

<sup>61</sup> For quote see Bye, "Memo to SFAF," p. 4. SFAF was not the only AIDS organization in San Francisco to use social marketing. The Stop AIDS Project used R and D Corporation to develop small support groups where men talked about how to practice safe sex. "The Stop AIDS project will be the equivalent of a community meeting of 1,000 San Francisco gay and bisexual men, conducted in small confidential groups of 10-12 men per group so that each individual will have an opportunity to fully participate in the discussion... All gay and bisexual men are invited to participate in this important dialogue." "The Stop AIDS Project: A Community Experiment in Communication," 1985, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 8, folder "Early Fundraising Papers". This model for community education was also quite a dangerous endeavor. The Traditional Values Coalition tried to de-fund the group in 2001/2.

they paid particular attention to issues of translation, community leaders hoped to educate people from the bottom up instead of the top down.

The meeting of community leaders of color was not the first time these sorts of arguments were made in San Francisco. In the summer of 1985 a group of San Francisco AIDS workers formed the Third World AIDS Advisory Task Force (TWAATF) specifically to address the needs of communities of color in the city and beyond and what it saw as a deficiency in an exclusively service provision model. The Task Force emerged after a series of community meetings that included participants from the Human Rights Commission and the SFAF. A few months after the initial meeting, with a membership composed of people of all colors who agreed that it was necessary to attend to structural inequalities in the AIDS epidemic, several of whom were out gays and lesbians, the group created a steering committee to advance its efforts on behalf of minority communities in San Francisco.

Many of the Task Force members wore two or three institutional hats in addition to their work at TWAATF. They not only held jobs in San Francisco AIDS service organizations, they also served on various community groups as well. Hank Tavera ran Client Services at SFAF, sat on the Latino Coalition on AIDS, and chaired TWAATF. Miguel Ramirez worked in the education department at SFAF, volunteered at the Latino Coalition on AIDS, and went to TWAATF meetings. Amanda Hamilton-Houston, a psychologist employed by the AIDS Health Project, led the Black Coalition on AIDS, and participated in meetings of a researchers group made up of other Third World San Franciscans. While this often meant that many members were overextended in their work, it facilitated communication between groups, allowed representative from various communities to network with each other, and most importantly



highlighted the similarities and differences in the way service organizations and the state treated people with AIDS.

Members of TWWATF used their expertise as community leaders, as well as their knowledge of each other's activities, to force San Francisco's growing AIDS bureaucracy to recognize that people of color had special needs in the AIDS crisis. Using strategies that included "client advocacy, public testimony, lobbying, needle exchange, civil disobedience, political activism and multicultural awareness and training, along with education, information and referral," members targeted state agencies such as the AIDS Office and service organizations like SFAF to do more for people of color.<sup>62</sup> By design, this meant that the Task Force dealt with diversity within communities of color, whether in terms of gender, class or sexual practices. It also required the organization to expand the meaning of AIDS work to more than health and welfare, including issues of political and economic inequality as well.

Two events symbolized TWAATF's commitment to broadly conceived AIDS work: the 1985 production of a brochure designed exclusively for people of color, and the 1986 TWAATF planning and coordination the first Western Regional Conference on AIDS and Ethnic Minorities held at the University of California-San Francisco (UCSF).<sup>63</sup> Both the document and the conference called on people of color to be more aware of AIDS and demanded that organizations recognize the different needs of those communities and at the same time consider what it would mean to embrace anti-racism strategies as institutions trying to care for all people with AIDS.

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62 Hank Tavera, "The Third World AIDS Advisory Taskforce," Nov. 1990, p. 1, TWAATF Records, Box 1, folder "History, Organization, and Policy Statements (1987-1991)".

63 TWAATF, "Information for People of Color," Dec. 1985; TWAATF, "Organizational Chart," Aug. 12, 1986, TWAATF Records, Box 1, folder "History, Organization, and Policy Statements (1987-1991)".

