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Activist Advertising: Case Studies of United Colors of Benetton's AIDS -Related Company Promotion.

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ACTIVIST ADVERTISING:
CASE STUDIES OF UNITED COLORS OF BENETTON'S
AIDS-RELATED COMPANY PROMOTION .

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Speech Communication

by

Heidi Jolene Brough
B.A., Northwest Nazarene College, 1992
M.A., Emerson College, 1993
May 2001

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how advertising and company promotion may be used to address social issues. In particular, I examine how the clothing company United Colors of Benetton attempted to position itself within the AIDS crisis. Specifically, this study investigates through case studies how the Benetton Group used activist advertising and company promotion to bring about social change concerning AIDS-related issues. I also attempt to account for the controversy that the promotion elicited through establishing the anomalous status of the company's promotion within traditional advertising efforts.

The study begins with information concerning the AIDS crisis and AIDS activism and then moves to an overview of United Colors of Benetton's promotional activities. I discuss traditional fashion advertising and "shock advertising," and also review activist advertising or advertising that addresses social issues.

Specific advertisements and campaigns discussed include United Colors of Benetton's 1992 David Kirby AIDS advertisement and the 1993 HIV positive advertising campaign. I begin with a description of the advertisements and then move to interpret the ads, as well as to document and account for the controversy the images inspired. Additional areas discussed include Benetton's use of condom imagery and other AIDS-related company promotion, such as safe sex materials, condom distribution, fund-raising, event sponsorship, art shows, and donations.

The study concludes with discussion concerning the interrelatedness of Benetton's advertising and the work of AIDS art collectives. Additionally, the final section briefly recognizes the parallels in the company's activist advertising dealing with AIDS and company promotion dealing with racial issues and world peace.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I've always been cautious but here I am. I am not jealous of the healthy. My feelings about them is, stay non-positive please. Take care of yourself, lead your life and stop this illness. Learn about it and help everyone—especially the young—to steer clear of it. (*COLORS* 113)

Tibor Szendrei captured these words of Leslie, a 38-year-old former computer engineer from Budapest, who lives with AIDS. Leslie claims, "I may have resigned myself to this illness, but it has not overtaken me" (*COLORS* 113). His words mark the spirit of struggle against sickness, as well as against the social and political factors facing people living with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Leslie advocates action to encourage people to learn more about AIDS and to be a part of stopping its spread. In particular Leslie makes an appeal to protect youths. This appeal becomes particularly poignant in light of statistics from the *World AIDS Day 1998 Resource Booklet* that reveal that every minute five young people around the globe are infected with HIV.

Richard L. Wittenberg, president and CEO of the American Association for World Health, echoes Leslie's concern and comments:

Now more than ever . . . there is a need to encourage young people to get involved in reducing their own risk of infection and in helping to prevent the spread of this disease that threatens their generation. They must be mobilized to educate themselves and their peers and to adopt healthy lifestyles and responsible attitudes about sexual behavior. (quoted in *World*)

Wittenberg's and Leslie's focus on education and encouragement to learn more about HIV and AIDS pose a challenge in a world circulating with fear, prejudice, special interests, and competing agendas concerning HIV and AIDS.

Statistics from the *HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report* presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that from 1981 through June of 1999 there were over 700,000 AIDS cases in the United States and related dependencies and

possessions. In 1997 CDC estimates speculated that anywhere from 650,000 to 900,000 Americans live with HIV and that 40,000 people become newly infected each year. These numbers are part of a worldwide estimate that approximately six million people will be newly infected each year. These numbers indicate wide-reaching impacts for HIV and AIDS though verifiable statistics concerning the spread are nearly impossible to obtain. HIV testing practices, status reporting procedures, speculative diagnoses, and faulty predictions about the spread of HIV/AIDS have created significant difficulties in estimating the number of those affected.

HIV and AIDS affect an ever-growing number of people, and this growth has prompted the private and public sectors to address the problem in various ways. International governments addressed the social issue by organizing health institutions, developing public communication campaigns, and funding research. In addition, the diverse composition of the private sector involved the activity of the scientific community, media groups, corporations, churches, activist organizations, and individuals. These groups mounted their own campaigns to disseminate information, facilitate medical research, lobby governments, and critique the crisis. The prevailing tenet of activity aimed at drawing attention to HIV/AIDS issues.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study begins with a brief overview of the AIDS crisis and the introduction of United Colors of Benetton, an Italian clothing company whose promotional efforts have attempted to address AIDS issues. Discussion explores the belief that AIDS activists have significantly impacted how AIDS has been addressed in the United States and that activist efforts have successfully drawn attention to the AIDS crisis. Chapter two offers an overview of Benetton's style of activist advertising and posits a theory involving the company promotion's anomalous status and its potential for controversy. Chapters three through five document how the clothing company interjected promotional advertising and educational information into addressing the AIDS crisis. The study attempts to document

and account for the controversy surrounding the Benetton Group's involvement with AIDS issues.

Benetton's involvement with social issues has not been limited to AIDS. In the midst of the campaigns described in this study, the company has also produced images and taken action to end racism and promote peace. These efforts include advertising, conferences, festival sponsorship, donations, collaborations with activist organizations, and educational programs. The variety of these activities provides a larger context for the efforts of the Benetton Group to address AIDS issues.

Chapter two includes journalist Helen Fielding's concern with using advertising as a forum to address social issues. Her concern is that agencies that address social issues require integrity, commitment, research, sensitivity and communicational brilliance and that profit-driven companies and advertising agencies are ill-equipped to address the challenges of problem-solving. United Colors of Benetton, however, by situating itself within the effort to draw attention to AIDS issues seems to have demonstrated these qualities in its activities to some degree. The integrity of the company's campaigns can be seen through the company's efforts to develop a response to the viewing public's demand for Benetton to act with a social conscience beyond advertising campaigns. The monetary support and organizational network that Benetton developed with AIDS activists helped to demonstrate the company's interest in promoting AIDS issues.

The company's commitment to AIDS issues may be seen in Benetton's sustained response to the crisis that incorporates helping people. The production of several advertising campaigns concerning the AIDS theme, as well as fund-raising efforts and educational campaigns, further indicate the company's commitment to AIDS issues. The company also collaborated in at least one research effort to document sexual practices of youths to determine effective strategies for educational messages and has held events to raise funds for institutions of research. In addition, Benetton demonstrated sensitivity to communities most affected by aligning activist efforts with and involving those at work

in the cultural war on AIDS. Finally, United Colors of Benetton demonstrated communicational brilliance through the company's effort to address AIDS issues in the advertising forum and with provocative imagery and challenges to the boundaries of advertising.

Benetton's promotional efforts challenged traditional advertising by focusing on social issues. This challenge to traditional advertising stirred controversy that results from the advertising's anomalous status—caught between a positive social function that addresses social issues and the commercial aspects of the advertising forum. Mary Douglas proposes that people respond negatively to anomaly in three basic ways: they ignore it, do not perceive the anomaly, or perceive it and condemn it. Often the most vocal critics of Benetton perceived the company as a threat and condemned the company and its advertising. Benetton, on the other hand, did not deny the advertising's anomalous status but instead attempted to create a new place for the anomaly. The company argued that this promotional material was on the fringe of a new type of advertising that combined a social agenda with commercial gain.

Within the conflict over the right to use shocking or provocative imagery to sell fashion, concern arose over representations of AIDS and HIV in the company's advertising. The concern from activist groups in particular appeared fragmented, but Benetton seemed to allow opportunities for AIDS groups to articulate their purposes more clearly. The discussion that the advertisements inspired seemed to reflect evidence that the Benetton Group promoted AIDS awareness by helping AIDS activist groups to strongly formulate their identities, ideals, and purposes. In particular, educational programs and safe sex guides received funding by Benetton, and many AIDS groups developed the content of these materials.

BACKGROUND OF THE COMPANY

In 1965 four Italian siblings, Luciano, Giuliana, Gilberto, and Carlo Benetton, founded the Benetton Group Sp.A., a clothing company designed to target youthful consumers. By the late sixties, the Benetton Group had 500 stores across Italy, and the doors to the first store outside of Italy opened in 1969 in Paris's Latin Quarter. Benetton soon grew to become Europe's largest clothing manufacturer and the world's leading consumer of wool in the garment industry. In the nineties Benetton had 8000 retail stores in 110 countries and employed 5500 at the company's headquarters and production centers with 30,000 working for various suppliers. At its American peak in 1988, Benetton had 700 stores in the U.S., but by 1995 the Group had dropped to 150 stores with 271 'shops in stores' and concessions in the U.S. Benetton officials estimated in 1999 that there were 200 stores in major North American cities.

The great dip in the number of stores across the United States led the Group to try alternate strategies to invigorate the American market. In 1998 Benetton partnered with American Sears stores to launch a new line of fashion for children and teens. Benetton U.S.A. was offered at select stores within Sears' network of more than 830 full-line department stores and 2500 off-the-mall stores. Sears, however, discontinued the partnership with Benetton in the spring of 2000 after Benetton launched a controversial advertising campaign focusing on inmates on death row.

Benetton has been hailed as revolutionizing the fashion sector with the company's innovative production and distribution system and its trend-setting store designs. But perhaps the area drawing the most attention for Benetton in its 35-year span is the production and placement of its advertising and communication campaigns. The company tries to cut through the clutter of imagery and products already in the marketplace with innovative communication and promotion campaigns that often shock viewers and incite controversy.

For instance, in 1985 passengers Franz Mitterand and Mikhail Gorbachev were met with an unavoidable sight as the presidential motorcade drove along the Champs-Elysees in Paris. The cars carrying the leaders wound through the street while an endless string of billboards presented the repeating image of two black children facing one another. The visual, one of a series of advertisements published by the Benetton Group, depicted the head and shoulders of two children in a pose that suggested they might be hugging. A child with a small flag of the United States sitting on its head leans forward with puckered lips and eyes trained on the lips of another child with a small Soviet flag resting on its head. The "Soviet" child appears to respond with a relatively negative facial expression and gazes over the other child's shoulder. Gorbachev's reported response to this propaganda was to ask his colleagues, "Who is this Benetton anyway?" (quoted in *Global Vision*). The obvious effect of the advertisement was to draw attention to Benetton.

In this specific instance, the Benetton Group attempted to use the placement of billboards staged at a specific time to reinforce the theme of its 1985 advertising campaign, which officials explained was a symbolic appeal for antagonistic countries to sit down and reason together. Additional advertisements in this series pictured pairings of flags and symbols of various, often conflicting, countries: United States and USSR, Germany and Israel, Greece and Turkey, and Argentina and England.

The company's book *Global Vision* notes that criticism in the United States to the 1985 advertisement seemed simply to revolve around a ban on displaying the national flag in advertising. The European reaction to the campaign was positive, however, and resulted in Benetton receiving several advertising awards. In France, the ad won the *Grand Prix de la Communication Publicitaire* and the overall campaign won a prize of one million francs from the *Banque de l'Union Publicitaire*. The money was then reinvested in advertising space.

The 1985 advertisement was created by fashion photographer Oliviero Toscani who worked in conjunction with the Parisian advertising agency Eldorado. Toscani and

Eldorado developed campaigns that featured teens from different countries and ethnic groups dressed in colorful knitwear smiling and laughing together. These campaigns, with a slogan translated into corresponding languages, ran in fourteen countries.

The theme of "United Colors of Benetton" espoused in the 1985 campaign became a preface for the vision of Benetton's advertising and company promotion. The company established global marketing campaigns that emphasized the company's multicultural interests. President Luciano Benetton describes his vision for this multicultural imagery in promoting Benetton:

It's a billboard full of happiness . . . full of children with beaming faces. Their smiles talk to us. When I saw the poster for the first time, I was speechless [sic]. My heart was throbbing with excitement. I couldn't [sic] believe my eyes. How could anyone create a corporate image which fit so perfectly with Benetton's vision? Such a perfect statement of our corporate identity made me gaze and gaze almost in disbelief. (*Global Vision*)

Luciano Benetton's corporeal reaction seems to embody the vigor with which the Benetton Group would attempt to promote images to unite the world.

Images of happy youths in colorful clothing soon became a symbol of Benetton's international flair. The company's advertising developed its focus in 1985 while Toscani photographed a multi-racial group of children. An UNESCO official visiting the studio in Paris observed that Toscani had assembled a United Nation of Benetton and the theme, "United Colors of Benetton," was born. In 1989 the company adopted "United Colors of Benetton" as its official trademark and ended its relationship with Eldorado in order to produce all promotions in house under the direction of Oliviero Toscani. According to the company, Benetton's decision to use "United Colors of Benetton" acted as a commitment to promoting world peace and equality as the official company platform. In addition, the company also significantly changed its logo in 1989 to feature a green rectangle with the pronounced white words "United Colors of Benetton" (*Global Vision*).

The year 1989 also marked a clear shift in the subject of Benetton's advertising. The ads were not product-oriented like past campaigns in which the subject of the ad was the clothing or models who wore Benetton apparel. Advertising campaigns soon extended beyond promoting multiculturalism, racial harmony, and world peace to address condom usage, AIDS awareness, racism, discrimination, child labor violations, pollution, environmental abuses, natural disasters, overpopulation, war, capital punishment, and definitions of art. Above all, the advertising campaigns attempted to challenge the boundaries and norms of advertising.

Most of Benetton's advertising imagery has been controversial. For instance in the spring/summer 1991 campaign Benetton presented an advertising image of numerous cross-shaped headstones at a WWI cemetery in France. The advertisement featured no Benetton product but included the Benetton logo. The cemetery ad was published in Italy a few days before the start of the Gulf War in the dailies *Il Sole 24Ore* and in *Corriere della Sera*. Giurì, a self-regulatory commission set up by Italian newspapers, immediately banned the ad. Newspapers in France, Great Britain, and Germany also refused the ad. Toscani explained on a company website that in 1990 Luciano Benetton had asked him to do something about the coming war, so he said he took a picture of a cemetery ("Toscani on Advertising"). Another site explains that the ad of long rows of symmetrically aligned crosses reminds us that in wartime nobody wins—beyond uniforms, races, and religions, death is the only victory ("Nothing"). Critics, however, believed the ad was insensitive and ill-timed.

The fall/winter campaign of 1991-1992 adopted the theme of love as the underlying reason for life and presented controversial imagery such as the following: a bloody newborn baby, a priest and nun kissing, a white girl with angelic blond curls next to a black girl with devil-like horns hugging, and colored leaves floating in a sea of oil. The bloody newborn image was by far the most controversial and was banned in several forums. The image of a

priest and nun kissing also caused controversy, and the Catholic Church protested its display and placement.

For their spring/summer 1993 ad campaign, Benetton announced the Benetton Clothing Redistribution Project that involved a worldwide initiative to encourage customers to donate used clothing to local Benetton stores. This clothing was then redistributed worldwide to needy people. The first advertisements for this project featured a photo of a nude Luciano Benetton with the copy, "I WANT MY CLOTHES BACK." The second ad featured the same image with the copy "EMPTY YOUR CLOSETS" and details about the project. The final ad of this campaign included a thank you and photograph of the primary members of the Benetton family.

This community service project was followed by Benetton's attempt to challenge distinctions between advertising and art. In 1993 Toscani entered a piece in the Venice Biennale, one of the world's most prestigious art exhibits that is held every two years, which he then shaped into an advertisement for newspapers. Toscani's exhibit for the Biennale featured a 400 square meter triptych comprised of 162 color photographs of genitalia representing both sexes and a comprehensive range of ages and races. The Biennale exhibition ran from June 13 to October 10. Days before the opening, Toscani ran a reduced version of his submission to the Biennale as an advertisement for United Colors of Benetton. The ad featured only 56 genitalia and was offered to newspapers in both Italy and France. All newspapers refused the ad except the French newspaper, *Liberation*, which agreed to run it in the June 9th edition. The June 10, 1993, *Los Angeles Times* reports that according to *Liberation's* sales director, Michael Vidal, this decision was made after the newspaper's lawyers said there was little chance the paper could be sued for offending public decency (2D). Pinson and Tibrewala note that the day the ad ran, the newspaper sold an extra 40,000 copies (13).

According to Pino Corrias, the refusals to run the ad in newspapers surprised Toscani:

I got several letters saying they couldn't print the pictures as advertising. I don't see why not. They are beautiful pictures and they would be displayed perfectly on a double page. I cannot believe that readers would not have liked it. There is nothing wrong with it. Every reader has got their own genitalia, just like they have two knees, two feet, a belly button, a nose. Tell me the difference. (quoted in Corrias)

Toscani's belief in the appropriateness of his imagery in the advertising realm led him to declare:

If necessary, I will end up paying for two pages myself and publishing the pictures without a brand label on them, and the first place I'll try is *l'Osservatore Romano*, the Catholic newspaper. After all, its editors, some time ago, filled churches with unmasked men and women. (quoted in Corrias)

This proposed challenge to the advertising realm exemplifies a brazen quality in Toscani's efforts that intend to shock.

Toscani explained that the 56 images of varying genitalia in the advertisement were "an exploration of the limits between art and advertising, to understand where one begins and the other ends and how tolerance shifts from one realm to the next" (quoted in Giacomotti). Toscani asserted:

I make no difference between an ad, the front page of a magazine or a photo on a daily newspaper: They are all expressions of contemporary culture The fact that my new ad is accepted as an expression of art, but is refused as advertising, is because of the media's fear [of losing] clients and readers. (quoted in Giacomotti)

This orientation of Toscani to view advertising as a form that may exist outside of traditional advertising classifications presents the blending of genres that Toscani uses to challenge the form.

The most recent campaign to incite controversy is one that United Colors of Benetton offers to direct attention to another social issue. In January of 2000, the Benetton Group launched the spring/summer "We, on Death Row" campaign about

capital punishment for spring/summer. This series featured photographs and interviews of inmates on death row. The press release announcing the campaign describes it as being *about* the death penalty. With this work, Benetton claims to leave behind social, political, judicial, and moral consideration in a project that aims at showing to the public the reality of capital punishment. The company desires that no one around the world will consider the death penalty as a distant problem or as news that occasionally appears on TV ("Looking"). This campaign stirred concerned reactions in the United States to the perceived glorification of criminals, and the state of Missouri sued Benetton for falsely representing the company's interest when affiliates collected materials in the prisons.

In addition to advertising campaigns, the company also uses a series of catalogs to promote the company. Many of the catalogs focused on cultural diversity, as Luciano Benetton explains in March of 1998:

It's our prerogative to photograph new collections in unusual places: we're more interested in discovering people than in selling them dreams. So here is the search for real people and real stories, here is the discovery of beauty without stereotypes; here is diversity highlighted by uniqueness.
(Benetton, "People")

Toscani's search for diversity to document in Benetton's catalog began in the spring of 1994 when he went to Tuscany to photograph people at random for the Benetton catalog. His travels then led him to shoot subjects in Hungary, China, Norway, India, the Gaza Strip, Corleone in Sicily, Israel, Germany, and Japan. Initially, the catalogs featured clothing from United Colors of Benetton, but soon the catalogs moved away from featuring the Benetton product. The images within the catalogs were also subsequently incorporated into advertisements.

The Benetton Group promotes itself as a socially conscientious company and proudly espouses the company's interest in promoting AIDS issues. In fact, in 1993 president Luciano Benetton signed England's Declaration of Rights of Persons with

AIDS and HIV on behalf of the Benetton Group. This signature was the first by a corporation. Luciano also supported the Korean Foundation for AIDS Affairs and was named advisor to the Korean Association for AIDS Prevention.

Another area that the Benetton Group has explored in authenticating the company's activity within the AIDS cause is through promoting social research. Benetton collaborated in 1993 with a French magazine, *20 Ans*, to organize a 126-question survey concerning the sexual behavior of young men in France. Researchers collected more than 7,000 surveys in an effort to collate data that will help slow the spread of HIV among one of the most exposed age groups. This collaboration attempted to offer tangible action in strategizing about AIDS awareness and prevention.

This discussion of the Benetton Group is meant to give a general background of the company and its promotional materials in order to contextualize the following chapters within a range of advertising and promotional practice.

THE AIDS CRISIS

United Colors of Benetton became involved with HIV and AIDS in the early nineties around a decade after newspapers began drawing attention to the problem. Doctors in California and New York began noticing conditions such as pneumonia, cerebral lesions, skin cancers, and immunosuppression in select homosexual and drug-using patients in the late seventies. Rumors circulated that a rare malignant disease had appeared within homosexual communities in large American hubs. The CDC published the first announcement in the weekly bulletin, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, on June 5, 1981, describing five cases of pneumonia observed between October 1980 and May 1981. The report suggested the possibility of a cellular-immune dysfunction related to a common exposure that predisposes persons to opportunistic infections (Grmek 8). A second report in *MMWR* on July 4, 1981, outlined that since early 1979, twenty-six men had been diagnosed with Kaposi's sarcoma, a serious skin disease, in New York and California. The CDC concluded the report with the following advice:

Although it is not certain that the increases in Kaposi's sarcoma and *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia is restricted to homosexual men, the vast majority of recent cases have been reported from this group. Physicians should be alert for Kaposi's sarcoma, *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia, and other opportunistic infections associated with immunosuppression in homosexual men. (quoted in Grmek 8).

These reports directed information to the medical community alerting doctors of potential impacts to homosexual communities.

The report reached the general population a day before its release when the medical correspondent for the *New York Times*, Lawrence Altman, published a summary of the official report and interviews from researchers on the Kaposi Sarcoma and Opportunistic Infections (KSOI) Task Force. This article, titled "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals," identified that the cause of the outbreak was unknown and that there was no evidence of contagion (Grmek 8).

Detection of this strange phenomenon also began to occur around the world, including Europe, Africa, and Haiti. The earliest names for the conditions varied and were not adopted on a widely due to the restricted references to one population group, such as Gay-Related Immune Deficiency (GRID) or Neapolitan disease. In 1982 the acronym AIDS was adopted to represent Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, and in 1983 the expression entered the *Cumulated Index Medicus* of the National Library of Medicine.

Theodoulou, Guevara, and Minnassians report that in 1983 media coverage of AIDS peaked with the publication of an article in the May 6 edition of the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, suggested the possibility that AIDS may be transmitted to the entire population by routine close contact with infected persons. This announcement implied to the general population that everyone was at risk (51). Fauci's

speculation was not technically accurate but later specialists determined that AIDS may be spread through the exchange of bodily fluids such as blood, semen, breast milk, saliva, and vaginal fluid. Experts then determined that essentially five groups were at risk for the disease, including homosexuals, intravenous drug-users, Haitians, hemophiliacs, and prostitutes (Grmek 31).

Technically, however, AIDS refers to a syndrome rather than a disease because it is a constellation of symptoms constituting a clinical entity rather than an etiological unity. Researchers speculated about the causes of AIDS, and both American and French scientists isolated a virus in 1984 that they believe causes AIDS. Kits were then created to test for the presence of this virus or for antibodies against HIV. In May of 1986 the name Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) was given to the virus and AIDS became viewed as the advanced stages of a viral infection. This identification of a virus focused efforts on finding a vaccine to cure the problem though almost two decades later researchers still struggle in this endeavor.

This search for a vaccine has led some researchers to question the viral nature of AIDS. Peter Duesburg, professor of molecular and cell biology at the University of California at Berkeley and pioneer in retrovirus research, challenges the HIV/AIDS hypothesis in *Inventing the AIDS Virus*. Duesburg asserts:

The ultimate test of any medical hypothesis lies in the public health benefits it generates; but the virus-AIDS hypothesis has produced none. Faced with this medical debacle, scientists should re-open a simple but most essential question: What causes AIDS?... The colossal failure of the war on AIDS is a predictable consequence if scientists are operating from a fundamentally flawed assumption The single flaw that determined the destiny of AIDS research since 1984 was the assumption that AIDS is infectious. After taking the wrong turn scientists had to make many more bad assumptions upon which they have build a huge artifice of mistaken ideas. (6)

Duesberg's believes that scientists should refocus energy on determining real AIDS causes in order to find a cure for AIDS.

This challenge to the assumption that HIV causes AIDS is echoed by other scientists as well. Kary Mullis, a Nobel Prize recipient in Chemistry, boldly asserts in the foreword of Duesberg's book, "We know that to err is human, but the HIV/AIDS hypothesis is one hell of a mistake" (xiv). Mullis documents her struggle to prove that HIV causes AIDS, which the scientific community has assumed. She explains that while Duesberg and she disagree about what causes AIDS, they distinctly agree on what does not. She writes, "We have not been able to discover any good reasons why most of the people on the earth believe that AIDS is a disease caused by a virus called HIV. There is simply no scientific evidence demonstrating that this is true" (xiii). This fact problematizes the reality of finding a cure for AIDS any time soon.

Addressing the AIDS epidemic poses obstacles to communities internationally, particularly in light of a developing understanding of HIV/AIDS. Stella Theodoulou writes that AIDS is not simply a health issue but is instead a political and policy phenomenon:

AIDS is much more than a challenge to medical science, it is linked to the controversial subjects of sex and drugs, and because the disease surfaced first among homosexual Americans and drug users, it provoked deep and complicated feelings in everyone that have extended across our society with political and social consequences and deep ramifications. Basically, AIDS has tested the nation's abilities to act responsibly and sanely in the face of catastrophe. (6)

People's responses to AIDS have ultimately ensured the political nature of expressions and actions in determining a cure and stopping the spread of death.

AIDS ACTIVISM

Responses to AIDS efforts and outcomes of those efforts have inspired people to become involved in the process of ending AIDS. Individuals who identified themselves as agents of change formed collectively to address AIDS issues. "AIDS issues" encompasses a

wide scope of reference and refers to challenges, such as disseminating AIDS education and information, persuading people to change unsafe practices, promoting prevention, finding a cure, accessing health care, providing medical treatment, fighting discrimination, conquering stereotypes, negotiating representation, lobbying health care legislation, and collaborating collectively. Promoting an “AIDS agenda” within the context of this study refers to efforts that address the types of issues listed.

AIDS activism ultimately coalesced in 1987 when the gay community founded the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in New York City. Crimp defines the collective as “a diverse, nonpartisan group united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis” (*AIDS Demographics*). Subsequent to the New York coalition, other ACT UP organizations developed throughout American cities and abroad. A national collective of AIDS groups in the United States then formed in 1988, named ACT NOW, the AIDS Coalition to Network, Organize, and Win. Crimp identifies the target of these activist groups as the U.S. government, which they identify as a major culprit in the AIDS epidemic and a distinct cause of activist anger. An important topic of address for the activist groups is health care issues in the U.S. in relation to AIDS. AIDS activists aggressively monitor, lobby, and fight against the FDA, the CDC, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Wachter reveals that initially the gay community responded to AIDS by concentrating on caring for the ill and opposing measures that members saw as involving privacy issues. Wachter speculates that early resistance to more aggressive forms of political activism resulted from denial, a fear of losing hard-won sexual freedom gained in the seventies, and a concern that a visible gay response would lead to increased homophobia. This final coalescing of efforts to actively address AIDS six years after AIDS received national attention, Wachter believes, is due to four factors. First, the gay community initially had feared that an active role in the epidemic would lead to homophobia, but this fear never materialized. Instead public sentiment toward

homosexuality seemed to reflect more of an acceptance and sympathy for the gay community, which had been ravaged by illness.

Second, the sheer dimensions of the AIDS epidemic seemed to mobilize gays. The gay community was evidently at risk in 1987 when more than 20,000 Americans, about three fourths of them gay, had died of AIDS. Six years into the epidemic it became clear that the problem was not going to simply vanish or be short-lived.

Next, results from HIV tests provided positive results for tens of thousands of homosexuals, which ignited passions to become involved in the movement and to protect their own futures. The test results identified a future that many felt the need to shape.

Finally, research on AIDS causes progressed from the identification of the HIV virus to research on antiviral agents. In 1987 some of this research was only partially through the pipeline of federal research, and activists feared that if the government bureaucracy went unchallenged, then testing and approval of effective drugs would take more time than was available.

The formation of a collective to address AIDS-related challenges brought about a new dimension to addressing AIDS. Wachter describes the entry of activists into the AIDS health care scene as adding a jarring new dimension to previously genteel discussions between patient advocates, clinicians, researchers, and policy makers. He writes:

The activists' unprecedented *modus operandi* is a study in contrasts: street theater and intimidation on the one hand, detailed position papers and painstaking negotiation on the other. The effect has been to energize the fight against AIDS with an urgency that has translated into expedited drug approvals, lower prices for medications, and increased funding for AIDS research and care. (27)

This mobilization has brought about significant results in the effort to address AIDS concerns.

Theodoulou, Guevara, and Minnassians describe United States media coverage of AIDS and indicate a peak in coverage in 1987 due to public federal government

recommendations on testing and screening procedures, as well as President Reagan's first formal acknowledgement of AIDS. After this spike, media coverage began to decline once again and became more routine than in previous years. This coverage was still framed in terms of lifestyle and scientific issues; however, the epidemic became more normalized in relation to the general public with less negative imagery used in reference to at-risk groups. The authors note that from 1981 to 1987 there is a cyclical dimension to AIDS reporting that gives way to a more routine, event-driven coverage in the late-eighties and early-nineties (53-54). This event orientation in coverage then offered an inviting opportunity for activists to stage events to draw attention to AIDS.

Wachter notes that AIDS activism has enjoyed unprecedented success in shaping health policy by ensuring that large amounts of money are devoted to AIDS research. This treatment of AIDS has led some to question whether these expenditures are in the best interest of public health. Wachter cites the following examples of funding:

For example, federal spending for AIDS was \$1.6 billion in 1990, a year after 40,000 Americans died of the disease. During the same year, federal spending for cancer, a disease that killed 500,000 in 1989, was \$1.5 billion, and spending for heart disease, which killed 750,000, was less than \$1 billion. (30)

AIDS advocates argue that this expenditure on AIDS is warranted because AIDS is an epidemic and infectious. Wachter concludes that the success of AIDS activism demonstrates that the decisions about allocations of resources, even in health care, are inherently political and thus amenable to effective lobbying (31).

The strategies of activism have come under question with differences in opinion over enactment. Disagreements abound in whether confrontation or collaboration is the most effective strategy for obtaining desired results. Wachter asserts that disagreements in strategy are not surprising within a movement whose tactics range from disrupting the New York Stock Exchange to publishing position papers that evaluate new reverse transcriptase.

Ultimately, these disagreements lead to contradictions within the philosophical motivations of activists.

At the Fifth International Conference on AIDS in Montreal in 1989, activists made their presence known through agitation and called for the U.S. government to take action in research and treatment. A principal organizer of the 1990 conference characterized the Montreal conference as a landmark of the activist movement and observed that the activists “exploded.” In planning for the next conference he acknowledged the increasingly formidable presence of activist groups as a dominant concern (Sills). At this next conference in San Francisco, activists shouted down Dr. Louis Sullivan, secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, while he attempted to address the convention. This denial of speech to perceived “enemies” of the AIDS movement led to responses such as the following by a newspaper editorialist:

There is a fine line between, on the one hand, street theater, civil disobedience, and the right to demonstrate, and on the other, mob behavior and brownshirting Many fear that the politics of anger is causing the community to abandon its commitment to the freedom of expression and the right to privacy, the two ideas used most often to support gay rights. (quoted in Wachter 32)

This editorial expresses the misgivings in the community about the contradictions in AIDS strategy employed by gay activists.

The broad range of challenges in addressing AIDS issues has fueled continued efforts to draw attention to the needs of AIDS communities and to stop the spread of AIDS. As Wachter notes, the nature of participants in AIDS activism also poses distinct difficulties for AIDS involvement:

Perhaps the greatest challenge to AIDS activism is posed by the merciless nature of the disease itself. Although activists have succeeded in demanding that the world take note of the urgency of the epidemic, that very urgency is what robs the movement daily of its best soldiers through burnout, illness, and death (33)

This toll to the activist community suggests that there perhaps is room for more activist responses from “nontraditional” activist sources, such as corporations like United Colors of Benetton.

PREVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In chapter two I begin this study of Benetton’s AIDS activist advertising efforts with an overview of social issues advertising and an exploration of the controversy surrounding advertising that intends to shock viewers. I also investigate advertising that promotes seemingly opposing agendas—that of the non-profit cause and a for-profit organization—and propose a theory concerning the controversy that ensues.

In chapter three I investigate an advertisement from Benetton’s 1992 spring/summer campaign that features a photograph of AIDS activist David Kirby on his deathbed while surrounded by his family. I describe and interpret the advertisement and then summarize the controversy and criticism surrounding Benetton’s use of the advertising. I then assess the controversy in relation to the advertising’s anomalous status within traditional standards.

Similarly, in the fourth chapter I explore Benetton’s HIV positive ads from the 1993 fall/winter campaign. I describe and interpret the three advertisements within this series and also document the criticism that the ads provoked. I then offer discussion concerning the controversial quality of the advertisements and the potential for this campaign in relation to an activist agenda.

In the fifth chapter I investigate the evolution of Benetton’s philanthropic endeavors, as well as document additional AIDS-related promotional materials. Specifically, I look at the development of Benetton’s philanthropic endeavors and the formation of a policy on corporate donations concerning the causes the company advertises. I overview the company’s initial advertising concerning HIV/AIDS, and focus specifically on condom promotion. In addition, I explore Benetton’s involvement in AIDS education and the company’s collaboration with AIDS organizations. I explore the company’s educational contributions in varying contexts, including the seventh edition of the company’s magazine,

COLORS. Finally, I document Benetton corporate sponsorships and AIDS fundraising efforts.

The final chapter investigates the inclusion and reflection of Benetton's activity within the practices of art collectives addressing AIDS issues. Additionally, I offer discussion of Benetton's social issues advertising by briefly relating Benetton's involvement in AIDS issues to the company's efforts to teach peace.

SIGNIFICANCE

Scholars suggest that today's consumers are different from those from previous generations and advertisers are attempting to react to the new conditions of the marketplace in an effort to cut through the clutter (Conover). Those new conditions include a fragmented audience, an incredible amount of advertising already in existence, and an increasingly disaffected audience. In particular, Domzal and Kernan characterize ours as a culture of consumption that gives rise to a global, postmodern consumer and a postmodern climate that challenges the rational basis of modernism. Postmodern reactions to modernism challenge the inevitability of human progress, the plausibility of science, and the hegemony of bureaucratic control (7). Domzal and Kernan write that the postmodern consumer collapses distinctions between mind and body, male and female, sacred and profane, high and low culture, public and private. In addition, the postmodern consumer has a strong sense of irony and playfulness, disdains logical explanations, and appreciates fantasy, especially if it is visual (8). Postmodernism emphasizes the visual over the verbal. Linda Scott explains that to be successful in this era, advertisers must think of postmodern advertising as a way to move "toward a culture in which pictures demonstrate, exhort, explain, allude and, above all, play" (quoted in Domzal and Kernan 9).

Because Benetton offers a clear example of postmodern advertising and a nontraditional style of promotion that causes controversy and redefines conventional practices, the company becomes a noteworthy example of how companies compete through staging publicity events. The company has led the promotion industry causing many to mimic Benetton's controversial imagery and practices. As the company establishes a standard for risky promotion, its efforts are important to analyze because of their strong influence on the advertising industry, savvy construction of visual communication, as well as in defining promotional and charitable activity in general.

This study is of value to those interested in advertising, mass media, as well as journalism. Benetton's promotional material represents the values, beliefs, and attitudes not only of the company but also of consumers of the late eighties and early nineties. Because the advertisements are cultural artifacts, they offer rich study for those readers interested in history, rhetoric, theater, anthropology, cultural studies, art, social drama, and life as everyday performance.

According to the promotional book, *Global Vision: United Colors of Benetton*, "Benetton's campaigns, which focus on themes of universal concern, are the driving force behind the company's communication strategy." As this force, the controversial advertisements play a significant role in shaping the rhetoric of the company. According to promotional copy, Benetton's advertising campaigns have sought to position Benetton as synonymous with multi-cultural diversity, inter-racial harmony, and an upscale approach to fashion retailing. Led by Benetton's advertising creative director, Oliviero Toscani, Benetton proposes risky imagery of real life conditions as a unique way to reach consumers jaded by unrealistic commercial claims. Investigation of the company's

promotion then offers the opportunity to explore how a fashion company might make advertising more “real” and less reliant on false images and claims.

Peter Fressola, Benetton's director of communication in North America, contends that these images are socially relevant and generate discussion about important issues (Greenaway). Along with heightening the public's awareness of social problems, the images also strive to create a socially conscious identity for the company. Declares Toscani, "We don't actually want to impose our credo, our vision We just want to propose a credo or vision" (Scotland “AIDS”). In respect to Toscani's vision, the advertising community is then baffled by an advertising strategy that features no product, no product benefits, and no calls to action.

Many critics complain that Benetton's ads are exploitative, sacrilegious, offensive, insensitive, and opportunistic. O'Leary notes that "criticism" is a kinder response to Toscani's work, since Benetton's ads are routinely banned by governments, blasted by religious leaders and cited in angry store licensee suits. Jacques Séguéla of Euro-RSCG comments:

Advertising should sell happiness . . . this pair [Toscani and Benetton] have understood that society is adrift, and they have chosen the easy path: instead of extending a lifebuoy, they are pushing society's head down further under water, rubbing its nose in sex, in AIDS, in shit. (Pinson and Tibrewala 16)

As this comment notes, the topics and strategies that the company uses in advertising become the key targets for criticism from the advertising community and consumers. An investigation of the strategies used and community responses then potentially reveals insight on the way ads work within a commercial matrix.

In response to criticism and controversy, Benetton representatives generally offer surprise and dismay. Comments president Luciano Benetton:

Often we don't expect to cause such a stir. But people have very different ideas about things. Think about Italy. We're a country of about 160 different political parties. We're a case in point, a microcosm of the world. (DiCocco)

Luciano's response to inciting controversy defrays critics who call the advertising effort calculated though his response proposes a naiveté about marketing and promotional materials.

Countering critics who point out that many of Benetton's advertisements do not feature their products and have nothing to do with selling sweaters, Fressola offers a key viewpoint to position Benetton's advertising within the controversy:

We've been saying all along that our intention is not to sell sweaters We're not that stupid. We're doing corporate communication. We're sponsoring these images in order to change people's minds and create compassion around social issues. We think of it as art with a social message.
(Squiers)

This idea of blurring the lines between art and advertising seems both a hallmark of Benetton's advertising campaigns and an excuse in defending the company against criticism. No other company has so blatantly proposed aesthetic aims in the formation of its rhetoric.

Given free reign to explore his creativity, Toscani comments, "Renaissance painting existed because of Lorenzo de Medici; this exists because Luciano Benetton gave me a Sistine chapel" (J.L.). Toscani references his work with the company's magazine, *COLORS*, though essentially his view applies to Benetton's promotional machine that he oversees. His descriptions of himself and the company typically refer back to art of the Renaissance.

Toscani views his work as inherently artistic and serving a clearly aesthetic role within culture. But as Clifford Geertz notes:

The chief problem presented by the sheer phenomenon of aesthetic force, in whatever form and result of whatever

skill it may come, is how to place it within other modes of social activity, how to incorporate it into the texture of a particular pattern of life. (1475)

Benetton's activity, because it blends and challenges modes of social activity, presents material that requires investigation.

Benetton tackles a vast range of social issues and uses multiple strategies for promoting the company's name. Scholars have failed to contextualize Benetton's advertising within the company's overall corporate rhetoric and promotional activity. While many authors have focused on explaining Benetton's advertisements and writing personal responses to the ads and company strategy, they have failed to situate the advertisements within the larger framework of the company's promotional practices, such as Benetton's philanthropic and activist efforts. Due to the increasing complexities of advertising within a postmodern consumer culture, advertisements cannot be understood in isolation and without looking at a range of cultural practices. In particular, Benetton's company promotion extends beyond their printed advertising to additional cultural activities.

Because of the breadth of Benetton's promotional activity, simple analysis of advertising and the audience misses half of Benetton's performance. Scholars who investigate the advertisements as discrete texts through semiotic analysis, as well as those who use quantitative measures and focus groups to determine audience reception, have neglected the cultural workings of Benetton's rhetoric and promotional practice (Evans and Riyait). The value of this project is the thorough documentation of Benetton's AIDS-related campaigns and the responses elicited from viewers. This project is the first to evaluate the Benetton Group's promotional material within the context of its intended social function to bring about social change, as well as to inspire response from viewers. Further, this study attempts to situate Benetton's promotional activity as an arm of activist political art extended to the community through partnerships with activist groups.

In effect, this study attempts to go beyond the semiotic reading of a text to explore what the advertisements have *done*—not just what they *say*.