The brochure, “Information for People of Color: Asians, Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans” used words, both sexually explicit and not, to convey the need for behavior change among people of color. Once unfolded, the pamphlet opened with a bold statement: "AIDS IS STRIKING PEOPLE OF COLOR. It is not limited to gay white men. In fact, two out of five Americans with AIDS are Black, Latino, Asian, American Indian, and other people of color. Among women, half are Black and one in five are Latina." In contrast to this forceful, yet bland language, the long list of how people could get AIDS used more sexually explicit language. The bullet points read:

- You can get AIDS from someone who is infected with the AIDS virus:
- If you have intercourse without a rubber...
- If you use someone else’s sex toys, such as vibrators or dildoes.
- If you swallow urine (piss), semen (cum), or feces (shit) or allow them in your mouth...
- If you shoot up drugs with someone else’s needles, ‘works,’ ‘rigs,’ or tools.
- If you have sex and take inside yourself the blood or cum of someone who does the things listed above.<sup>64</sup>

The text covered a wide range of behaviors, behaviors that both men and women could perform, but did not shy away from sexually explicit imagery. The brochure writers hoped to utilize a central premise of gay liberation – the ability to have frank and open conversations about sex – in conjunction with the need to write for an audience that included gay and bisexual men but was not limited to that group.

The conference followed on the heels of the brochure and continued to deal with the uneven HIV infection rates among people of color. Citing then current CDC statistics that 25

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<sup>64</sup> TWAATF, "Information for People of Color."  
**UIC Great Cities Institute**

percent of AIDS cases were Black, and 14 percent were Latino, TWAATF hoped the conference would educate health care professionals about the needs of people of color, as well as allow service providers a chance to network with each other. With fourteen workshops over the course of the three-day conference, ranging from “The Politics of AIDS” to “AIDS and Correctional Institutions,” the group began conversations that had not yet taken place in formal settings. The conference expanded the focus of prevention efforts from the promotion of safe sex to risk reduction more broadly defined to include everything from substance abuse to ways to control perinatal transmission of HIV.<sup>65</sup> By assessing the problem of AIDS in prison, the participants specifically considered how location affected behavior and knowledge. Male and female inmates required prevention efforts that acknowledged their unsafe actions, especially because the state ignored that sex and drug use happened in penal institutions. In a prison setting, the lack of freedom and access made prevention work very different from what could happen in a bar or a bathhouse.<sup>66</sup>

The mission of the conference made it clear that the group tried to extend its advocacy to highlight the social and political aspects of health issues. In this respect, TWAATF articulated a position that was more similar to the earliest AIDS activists described in the previous chapter than SFAF. TWAATF supported universal health care for people of color across the city. It was also one of the first organizations to discuss the impact of immigration legislation that excluded HIV-positive immigrants and visitors from the nation, a topic discussed in the next chapter of this study. In response to a municipal Task Force on HIV 1990 report, Hank Tavera criticized

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65 TWAATF, "Western Regional Conference on AIDS and Ethnic Minorities, April 25-27, 1986," April 25, 1986, TWAATF Records, Box 1, folder "Western Regional Conference on AIDS and Ethnic Minorities, 1986; planning (1985-86)".

66 Footnote material on AIDS and Prisons.

the city government for giving “little attention...to the problems of HIV-affected Latino and Southeast Asian immigrants and refugees, particularly around the issues of amnesty [and] entitlement programs...” even though the San Francisco was supposed to be a “Sanctuary City” where legal and illegal immigrants would be treated equally.<sup>67</sup> With its broad focus, the Task Force recognized how AIDS manifested itself across different communities and envisioned solutions that shifted responsibility away from the individual, drew on the government for resources, and in so doing fundamentally expanded the San Francisco model of care to include broad, political solutions for the AIDS epidemic.