In an interview with the German publication *Werben and Verkaufen*, Toscani commented, "My dream is that some day Benetton won't have to spend another penny on advertising in newspapers or magazines" (Greenaway.) Through their complex promotional mix, Benetton moved closer to realizing that dream. Approaching social communication as the responsibility of the company, Benetton's revolutionary strategy to create an identity for itself demonstrates the value of communication and promotion within the fashion industry. According to Toscani, the task of social communication no longer rests solely with the news media. The Benetton Group, in its efforts to create social awareness and appear conscientious, then actively capitalizes on attention from the public and critics. Commenting on the importance of corporate communication Toscani states:

Products change, are designed over and over again—it is communication that can capitalize the brand. If communication will be intelligent, the firm will have accumulated capital; if not, it will have no capital at all.
(Blonsky and Calligaris)

The capital Toscani values here is name recognition.

As Squiers notes, the company has achieved its goal of garnishing extensive press for its activities. Thousands of articles have been written documenting and/or criticizing the movement of this company economically, technologically, and socially. How Benetton has positioned itself within the controversy in an effort to shape a global corporate image becomes a copious area of investigation.

Using a communication strategy that includes print advertising and publications, as well as a variety of other staged events, the Benetton Group attempts to redefine advertising and promotion within a global context. Comments Toscani, "We are focusing the interest of consumers on issues—on daily life, the human condition—instead of

consumption" (Millman). Benetton attempts to restructure advertising to include nontraditional advertising/promotional forms that expand advertising's position in society as a creative/creating force. Toscani challenges:

I think traditional advertising tells us how we should consume life I'm after the possibility of using advertising to tell us how we should use life. (O'Byrne)

Luciano Benetton explains that company officials concluded one day in the office that traditional advertising was of no use and had little effect on viewers. They determined that the company must overhaul its advertising or quit advertising altogether. Company officials then strove to invent something that makes people think and creates a dialogue (Perrotta 13).

In May of 2000, company officials announced the end of the 18-year relationship between Oliviero Toscani and the Benetton Group. At that moment, the future of Benetton's controversial advertising strategies and the company's involvement in social issues became unclear. Company president Luciano Benetton gave relatively little information concerning the parting and commented, "We thank Oliviero Toscani for his fundamental contribution to a new advertising concept that has responded with great efficiency to the brand communication needs of the multinational, present in 120 countries worldwide" ("Benetton Creative"). The company announced that the time had come to adopt a new advertising strategy that fostered teamwork rather than relying on the talents of one gifted individual (Agnew). Fabbrica, the company's design school, will now handle all communications and advertising material for the company.

The decision to part ways caused much speculation concerning the split and its relation to the latest controversial death row advertising campaign that inspired criticism,

caused Sears Roebuck to pull Benetton clothes from outlets, and resulted in a lawsuit from the state of Missouri. Toscani, however, characterized the parting with Benetton as having the “courage to end something that was fantastic” (quoted in Agnew). Toscani now serves as the creative director for *Talk* magazine in New York City. When asked about the split, he chose not to comment and said, “That is history. I’m very busy on new projects now—that’s why I left. Ciao” (quoted in “Toscani”, *Creative Review*).

Now that an era has ended for Benetton’s company promotion, it may be a good time to study and evaluate Toscani’s contributions. Toscani’s departure from the Benetton Group raises questions about the future content and effect of Benetton’s advertising and the company’s future involvement in activist agendas. Many have said that the company’s shocking strategies have gone too far in pushing the boundaries of advertising, but the effects have been successful for the brand marketing of the company. The continued challenge to the status quo of advertising, however, may be difficult for the young students of Fabbrica. Toscani has set a precedent for promotional materials that would be difficult for anyone to follow.

CHAPTER 2: ACTIVIST ADVERTISING

Viewers encounter many categories of advertising in daily life. Most of us are familiar with consumer advertising that aims to sell viewers specific products, goods, services or ideas and to create a brand or corporate identity. We recognize how this form of advertising works and feel comfortable with our control over the message's influence. Beyond the often overt pitch for products are areas of advertising that are equally motivated by salesmanship and work to persuade viewers to act, though the agenda for action is different from enticing viewers to buy a product. An increasing trend in advertising is for companies to begin pairing the two—advertising a product or corporate identity and promoting a social cause. In this chapter I will explore advertising that deals with social issues. John Zeigler defines these types of advertising in “Social Change through Issue Advertising” as issue advertising, public service advertising, and protest advertising. After reviewing these categories of advertising, I explain how a growing trend to produce “shock advertising” involves both charitable organizations in issues advertising and for-profit corporations in consumer advertising. In addition, this strategy to shock involves advertisers who blend a social issues agenda with the marketing of a corporation. Further, I posit that the clothing company, United Colors of Benetton, causes controversy because it attempts to do the latter and then functions as an advertising anomaly.

Zeigler describes issue advertising as advertising that deals with certain social issues and with aims to change, clarify, or repeal specific laws, or initiate new legislation (375). Generally this type of advertising is offered by social or activist groups and may

attempt to marshal public opinion and create a climate for change. If it is successful, then it will have changed a law or it will have achieved any of its stated specific objectives.

According to Zeigler, former U.S. President Lyndon Johnson acknowledged the success of one such ad created by Bert Steinhauser of Doyle, Dane, and Bernbach for Citizens Against Rats. The ad showed a large rat next to the headline, “Cut this out and put it in bed next to your child.” Johnson attributed to this ad the power to influence Congress to pass rat control legislation (376). The ad worked because, as Zeigler explains, the single indispensable ingredient of a successful issue ad is anger. First, the ad should trigger fear and then responsibly mold a person’s anger about the issue to motivate him/her to act (382).

In 1998, the charity Help the Aged presented a campaign in England and Scotland aimed at raising money to help older people heat their homes, install home insulation, and provide hot meals. The charity’s poster featured eight pairs of feet poking out from beneath sheets on a mortuary slab with the following caption: “Thousands of elderly people will stop feeling the cold this winter—Don’t let the winter kill.” In addition, to raise media awareness journalists were sent boxes with a pair of shoes wrapped in a note saying, “More than 21,000 elderly people will not be needing these this winter.” This reminder was meant to highlight that 21,000 pensioners died from cold-related illnesses in 1997, and the figure was expected to rise (Montgomery 3). Help the Aged’s campaign gained the attention of viewers by triggering fear of pensioners dying and encouraged viewers to act by donating funds to meet the heating needs of the elderly. Michael Lake, director of Help the Aged, comments, “People are rocked by the image but they get

through that and say, 'my word, we are glad you have done this,' If we can save one life, it's worth it. If people's sensitivities are bruised, that's a pity" (Montgomery 3).

Zeigler claims that issue advertising is appropriate for any and all media, in particular those that reach a significant number of people, including television, radio, newspapers, magazines, bumper stickers, placards, and buttons (378). Zeigler attributes the advent of issue advertising to the Civil Rights movement in the South in the early sixties and to confrontations in print advertising over the Vietnam War. He states, "At that time, I think advertising became recognized as a tool for lobbying and nonviolent protest" (376).

The motivation for issue advertising relies on the objectives and end result of the advertising. Zeigler define the rationale for developing the ads as focusing on the unique selling proposition: the reason someone would buy the product (or argument) over a competitive one. It is the sentence or paragraph that presents such a compelling argument that the viewer would determine it was not in his/her best interest to respond differently from the way the ad creators wished. Additionally, the rationale is a strategy that perceptively takes into account the strengths and weaknesses of the position advertised. To develop a rationale or strategy requires one to position oneself against the competition (378). In an ad like Help the Aged, a viewer would seem callous to position him/herself from the competition's viewpoint: "Let the Winter Kill."

Protest advertising, according to Zeigler, differs from issue advertising and protests or produces a specific call to action that seldom offers constructive solutions or alternatives in the ads. Its most significant intent is to express dissent though the motivation appears unclear in the absence of solutions (375-376). Instances of protest

advertising occurred during the Vietnam War as people developed promotional material to “Stop the War” or “Come Demonstrate with Us on Fifth Avenue.”

A local Idaho example of protest advertising is the display of a bumper sticker on cars asking viewers to “Can Helen, Not Salmon.” Helen Chenoweth-Hage is a relatively controversial congressional representative who has inspired criticism at various points in her career. She took office in 1994 and has taken positions on the environment and gun control that some find objectionable. The bumper sticker advocates removing Helen from office, rather than letting her destroy our salmon population. The sticker expresses discontent but does not offer a constructive plan to bring about change or to eliminate the perceived threat to the environment.

Public service advertising may be defined as educational, noncontroversial, and “safe” in dealing with subjects that most people are against, like forest fires (375). The Smokey Bear campaign of the fifties is a classic example of a public service message teaching that “Only you can prevent forest fires.” The advertising might ask people not to litter or pollute the environment. Public service advertising might also remind adults that a healthy self-esteem for children develops in proportion to the amount of time adults spend with the child, while Mothers Against Drunk Driving (M.A.D.D.) reminds viewers that “Friends don’t let Friends Drive Drunk.” These messages may be sponsored by the television network on which they play or by specific organizations or partnerships of organizations related to the message.

The uses of Zeigler’s categories of advertising generally relate to non-profit organizations. These forms of advertising become problematic when for-profit corporations broadcast messages dealing with social issues or a social agenda and

advocate action. For instance, in March of 1981 Ronald E. Rhody, public relations and advertising corporate vice president for Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corporation, spoke before the Public Relations Society of America concerning the debate on issues advertising. He discussed three commercials that were rejected by the CBS television network in January of 1981. The first shared the following message:

It's time America stopped crying 'Uncle.' We can't keep turning only to Uncle Sam to help us out. For instance, youth unemployment stands at about 18 percent; for minority youth, it's a shocking 38 percent. At Kaiser Aluminum we believe youth unemployment isn't just government's problem. It's everyone's. If you're in a position to hire, give America's young people a chance. One person can make a difference. You! ("Debate")

This commercial focused on youth unemployment and calls on the audience to help address the problem.

The second commercial offered the opinion that America has plenty of energy resources if only we would develop them, and the third commercial stated that the declining rate of productivity in this country would be reversed if we do things that encourage personal savings and business reinvestment in new plants and equipment. In addition, the three commercials urged viewers to write their elected representatives about those problems.

Few corporations readily advocate an activist agenda through their advertising material. The fact that Kaiser was unable to air a message that that would almost seem to be within the public service arena—hire youths to end youth unemployment or increase productivity by encouraging personal savings and investment—demonstrates an intolerance for companies to openly advocate a political agenda. These messages appear as harmless as Carroll O'Connor's plea for parents to "Get between your kid and drugs

any way you can . . . if you want to save the kid's life." O'Connor's plea appears to be acceptable because it resides as a non-profit public service announcement for a group such as the Partnership for a Drug-Free America. Kaiser, however, as a for-profit corporation, could not broadcast its message. Rhody explains Kaiser's concern for limiting the corporation:

We think urging people to get involved with issues that affect them is a positive action. We would like to be able to draw attention to issues that we think are important to our shareholders, our employees, our communities, and our company. We would like to be able to enter our ideas and facts into the marketplace of public opinion through network television. But we can't! ("Debate")

Rhody's concern is that his company may not express itself on the CBS network even if Kaiser buys the time.

Since 1981, we have seen more corporations attempting to involve themselves with political and social agendas through advertisements. Rhody's concern with such ads seems to indicate potential controversies concerning who may send out messages concerning social issues in advertising, what images may be used, as well as the group/company's motivation in presenting the imagery. If special interest groups present issues, the association is natural that their promotional efforts will relate to the issues with which they work. For example, the American Heart Association may promote material dealing with smoking or tobacco usage and no controversy ensues. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) might put out material that is anti-fur in fashion or against medical research involving animal-testing, and such promotion may seem completely logical to viewers making an association between the constructors of the message and their agenda. PETA comes under attack for promoting its cause only when

the imagery it uses strikes viewers as offensive or sensationalistic, such as the images of hunters clubbing baby seals to death.

Commercial companies that decide to incorporate a social agenda in their corporate promotion are not inherently controversial. For example, a company that adopts breast cancer awareness as a company platform is usually applauded. Images of pink ribbons are acceptable and seem to instill confidence that, by promoting awareness, we can make a difference. It would seem that as long as the imagery is not inflammatory, then a company's involvement in a social agenda is acceptable and helps to promote a positive image for the company. When the company begins to use shocking imagery, however, in an effort to gain attention or promote an agenda, then controversy ensues. If the company were to present images of the bare chests of women who had had mastectomies on billboards and in print throughout the country, the company would probably be criticized resoundingly for its deliberate attempt to gain attention to itself by shocking the public for commercial gain. Images of breastless women did appear on billboards in the early nineties and were sponsored by a group trying to encourage women to have regular mammograms. The group was ultimately asked to remove the billboards because so many found the imagery offensive.

For those interested in presenting a social message, groups with an activist or charitable association rather than a for-profit or corporate association generally seem to have easier access to promoting their messages. The tension surrounding who is allowed to present a controversial image to raise awareness or generate discussion or raise funds has led to dispute over how controversial that message may be. Because the costs are great in extending a group's message, many groups turn to shock as their tactic of choice.

Jade Garret writes, “Worthy causes with precious little money to spare and equally limited time to grab our attention frequently turn to the hit-them-hard approach.” This shock-tactic has come under wide scrutiny by those in favor of non-profit organizations using shock advertising and those against.

One example of a controversial campaign involved promotional materials for the Imperial War Museum in London. The museum promoted a new Holocaust exhibition with a television and print campaign. The television ad begins with what appears to be one of the pyramids in Egypt and a voice-over that asks, “Have you ever wondered what man could achieve when he really sets his mind to it?” The camera pans out from the scene as the narrator continues, “What he could build and plan, how he could inspire others to do things they never dreamed they could do If you’ve ever wondered what man is truly capable of, now’s your chance to find out.” The camera reveals that what viewers are looking at is the entrance gate to Auschwitz. The voice of Adolf Hitler brings the spot to a close with the final line on the screen, “The Holocaust Exhibition. You need to know.” This campaign also included posters featuring slogans like, “If you want to see how man made his mark on the 20th century, now’s your chance,” written across the image of a prisoner’s arm tattooed with his inmate number (Garret).

Ad creator Michael Green of the ad agency Delaney Lund Knox Warren, comments, “We’re not trying to educate people about the Holocaust, that’s the job of the exhibition.... Our job is to get people to visit the museum. We have the tools to touch people’s emotions and manipulate their feelings—any controversy will surround our use of that skill” (quoted in Garret). Green’s efforts were criticized by Tim Mellors, a top creative director in London, who says, “The Holocaust ads should be coming from the

view of the people involved, you don't get involved with architecture. In these ads you're as distant as the shot is. It's like showing the twin towers of Wembley and asking people to feel the passion of football" (quoted in Garret). Nevertheless what we see in this communication effort is a noble institution, a museum, presenting a controversial campaign in order to gain attention, as well as to increase visitors and sales to an exhibition.

In 1995 the Advertising Standard Authority in Europe seemed to reach its tolerance point for charities using controversial imagery and accused charities of using shock advertising to counter declining donations. The ASA claimed that charities were overzealous and exploited the trust the public had in them in their effort to produce advertising that draws people's attention. The ASA noted that shocking images, claims, and statistics raise questions about the real size and extent of the issue. The ASA fielded complaints concerning the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the group's ad that linked mass murderer Jeffrey Dahmer and the abuse of animals. Ad copy read:

Before graduating to mass-murder and necrophilia, Jeffrey Dahmer mutilated birds, rodents and domestic animals (the bones were found in a hut next to his father's house). The torture of small mammals is a regular occurrence in Britain. Rabbits are hung from trees. Squirrels are nailed to them. Hedgehogs are used as footballs. None of this, however, is illegal. The Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill will make it so.
(Ridley)

The ASA concluded that the use of Dahmer in the advertisements was "inappropriate" and doubted the IFAW's cited statistics. An IFAW spokesman said, "We don't want to offend people, but we have to use the most forceful and hard-hitting advertising we can to

get our message across” (quoted in Conaghan and Spencer). The spokesman also said the organization stands by its figures and would continue to use forceful images.

The ASA’s code already stated that no advertisement should play on fear or excite distress without good reason. When advertisers make an appeal to fear, the code states that the fear evoked should be proportionate to the risk addressed. The code also establishes, “An advertisement should excite distress only in circumstances in which the seriousness and importance of the subject matter unarguably warrants such an approach. Distress should never be occasioned merely in pursuit of an attempt to attract attention, or to shock” (Hunt). Essentially, the ASA code emphasizes that the relative weight or extent of the problem must be proportionate to the shock value of the ad.

The desire to gain attention from the viewing public does not rest solely with charities, non-profit and activist organizations. Consumer advertising also has a vested interest in gaining attention for its message and practitioners too design advertisements to provoke a strong public reaction. This advertising has come to be termed “shock advertising” or “shockvertising” in the industry. Stephen Armstrong describes the role of shock advertising and writes, “Ads using shock tactics are the stormtroopers of selling. They kick down the door to your mind and plant an idea like a hand grenade in your subconscious. To an advertiser, this is ‘impactful’” (“Nasty”). Armstrong’s graphic depiction of shock ads demonstrates the effect that the ads are designed to have on the viewer. Viewers are encouraged to take notice of the message, the product, or the company identity. To some, this advertising effort is viewed as an assault on viewers.

Armstrong attributed shock advertising in the 1990s to three colliding factors. First, the overwhelming number of commercial messages that people receive every day

means that ads have to shout increasingly louder to be heard. He notes that in the last decade there has been more than a 2,000 percent increase in the number of different ads aired on TV in one day (“Yobs” T9). With this great number of messages, ad makers compete to gain our attention. Stephen Henry, founding partner of ad agency Howell Henry Chaldecott Lury, comments, “On average, we in the West receive 1,300 commercial messages a day Most of the time our brains are skilled enough to extract entertainment and ignore the sales message, so advertisers are looking for a way of making us interact with the ad” (quoted in Armstrong, “Nasty”). Essentially, ad makers grapple to catch our attention any way they can.

Second, Armstrong asserts that the ad-literate consumer became a serious challenge for ad agencies to reach. Agencies found that in the beginning of the nineties, consumers who had grown up with forty years of commercial television were savvy to the tricks advertisers can throw at them (“Yobs”). In addition, those Generation X members who have followed the Baby Boomers have a different philosophical make-up than generations that have gone before. Nancy Ryan notes that this generation is the most familiar with nascent media formats that range from cable to computer information networks. She says, “Their familiarity with a dizzying number of information outlets has made them less cynical about marketing But they are very much a word-of-mouth group. They trust each other more than the mainstream media.” The diversity within the audience then makes reaching consumers challenging.

Finally, Armstrong argues that a change in the make-up of ad agencies contributed to the rise of shock advertising offered. Because of a recession in the early nineties, a three-year hiring freeze limited the influx of youthful talent, but ad agencies

began to recruit young creative teams again in 1994 and 1995. This new talent did not participate in the glitz of the eighties advertising arena but instead drew its ideas from club culture, the underground, real life, and film-maker Quentin Tarrantino (“Yobs”). The resulting ad creations then had a new character make-up that involved riskier imagery and harsher realities. Ryan asserts that this new talent is of a generation full of ideological contradiction. For example, Generation X made “Beavis and Butthead,” MTV’s animated ne’er-do-wells who love to set fires and torment animals, into a national phenomenon, yet members strongly support the environmental movement. This contradiction then invites ad product that challenges traditional advertising.

In some instances, companies even began using a more innovative design of advertising by eliminating the outside advertising agency altogether. Several companies have employed in-house agencies or artists to develop ad campaigns for them: Oliviero Toscani has developed Benetton advertising alone and in conjunction with Fabrica, a creative design school; Loblaw’s Dave Nichols designs his own material; the Gap has commissioned Rolling Stone photographer Annie Liebowitz to shoot celebrities for a black-and-white poster series; and Calvin Klein uses his in-house agency, CRK, to develop advertising. This effort to employ artists to build brands, sell products, and express a company’s vision results in often unorthodox approaches that some applaud and others criticize.

John Dalla Costa argues that “developing advertising without the usual intermediation of product managers and ad agency people is a way of projecting intimacy into advertising” (“Some”). He views this intimacy as a good way to reach consumers and to effectively build a relationship with them. He believes that this type of ad design

that uses in-house agencies and artists serves as a worthwhile example for others in the communications industry. For example, Benetton, Loblaws, The Gap, and Calvin Klein use advertising that flows from the vision of the CEO. These practitioners have compressed the communications development to limit the steps between vision and execution to as few as possible. In addition, Dalla Costa explains that the closer the link between the practice of creative invention and the business idea, the clearer the resulting communication. He advocates, “Marketers must step out from behind the protective screen of research and actually apply judgment. They must have the confidence to set directions in a business world shrouded in ambiguity, contradiction, confusion and competition” (“Some”). Ultimately, Dalla Costa writes that creative people must practice their art as an expression of a business idea in which craft must serve business and not aesthetic priorities.

Rupert Howell also writes of the necessity to keep the business perspective in mind for the creation of advertising materials, though he expresses concern for some potential pitfalls of those companies that stray from advertising agencies:

My experience has proved to me that if you give complete freedom to a film director or a photographer you’re in danger of losing the commercial imperative. If advertising agencies are about anything they are about marrying commerce and creativity. This is a real skill, a classic combining of left and right brain capabilities. (“Why”)

Thus, Howell asserts that agencies aid the saliency of selling through advertising.

In some instances the advertising product of companies that employ artists to develop campaigns readily falls into the category of shocking. The fashion industry, in particular, has been accused of capitalizing on shock advertising throughout the nineties with various campaigns launched throughout the United States and Europe. In 1995,

Calvin Klein offered a campaign that featured pubescent-looking models wearing CK denim in listless yet provocative poses against a wood panel backdrop suggesting a seedy or underground space. Many thought the ads celebrated the child pornography industry, and Donald Wildmon of the American Family Association led a public outcry that resulted in Calvin Klein and his in-house advertising agency, CRK, being investigated by the FBI for violating child pornography laws. The campaign was ultimately withdrawn, but the extensive coverage of the campaign highlighted Calvin Klein unavoidably.

The excessive attention that Calvin Klein received because of his presentation of shocking material is perhaps the greatest criticism of shock advertising strategy. David Rowan writes that “PR advertising” may be defined as “how the marketing industry describes its latest ploy to get you thinking of, and then buying, the product: it’s the use of shock advertising to generate media chatter” (“Glossary”). Rowan’s concept of PR advertising may apply to companies with distinct products for sale or those with a social agenda or cause to increase public awareness of issues. The motivation behind this type of promotion is that the company or group presents an advertising image or campaign that attempts to shock the public. The risky imagery is often criticized, denied by publications, and banned from media. Because of the controversy surrounding the campaign, the news media and advertising industry then offer many articles and comments outlining the controversy thereby giving extensive mileage to a campaign that would otherwise be presented only on a limited scale. As Gustafson, Yssel, and Witta note, “If you make a small amount of the right kind of noise, the media will deliver you tens of hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of free publicity.” This publicity then is part of a the strategy to draw attention to a company any way possible.

The literature concerning shock advertising suggests two basic categories. The first category includes charities or social advocacy groups that use shock advertising because they have a striking social message and a limited budget, hence they must get the most media mileage possible with a campaign. The second category consists of companies that use shock advertising to try to get media attention to sell more products or to build a stronger corporate identity. What happens then when a for-profit corporation decides to adopt a social issues platform in a manner reminiscent of a social advocacy group and uses shocking imagery?

The problem itself is not that a company would take on a social agenda in its ads. Termed “activist advertising,” this type of promotion raises social issues while improving brand awareness. Denise Smith Amos terms this type of promotion “cause marketing” and explains that it is the practice of linking a company or product to a charity or cause in a long-term and visible way (“Companies”). She notes that American Express gave cause marketing its first national trial in the mid-1980s when the company announced it would donate a percentage of card member charges to the renovation of the Statue of Liberty. The campaign raised \$1.7 million and substantially increased card usage and new card applications.

Amos notes that in 1992 companies spent more than \$254 million marketing causes, which more than doubled the amount spent in 1990, according to the IEG Newsletter, a Chicago publication tracking marketing strategies. Jim Andrews, editorial director of IEG, explains that in the midst of a rough economy of recession and economic downturns, cause marketing sends a very good message (quoted in Amos, “Companies”). This form of marketing has become so common that the June 14, 1993, issue of the *Daily*

News Record, a newspaper for the clothing industry, listed 146 textile, clothing and footwear companies actively practicing cause marketing. This list did not include companies that only wrote checks.

Companies such as The Body Shop, Ben and Jerry's, Ryka Inc., and Newman's Own incorporate social causes actively in the company's operations. These companies support a variety of causes such as the environment and saving the rain forest, stopping violence against women, and proper child seat safety. In fact, the companies also donate large amounts to their causes. The ice cream company Ben and Jerry's devotes seven and a half percent of profit to causes, while footwear maker Ryka Inc. devotes seven percent. Food company Newman's Own donates one hundred percent of its profits to a variety of causes. The company's slogan even reads, "Shameless exploitation in pursuit of the common good." These percentages outdistance the average corporate contributions to charities of 1.8 percent of profits, according to the Council for Aid to Education (Amos "Companies").

Jim Nardecchia of Ron Foth Retail explains the motivation behind cause marketing: "We talk a lot about creating a 'personality' for your business. This is just a more progressive communication about a company's image" (quoted in Hood). Similarly, David Milenthal of Hameroff Milenthal Spense Inc. explains that such an issues-oriented approach is designed to build customer loyalty and separate the company from its competition. By presenting its stand on "heavy issues," a company is able to break away from parity and differentiate itself from its competitors (Hood).

Yet sometimes this cause marketing attempts to differentiate itself so distinctly that it shocks viewers' sensibilities. In the early nineties American sportswear

manufacturer, Esprit, caused some viewers distress by launching a campaign that reflected issues ranging from pro-choice to racism to homelessness to voter registration. Images such as a black girl standing in profile accompanied the slogan: “End racism and the killing of my people in the streets.” Esprit then invited consumers to respond to the issues presented in the ads. More than 15,000 people responded to the ads, and Esprit used those comments to develop another socially aware campaign. The new ads showed a consumer, the consumer’s concern/social issue, and a telephone number for an activist organization. One example concerning nationalized health care featured the headline, “What would you do?” Underneath this line was the photograph of South Dakotan Allyson Utpadel and her comment: “I’d make health care a right, not a privilege.” Beneath her comment was printed: “For more information on nationalized health care, contact Public Citizen (202) 546-4996” (Hood). Ads like these attempted to claim the viewer’s attention concerning social issues and to arm the viewer with a social group to contact for more information.

Susie Tompkins, co-founder of the San Francisco company, explains Esprit’s “Save the World” campaign: “Clothes are what we produce, but we’ve always been a lifestyle company, and to me, there’s always been a connection between humans, corporations and ecology; it all goes together as I see it” (quoted in Hart). She adds: “We wanted to let the youth of America know that we, Esprit, really understand that they have a lot on their minds. We wanted to give them a platform. It’s a way of giving something back. If we sell clothes from the ads as well, then that’s great” (quoted in Fielding, “Cashing”). In this case, Esprit downplayed the product they sell in order to sell a social concern and to establish a stronger brand identity.

Esprit's use of this activist advertising generated some concern for its visual shock value. The company argued that its history of sponsoring youth projects underscored the company's concern for addressing social issues that youths cared about. Esprit's messages were clear in subject matter and direction: this issue is a concern and if you would like more information, then contact the following agency. The company attempted to situate itself as socially responsible and interested in making the United States a better place. Campaign director Sandra Ranke explains, "We don't look at it as a marketing ploy.... As a business, it is our role to take on issues like this—and to encourage others to do the same. It's all about living your values" (quoted in Horovitz, "Marketing"). Esprit argues that the advertising ultimately ought to be perceived in the context of the company's other philanthropic endeavors.

Not everyone, however, reacted positively to Esprit's efforts and supported the company campaign. Winsome Cornish, editor of *The Voice*, addressed the campaign and explains her offense at the use of the black girl's image and comment: "I think it's pathetic. Clothing companies are merely using the black image to generate controversy, trying to raise their profile and sell their product on the backs of black people" (quoted in Fielding, "Cashing"). Racial issues have surfaced in many advertising campaigns, and Cornish believes that there are many ways to be socially helpful without combining racial issues with advertising.

Helen Fielding echoes Cornish's concern with pairing social issues with advertising and argues:

... the combination of the cynical process of selling, with its emphasis on short, simple messages, and the well, [sic] difficult, complex, huge process of addressing the world's problems is not a match made in heaven. The need it creates

for integrity, commitment, research, sensitivity and communicational brilliance is too much to ask of money-making corporations and admen. (“Cashing”)

Fielding suggests that the challenges of producing an effective social issues campaign within the limited parameters of the advertising medium are difficult and that the attempt necessitates responsibilities beyond the capabilities of for-profit corporations.

Negative public reaction to Esprit’s campaign was mild in comparison to other companies using shock advertising to gain attention. In fact, United Colors of Benetton has come to be known as the classic example of a company that uses shock advertising gratuitously. When Rowlan proposed his glossary term for the nineties, including “PR advertising,” United Colors of Benetton was his chosen example of a company that generated free publicity by presenting controversial imagery. The company’s choice to highlight social issues rather than the company’s products seems to draw attention to areas of tolerance in consumer advertising. Charitable organizations may use shock advertising because of their non-profit status, and because of the importance of the issues they highlight. A corporation, however, is challenged by society when it attempts to use shock advertising concerning social issues.

To explain why Benetton’s promotional material sparks controversy, I will explore the concept of anomaly and how Benetton’s advertising may work within and outside understood categories and norms of advertising. Mary Douglas offers insight into this area of anomaly in *Purity and Danger*. Douglas explains that people’s impressions are schematically determined by the stimuli around them. Our interests are governed by a pattern-making tendency, sometimes called schema, which reflects how we select only stimuli that interest us. Within a kaleidoscope of shifting impressions, each person then

constructs a stable world where objects have recognizable shapes, are located in depth, and have permanence. Through our perception processes, we build understanding by taking and rejecting cues from around us. Those cues that are most acceptable to us fit most easily into the pattern we are building. Those ambiguous cues tend to be treated as if they harmonized with the rest of the pattern. Those discordant cues tend to be rejected. If we accept the discordant cues, then we must modify our structure of assumptions. As learning proceeds we name and label objects.

As time progresses and we experience more, we invest more in our system of labels. These labels may be modified but for the most part are reinforcements of past experience. We then ignore or distort uncomfortable facts that do not fit within our labeling system so as not to disturb our established assumptions. To confront those cues that do not fit our assumptions can be unsettling (36-37).

Douglas writes that those elements which do not fit a given set or series are anomalies. When something is firmly classified as anomalous, the outline of the set of which it is not a member is clarified. The experience of reflecting on our main classifications and on experiences that do not exactly fit them is profitable because in general these reflections confirm our confidence in the main classifications (38).

Douglas suggests that there are two basic ways of treating anomalies. Negatively, people might ignore, not perceive the anomaly, or perceive the anomaly and condemn it. Positively a person can deliberately confront the anomaly and attempt to create a new pattern of reality in which it has a place (38). Douglas asserts, "Any given system of classification must give rise to anomalies, and any given culture must confront events which seem to defy its assumptions. It cannot ignore the anomalies which its scheme

produces, except at risk of forfeiting confidence” (39). Douglas then espouses the value of confronting anomalies.

First, Douglas explains that settling on an interpretation reduces ambiguity. Douglas previously defined ambiguity as “a character of statements capable of two interpretations” (37). Next, Douglas asserts that the existence of the anomaly can be physically controlled, for example, the disposal of a night-crowing rooster. Third, “a rule of avoiding anomalous things affirms and strengthens the definitions to which they do not conform” (39). Next, events that are anomalous may be labeled dangerous. Douglas explains that attributing danger is one way to put a subject above dispute and to enforce conformity to a standard set of labels. Finally, anomalous symbols can be used in ritual to enrich meaning or to call attention to other levels of existence in much the same way that ambiguous symbols are used in poetry or mythology.

Using Douglas’s definition of anomaly as something that does not fit standard categories is relevant to explain the controversy surrounding Benetton’s promotional material. Advertising in general is designed to do specific things such as sell products or create a brand identity. Consumers are typically confident in their understanding of how advertising works; yet advertising becomes anomalous to viewers when they are not sure what it does.

The Advertising Standard Authority also believes advertising should behave in certain ways, and in 1996, banned advertising that representatives believed did not conform to advertising norms. For instance, in 1996 an ASA spokesperson expressed concern that advertisers were not matching their messages with the media they used (“ASA” *Marketing Week* 10). In particular, the ASA criticized those commercial

advertising efforts that focused on social issues through using provocative imagery rather than showing images of the company's product. The ASA's criticism suggests that advertisements and products/companies work within a system that prescribes appropriate content for the form.

Oliviero Toscani, however, has repeatedly argued that Benetton's advertising is not traditional in its form or function. His efforts seem to defy the norms of product advertising where products are displayed in the ads and advertisers create a desire in the audience for the goods for sale. Instead, Toscani proposes that his ads are not meant to convince viewers to buy a product. Rather, he would like viewers to discuss social issues. He claims, "Advertising is the richest and most powerful form of communication in the world. We need to have images that will make people think and discuss" ("Toscani on"). He argues that rather than be classified as "advertising," the images he proposes should be viewed as a form of communication. Toscani explains that his images are designed to communicate a social message. He claims, "Advertising channels are rich and powerful, and as a communicator, it's more important [to make a social statement] than to say our sweater is better" (quoted in Palmieri). Toscani proposes that he would rather focus on social issues than on promoting the Benetton product.

The agenda for Benetton's advertising contrasts with the traditional framework for fashion advertising. Peter Arnell, chairman of the Arnell Group, a marketing and advertising firm, explains how fashion advertising generally works:

Fashion advertisers try to take on the responsibility of depicting the trends. It's much closer to the speed of the world at that moment—the world's visual culture. They try to achieve their vision publicly, in trying to let people know how to dress. In most cases, it's much more related to

trends—which in some cases they create—than timelessness.
(quoted in Lockwood)

This ideology behind ad development seems to echo the motivation of fashion shows where designers portray the product and create an identity for the product line.

Benetton's removal of the product from company promotion and the departure from uniting the trend-setting function of clothing design with the advertising forum propel the company's efforts into different and anomalous space.

Toscani's vision for advertising and corporate communications carries with it social responsibilities that suggest a duty for companies, advertising, and media.

Advertising, he believes, can and should do something more than what traditional advertising has done. He argues:

Communication is the responsibility of a company as much as it is, say, the responsibility of the media. I don't believe we're using human tragedy to sell clothes. Until now there has been an assumption that opinion communications belong only to editorial and not to advertising. But advertising is another channel that can be used that way. Advertising can be used to say something that is real about things that exist, that are problems which touch everybody. (quoted in Allen)

He further explains, "That's my work: to report something that exists. We can't be like ostriches who put their heads in the sand" (quoted in Hume). Toscani's ads attempt to promote discussion about issues that people would normally miss if they were approached through other channels. This discussion could potentially lead to solutions to social problems, which mirrors the agenda and motivation of activist groups and charitable organizations.

Toscani equates the function of advertising with that of the news media that report and comment on the happenings of the world. Toscani believes his advertising can operate at the same level as the news. Viewers, however, do not typically look to

consumer advertising to learn more about the world. They look to consumer advertising to learn more about a product or service or company.

Toscani's efforts work to bring attention to a multitude of social issues, but he asserts that the Benetton Group does not want to be perceived as the champion of noble causes. He elaborates, "Its intention is to stimulate a critical discussion within the context of traditional advertising which, as a rule, glorifies reality and makes it more palatable by eliminating its inherent conflicts" ("Advertising"). According to Toscani, conventional advertising has always lied to its public because it tries to sell happiness by representing a fantasy world in which everything is beautiful. It exploits emotions in order to make money. Toscani argues that advertising has the responsibility to raise sociopolitical issues and make people think. This role in bringing issues to viewers' attention and generating political discussion creates dissonance for viewers because such advertising does not match the consumers' classification for the functions of advertising.

Toscani espouses the need to overcome the harmful and untruthful messages found in advertising that often lull viewers into false notions:

All commercial images have a social meaning and an impact. Nobody has done an analysis of the harm done by stupid advertising and its twisted value system. A lot of insecurities are caused by the stereotypes in those images, and advertising is very influential in the education of our young. ("Toscani on")

This view of the power of advertising to construct questionable realities for viewers, particularly the young, underscores a function in advertising to shape norms, such as what is deemed beautiful. In a *Financial Times* article Toscani continues his criticism of the advertising industry:

Advertisers have done a lot of social damage . . . using fake images and fake dreams to sell us their products, so that today if you are a girl you really are a nobody if you don't look like Isabella Rosellini With the amount large

multinationals spend on advertising they could make the best campaign in the world against drug abuse for example.
(quoted in Pinson and Tibrewala 16)

Because Toscani is not part of an ad agency and does not view himself as an “advertiser,” he sets himself apart from the industry. His images are not fake, he does not present a limited standard of beauty, and his ad dollars do not perpetuate advertising’s creation of empty standards. Instead, his work avoids empty standards by addressing significant issues.

The company website further elaborates on the company’s communication policy:

Benetton believes that it is important for companies to take a stance in the real world instead of using their advertising budget to perpetuate the myth that they can make consumers happy through the mere purchase of their product.
 (“Communication”)

It continues by asserting that the Benetton ads do not show a fictitious reality where using Benetton products makes people irresistible. In fact, Benetton typically omits any reference to its product line at all. Though early ads featured Benetton’s clothes, since 1989 the company generally has not featured or included the product in the company’s advertisements.

President Luciano Benetton further explained the company’s philosophy of advertising at a press conference to open an exhibit at London’s Royal College of Art:

We wanted to have a spirit of sensitivity and care for others as well as our own product.... What we show is the truth. If people want to censor it, I am sorry. Why does reality make such a big controversy? Why is traditional advertising, showing everything that is fake, accepted by the hypocritical people? (quoted in Russell)

Luciano Benetton’s question concerning the public’s tolerance for advertising imagery raises the issue that certain imagery is accepted in advertising, while imagery that strays from viewers’ expectations leads to controversy and rejection by viewers. The standard

of imagery in advertising is to present glorified representations of reality, but Benetton gives viewers a harsh reality that the company labels as "the truth."

Luciano Benetton says that his concern for social issues is widespread, and he indicates that his purpose in using advertising to bring about social change is simple:

I am only interested in the world and in people. I have always been sympathetic to people's problems, to minority rights, birth control, diseases, wars, racism, religious intolerance. I cannot offer solutions to these problems, but if I can make people more aware then that is all I am after.
(quoted in White)

With this statement Luciano seems to focus on the possibility of sharing knowledge or information about world problems through advertising but without holding his advertising responsible for providing a solution.

In addressing these social issues, the Benetton Group has faced criticism. The ad that received the most criticism within the 1992 campaign featured AIDS activist David Kirby near death and surrounded by his family. The company actively explained its intentions for using the provocative imagery. Peter Fressola, director of communications for North America, commented that the company knew the AIDS photograph would be controversial because AIDS is fraught with a great deal of emotionalism. He explained, "We seized an opportunity to publicize AIDS to create greater compassion. Would people rather have us show pretty girls in sweaters?" (quoted in Buck). He asserted, "Once you've seen it there's no way you can ever feel the same way about someone with AIDS again" (quoted in Allen). The viewing of the ad, Fressola asserts, then holds the potential for an activist agenda: "We believe that when that many people see an image this powerful, it can raise their collective consciousness...And that can result in action" (quoted in Horovitz, "Marketer's Rethinking"). He adds, "I could not participate in 'the misery of the month,' as some critics call it, if I didn't personally believe that this would move people even just a little bit . . . Benetton is just one more voice in a chorus of

voices calling for action" (quoted in Greenaway). This idea of the advertising's role in inspiring people to act does present some ambiguity, as the campaigns do not give clear directives for action.

The topic of AIDS in fashion advertising has not been limited to Benetton's use alone. Several companies have joined the social issues effort, and, according to ad experts, these ads will greatly increase consumer awareness of AIDS (Horovitz, "Marketers Use"). In 1992 shoe designer Kenneth Cole addressed AIDS and infant mortality with the following ad copy: "This year, because of AIDS, hundreds of Americans won't live long enough to fill these shoes" (quoted in Hart). The copy was next to a picture of baby shoes, and the ad ran in the glossy pages of fashion magazines. Another Cole ad featured a newborn's birth certificate stamped "HIV positive." Cole explains his use of the HIV/AIDS topic in ads as a way to reach a distant audience: "People are desensitized to media coverage of AIDS We try to bring attention to the cause" (quoted in Horovitz, "Marketers Use"). Cole seems to reflect the Benetton Group's desire to draw attention to the subject area and does not present a clear course of action for viewers.