TWAATF’s most lasting work, however, came when members tried to transform the internal structure of AIDS service organization in the San Francisco. They did this by consulting with and training service providers at overwhelmingly white organizations in hopes of changing the institutions that provided the lion’s share of service to San Franciscans of all colors. In an explication of this strategy Tavera wrote: “Although a positive step, it is not enough to paint broad strokes for compassion in responding to the epidemic... [I]ssues of racism [should] not be avoided with the jargon and seduction of ‘being multicultural’ without real change in the power structure of the organization.”<sup>68</sup>

In 1986, TWAATF’s demands for institutional change began to come to fruition at SFAF. The Foundation responded to TWAATF, and the Task Force’s many members who worked there, by encouraging the formation of four employee caucuses: the People of Color Caucus (POCC), the Gay Men’s Caucus, the Women’s Caucus, and the Support Staff Caucus.<sup>69</sup>

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67 Hank Tavera, "letter to Don Francis," April 15, 1990, p. 1, TWAATF Records, Box 1, folder "Meeting Minutes (9/86-10/90)".

68 Ibid., pp. 1-2.

69 People of Color Caucus, "Minutes of May 4, 1988 POCC meeting," May 4, 1988, SFAF Records, Carton 8, folder "People of Color Caucus, 1986-1989".

This organizational model provided a space for group conversations about important topics such as affirmative action for women and people of color within the organization as well as how SFAF might expand its mission to more effectively provide for the needs of all people with AIDS.

Despite a name that signaled a circumscribed ideology based exclusively on race, the POCC formed with the express purpose of instituting affirmative action hiring goals at the Foundation as well as aiding in the design of public programs. At their first meeting in November, caucus members listed nineteen ideas to work on, ranging from serving as an employee support group to deal with racism in the workplace, to lack of images of people of color in SFAF educational campaigns.<sup>70</sup> The group incorporated most of these concepts into its Statement of Purpose, which began with the goal “to serve as a support system for People of Color within the San Francisco AIDS Foundation and act as a link to the communities of color, and advise the Foundation on the needs of these communities.”<sup>71</sup> From its inception in late 1986, the POCC argued that the employment policies of SFAF had a profound impact on the kind of prevention material the Foundation created for communities of color. The POCC members called for better affirmative action practices because of what it would do for them as individual workers. More importantly, they recognized that better services for communities of color would only be possible if more people of color held management positions. They also argued that employment practices needed to change so that SFAF would be more effective in the

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70 People of Color Caucus, "Ideas," Nov. 18, 1986, SFAF Records, Carton 8, folder "People of Color Caucus, 1986-1989".

71 People of Color Caucus, "Statement of Purpose," Dec. 2-3, 1986, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 8, folder "People of Color Caucus, 1986-1989".

outside world. To further effect change, the POCC used its shared membership with groups such as TWAATF and the Black Coalition on AIDS, to increase its outreach.

Similar to the vignettes that began the chapter where the needs of gay men were represented as fundamentally different from people of color's, the caucus model also falsely set these groups against each other as they competed to make cases for larger shares of limited resources. Often debates over funding and organizational focus became quite heated, and caucuses argued with each other instead of making vociferous demands to the state and federal governments for more resources. Infuriated by a January 8, 1988 article in the San Francisco Chronicle that discussed the complicated relationship between AIDS prevention services for gay men and people of color, the SFAF's gay men's caucus sent an angry memo to the president, Tim Wolfred. Attached to the memo were paragraphs taken directly from the article, quoting SFAF's coordinator for Bilingual Multicultural Services and POCC member, Miguel Ramirez. The quote read, "[Mayor Art Agnos needs to] shift the city's focus away from white gay men and tailor more of its education and services to minority people." Calling his language "homophobic" and a form of "verbal gay bashing," caucus members demanded that Wolfred

send a letter to the Chronicle . . . making it clear . . . that we are committed to continuing programs that serve gay men while at the same time promoting needed programs for minorities. This letter should stress that some people are both gay and ethnic minority, and that *they* are most damaged by this kind of rhetoric. The letter should also make note of the gigantic contributions of gay men as staff of the Foundation, workers in the AIDS field generally, and the gay community at large.<sup>72</sup> [emphasis added]

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<sup>72</sup> Gay Men's Caucus, "Memo re: attached articles," Jan. 12, 1988, AO Records, Carton 2, folder "Minority Issues, 1987-".