Another national ad for Adverra, a nutritional supplement manufactured by Abbott Laboratories, openly talks about HIV as well. A 30-year-old male model in the ad says, "I never worried too much about nutrition Then, my doctor told me I was HIV positive." Christopher Crays, the model in the ad, has lived with HIV for seven years and counters critics who say AIDS-related ads are exploitative by saying, "My attitude is, you can't exploit the informed" (quoted in Horovitz, "Marketers Use"). Crays chose to be a part of the messages the ads send about HIV and supports information outlining health considerations for those diagnosed HIV positive. Crays proposes that the more people know about living with HIV, the less room there may be for exploitation.

Adverra's ad joins a 1995 commercial for Nike that features a runner named Ric Munoz in the company's "Just do it" campaign. The ad identifies Munoz as someone

who runs 80 miles every week and ten marathons every year and then reveals Munoz as HIV positive. Ad creators Wieden and Kennedy in Portland, OR, conclude the ad with Nike's familiar exhortation, "Just do it." Joe McCarthy, Nike's advertising director, describes the Munoz ad as an attempt to tell a sports story: "We wanted to tell an inspirational 'Just do it' story, and this seemed like a story that could appeal on a very emotional level. And it's grounded in sports, making it a story appropriate for Nike to tell" (quoted in Elliott, "From Nike"). Further, McCarthy asserts that Nike did not set out to make a statement about HIV or AIDS and explains that the company is not trying to get behind any cause with the ad. He proposes that Nike did not set out to be controversial and says, "The ad is about running. It's about a guy who is out there pushing and challenging his limits" (quoted in Horovitz, "Marketers Use"). Though his limits may be determined by his HIV status, Nike is not concerned with wider ramifications surrounding Munoz's health and the politics surrounding HIV.

Munoz himself describes the ad as "a story of a runner, No. 1, and a story of a runner who has a challenge, No. 2" He continues, "If it were up to me, I wouldn't be in the Nike ad because if it were up to me, I'd be H.I.V.-negative" (quoted in Elliott, "From Nike"). Munoz supports Nike's involvement with advertising and HIV/AIDS and only asks one question of the company, "What took them so long?" (quoted in Elliott, "From Nike"). The sentiment of Munoz's question supports the idea of companies and advertising incorporating the topic of HIV/AIDS in industry activities.

The above companies join Benetton campaigns in using HIV and AIDS as subjects of advertising though each company appears to have a different goal. McCarthy asserts that his company did not set out to be controversial in using HIV as a topic and contrasts Nike with the United Colors of Benetton agenda in promoting AIDS discussion. Luciano Benetton explains why he personally supported the company's use of AIDS topics, particularly in Benetton's 1992 advertising campaign:

It is an urgent moment to make this problem of AIDS known around the world. It is a grave problem I have had many friends who have died from this disease, so for me this image was particularly significant from a human point of view. You can look at the picture from many points of view. Of course, the image is very painful, but it's also very human and warm—it shows the love of the family. If you can see it this way, you might respect, and not confuse, the goal of this image. (quoted in Curry)

Luciano believes that the reactions people have to the ads invite discussion. This discussion then helps people to understand more, and he believes that when we understand other people's opinions, we become richer (Allen).

Luciano Benetton, like Toscani, views the Benetton Group's advertising as corporate communication. He explains that the Benetton Group sponsors these images to be published in more places than they would ordinarily appear (Smith). Luciano suggests that HIV/AIDS imagery has a limited scope with promotion developed and disseminated only through activist or non-profit organizations. The advertising medium, however, allows for imagery to be placed widely, particularly when the imagery is part of a global advertising campaign. Toscani affirms the great power of advertising channels and notes that the Benetton images are widespread. An article, in contrast, can only be seen in one magazine (Parola). The reaction to the Benetton advertisements, however, encouraged articles to be placed in countless magazines and newspapers.

The idea to link social concerns with selling clothes seems contradictory to many critics who accuse the Benetton Group of exploiting misery, catastrophe, or suffering in its advertising to make money for the company. Fressola actively addresses these concerns in interviews and notes that people's understanding of the advertising form contributes to the controversy. He remarks:

Every bit of advertising is exploitive sometimes. It's done to make a point. We like the fact (the campaigns) stir up the dust a bit Every issue we use is socially relevant and generates discussion about important issues I am constantly amazed that otherwise brilliant people say things

like (it's exploitive). It shows a mind-numbingly facile understanding of advertising. (quoted in Greenaway)

Fressola proposes that the company's promotional materials move beyond exploitation and instead highlight information and invite discussion.

Further, Fressola explains that exploitation is not by definition bad as long as there are no victims to the exploitation and some good is being served. He offers the following example to explain: "It can be said, for example, that Jerry Lewis exploits the poster child selected each year to help raise money for the Muscular Dystrophy Association, but this is not criticized because a higher goal is accomplished" (quoted in O'Leary 29-30). Perhaps the distinction in assessing the acceptability of the image is that the poster child daily lives with Muscular Dystrophy and willingly serves as a representative of the MDA. The child also has a vested interest in raising money that will help find a cure for the condition. Toscani turns this idea of exploitation around by figuratively suggesting that the child potentially exploits the MDA to achieve his/her own purposes. Toscani confirms Fressola's observation that advertising is exploitative and says, "I think that something is finally exploiting advertising instead of the other way around. Benetton is giving the opportunity to people who have AIDS, Down's Syndrome kids, all minorities, to express themselves. And I tell you, those people are pleased to do that" (quoted in Diaz). Essentially, then, the dispute seems to be whether Benetton is exploitative in a good way or exploitative in a bad way.

Toscani's view of advertising suggests that people may use advertising as a weapon. It is a tool with which to change society's perception, draw attention to issues, and initiate discussion. Somehow he positions the subjects of the ads as the ones who wield that power to influence, though the attribution of who really has power is debatable. Within the activist agenda, we see creators of messages designing communication to bring about change. For those who use a performance or theatrical space to enact social change, we see the viewpoint that theater practice conceptually may

be used in warfare. In fact, Augusto Boal asserts in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, that theater is a weapon—a very efficient weapon (Foreword). Throughout history actors and playwrights have attempted to express themselves through the theatrical forum. And in some instances that expression has been attributed with bringing about revolution.

If one can establish the theater as an agent for social change, then the concept of advertising as an agent for social change would appear reasonable. In the sixties, theater in America and abroad took on an increasingly active role in protesting the events of the day. For instance, groups protested the involvement of outside countries, like the United States, in the Vietnam War. Performers then created new modes of expression within the theater that challenged norms and expectations for theater. Performers took theater to the streets and used guerrilla tactics to broadcast its messages. Street theater then evolved as an anomalous arena of expression that encompassed and defied traditional theatrical practice.

The street theater movement of the sixties itself is noted not so much by particular performances or artwork as for its philosophy and motivation, as well as its nontraditional enactment. The practitioners attempted to reinvent performance in ways that would produce results and forge new relationships with audience members. The structure of performance was challenged as was the site of performance, the creation of performance, the democracy of performance, and the funding for performance. The ideals of using the theatrical space to make a difference, to cause audiences to take action, and to forge new paths in artistic expression echo the aims of the Benetton Group's use of promotional material. Street theater practitioners attempted to define the form and function of their effort and ultimately negotiated a new performance space for their efforts—the world at large. The controversy Benetton has provoked has worked to create a new space for advertising that unites a corporation's commerce perspective with a controversial activist agenda. Arnell notes, "Controversy, if possible, is a very good thing because it enables people both from a

consumer and trade side to participate in a dialog beyond the observation of the ad” (quoted in Lockwood). This clothing company hoped that such discussion would change reality.

Theater practitioners with a political motivation expanded the medium’s function of reflecting/representing reality and explored ways to alter reality. Márgaret Croyden writes that during the theatrical revolution of the sixties the basic art of illusion and the precepts of the mimetic theater were being uprooted and that departure from established techniques and production structures was common (xxi). Lesnick notes that most traditional theater shows the structure of society and unfolding of events represented on a stage as incapable of being influenced by society or the audience. This “new” work represents an attempt to bridge the gulf between players and audiences, as well as to provide a new model for the relationship between society and social reality. It suggests that social reality can be influenced and even determined by the members of society through collective action (13).

This departure in performance practice during the sixties has been given various labels, such as radical theater, political theater, agit-prop theater, alternative theater, guerrilla theater, street theater, happenings, and working-class theater. Lesnick describes guerrilla street theater as a radical political theater performed anywhere people gather—in the streets, in shopping centers, and outside of plants. Lesnick notes that there are many historical antecedents to this type of theater though these groups reappeared in the United States with the reemergence of a left following the McCarthy era and under the impetus of the antiwar movement. Lesnick asserts that it is a theater of statement, and these theater groups consciously function as instruments of propaganda of the left/new left movement. The performers have come to see that there are objective, historical, and social causes for their sense of alienation, and they believe there is a need for a theater that overcomes social alienation through collective social practice and political action (11-14).

The “agit prop” theater of the thirties, an American progenitor to the contemporary guerrilla theater, attempted to provide social analysis so audiences could confront the strangleholds in daily life. Lesnick suggests that guerrilla theater requires this continued focus on social analysis to be successful. He argues that people generally do not have to be told that their reality is oppressive. What they require is an analytic perspective on that oppression—knowledge of its causes, relatedness to other people’s oppression, and correct strategies for ending it. This social analysis ultimately results in stirring up audience members or moving them to action. Lesnick asserts that to bring about social change requires a process of moving or putting into motion (21-22).

Rather than use terms such as “guerrilla theater” or “agit prop theater,” Bim Mason writes of a street theater whose aim is not so much to provoke a particular group of spectators but to criticize certain aspects of the wider society. Termed “communicators,” Mason writes that these performers take it upon themselves to advocate a particular ideology or course of action that may be moral, religious, or political. They often desire to convey a clear, unequivocal message and simplify complex themes into conflicts of good versus evil, whether in terms of devils tempting saints or oppressors oppressing the oppressed. They often tackle current issues to make comment, though they adopted a more subtle approach than “agit-prop” because they found that most people recoil from such a blunt approach. Instead they allow the audience more room to draw its conclusions, even if that audience has been carefully manipulated. Their approach is to use theater as an educational tool. The performers feel they have something to teach the rest of society, a message to pass on, or a need to draw society’s attention to issues that it prefers to ignore. In a sense, they feel they have a more complete understanding of a particular situation than the rest of society (67).

This communicator theater works in two ways based on the audience’s beliefs. For instance, in those cases where the audience already agrees or believes the message, the theater reinforces, affirms, and encourages the already converted. In this situation,

one can assume that the audience has some kind of prior knowledge to the message of the piece. Performers then use shorthand images to suggest the larger ideas. The communicator theater may also draw the attention of the audience to an issue or persuade an unconverted audience to see society differently. The challenge here is to engage the audience. To effect this engagement, communicators use the most popular mediums available such as folk theater, music hall and circus, and story-telling (Mason 68).

This softer approach to dealing with social issues seems to downplay specific calls for the audience to act and may be likened to advertising that points to a social ill but does not present a ready solution or action for solving the problem. The Esprit campaign discussed earlier typifies an advertisement's call to action as do ads that directly ask for donations. Advertising for Benetton that simply shows an image would seem to fall more easily into this communicator category.

Benetton's strategy for communicating entails a two-fold plan to create awareness for social issues and to market the company's name. Fressola notes:

Of course we have a corporate goal to create brand awareness and ultimately sell a product, but that's not what these images are about We believe we can achieve our corporate goals, but at the same time do some good in the world by raising some serious issues. We don't believe those goals are contradictory. (quoted in Smith)

Yet Benetton's efforts may differ from the communicator's theater because Benetton's advertising presents a social issue for discussion but does not comment on or offer any sort of overt judgment.

Fressola explains that the choice to present photos without explanation serves to allow people to discern the meaning of the imagery for themselves:

It's up to the individual to interpret them as they wish, just as a person determines the meaning of untitled art We never tell people what to think. It's purely subjective. There's no underlying theme to the campaign other than social issues. (quoted in Buck)

He also elaborates:

We're not telling people what to think about them. We're saying, 'Here they are, draw your own conclusion; we think these are serious issues ' We're willing to take the heat if people think they're not appropriate subjects for advertising. We disagree We think it's a hell of a lot better than just putting a pretty girl out there in a pretty sweater. (quoted in Span)

This ambiguity of the ads, however, is unsettling to viewers because they seem to desire to read the ads in relation to the company's motivation. When viewing ads, consumers seem to want to "get" the message they speculate is before them. Benetton, however, defies that understanding of one interpretation by widening the scope of meaning.

This freedom to interpret serves to release the Benetton Group of culpability in offending anyone through its imagery. The company claims that viewers choose to interpret the advertisements as they see fit. If the interpretation is unpleasant, then the fault is in the viewer not in the image itself. Fressola says that this approach to company promotion generates criticism and raises questions concerning what is appropriate to portray in advertisements. He comments:

What's interesting to me are the people who say these are not appropriate images for advertising Says who? Appropriate implies a standard or norm, but standards are constantly shifting. So many people have compartmentalized thinking: Either you sell sweaters or you do some public good, and you can't do those things together. We say, 'Why not?' (quoted in Smith)

Fressola proposes to allow flexibility and tolerance for what is entered into the advertising realm, particularly the work of the Benetton Group since it elevates the intellectual and aesthetic level of the marketplace.

Benetton officials seem to desire adjusted categories for the company's advertising. As people determine the advertising to be anomalous, company officials argue that the definition of appropriate advertising should be made broad enough to

include consumer advertising that uses provocative imagery in order to promote a social agenda. When viewers are resistant to accepting the ads, company officials, particularly Oliviero Toscani, then launch a media spin to call its efforts a form of art.

Since the mid-1980s, creative director Oliviero Toscani has been openly and aggressively critical of traditional advertising and its lack of creativity. On several occasions he has argued that within traditional advertising agencies' practices, "The relation to advertising and art is the same as music and muzak. There is no real contribution to art from advertising. Why is that?" (quoted in Scotland, "Benetton's"). He offers this question to confront traditional advertising production, as well as to draw attention to the fact that his advertising is different from the norm in consumer advertising. When viewers critique his work negatively, he often falls back on the argument that traditional rules for evaluating advertising do not apply to his efforts. Ultimately, Toscani claims to have killed advertising because of his reworking of the form (Snaije).

Essentially, Toscani suggests that his work is not advertising but art. Toscani's primary understanding of art is as a carrier of cultural messages rather than, say, a carrier of cultural beauty, though he claims to capture beauty in many of his works. He asserts that it is not traditional advertising: the content of his work is different from past and present advertisements; he proposes a social agenda with his work, and the content is open to interpretation. His work has also been displayed differently from most advertising. In some instances the display/placement has had a performance art quality to achieve maximum impact. For example, in 1985 Toscani intended world leaders to see the display of a particular image on posters/billboards lining the Champs-Elysees in Paris in order to make a social statement. In other instances his work has been on display in art galleries and museums around the world. Finally, Toscani argues that his work is not advertising because it has nothing to do with company sales.

Peter Fressola claims, "Advertising is the art of our day" (quoted in Greenaway). He proposes a framework that views the advertising object as a work of art and the Benetton producers as artists with a social agenda: "We think of it as art with a social message" (quoted in Squiers). Toscani explains his motivation for creating the socially relevant advertising/art:

I think traditional advertising tells us how we should consume life I'm after the possibility of using advertising to tell us how we should use life. Advertising is the richest medium in the world that produces the poorest art. (quoted in O'Byrne)

Toscani's belief then is that he can rework the form and maximize advertising's full potential.

Toscani's work demonstrates a unique relationship within the advertising industry between the Benetton Group and Toscani's service. This relationship creates a sense of Toscani as a creative artist sponsored by the Benetton company. In fact, Toscani has described Luciano Benetton as "a man of vision, very courageous and really a Lorenzo de Medici, with a kind of magnitude" (O'Byrne 11). Luciano allows Toscani to create uncensored: "I just tell him. We're very close friends by now; we talk about our children, politics, discuss what's going on and out of that I decide the next campaign" (quoted in O'Byrne). This relationship appears to give Toscani freedom to design Benetton's corporate promotion.

Given free reign to explore his creativity, Toscani explains how his relationship with Luciano encourages significant artistic expression. Concerning his work overseeing the company magazine, he comments, "Renaissance painting existed because of Lorenzo de Medici; this exists because Luciano Benetton gave me a Sistine chapel" (quoted in J.L.). The magazine affords Toscani the opportunity to explore the medium's potential to create artistic meaning. Further, Toscani says that his artistic expressions result from the partnership with the company president:

Advertising can be done as well as cinema and painting, as well as all high forms of human expression
Advertising is not just about the selling of a product. It has an equal social obligation to do something more. Luciano Benetton really believes in that power of communication.
(quoted in O'Leary 28)

According to Toscani, the two seem to agree on the potential of advertising to make significant artistic and social contributions to society.

Toscani studied photography at Zurich's *Kunstgewerbeschule*, which was founded by members of the Bauhaus school in Germany, and graduated in 1965. He was born in Milan, and his father was a photojournalist who worked for the *Corriere della Sera*. Toscani claims that he began taking pictures in the sixties inspired by a sense of reportage, but his work soon became involved with the fashion press. Toscani shot fashion spreads in Italy during the sixties for magazines like *Elle*, *Vogue*, *GQ*, *Mademoiselle*, and *Harper's Bazaar*. Toscani explains that he began his career with an anthropological point of view though he developed into a fashion photographer employed by Valentino and Chanel. He reveals, "I was the last one to do a Chanel campaign before Lagerfeld started doing it himself" (quoted in O'Byrne). Toscani eventually joined the Benetton Group in 1982 and later parted from the company in May of 2000.

When Toscani began work with company president Luciano Benetton, he first convinced Luciano that Benetton ought to promote itself as a lifestyle and not a clothing company. By 1989 the company handled all aspects of its own communication including production and media buying. Toscani explained, "From the beginning, Luciano Benetton wanted image to be an in-house product, so that it would reflect the company's soul" (quoted in Pinson and Tibrewala 8). As Pinson and Tibrewala noted in their case study of the Benetton Group, fewer than ten people managed the entire process. Toscani's visual imagery was discussed by the advertising team and then shown to

Luciano for final approval. This process allowed the Benetton Group to produce advertisements for one-third of the cost of competitors' advertising (8).

Though Luciano proposed to control the Benetton advertising image closely, Toscani seems to have flourished in his creative power. In a spring 1993 campaign, Toscani convinced a newly elected Italian senator and Italy's leading entrepreneur to pose naked for a clothing redistribution project and advertisement. The company president's naked body was modestly screened by the caption, "I want my clothes back." This ad began a campaign that asked people to donate used clothes to local Benetton stores to be redistributed by worldwide charities.

Throughout his work with the Benetton company, Toscani has explored the blend of advertising and art. He stated:

Benetton gives me the world's largest museum—the street, tens of thousands of posters in a hundred countries—every artist's dream An artist must help change things I want to show what people do not want to see.... Luciano is my patron, my Lorenzo de Medici. (*Le Monde*, 2/17/95, quoted in Pinson and Tibrewala 16).

Because Benetton sponsors Toscani's artwork, he is able to reach a viewing audience far greater than any other forum for art. Since his work is art for the masses and geared to the pedestrian, his stage becomes the street. His popular display of art creates a wide audience for his work, and he reaches more people through the display of his work in these open places than if his work were limited just to theater, gallery, or museum space. Interestingly enough, even when the ads are placed in these smaller venues, people have sought out Toscani's work. Toscani offers the following evidence:

Today, kids get killed on the road because they have been convinced by the promise of happiness suggested by some car makers in their ads. But that doesn't stop them 'selling whilst they're dying'. Right now, I am exhibiting my posters on a 6,000 square metre surface in Brussels 48,000 visitors have been to see these posters, already seen in the street. Next door, there is an exhibition of Flemish painters .

. . they have had 3,200 visitors. (*Jeunes à Paris*, January 1995, quoted in Pinson and Tibrewala 16)

The numbers viewing the materials reflect a potential distinction in popular art and fine art audiences with fine art historically created for limited audiences and popular art created for the masses.

Toscani's desire to reach audiences with a social message where the people are—the streets—echoes the desire of activist groups to reach people wherever they are—in their cars, in the park, and on the subway. The transient nature of viewers who move from place to place mandates that advertising placement must adjust to include the potential sites viewers encounter. The nature of the printed page or billboard allows both a fixed and movable quality to touching audiences. The poster on the side of the bus may visit a viewer's frame of awareness as the viewer sits at a bus stop or drives alongside the bus. A newspaper with an advertisement may be purchased, read, taken home, left on a park bench for another reader, or some other fate following a moveable medium. A billboard may remain stationary as its message shouts to viewers who walk or drive by. Jaspar Shelbourne, executive director of JWT, explains that in order for a medium to gain attention, such as a billboard, it has to have a special quality to reach viewers as they move: "To be worth the effort, posters have to have 'stopper value.' Most of them are taken in from a car, so they have to make you stop and look, to hold your eye and impart the image. They need a striking visual, something to make you bother to look at it" (34).

While placing ads in a public space to reach viewers is not revolutionary, the fact that the ad content differs from conventional ads in some cases causes a shock to viewers. For instance, some viewers were shocked to see the image of a naked chest of a black woman holding a white child blazing on the side of a bus. When this ad hung in a museum gallery, its placement was not so shocking. The fact that it was an advertisement hanging in a museum space was perhaps the surprise. But Toscani's work has been displayed in museums such as the Old England Museum in Brussels, the

Corporate Art Museum in Tokyo, the Bienal in São Paulo, Brazil, the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City, the Estacion Mapocho in Santiago de Chile, the HDLU Museum in the former Yugoslavia, and the Cable Factory in Helsinki. The placement of his work on the walls suggests the gray area designating his work as advertising or popular art. In most of the museum displays, Benetton hoped to re-launch debate about the relationship among art, communication, and industry.

Toscani has attempted to frustrate further the definitions of advertising by creating advertising artwork for display at prestigious art shows such as the Venice Biennale. He submitted these entries in advertising form to publications, but newspapers and magazines rejected the images of 56 genitalia. Frustrating the distinctions between art and advertising became an active endeavor for Toscani who has often sought to counter criticism of his ads. When the ads did not conform to consumer expectations for advertising, the imagery and the corporation's agenda became an active topic of debate. In an effort to counter the widespread controversy and criticism that the ads evoked, Benetton officials defined the Group's advertising efforts as outside the boundaries of traditional advertising guidelines. Toscani has worked hard to establish his advertising as anomalous or not of the traditional advertising kind. This anomalous state will cause controversy. As noted earlier, corporate officials' rhetoric states that his advertising is not advertising but is communication on social issues, and he has said that his advertising is not advertising but art. Ironically, Toscani argues for his own anomalous status but seems to fume when people find his advertising unacceptable for the forum. Essentially, his work does not "walk like a duck" but does "walk in a duck-like manner." It does not "talk like a duck" but does "talk in a duck-like manner." People then want to view and evaluate the work as a "duck." Viewers process information according to their understanding of what it means to be a "duck." Toscani, however, vehemently argues that "It is not a duck!" Toscani seems to want to create new labels and categories. Ultimately, he offers his own metaphor of trying to get out of the vicious circle of

advertising, "We are still a donkey, but we don't want to scratch against other donkeys" (quoted in Kuhn).

One of the most significant claims that Toscani proposes concerning his consumer advertising is that it is not created to sell. He expresses no concern for company sales and claims that he does not produce ad work in order to sell Benetton's product. He states, "The instructions I received didn't indicate selling as a target. Therefore I am free to create as I see fit" (Mainichi Shimbun, 11/9/91, quoted in Pinson and Tibrewala 17). In fact, Toscani believes that if the advertising industry is to achieve its potential, it should not be preoccupied by commercial concerns:

Creative people shouldn't even think of selling. The world needs much more creativity than anything else; the madness of today might be the incredible industrial product of tomorrow. (quoted in O'Byrne)

Once freed from the cumbersome concerns of sales, Toscani suggests that true creativity may be unleashed.

By verbally disassociating himself from responsibility for company sales, Toscani believes that his advertising transcends the selling of the product. He argues that his work is that of corporate communication and readily points to the company's lack of market research to support his disinterest in whether or not the advertising sells clothes. "Research?" he asks. "We try to do the very opposite You have to have the courage to make mistakes. Everything about us is about impulse, about gut" (quoted in O'Leary 30). He adds, "You know, market research and all that—we're against that because it brings mediocrity. We go for pure instinct" (quoted in O'Byrne). Finally, Toscani states, "I am responsible for the company's communications; I am not really responsible for its economics" (quoted in Giroux 11). This final comment further attempts to compartmentalize the company's activity.

Ira Matathiah, chief executive of Chiat/Day Inc., comments that Toscani's view opposes traditional understandings of advertising and questions the practicality of Toscani's view:

The notion that creative somehow stands aside from the marketing and selling process is something I think is anathema to the way most of us think about our roles in the overall communication process. (Scotland, "Benetton's")

Typically, the sign of effective creative contributions in advertising directly relates to the ability of that material to create interest and inspire purchasing decisions.

In support of Matathiah's reading of the Benetton advertising, it is obvious that Benetton's advertising operates within a capitalistic economy. To suggest that somehow the company's advertising circumvents selling goods seems nonsensical. Art, advertising, and media all come down to selling products. Benetton's advertising cannot operate without regard to sales, not because the company represents some revolutionary advertising strategy, but because sales are an essential part of the cultural matrix in a capitalistic economy.

Toscani's interest in creating rather than selling reflects the Benetton Group's philosophy of retailing, which downplays the selling side. President Luciano Benetton and company developed a production and distribution system that allowed the company to franchise stores to local retailers through company agents, which enabled the company to remain uninvolved in the actual customer purchase of Benetton's products. Luciano claimed in his book, *Io e i miei fratelli*, that the company did not want to become directly involved in the selling side so when it was time to open stores, the company called upon friends with financial resources who moved into that area (Pinson and Tibrewala 5).

In addition to this corporate philosophy, Luciano Benetton also developed a strategy for entering new markets that reduced the need for direct advertising. This strategy entails using store placements to create an observable presence of the Benetton name in a given locale. Company agents establish a lead store and cover the area with additional shops offering Benetton products. Ultimately, this store placement creates a sense of there being a Benetton store on every corner. For example, Milan alone has over 45 stores.

With the proposed reduction of direct advertising, the company seems to feel free to be creative in advertising without the pressure of sales directly relating to the advertising's effects. Luciano Benetton argues that the best advertising for his products is where his stores are in the streets of the world's main cities: "That is where we promote the products and the prices. Not in the ads" (*CB News*, 6/28/93, in Pinson and Tibrewala 15). Luciano further explained in "Franchising: How Brand Power Works":

I discovered that, even if the brand was unknown, seeing three or four of our shops in one town would give a feeling of security equivalent to a good advertising campaign We prefer small spaces . . . a very limited selection, in a store that's always crowded, if possible. We want a lot of people looking at the same thing, watching others buying clothes. (quoted in Pinson and Tibrewala 5)

This philosophy of shop placement and store size was particularly effective in European markets but became a problem in achieving long-term success in American markets.

When people criticize the company's capitalist agenda of using controversial imagery to sell its product, Luciano Benetton asserts, "I have no idea of the correlation between the new campaign and how much money we are making. That is absolutely not the point. There are too many pictures of clothes in magazines already, we just wanted to

do something different" (quoted in White). The company's efforts to do something different demonstrate a challenge to social issues advertising. Benetton violates the territories determining which agencies are allowed to use provocative images to further social causes, and the company challenges the bounds of tolerance in consumer advertising. Michael Green, creator of the previously discussed Holocaust exhibition campaign, complicates the issues surrounding shock advertising when he criticized the Benetton Group's long-standing advertising efforts. He states, "Benetton's use of shock tactics isn't justified. They use very controversial images but the clothes and the shop are very middle of the road and bland. They have robbed an Aids charity of some impact" (quoted in Garret). Green's suggestion that somehow only charities or social organizations ought to be allowed to use shock tactics seems to undermine the fact that his own Holocaust campaign does not necessarily promote a cause and is for an institution that stands to make money off of the resulting promotion. Does his use of Holocaust imagery somehow then take away from the Anti-Defamation League, a human rights organization, or any other agency dealing with the issues of Jews or Holocaust survivors?

Ultimately, the Benetton Group attempts to create a new category in advertising for its promotional material. Benetton proposes a manner of treating anomaly that Douglas would label as "positive." Those who perceive the distinction in Benetton's advertising and then condemn it would treat the anomaly negatively. Obviously, these two opposing charges conflict. The fact that some people view the advertising as negatively as they do would suggest that advertising violations pose a potentially dangerous threat to the institution of advertising and the market place. Douglas explains

that by deciphering anomaly, people strengthen their convictions for classifying stimuli. By advocating the inappropriateness of Benetton's consumer advertising, which relies on social issues to gain audience attention, definitions of what should be allowed are then mediated by advertising's governing agencies, publications, news media, the judicial system, and viewers. Bob Garfield of *Advertising Age* claims that the January 2000 campaign featuring photographs of U.S. prisoners on death row wears a different label than the company proposes:

There is no escaping that this effort, like all of its pretentious predecessors, is fundamentally brand-image advertising. Not journalism. Not art. Not politics. Not public service. It is promotion—ambitious, provocative, challenging self promotion . . . no brand has the right to increase its sales on the backs of . . . condemned men and women, much less their slaughtered victims. (Diaz)

Garfield's opinion that no one brand or company has the right to use these subjects for consumer advertising and company gain encapsulates the essence of the debate generated by its anomalous status in social issues advertising. Toscani counters oppositional opinion concerning his advertising by noting that it is possible to have an alternative message within the advertising media:

It can't be more simple than this, and they're [the advertising images] strong These are people who are on the edge. They are to be eliminated, so it is touching. It's not for me to say if they are innocent or guilty. If I did this in an editorial, it wouldn't shock. It shocks just because it is in the advertising world. (quoted in Diaz)

Toscani essentially argues for the freedom to expand the boundaries of consumer advertising. He notes, "People's expectations and tolerance levels are changing They're starved for something new and different to shake us from complacency Benetton represents the fringe of a new kind of advertising" (quoted in Conover). This

“new kind of advertising” will be explored more fully in the following chapters that address in detail the AIDS-related promotional campaigns of United Colors of Benetton.

CHAPTER 3: THE DAVID KIRBY AD

We too were confronted with the problem of deciding whether to publish the campaign images or not and we decided to do so. Because we think that advertising can only be censored when it wounds mass sensitivity. And Benetton only “wounds” one thing in mass, the rule of the game of a flat and, by now, too usual message¹ (*COLORS* No.6)

In 1992, United Colors of Benetton sparked controversy with the launch of the spring/summer advertising campaign that defied traditional advertising norms and attempted to draw attention to social issues around the world. The campaign consisted of a series of seven representations and included photographs of the following: an Indian couple wading through a flood in Bangladesh, photographed by Steve McCurry; a bombed car in Sicily, by Gian Luigi Bellini; Albanian refugees leaping from a ship, by an unknown photographer; an African guerrilla soldier holding a human thigh bone in a prison camp in Liberia, by Patrick Robert; people searching through a trash container in Liberia, also by Patrick Robert; the aftermath of a mafia killing in Palermo, by Franco Zecchin; and Therese Frare's photograph of AIDS activist David Kirby close to death while being held in the arms of his father.

These seven images offer unique representations of situations and conditions around the world that the Benetton Group believes need attention. The company book, *Global Vision*, indicates, “Nothing has shaken world opinion in relation to advertising as much as this campaign.” Five of the seven images were banned in various countries; McCurry’s photo of an Indian couple and Roberts’ photo of people sorting through trash were the only two uncensored. Some inspired lawsuits, such as the one filed by the family of a Sicilian Mafioso, Bendetto Grado, murdered in 1983. Commented Grado’s daughter, Rosalia, one of the women photographed mourning the death, “What has the

¹ P. Rothenbuhler commented in the February 24, 1992, edition of *Schweizer Illustrierte* and quoted in *COLORS* No. 6.

tragedy of my father got to do with selling jeans?" (quoted in "Benetton Case"). This question resonates with viewers who attempt to determine the possibility of a corporation selflessly promoting social issues in promotional campaigns.

The 1992 fall/winter campaign also consisted of photojournalistic images that attempted to bring attention to worldwide issues. Imagery included the following: a photograph of an albino Zulu by Yves Gellie; a picture of a bird covered in oil from the Gulf War oil spills by Steve McCurry; Jean-Pierre Laffont's image of children building a wall with bricks; a photograph of a KGB interview of a Russian mafia informant by Hans Jürgen Burkard; a picture of a coal dust-covered girl holding a doll by Simona Cali Cocuzza; and Gustavo Gilabert's photo of pigs in Peru foraging in a garbage heap. The images were chosen for their visual appeal and their universal quality. Toscani explains how he formed this 1992 campaign:

I leafed through newspapers and magazines from all over the world, examining thousands of photographs. Gradually I eliminated those pictures which—albeit significant—were too closely identified with a specific event, time or recognizable place. In fact, through my search, I followed standards of selection known to all photojournalists. ("Why I")

Toscani's search led him to timeless albeit provocative images that he explains take on added value when they are placed in the context of Benetton advertising. He asserts that they possess the ability to present to a worldwide audience the searing and contradictory elements of our common experience. He claims that the ads of the second grouping offer a fertile campaign and states, "It's not as obvious as the last one, and because it's ambiguous you have to look twice to draw meaning" (quoted in O'Leary 31).

The photojournalists behind these images each document a specific problem or tension in areas around the world. For the most part, the photographers had a clear mission in documenting the subjects that they captured. For instance, Steve McCurry indicates that he attempted to capture the environmental "sadness" and destruction

surrounding the oil spill catastrophes of the Gulf War. Jean Pierre-Laffont too strove to document social ills by addressing international child labor violations. He cites that fifty-two million children under the age of twelve labor from eight to twelve hours daily around the world. Pierre-Laffont indicates that his mission was to capture these abuses and expresses his frustration in trying to get publications to print his series:

Curiously the leading international magazines have shown little interest in the photographs, and considered them too sad but mostly too telling. It is a real pity! Before embarking on my journey I read the Declaration of Rights of children. I can honestly testify that in every country I visited the children's rights are totally and blatantly violated.

The Benetton Group's reprinting of a photograph in his series allows Pierre-Laffont to broach the topic of child labor violations on a broader scale.

The other photojournalists whose work was used in Benetton's campaign also cite their interest in documenting social concerns. Hans Jürgen Burkard captured his photograph of the KGB interview while traveling for months with special police who combat organized crime in Russia. Burkard concludes that inadequate funding and supplies for the police, as well as corrupt politicians, are part of Russia's problem. In addition, Simona Cali Cocuzza's photograph of a coal dust-covered child was part of an effort to capture the lives of people tormented by years of repression and guerilla warfare in El Salvador, and Gustavo Gilabert's photograph of a garbage dump was part of an attempt to unearth links to disease and cholera in Peru.

All of these photographs from this campaign and the previous one, attest to the reality and social issues that people experience worldwide. The "ambiguity" of the second campaign seemed to lead to less criticism concerning the actual images to which the company drew consumers' attention. The photograph, however, that caused the most reaction from viewers and created the most controversy was part of the first 1992 campaign. The image of David Kirby resides as one of Benetton's most controversial

advertisements and offers the most fertile ground to explore Benetton's role within activist advertising practice. The image of David Kirby and his family centers on AIDS issues and representation. Ultimately, the use of this image seemed to launch the Benetton Group on a journey of involvement in an activist agenda.

In this chapter I first discuss Benetton's appropriation of images from the photojournalism genre for its 1992 campaign. I then describe and interpret the campaign's most controversial image, the one of David Kirby. In this study of the Kirby ad, I offer a story of the photograph itself and its relation to the photographer, the subjects, the Benetton Group, and AIDS activism. I discuss the regulation of this advertisement, and explore criticisms of the ad's use and representation. Finally, I account for the controversy surrounding the ad in relation to its role in activist advertising practice.

BENETTON'S APPROPRIATION

The Benetton Group has introduced nontraditional imagery in the advertising forum in order to break through the overwhelming visual display consumers face daily. To capture the interest of viewers, Toscani presents the unexpected. In the 1992 spring/summer and fall/winter campaigns, Toscani used a technique called appropriation to gain viewers' attention by placing imagery from another venue into advertisements for the United Colors of Benetton.

Henry Sayre defines appropriation as the art critical word for the reliance on antecedent work. He defines appropriation as "mechanical" and not "creative" nor "original." Sayre posits that the artist is at least as much a "seer" as a "maker" in that the artist recognizes the aesthetic in the world and frames it. Within collage, the artist attempts to collapse distinctions of high and low art by allowing components of both to exist together. Sayre notes, "In contemporary appropriation, . . . high art is not so much

undermined or subverted as it is recognized to be complicitous with, involved in the same operations as, mass cultural images and artifacts" (20).

For example, Marcel Duchamp offered an ironic challenge to the notion of artistic originality with his "Fountain" piece. Duchamp introduced the idea of the "ready-made," a mass-produced found object that he chose to display as his own art. Duchamp's 1917 "Fountain" creation is perhaps the most famous example of appropriation. A display at the Seattle Art Museum indicates that Duchamp purchased a J.L. Mott Iron Works porcelain urinal at a hardware store and then made it into an art piece by setting the urinal on its back and signing it "R. Mutt." The New York Society of Independent Artists refused the exhibition, and controversy surrounding the piece then helped to focus "artistic" attention to Duchamp's work. Alfred Stieglitz photographed "Fountain" for his avant garde art magazine, *The Blind Man*. Louise Norton wrote an accompanying essay that praised "Fountain" and its "pleasant" formal qualities and compared its "chaste" simplicity to the lines of "a lovely Buddha."

In the instance of Benetton's 1992 campaign, Oliviero Toscani offered an advertising campaign that, like Duchamp's work, reintroduced artifacts into a new context. In his appropriation of previously published photojournalistic images into the advertising realm, Toscani attempted to collapse the two genres. This collapse served to blur the distinction between the two in a way that can be equated to the collapse of high and low art forms and the purposes of each. His work showed how the two are similar or complicitous in their sponsorship of imagery and their link to commerce, particularly with Benetton's logo boldly affixed to each photograph.

In this instance, Toscani became a seer who determined the potential for the imagery beyond its normal confines. Toscani's "ready-made" was the photograph of Kirby, which he electronically colorized and signed "United Colors of Benetton." In fact *Global Vision* describes the poster of Kirby as "the work of Oliviero Toscani" and makes no mention of the photographer, Therese Frare, who originally captured the image at the Pater Noster House. The book references the photo as originally a monochrome picture that was colorized through an electronic process but gives no credit to the woman who took the photograph.

Toscani explained the effect of his appropriation on audience members and reasoned that if you see a news photo of fighting in Sarajevo within its news context, the image conforms to your expectations that accept that shocking violence in the news is normal. But when that same image is taken out of the news and a Benetton label is placed on it, people become re-sensitized to the issue (O'Leary 29). The re-sensitization, however, is troubling to viewers because the advertising imagery exists outside of viewers' expectations of what fashion advertising should look like.

Vicki Goldberg also suggests that Benetton's appropriation of the photographs into the advertisement sector blurs the line between advertising and news. She notes that advertising and news have been inching into each other's territories for years, though Benetton's 1992 campaign meshes the two in an overt way. Specifically, Goldberg explains that news photographs have strayed from their moorings throughout history partly because, copyright laws notwithstanding, the images really belong to everyone. The history of our century is encoded into photographic images filed into our minds and shared by members of the common culture. One need not venture far through the past to

find images of Jack Ruby shooting Lee Harvey Oswald or a Chinese dissident holding up a hand to stop a line of tanks. Goldberg continues that the use of these images guarantees instant connection and social commentary. Because this imagery is so powerful, it does not lose meaning when it is radically displaced, though it does cause controversy when the intention for using the imagery is ambiguous.