The memo writers also wanted these opinions reinforced to Foundation employees at the weekly staff meeting, and expressed forcefully to the Mayor's office as soon as possible.

The caucus's memo enraged Ramirez. He quickly penned a response to Wolfred pointing out that the caucus had selectively deleted part of the article text from the photocopy sent to the entire staff. Comparing a full copy of the newspaper article to the one provided by the gay men's caucus, Ramirez highlighted one sentence left out of the original attachment. "Every day we get more and more cases of minorities with AIDS, but their understanding of the problem is about two years behind the white population." Ramirez went on to argue that the city's AIDS services needed to be revamped, "based on a principle of inclusion not exclusion."<sup>73</sup> Here his words echoed the POCC's statement of purpose, the caucus of which he was a member: "[The POCC] supports increased funding not reallocations of funds for education, prevention, etc. for ethnic minorities with AIDS/ARC."<sup>74</sup> In short, Ramirez argued that the physical transmission of AIDS was limitless, while the barriers of race and class prejudice on the part of the fundraisers, the staff, and the Board impeded the cultural transmission of AIDS prevention.

The exchange between Ramirez and the gay men's caucus encouraged the POCC membership to pursue affirmative action goals, and at the same time seemed to motivate the SFAF management to respond to TWAATF and POCC demands. In September 1988, the Long Range Planning Committee of the SFAF took up the question of how best to produce a multicultural workplace at the Foundation, which would be the first step in creating an anti-racist outreach program. In a questionnaire distributed to the entire staff they asked: "How can SFAF

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73 Miguel Ramirez, "Memo re: Response to SF Chronicle and Gay Men's Caucus," Jan. 13, 1988, AO Records, Carton 2, folder "Minority Issues, 1987-".

74 People of Color Caucus, "Statement of Purpose," p. 3.

build an anti-racist, anti-sexist, and more inclusive multiculturally sensitive organization? How can we succeed in meeting the differing needs of gay men and people of color?” and “How should the racism, sexism, and homophobia fuelling the (continual state and federal legislative) assaults be confronted?”<sup>75</sup> The questions showed that the POCC had made headway into the establishment. The Foundation realized that to create effective prevention it needed to be committed to the needs, the presence and the survival of all people with AIDS, but do so in a way that did not assume that all people experienced AIDS in the same way.

The POCC met to discuss these important questions, and submit its answers to the Planning Committee. The members ranked their proposed solutions. To the first question on organizational structure, the caucus members wanted people of color in “more visible, less tokenistic positions of power.” They also suggested that using a “multicultural model” would help them develop Client Services for all communities.<sup>76</sup> To address the second part of the question about differing needs, the membership troubled the nature of the question itself. They argued that the language of “gay men” and “people of color” perpetuated the problem. Instead they suggested, using phrases like “how do we meet the needs of all people affected by HIV.” To encourage this change, the caucus desired more communication between groups and a better sense of the agency’s total services.<sup>77</sup> In response to the last question, the caucus’s answer was quite direct, “put together a multi-racial, multi-sexual, sexually diverse team” to help the Public Policy office respond to the federal assault on AIDS service providers.<sup>78</sup>

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75 Hank Tavera, "Memo to the POCC," Sept. 19, 1988, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 8, folder "People of Color Caucus, 1986-1989".

76 People of Color Caucus, "Minutes of September 28, 1988 POCC meeting," Sept. 28, 1988, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 8, folder "People of Color Caucus, 1986-1989".