Photojournalism executes a news function by definition that also seems to contribute to the definitions and distinctions of art. Journalistic photographs have been hung in museums and celebrated, a practice that adds depth to their role of reporting on the world. The distinction of photojournalism as artistic expression authenticates the replication of reality in socially relevant ways. For instance, James Nachtwey's war reportage from El Salvador at the International Center of Photography in 1989 was too bloody for most publications to reproduce but was welcomed by art audiences. The introduction of photojournalism in the advertising realm then attempts to reinforce the news component of the photographs themselves, but it also opens the door for Benetton officials to explain the offerings as socially relevant artistic expressions.

Benetton's advertising is often labeled "political advertising" because the company pairs unexpected imagery with provocative placements. The exact political message is not always clear, and discussion often revolves around the politics of a company addressing social issues through advertising. The Benetton Group explains that the images are presented to document the realities of the day and to encourage a dialogue. The company's promotional materials violate the distinctions of news, selling, and social commentary and lead to efforts to categorize the company's promotion. For instance, Goldberg writes concerning the 1992 advertising campaign, "the bombed-out car, the

ship and the illness are undeniably news, the logo indisputably an ad" (33). The ambiguity in what viewers are supposed to do upon viewing the news/ad also contributes to the controversy of Benetton's style of advertising.

THE DAVID KIRBY AIDS AD

The storyline of the David Kirby photograph is distinct from that of the other images Benetton used in the 1992 campaigns. The other imagery of the campaigns tends to focus on objects, animals, parts of bodies, large groups of people, or those situated within a public space. This ad, however, focuses on the death event of an AIDS activist. This image has created the most controversy, though several other images within the campaigns have been banned. The photograph was perhaps the only "staged" representation of the campaign and began as part of a class project for a graduate student. The Kirby photograph was the only photograph in the series to be colorized to fit into the aesthetic feel of the campaign. The work essentially captures a traditionally private moment of grief and death, topics typically omitted from advertising, and attempts to document the experience of the Kirby family.

The "story" of the advertisement begins with the work of Therese Frare while she was a graduate student at Ohio University in the spring of 1990. Frare began her involvement at the Pater Noster House, the location of the photo, as a volunteer. She volunteered at the AIDS hospice with the hope that eventually her association might work into a photography project. Frare notes that at the time, people were a bit leery of letting someone come into the facility and take pictures. But as Pater Noster started allowing the media in, Frare began taking photographs of the residents. Frare notes that

for the residents, "It was the time to tell some stories" (Personal interview). And Frare became a ready agent in that story-telling process.

Frare's role as a photographer capturing the image becomes a central factor in the creation of this art event. Yet, the performance begins with a body that has its own narrative voice. For the Kirby photograph, the story began with David Kirby. Both David Kirby and Therese Frare became collaborative producers in this project when Kirby asked Frare to document his battle against diseases that ravaged his body. For in as much as Kirby became a part of Frare's photography project, Frare became a part of Kirby's mission to create AIDS awareness. Frare positioned herself as a participant-observer within the Pater Noster facility and yielded an image representative of Kirby's experience and one that she and Kirby hoped would be relevant to other people with AIDS and their family's experiences. Their combined efforts readily speak to the collaborative nature of activist work and its focus on the community. It is this community activity that resounded through the use of this photograph as an advertisement and furthered Kirby's original activist work.

Kirby's invitation to Frare to photograph his battle with AIDS seems to augment his active interests in educating the public about AIDS and supporting the rights of people with AIDS. Previously, Kirby had launched the Ohio AIDS Foundation and lectured vigorously about AIDS awareness. He spoke to health care workers, civic groups and schoolteachers about how HIV is spread and how to avoid contracting it. He combated the ignorance and fear that confronts people with AIDS. Barb Cordle, volunteer nurse and director of the Pater Noster House, said that David wanted to put a

face on AIDS and that he wanted to eliminate deep-seated fears against people with AIDS and against homosexuals (Curry).

The idea to "give AIDS a face" or "to bring AIDS home" is part of an early activist position that one of the central problems of AIDS and one of the things activists needed to combat was bureaucratic abstraction. Thus, the portraiture of people with AIDS became something of a genre. The fixation of some on what the ravages of AIDS look like led protesters to object to AIDS representations involving sickness. In ACT UP's protest against Nicholas Nixon's serial of photographs on people with AIDS shown at New York's Museum of Modern Art, members demanded, "STOP LOOKING AT US: START LISTENING TO US." (This instance is documented thoroughly in Douglas Crimp's "Portraits of People with AIDS.")

Kirby's own experience demonstrates the extent of ignorance in the small town of Stafford, Ohio, where he went home to die. Cheryl Curry reports that when Kirby first got sick and people learned that he had AIDS, the emergency crew who rushed him to the hospital later burned the ambulance's contents. Area schoolchildren even spread the rumor that an AIDS monster lurked in the town. Myths, misinformation, and biases such as these concerning HIV and AIDS circulate around communities, and activists such as Kirby have battled fervently to dispel these fallacies.

Kirby's campaign continued throughout his four-year battle with AIDS. At Kirby's request, Frare then captured the last moments of Kirby's life as his family gathered around his bedside. Frare notes, "I felt honored to be able to do this for him and his family" (quoted in Curry). Because of her relationship with the Pater Noster House and her association with Kirby, Frare captured a natural pose of the family interacting.

Frare then submitted the black and white photograph to *Life* magazine where it was chosen to run in the November 1990 edition. Though the image itself won several international photojournalism awards, including the World Photo Award, David Kirby's family received no special recognition or responses from viewers. That changed, however, when Benetton ran a colorized version of the photograph as an advertisement. After the ad ran, hundreds of people began contacting the family by phone and by letter (Curry).

Oliviero Toscani, Creative Director at Benetton, reportedly discovered Frare's photograph while leafing through newspapers and magazines from all over the world. According to Genevieve Buck, Toscani sifted through some 50,000 stock photos to search for images that Toscani deemed to reflect the reality of life. He explained, "I wanted to put together a series of images that would tell us a little part of the problems and concerns we face every day" (quoted in M. Moore). The company believed that AIDS was an important topic, so the company introduced the ad to expand its vocabulary of images. Luciano Benetton, president of the company, said that Frare's photograph was chosen for its power and humanity and to prove to the world that the company was not out to shock people gratuitously (White). Ultimately, the company viewed the advertisement as an opportunity to donate to the AIDS cause.

After Toscani discovered Frare's photograph, the Group contacted Frare who in turn contacted the Kirby family to discuss the company's use of the imagery in an advertising campaign. The family agreed to the use of the photograph and noted that David would have enthusiastically supported the idea of reaching thousands of people with his AIDS message (Curry). Commented Frare, "To me the Kirbys' support is

everything Without it, I don't know what the photograph means. With it, I think it means a lot. Here's a family that had enough courage to invite me into an incredibly personal moment, and then share it with everyone else, because it was in keeping with their son's work and their own" (quoted in Span). The activist motivation in publishing the photograph on a broad scale reinforced the aim of sending out a message. As Frare notes, "It's a sad image, but it's very moving. It really conveys the Kirbys' belief that you can't turn away your kids—you have to accept them no matter what" (quoted in Curry). Though the image came to be known as "the AIDS ad," the company labeled the piece "Family," thereby recognizing the importance of positive AIDS representations.

The "Family" imagery consists of a young man in his thirties lying in what appears to be a hospital bed. The man's body lies at an angle with the head positioned toward the upper left side of the photograph and his body extended to the lower right corner. A white blanket with a faint plaid print over a brown and white floral sheet covers the man's body and is turned down at the man's upper torso. The outline of the man's body is not readily apparent under the covers, though his torso appears to be elevated slightly by pillows or the bed. The man wears a white gown that is visible at the shoulders. His bony left forearm and left and right hands rest on top of the covers. The man's left forearm wears a black digital watch that emphasizes his thin wrist. A female right arm bearing a black sleeve reaches from the left, and the hand, wearing a pinkie ring, holds the right wrist of the man in the bed.

The man's left elbow is held by an older man (probably in his fifties) who leans toward the figure on the bed from the side of the bed across from the partially included female. The older man wears a black short-sleeved t-shirt and leans forward to rest his

torso against the side rails of the bed as he cradles the younger man's head with his right arm. The older man's right thumb rests on the younger man's right ear and the older man's fingers extend along the beard line of the younger man. The older man rests his right temple and nose against the forehead of the younger man. The older man's eyes are closed and his mouth hangs slightly open with the lower half of his face slightly contorted. The older man's hand and face frame the younger man's gaunt face, which is framed by his own dark brown hair, moustache, and beard. The younger man seems to gaze unseeingly with his brown eyes, while his mouth remains fallen open. Underneath his chin, the younger man's right hand seems to hold the covers ineffectually.

A small picture (around 11" X 16") hangs on the wall above the father's head. The picture shows two lavender robed arms and hands extending outward and downward. A bright yellow and white background surrounds the reaching hands. The frame of the photographed image cuts off the frame and top of this picture. Behind the older man some kind of toy or machinery can be partially seen in the corner. Along the adjacent wall a brown door provides a background for the other couple in Frare's photograph. Next to the older man sits a heavy-set woman in her late thirties wearing a tie-dyed light blue and pink shirt. Above her head (or in her hair) is a bunch of white daisies. The woman embraces a young girl of about eleven who wears a white t-shirt. The woman's left hand rests along the left side of the girl's head and draws her to the bosom of the woman. The woman's right arm reaches to hold the left shoulder of the girl toward her. The girl's left hand rests on the bed railing while her elbow hangs downward. The girl's gaze is directed toward the man lying in the bed, and her lips are parted. The woman embracing the girl directs her gaze across the bed at the person whose hand is visible.

The woman's face appears emotionally affected through the slight contortion of her eyes and forehead and the mouth with lips pressed together.

The ad offers viewers an image that seems to be of intense emotions and grief. The older man's obviously emotional response to the young man in the bed and the woman's response to the unseen person across the bed mark this scene as one of sadness. The gaunt features and expression of the man in the bed, as well as the accompanying concern of those surrounding his bed scene, suggest that the man is near death. He does not seem fully present due to his blank gaze, but the obvious presence of his family resounds in the manner in which the older man holds the younger man close. The embrace seems to be captured in time in such a manner that if the movement were to have continued, a viewer could imagine the older man speaking reassurances to the younger man. Those surrounding the bed seem to offer assurance, presence, and care for the man dying in the bed.

The image itself offers no immediate clues to determine the relationship of the attendants. The older man cradling the head of the younger man could be lover, father, friend, though one hesitates to say brother because of the age difference. The aged female hand reaching in from the opposite side of the bed seems to dispute the older man's position as lover, and a viewer might reasonably conclude that the two older parties are related. One might speculate that this older couple is the younger man's parents. The woman to the side of the father could then be read as a sister or friend to the man in the bed. One could speculate that this woman might also be the younger man's wife and the child his daughter, but the attendants' positions might need rearranging to place the woman closer to the man in order to give that reading resonance. The woman's intense

gaze at the party on the other side of the bed seems to dispute the "wife" reading as well, because her focus of concern is so apparently directed at the other person and not her "husband." A resemblance between the eyes of the young man and woman suggests they are brother and sister. The woman holding the girl in her protective care suggests that the two are mother and daughter. The mother's protective arms allow the daughter to gaze at the sick man, but the comfort of her body is readily present to shield her daughter from the viewing.

The green box of Benetton's logo, "United Colors of Benetton," sits underneath the woman's right hand and along the back of the young girl. Additional copy printed in small type reads, "Our spring/summer 1992 edition of *Colors* magazine is now available," and includes an 800 number to call for the nearest store.

The appearance of the young man and his attendants offers a marked contrast in terms of health and wellness. The young man's lack of alertness, his haggard features, and his emaciated body disappearing from view oppose the full, fleshy, and expressive bodies of those attending him. His presence is marked by absence, while those surrounding are ample in their attendance. The prognosis for this man is death from speculated causes.

Religious imagery seems to resonate throughout this photograph and has inspired the company to name the image, *AIDS: A Modern-day "Pieta."* The young man in his early thirties bears a striking resemblance to the traditional representations of the Christ figure that feature a pale and gaunt face, long hair and beard, white gown, and thin frame. The celestial picture of hands that hangs above the father's head also supports the religious imagery. The hands, surrounded by a bright light, are reaching out to the young

man. The hands offer acceptance and an invitation to the man and family. These hands offer the symbolic love of God to all men and to this sick man in particular—to invite him to heaven. This religious picture on the wall, probably not one hung by the family, suggests that the room is one of a Catholic facility. The black shirt of the father and the black sleeve of the unseen woman lend a solemnity and spirituality to the moment. Though wearing only a t-shirt, the older man could easily add a collar to his attire to suggest the presence of a priest and symbolic father of the church.

The reading of the photograph becomes even clearer when paired with information surrounding the situation and scene itself. Many viewers, however, did not have this information upon the initial viewings. Viewers were upset with a number of issues concerning Benetton's use of the advertisement, which include the exploitation of the Kirby family, Benetton's method of activist advertising, the representation of people with AIDS, the use of religious symbolism, and the commercial gain of the company. Though the ad was meant to stand on its own, without explanation, the Benetton Group confronted criticism of the advertisement through press conferences and interviews with the press.

THE AD'S REGULATION

In order to contextualize the criticism aimed at Benetton, I first document the manner in which regulating bodies and agencies censored the ad. Many advertising authorities throughout Europe condemned the ad, including Italy's *Guiri di Autodisciplina Pubblicitaria*, Holland's *Stichting Reclame Code*, Spain's *Resoluciones de Autocontrol de la Publicidad*, the UK's Advertising Standard Authority, LTD., France's *Bureau de Verification de la Publicite*, and Belgium's *Jury D'Ethique Publicitaire (Global)*. These

groups advised magazine and newspaper publishers and poster contractors to refuse the placement of the advertisement.

A spokeswoman for the British ASA commented that the Benetton campaign featured images of highly sensitive, emotional, and tragic situations which most advertisers in Britain would not want to use or be associated with ("British"). Caroline Crawford, also of the ASA, stated, "If people don't see the connection between a clothing company and a sensitive subject like death and AIDS, it is almost bound to cause offense" (quoted in "Benetton Set"). She cites the AIDS ad as one of "pure exploitation of scenes of tragedy and would be highly likely to cause great distress [to the viewing public]" (quoted in Mead, "Watchdog"). This ruling fell within British general decency policy. Many of the agencies listed above are self-regulatory bodies with no legal power. Despite the agencies' advisory, several publications ran the imagery throughout Europe.

The French magazine, *Max*, featured the advertisement and editor Nicolas Finet was quoted in the February 8, 1992, edition of *Strategies*: "Our readers, those between 15 and 30 years old, are directly affected by this topic. This campaign is one way of approaching the AIDS problem while avoiding the socio-medical aspect. Our readers' letters have shown that we were not wrong" (quoted in Pinson and Tibrewala 11). In addition, Switzerland's *Schweizer Illustrierte* accepted the ad and said that it did not hurt mass sensitivity but "wounded only one thing: the rules of the games according to which the message must be dull, stale even" (quoted in Pinson and Tibrewala 12). These voices supporting the imagery, however, were in the minority.

Most groups followed the rulings set for this advertisement but did so after viewing the offending material themselves. Benetton booked space in British magazines

directly from its headquarters in Italy, but the company kept the magazines waiting and submitted advertising copy at the last minute. Maggie Alderson, editor of Britain's *Elle*, said, "The space was booked well in advance for our next issue, but the copy arrived very late, and when we saw it we simply said: 'No way'" (quoted in Mullin). The magazine then ran a blank double page spread with Alderson's explanation to readers that some subjects "are too personal and upsetting to be hijacked for advertising purposes" (quoted in Elliott, "Another"). Commented Alderson, "It is an incredibly moving image in the right context, but to use it as an advertisement for a fashion store selling jumpers is incredibly insulting" (quoted in Mullin). *Elle* reportedly lost £100,000 in the editorial decision to omit the ad (Boggan, "Fashion").

Another publishing group also refused to print the ad after it arrived, and Margaret Leonard, advertising director at EMAP Metro's young women's group, expressed disgust with Benetton's advertising strategy. She commented, "They are supplying the copy late from Italy deliberately to make it difficult for a publisher to back out, and it really is a pretty sick stunt." She continued, "Under no circumstances would we carry this advertisement, and the decision across each of our three publications will cost us up to [£]100,000" (quoted in Mullin). The rejection of the image by Leonard and Alderson demonstrates the ultimate veto power of editors and supports the position that Benetton's choice of imagery violates traditional advertising standards. The magazines ultimately attempted to counter the perceived gratuitous abuse of AIDS imagery for commercial gain by sacrificing their own profit margin.

Editors of other publications chose to respond to the advertisement in a different manner. The editor of *The Face*, Sheryl Garratt, ran the Benetton advertisement in its

March issue but donated the revenue gained to charity. Commented Garratt, "When everybody has seen the picture in the press anyway, there seemed no point in putting out a press release saying we'd banned it and generating even more publicity for them. At least this way we'll be putting some of Benetton's money where their mouth is" (quoted in Fielding, "Pulling"). This donation by *The Face* forwards the work of activists within the AIDS effort. Garratt's comment suggests that Benetton's interest in using this imagery was not socially motivated and implies that Benetton ought to authenticate its advertising efforts through monetary support or action that furthers AIDS causes.

Measures to police Benetton's activity reflect the sentiments of those operating within the advertising industry. Steve Boggan quotes a senior executive of the industry's trade bodies:

Everyone in the industry regards this as a despicable exploitation of a tragic situation. I have seen what has happened to Benetton's sales since they began running controversial ads—they have rocketed. I have spoken to editors, agencies and creative people and they all say they are fed up with this misuse of the medium. No one has the power to order a boycott, but, voluntarily, one is emerging. No agency in Britain will act for Benetton and now publications are turning their back on it. Soon, it will have nowhere to advertise. ("Benetton Faces")

Though the media expressed frustration with Benetton's use of shock tactics, Boggan's claim appears to be faulty. In reality, Benetton did not need agency services because the company created its own in-house agency. And publications in need of advertising revenue continued to include Benetton's advertising.

The editorial decisions to reject this particular Benetton advertisement, however, did resound through Europe. In Germany, *Elle*, *Stern*, *Tempo*, *Marie Claire*, and *Max* rejected the ad. Editors of *Annabelle* and *Femina* in Switzerland, and those of *Elle* in Holland, Portugal, Italy, and France followed suit. The French publications *Le Nouvel*

Observer and *Cosmopolitan* also refused the ad. In Spain *Cosmopolitan*, *Hola*, *Man*, *Superpop*, and *Vogue* declined the ad. The Greek *Marie Claire* denied publication, as did Italy's *Tv Sorrisi Canzoni*, *Centro Cose*, *Tutto Musica*, *Donna Moderna*, *Grazia*, and *Famiglia Cristiana (Global)*.

Since Benetton introduced the advertisement in Europe before Canada or the United States, speculation brewed concerning the advertisement's reception in North America. The campaign was revealed on February 13, 1992, and Randall Scotland proposed that the spring campaign potentially violated two clauses of the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards ("AIDS"). Scotland's assessment was based on conversation with Suzanne Keeler of the Canadian Advertising Foundation, which administers the code on behalf of advertisers, agencies, and the media. Keeler suggested that the ad potentially violated the first clause that states that advertisements must not "play upon fears." The second possible violation was against the use of demeaning or derogatory portrayals of persons with disabilities. Advertisers that breach these clauses are told by the CAF that if they do not amend or withdraw the ad, the CAF will ask the media voluntarily to not run the ad.

A February 27 letter to the editor of *The Financial Post* concerning Scotland's article claimed that the Benetton ad was misunderstood. Kari Kerr, communications manager for the Canada Advertising Foundation, wrote to put the record straight concerning the CAF's activities. She noted that the CAF was simply asked for comments concerning the new Benetton campaign and writes:

Interestingly, we have not received any complaints about this advertising. If we do, CAF has an exemplary self-regulatory procedure in place to handle public concerns about the content of advertising, through the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards The Canadian Advertising Foundation knows it is in the best interests of both the consumer and the advertising industry to encourage responsible advertising in an atmosphere openly

respecting the right to commercial free speech and minimal regulation. ("Keeping")

Peter Fressola, Benetton's director of communications in the U.S., said that Benetton would offer the advertisement to magazines in Canada and that it would be up to the discretion and judgment of the publishers whether or not to accept the ad (Scotland, "AIDS").

Benetton company executives reported no resistance to publishing the ad in the United States, where they say every magazine they approached accepted it (Associated Press). The advertisement ran in the U.S. in the March issues of *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, *Details*, *Us*, *Spin*, *Interview*, *Mademoiselle*, and *Elle*. The ad ran as part of a context campaign that included three images placed together in publications: AIDS, burning car, and Albanian refugees.