77 Ibid., p. 2.

78 Ibid.



Jackson Peyton, SFAF's Education Director and gay caucus member, did not agree with the POCC's analysis. In a response to the questionnaire Peyton wrote, "We do NOT have as our mission the development of an anti-racist, anti-sexist organization. Our mission is to stop the AIDS epidemic and to provide services to HIV affected people."<sup>79</sup> He saw no direct connection between the internal structure of the organization and the work the organization did in the world. He followed his first response with a sentence that used the exact same words as the POCC, but in this context the answer had a very different meaning. "We are not here to meet the needs of gay men and people of color. We are supposed to meet the needs of people at risk for AIDS and people affected by AIDS."<sup>80</sup>

The POCC and Peyton used the same words but to very different ends. While each one talked about the need to care for all people affected by AIDS, they disagreed on whether that meant they needed also to deal with how inequality, whether based on sexuality, race, gender or combinations of all these categories, affected the same people. In that respect, the debate the POCC and Peyton had symbolized the limits of coalitions built to respond to the AIDS crisis, people spoke the same words, but not the same language.

As an organization TWAATF no longer functioned after 1991, but the former members of the group continued to influence how San Francisco ASOs functioned. The impact of their work and the legacy of the vociferous debates they started can be seen in the AIDS prevention campaigns SFAF created between 1988 and 1991 to continue promoting condom use among gay men. The first campaign, "Get it On," created primarily for white men, was followed by "Get

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79 Jackson Peyton, "Memo To Kevin Cox Re: Long Range Planning," 1988, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 8, folder "Gay Men's Caucus".

80 Ibid.

Carried Away,” made for black men, and “Listo Para La Accion,” for Latinos. The two strategies designed for gay men of color sparked serious controversy for SFAF, while the one made for white men emerged without a fuss. Looking at how SFAF developed these prevention campaigns, as well as how the intended audience and the larger public responded to them provided empirical support for the idea that race, sexuality, and gender could never be separated in the AIDS epidemic.

Released in 1988, “Get it On/Dress for the Occasion,” was the first poster in a series produced by SFAF intended to increase gay men’s condom use in this series. The poster showed a naked white man, from nose to knees. His hands were placed on his inner thighs, providing a frame for his erect penis covered with a condom. Below the image, the text read “Dress for the Occasion.”<sup>81</sup> [Image 3]

Before the campaign’s release, SFAF conducted a focus group with a group of white gay and bisexual men, the first time the organization marked whiteness as a race. They responded quite positively to the poster. Men found the image “very erotic.” One suggested that the poster was “basically porn, but it gets the message across.” Another participant used the language of consumption in his praise. “I really get from that picture ... that condoms are fashionable. This guy is hot -- who wouldn't want him ...Condoms are in. It makes you want to wear a condom.”<sup>82</sup> [ellipses in original] After the focus group, production on the poster began and copies were distributed across the city. Response to the poster was overwhelmingly positive, and signaled the centrality of consumption in prevention material created for white men.

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81 "Focus Group Research on AIDS Educational Material Among Three Groups: General Population, Gay and Bisexual Men, & Sexually Active Heterosexual Women," Nov. 23, 1987, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 19, folder "Evaluation of AIDS Educational Media Materials for English and Spanish Speaking Populations, 1987".

82 Ibid., p. 14.

The second and third campaigns in the series, each of which was directed toward gay men of color, were not adopted as easily. “Get Carried Away,” the campaign designed for black gay men, was well received by the focus group of men who saw the poster. In late 1989, before producing the actual poster, SFAF conducted two focus groups in the Tenderloin neighborhood of San Francisco to see what kind of issues and images black men would like to see. The men at the session expressed their frustration caused at the absence of blacks in safe sex material. They also complained that the bars they frequented did not have the prevention materials posted, as was the case in many white bars. Here, the racial division felt in the larger gay community played itself out in how black men viewed AIDS prevention services and whether they paid attention to the messages that were available to them in public spaces. While the men interviewed possessed some information about HIV transmission, in the end “they had a lot of confusion on safe sex.”<sup>83</sup>

To address the ideas presented in the initial focus groups, SFAF’s education department created a poster and pamphlet with images of black men. The poster showed two black men in a naked embrace. One man stood, holding the other man in his arms. The standing man’s penis was erect and covered with a condom. The text above the image read, “Get Carried Away,” “with condoms” below it.<sup>84</sup> [Image 4] The pamphlet featured the same models, images, and text, but also included more explicit harm reduction material. The brochure told men that “you can’t tell if he has AIDS by looking at him, so protect yourself, protect him, ALWAYS USE A CONDOM.” It then provided a four-point guide on how to use a condom. Under the condom

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83 Ernesto Hinojos, "Letter to Dr. Rutherford," Oct. 23, 1989, p. 1, AO Records, Carton 17, folder "SFAF: Six Other Proposals".

84 SFAF, "Get Carried Away... with Condoms," 1989, p. 1, AO Records, Carton 17, folder "SFAF: Six Other Proposals".

section, the brochure also explained how to clean needles in between each use. This last part was added after the focus groups suggested that material needed to include information for intravenous drug users who might, or might not, also be gay.<sup>85</sup> With the materials in a more definitive form, SFAF convened another focus group. The eighteen men, ranging in age from 21-41, liked the poster and pamphlet. They appreciated that the models “were Black and loving.” They also confirmed that the information presented was accurate and useful.<sup>86</sup>

To help distribute the materials and ensure visibility, SFAF sought help from Black and White Men Together (BMWT), the multiracial, gay organization that had called for such coalitions six years earlier. Together, the organizations hired an outreach worker to work in bars frequented by black gay men. He went to bars during peak hours and spoke with patrons about safe sex and HIV prevention. SFAF then arranged follow-up information and services for anyone who needed it. SFAF clearly tried to connect the production of knowledge to the dissemination of knowledge. SFAF’s effort to build a service coalition with BWMT suggested that the Foundation’s Board now recognized the problem with using safe sex workshops that were designed with the intention of being universally appealing for gay men, but were actually geared toward white gay men, an argument confirmed by a 1990 BMWT study of almost 1000 black gay men.<sup>87</sup>

Despite the outreach, the project soon ran into problems. As a contract agency with the AIDS Office, SFAF had to present any campaign receiving federal funding to a “community review board” for vetting. The board, composed of five people with varying degrees of connection to public health services, considered the campaign on January 31, 1990. At the

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85 Ibid.

86 Hinojos, "Letter to Dr. Rutherford," p. 2.

87 Philip Hiltz, "Study Says Many Gay Black Men Don't Guard Against AIDS," New York Times, June 15, 1990.

meeting held in the AIDS Office, the group discussed their objections to the poster. One argued that it was “too sexually explicit for a reasonable person,” and that it may “land in other’s hand.” Another commented that the poster failed to “depict with dignity and empowerment.” Three members of the panel expressed support for the poster. They argued that the crisis situation called for this approach, and that “provocative” material would “start where the client is.”<sup>88</sup> Ultimately, the board approved the poster, but suggested that SFAF work on consulting more people in future campaigns.

This process occurred as it did as much because of the Reagan administration’s guidelines for the content of AIDS prevention material created using federal funds as the concerns expressed at the local level. In February 1987, the President demanded that all funded materials “emphasize local control and encourage responsible sexual behavior based on fidelity, commitment, and maturity, placing sexuality within the context of marriage.”<sup>89</sup> This gave the review panel in San Francisco the power to delay the production of these materials, even in the face of support by the intended audience. While no evidence exists as to why the reviewers chose to use their power at this moment, it is likely that they did so, in part because of conservative party politics in the state of California.<sup>90</sup>

Opposition to their efforts did not stop the SFAF education staff from designing the third poster in the series specifically for Latino men. In March and October 1989 SFAF convened

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88 CDC Educational Materials Review Panel, "Minutes for 1/31/90," Jan. 31, 1990, p. 1, AO Records, Carton 17, folder "SFAF: Six Other Proposals".

89 Domestic Policy Council, "Decision Memorandum on AIDS in America," April 30, 1987, p. 2, Ronald Reagan Library, William L. Ball Files, Box OA 15332, folder "WLB - 1987 Health--AIDS [1 of 2]".

90 See Linda Breakstone, "State GOP Infighting Over AIDS," San Francisco Examiner, Sept. 28, 1987, A1; Marsha Ginsburg, "Health Chief Disputes GOP on AIDS Stand," San Francisco Examiner, Sept. 29, 1987, 1; Brian Jones, "State Bans Safe Sex Info," BAR, Oct. 1, 1987, 1; Thomas Keane, "GOP Criticized For Vote on AIDS Material," San Francisco Chronicle, Sept. 30, 1987; Holly Smith, "SFAF Executive Director Shocked and Dismayed at California Republican Party Resolution on AIDS," Sept. 29, 1987, SFAF Records, Carton 8, folder "Responding to GOP Charges of 'Obscene' AIDS Literature, Press Conference, 9/29/30,"

focus groups of “gay and bisexual health educators from the Latin Community” in an attempt to determine what the best message was, and how to disseminate it to the community.<sup>91</sup> The focus group participants concluded that certain segments of San Francisco’s Latino community needed more help than others. To elaborate, they ranked six groups in order of importance, defined as most in need of prevention information: injecting drug users; undocumented immigrants; Latin gay homeless; Latin transvestites; Latin gays over 50; and Latin gay youth.<sup>92</sup> The educators called for the incorporation of “family, religion, friendship and spirituality” into prevention work because “these issues are an intrinsic component of the Latin community.”<sup>93</sup> In so doing, they resisted stereotypical notions about macho Latino men with overactive sex drives even as they embraced some essentialist notions of Latino culture.

In an attempt to continue the lively discussion, SFAF showed the group “Dress for the Occasion,” the poster that had been designed the year before for white men. The group, on the whole, thought that the poster was too direct and sexually explicit for Latino men. One man suggested that two men appear in the image for Latino men, not just one.<sup>94</sup> When the meeting ended, SFAF staff had several good ideas for a new prevention poster. The overwhelming majority of participants wanted to see images with two partially nude men.

Six months later, SFAF created two versions of a poster entitled “Listo Para La Accion ... con Condon” (Ready for action with a condom): one was “less sexually explicit” and would appear as a newspaper advertisement; the other showed partially nude men and was designed for

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91 Victoria Sanabria, "Summary of Findings: Input of Latin Gay and Bisexual Health Education Providers," Dec. 26, 1989, p. 1, SFAF Records, Carton 19, folder "Summary of Findings: Input of Latin Gay and Bisexual Health Educations Providers, 1989".

92 Ibid., p. 2.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid., p. 3.

distribution in Latino gay bars.<sup>95</sup> [Images 5 and 6] Using a similar production strategy for this poster as for “Get Carried Away,” SFAF then conducted a series of focus groups with Latino gay men, showing them potential versions of the campaign. The “sexually explicit erotic safe sex” poster, picturing two men about to have anal intercourse using a condom, received five positive responses, and one negative at a session held in March 1990. Those who liked the poster commented that the models were attractive and the situation realistic. But even those who approved of the poster expressed concerns about the explicitness of the image. They were concerned that many people, including “Latinos recently arriving from Latin America” might find the poster offensive.<sup>96</sup> None of the participants objected to an alternative image that showed two men, one wearing only underwear, the other in jeans with a condom tucked into the waistband, holding hands. They liked the display of affection between the two men as well as the fact that this image could be shown to the larger Latino community in Spanish speaking newspapers.<sup>97</sup>

With suggestions from the focus groups incorporated into the more sexually explicit poster, SFAF’s Ernesto Hinojos, the Education Director, sent both posters to the AIDS Office for review in April 1990. Several members of the review board were outraged by what they saw. Juan Cruz wrote an angry memo to the group protesting the message of the poster.

My first reaction was ‘what the fuck are they doing now!’ And it doesn’t get any better. I won’t be a ‘liberal’ and say that due to this crisis etc, I will pass on this: The poster implies that people can only be reached through the lowest common denominator

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95 "Field Testing," March 8, 1990, p. 1, AO Records, Carton 17, folder "SFAF: Poster Targeting Gay Latino Men".

96 "Summary of Major Findings," March 8, 1990, p. 1, AO Records, Carton 17, folder "SFAF: Poster Targeting Gay Latino Men".

97 "AIDS Office Material Evaluation Sheet," March 8, 1990, p. 1, AO Records, Carton 17, folder "SFAF: Poster Targeting Gay Latino Men".

(pornography). ... I don't read porno for edification or education, I use it for thrills. In this case it denigrate the viewers; it's [sic] message implies that the viewers can only learn to save their lives through porno, I don't buy it. This is also racist. Why do the men of color have to be reached by the most in-your-face porn and that other people, white gay men and heteros, don't need to be informed and encouraged by such blatant material?<sup>98</sup>

Cruz seemed to ignore that the content of campaigns designed for white gay men pictured very similar sexually explicit images. Perhaps he thought those sorts of images were appropriate for white men but not Latinos. Perhaps he was offended by the representation of gayness that pictured one man as the active partner, the other as the passive partner. Either way, Cruz refused to approve the material, refusing to be considered a 'liberal' enabler.

At that point, the review panel revoked the city and county funding for the *Listo Para La Accion* project. They not only objected to the content, but also questioned the process of focus group testing that produced the posters in the first place. In a letter from the Director of the AIDS Office, Sandra Hernandez, to Les Pappas, the Campaign Development Director, Hernandez suggested that "you take into serious consideration the cultural, as well as educational impact of an erotic poster to the target audience, and to the larger Latino community."<sup>99</sup> A week later, Pappas responded to Hernandez's rejection. He explained that SFAF had "rigorously" worked with "representatives from the Latino AIDS Project, *Mano a Mano*, and *Men of All Colors Together*," all key organizations in gay and bisexual Latino communities. He felt confident in *Listo Para La Accion* as part of a "multi-faceted campaign for the Latino gay male

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98 Juan Cruz, "Memo Re: The Poster..." May 21, 1990, p. 1, AO Records, Carton 17, folder "SFAF: Poster Targeting Gay Latino Men".

99 Sandra Hernandez, M.D., "Letter to Les Pappas," June 11, 1990, p. 2, AO Records, Carton 17, folder "SFAF: Poster Targeting Gay Latino Men".



community.” He ended the letter by adding that “the required budget transfers have been made” to produce and distribute the poster without city funds.<sup>100</sup>

Considering the controversies that ensued upon completion of these campaigns suggests that attention to the intersections among race, sexuality and class occurred in fits and starts over the course of the first decade and half of the AIDS epidemic. It also makes clear that all of the actors in this story had a problem dealing with the reality of those intersections. The dominant (read: white) gay community could not imagine how racial difference was implicated in conversations about sexuality, while the dominant African American and Latino community (read: straight, maybe religious), refused to see sexually explicit material as anything other than the legacy of a racist sexual imagination. I am not making the argument that communities of color were more homophobic than white communities, nor that white gay men were more racist than straight ones, rather that at this moment in the late 1980s and early 1990s it was exceptionally difficult, if not impossible, to build coalitions across these identity categories.

These struggles over how to create effective and, using the words of the historical actors, “culturally sensitive” AIDS prevention material, also point to the centrality of arguments about identity politics in this period. This not only marks a beginning in the use of the language of diversity, but also shows that the definition of diversity was under serious debate. By detailing the fissions among service providers and activists I have tried to illustrate the limits of identity politics where identity obfuscated behavior or political ideology. I also hope I have begun to suggest a historically specific argument about identity politics, one that situates the work and words of activists in a larger context.

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100 Les Pappas, "Letter to Sandra Hernandez," June 18, 1990, p. 1, AO Records, Carton 17, folder "SFAF: Poster Targeting Gay Latino Men".

Finally, this story puts into sharp relief the difficulty people committed to political and social change faced in the 1980s. The radicalism of the late 1960s and 1970s had morphed into liberal pragmatism, and the rhetorical power of conservatism made systemic critiques not only harder to hear, but more importantly harder to say.