CRITICISM OF THE AD

Many critics have argued that the use of this image as an advertisement exploits, among other things, David Kirby and his family. Yet, the Kirby family has been quite vocal in clarifying their purposes and aligning their interests with the Benetton company. Genevieve Buck reported that the Kirby family understood that the advertisement would be controversial. Bill Kirby, father of David, said that, "when we were approached, we were warned and we were given time to think about it and talk it over. Everything was straightforward and honest" (quoted in Buck). Their support of the photograph and its use in an advertising capacity counters the criticism that the ad exploits Kirby and family.

In order to clarify some of the controversy surrounding the imagery's unveiling in Europe, the Benetton Group used a series of press conferences throughout the fashion capitals of the world. The series aimed to explain the campaign and began with the February 13 conference in New York City to launch the campaign in the United States. Along with Benetton officials, the Kirby family and photographer Therese Frare were present to answer questions and to speak about their interests.

At the press conference, Bill Kirby explained that the use of the image was to encourage people to become more cautious in lifestyle choices. He stated that seeing the picture is quite painful to the family, but if it makes people think and change their lifestyle to save themselves then it will have been worth it. He also noted that:

This was an opportunity to reach people—to make them think that a lot of those with AIDS are not getting the proper care. There are a lot of ways people can get involved—even a handshare [sic] will help. (quoted in Palmieri)

On another occasion, Kirby stated that the family had agreed to the photograph's use and to the press conference "because we're pushing for more involvement in the care of people with AIDS. They need loving care. AIDS is more than pain" (quoted in Buck).

Cheryl Curry writes that to the Kirbys, the startling photograph illustrates how they came to know their son as an adult and how they want the world to remember him—as a man who tried to educate people by sharing the horrors that AIDS inflicts on its victims. The Kirbys say that the image graphically informs people about how powerful a supportive family can be for people with AIDS. Photographer Therese Frare echoes this view, "It's a sad image, but it's very moving. It really conveys the Kirby's belief that you can't turn away your kids—you have to accept them no matter what" (Curry). The presence of the Kirby family in the photograph portrays how devastating AIDS can be to a family.

Bill Kirby admits, "I'm not really comfortable with the photo When I look at that picture, it brings back all the heartache. Until this winter [of 1992], I couldn't even look at it without crying" (quoted in Curry). But he argued, "people don't know the severity of AIDS. The picture tells that much more than we can" (quoted in Buck). His words obviously support the portrayal of David in the ad and the use of the imagery on a wide scale.

Some concern arose over whether or not David would have agreed to the use of this photograph by Benetton, but Kay Kirby, David's mother, says, "It's what David would have wanted You can see the family anguish, and people need to know this is reality" (quoted in Curry). This affirmation of Kirby's wishes also negates the claims of exploitation.

Barb Cordle of Pater Noster House agrees that the use of the photograph is what David would have wanted. She wrote in a letter on February 2, 1992:

For the occasionally sincere person who may honestly wonder if David would have wanted his picture in magazines on billboards or on T-shirts—I write this letter. To say yes. You had to know him. I knew him. And I loved him. I listened to his Aids education speeches and I changed his diapers. I laughed with him and I prayed with him. And I kissed him goodbye. (*Global*)

Cordle's words similarly approve of the photograph's use.

The Kirbys' decision to play an active role in advocacy has been in an effort to further their son's work. Bill Kirby said, "David had his fingers crossed that he'd live long enough to find a cure for AIDS We want to give other AIDS patients and their families the same hope" (quoted in Curry). While the image does not seem to offer a message of hope, the photograph becomes part of the Kirbys' labors to draw attention to AIDS and the issues surrounding the spread of HIV and living with AIDS.

The Kirby family viewed the use of the photograph by Benetton as an important opportunity to spread a message that would otherwise have stayed only at the local level. From the Kirbys' perspective, the Benetton advertisement served as a useful vehicle. Bill Kirby remarks favorably on the corporation's involvement:

I think more companies should have that attitude and bring issues out It doesn't make any difference what kind of company it is. It's just an opportunity to make people more aware, to change their lifestyle, to be more careful, whatever I don't want to see anyone else go through what we had there, but I know thousands will be, right this minute. People

need to have something that's a little shocking to wake them up. (quoted in Smith)

The Kirbys welcome the support of any company or group willing to enter in the effort to bring about social change. For the Kirbys, the results of the activist work that potentially shocks viewers justify the means.

Bill Kirby further explains the support of the Benetton Group in joining the family's agenda:

I worked for a company for 35 years which had a matching donor program They wouldn't match our contributions to AIDS. They'd only match cultural donations. Then along came Benetton, a company we'd never even heard of, and they've been very generous in our work. They've helped us get five houses repaired and refurbished so we could expand our housing for the homeless with AIDS, and they continue to give us clothing for them. (quoted in O'Leary)

This philanthropic activity, according to Bill Kirby, validates the company's involvement in the AIDS crisis and shows a company making a difference.

Throughout the controversy, few have cited the Kirbys' goal to increase AIDS awareness or their permission to use the photograph as an inappropriate aim. Gilbert Adair, however, offers discontent with the Kirbys' action in his article, "Arts Diary: In the Name of God, Go Stick It Up Your Jumpers":

The photograph in question is a very beautiful one, demonstrating how, in moments of extreme distress . . . ordinary people instinctively contrive to assume postures as eloquent as those imagined by the greatest painters; and it's naturally disheartening to learn that the victim's family gave (or sold) permission for Benetton to exploit it.

Adair's criticism of the Kirbys seems to lose momentum when one recognizes that the money that Benetton may have offered for the use of the photograph was immediately invested in the lives of those living with AIDS.

Canadian citizen Mike Blanchfield defends the Kirbys' motivation and redirects criticism of the photograph's use toward the Benetton Group:

No one should judge the members of the Kirby family for their motives. But you have to question whether Benetton's manipulation of the Kirby family, at a time when they are extremely vulnerable, was in the best of taste. It's not offensive that Benetton is raising social issues. What is offensive is the company's lack of commitment and usurious attitude towards them.

This criticism of Benetton stems from complaints that the company was slow to respond to AIDS issues beyond featuring the subject in advertising campaigns.

Luciano Benetton in responding to general criticism concerning the ad's usage counters:

It's very difficult to pass judgments. I received a letter from the parents of the boy saying that they were tired of people asking them if thy [sic] had been exploited by Benetton, when what they really feel is that they have exploited us to publicise the fight against Aids. (quoted in White)

Luciano's words propose that several agendas were met in the use of the photograph of the advertisement.

Whether or not Benetton has exploited the Kirbys or the Kirbys have exploited Benetton, the question might better focus on what level Benetton offers its support and expresses interest in spreading the Kirbys' cause and that of AIDS awareness. In his review of the New York press conference, Robert Parola reports that the most uncomfortable and telling moment of the press conference was when Bill Kirby got emotionally overwhelmed and no one from Benetton stepped in to help. He writes that this lack of support just seemed to focus more attention on the seeming lack of emotional involvement from the Benetton people. Their hesitation, however, may also have been due to cultural and language barriers (Parola).

Criticism of the Kirby photograph came most directly from AIDS organizations whose activist goals Benetton said it attempted to further in the promotion of AIDS awareness. A February 17, 1992, report in *Times Wire* indicated that two representatives from Gay Men's Health Crisis met with one of the ad's designers to explain their

opposition to the use of the photograph of David Kirby. After voicing their concerns, the group's representatives said that Benetton associates seemed to have already made up their minds to use the ads without revision.

This resistance or lack of flexibility on Benetton's part seemed contradictory to its voiced support of AIDS awareness, though at the time the company's advocacy was just beginning to evolve. AIDS artwork historically has been categorized by flexibility with respect to the community in which it originates. For instance, in the spring of 1988 when the AIDS art collective, Gran Fury, participated in organized protest days against homophobia, the collective proposed two historical images of same-sex couples kissing paired with the phrase, "Read My Lips." One image showed a World War II shot of sailors kissing, while the other featured a lesbian couple from a 1920s Broadway play gazing with intensity into each other's eyes. As Richard Meyer notes, several lesbians in ACT-Up pointed out that the women's graphic was troubling insofar as it reduced lesbian eroticism to a gaze, a fixed distance, a refined delicateness. While the males kissed, the females just looked (69). Gran Fury then revised the imagery placed on t-shirts to include a Victorian image of two women in the midst of a passionate embrace. Meyer comments, "Such revision was characteristic of Gran Fury's working method: the group's graphics, placed in dialogue with the larger AIDS activist movement, were open to the criticism and creative input of that movement" (69). This adaptation of AIDS materials demonstrates how the various members of the collective influence the group's materials.

Benetton's inflexibility to adapt its work contradicted a historical tradition found within the AIDS activist movement and thus violated norms. The refusal of that community's focus caused GMHC spokesman David Eng to argue that Benetton exploited AIDS to make a buck. He stated in the February 14, 1992, edition of *The Record* that, "They have taken a series of very strong and controversial and arresting images and fashioned them into a strategy to sell clothing" ("Controversial"). Eng also said, "It does raise an issue, to a certain degree, but it doesn't follow through. There's no

copy in this ad except for their logo and a line telling you what number to call for the nearest store" ("Dead"). This omission of information complicates the activist community's willingness to support the advertisement.

Eng's largest criticism was that the Benetton Group did not give people a "next step" to further the AIDS cause, such as including an AIDS hotline number to call for information or incorporating copy to urge support for local AIDS organizations. He states:

When you do issue-oriented advertising, you don't just present it and leave it at that. You have to give people a second step to take If you look at this campaign, I don't know what kind of conclusions you could draw from it other than the ultimate goal is to sell clothing. (quoted in M. Moore)

Eng raises questions about the effectiveness of Benetton's advertising in calling people to action and suggests that Benetton's ads work more as protest advertising. The criticism of Benetton's approach to activist advertising could be related to what other companies were doing concerning social issues, particularly the previously identified 1992 campaign by Esprit in which Esprit clearly included contact information for viewers interested in becoming involved with the social issue advertised.

Benetton countered the criticism of not providing a phone number or avenue for follow-up by arguing that the ad ran globally and that there is no global hotline concerning AIDS. Company officials argued that showing the picture should be enough because it has been seen by over a billion people and has stirred up discussion about AIDS worldwide (Allen).

The global outreach of Benetton's campaign, however, raises questions of universal effectiveness. Though the campaign may have been international in distribution, critics still

argue that a telephone number or additional information could have been included for each area and in the appropriate language for the country that the ad was shown. After all, Benetton did not distribute the whole series of images within the campaign universally. For instance, they chose only three of the seven ads to be shown in the United States, and Italy was the only country selected to run the mafia image. This structuring of the ads for different markets suggests that the company recognizes variances within the countries that it targets. The company's omission of additional information suggests that Benetton desired the image to speak for itself no matter what the ad said to individual viewers.

The New York-based Gran Fury also experienced the difficulties of distributing campaigns internationally with the *Je Me Souviens* artwork that members created in 1992. Gran Fury was invited by the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art to participate in the exhibition, *Pour la suite du monde*, which translates, "So That the World May Continue." Gran Fury contributed artwork that tried to connect a sense of French Canadian patriotism with the AIDS crisis in the United States, but the reception proved controversial. A spokesperson for Montreal ACT-UP, Douglas Buckley, declared that Gran Fury's poster reflected an imperialistic, American context that had nothing to do with the AIDS crisis in Quebec. He determined that the statistics, point of view, and reality of the imagery that Gran Fury used were all American and were then superimposed on some of the most potent of Quebec symbols (Meyer 80). This combination resulted in ineffective and impotent material.

In addition, Richard Meyer notes that Gran Fury's attempt to globalize its activism by producing work for such venues as Venice, Berlin, and Montreal was increasingly vexing to the collective. The problems surrounding the reception of Gran Fury's work in Montreal

reflected a dilemma that would ultimately end Gran Fury's international work. Essentially, the question arose as to how the collective could continue to produce work for foreign venues when its knowledge of the AIDS epidemic was rooted in an American—and, more specifically, a New York City-context. A member of Gran Fury comments that by the early 1990s, the collective became a kind of institution in the art world for AIDS activist work and received offers from all around the world to do projects. But the member notes that while the group could speak to the community in New York, it was extremely difficult to go to another place and address its situation (Meyer 80).

Contrary to the member's claim, Gran Fury also had problems addressing the diversity found within New York City. The collective produced a "1 in 61" poster that read:

AIDS: 1 in 61/ 1 in every 61 babies born in New York City
is born with AIDS or born HIV-antibody positive/ So why
is the media telling us that heterosexuals aren't at risk?
Because these babies are black. These babies are
Hispanic./ IGNORING COLOR IGNORES THE FACTS
OF AID. STOP RACISM. FIGHT AIDS. (Deitcher 201)

The poster was translated into Spanish, but according to Tom Kalin, the last line didn't quite translate, so in Spanish it read, "*EL SIDA no discrimina entre razas o nacionalidades. PARA EL RACISMO! LUCHE CONTRA EL SIDA!*" This translation means "AIDS does not discriminate against race or nationality. FOR THE RACISM! FIGHT AGAINST AIDS!" Kalin notes, "I think it's also important to talk about the translation of that poster because I remember that the voice of the Spanish translation was a very different voice. It was much more like a savvy, accusatory thing" (quoted in Deitcher 201). The differences in translation created a subtle variance in cues that then affected interpretations.

Gran Fury member Loring McAlpin further explains how the collective's efforts to cross New York's subcultures challenged the focus of the group:

It's something that we did struggle with for a while because at a certain point we wanted to start reaching out to other communities. But we had to be realistic about the extent to which we could do that in the group with no Spanish speakers. It was a problem simply realizing that there was a lot of work that needed to be done for those communities and that we had to think before stepping in to do it. How could we understand what their issues really were? (quoted in Deitcher 201-202)

McAlpin suggests that the collective's work required extensive preparation and research to have an impact.

Questions concerning the universality of imagery and artwork pose complications for the reception of Gran Fury's pieces. If viewers interpret the works in a manner vastly different from the producers' intentions, then the effectiveness of the effort may be reduced. Gran Fury's efforts, as well as the efforts of Benetton's advertising campaign, became ready targets of criticism when viewers believed that other strategies would have been more effective. Additionally, viewers were critical when they thought that the imagery did not speak to their experience and when they felt that the work presented did more harm than good. The Kirby advertisement is one example that was criticized at all these levels. Evans and Riyait published a study in 1993 that investigated the concept of "universal" readings of Benetton's global advertisements. While the study did not include imagery from the 1992 campaign, the imagery tested did include ads without text that the Benetton Group meant viewers to interpret universally. The quantitative study compared the interpretations of four national groups of students: British, Norwegian, French, and German. Results showed that the four groups' interpretations of the advertisements were not only different from Benetton's proposed meanings but different from each other as well. Toscani's telling comment concerning the task of viewing Benetton ads dramatizes the challenge of finding similarity within interpretations: "Our advertising is a Rorschach test of what you bring to the images" (quoted in O'Leary).

Essentially, Toscani claims that the meaning of the advertisements relies solely on the viewer's interpretation.

The concept of using a "universal" campaign to address AIDS issues becomes a problem for addressing an international audience. The extended reach of HIV infection and the impacts involved with efforts to stop its spread pose problems in implementing effective global campaigns. Marie St. Cyr-Delphe recognizes the challenges inherent to international AIDS efforts:

HIV, which knows no social or economic barriers, no political ideology, and recognizes no skin colour, is planting seeds of destruction in communities, nations, and continents throughout the world. Yet each nation must face the challenges in the context of its own historical, cultural, economic, social, and political realities. (63)

As St. Cyr-Delphe notes, the most striking challenge of the AIDS epidemic is that each country, and even regions within countries, experiences a different reality of HIV infection and AIDS. Infection and treatment issues run the spectrum: drug use, multiple sexual partners, refusal to use condoms, refusal to be tested, health care for people with AIDS, stigma of HIV/AIDS diagnoses, inadequate funding for educational campaigns, and monetary support to find a cure. The factors that surround HIV/AIDS are as diverse as the many countries and cultures that are affected.

For instance, a study conducted in December of 1988 found that intravenous drug users accounted for 2/3 of AIDS cases in Italy, while gays accounted for only one in six. This situation in Italy varies greatly from HIV infection in areas of Africa or the United States and even other parts of Europe. David Moss notes that the transmission route of HIV infection through drug users has further implications for the contours of the problem and the responses. First, it leads to a more variegated infected population than elsewhere—women, children, and heterosexuals. Second, the average age of AIDS cases is lower in Italy than in some other countries because introduction to drug use begins

young. Finally, the third significant aspect of the distribution of AIDS is its geographical spread within the country. These distinctions for HIV infection in Italy suggest that in order to address effectively the problem of HIV infection in that country, a specialized plan must be implemented. Barbara Misztal and David Moss surveyed the national policies set up to act on AIDS and concluded:

In each society HIV infection has been portrayed as linked firmly, if never exclusively, with a particular social group or category: gays in the United States, ivdus [iv drug users] in Italy, prostitutes in Central Africa, foreign students in Belgium and Eastern Europe An obvious factor relevant to responses is the particular national profile of HIV infection and AIDS cases, which may not only vary considerably among countries grouped together in global statistics but is liable to progressive or discontinuous changes along several dimensions. (237-238)

Essentially, productive AIDS action will go beyond obvious "risk" groups to target effective prevention in relation to the diversity within specific cultures and subcultures.

The idea of a "global" campaign to address "the" AIDS problem is unfortunately unrealistic. Benetton's effort to use an image that conveys the "universal" concept of AIDS leading to death is ultimately problematic in addressing the variation in responses to HIV/AIDS. For instance, how will portraying a death due to AIDS related illnesses influence those people who refuse to be tested for HIV? Those people who deny the likelihood of infection or who do not want to know that they are infected would not seem easily swayed by information that, from their perspective, has no relationship to them. Benetton's follow-up efforts (detailed in chapter five), however, demonstrate a greater sensitivity to the variations in cultures and subcultures.

In spite of the need for greater variation in international AIDS campaigns and criticism from most AIDS groups, one group did support Benetton's use of the Kirby photograph. The German AIDS organization DAH applauded Benetton's use of the imagery, and officials said it saw the widespread publication of Kirby's picture as a

chance to break down public taboos on death and dying (Landis). Yet, the fact that the image was of a person dying from an AIDS-related illness was responsible for much of the criticism for the advertisement and its depiction of AIDS. Christopher Babick, executive director of the People With AIDS Coalition in New York, called the photograph stereotypical in its grimness. He remarked, "Most people in the U.S. think a positive HIV diagnosis is a death sentence, and the photograph reinforces that" ("Dead"). The coalition works to confront imagery that members find contrary to the reality of living with AIDS.

The depiction of David Kirby did invite language that upheld the stereotype of death for people with AIDS. The ad prompted most writers to describe Kirby as an AIDS "victim" or "sufferer." This language, according to Max Navarre, is damaging. He writes:

As a person with AIDS, I can attest to the sense of diminishment at seeing and hearing myself constantly referred to as an AIDS victim, an AIDS sufferer, and AIDS case—as anything but what I am, a person with AIDS. I am a person with a condition. I am not that condition.
(143)

Essentially, critics such as Navarre argue that such language upheld dominant representations of persons with AIDS, which many working within the cause fight to dispel. Britain's Health Education Authority spokeswoman Lynn Walsh commented, "To show such a bleak pessimistic picture doesn't help anybody. Although Aids is deadly many people enjoy years of life before falling ill" (quoted in Lawson). Benetton's advertisement showed the moment of death from AIDS-related causes rather than a moment of triumphant moment of life.

Most AIDS activists prefer the images of life and liveliness in choosing how they wish to be identified. The Advisory Committee of People with AIDS, a precursor to the National Association of People with AIDS, stated its view effectively when it issued the following statement:

We condemn attempts to label us as "victims," which implies defeat, and we are only occasionally "patients," which implies passivity, helplessness, and dependence on the care of others. We are "people with AIDS." (quoted in Grover 26)

Then in October of 1987 at a March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, PWAs (People with AIDS) took the naming of their condition one step further by announcing that they are "people living with AIDS." As Jan Zita Grover accuses, "It is a measure of the need of the press—left, center, and right—to distance itself from AIDS that few have chosen to employ either term" (26). The title in the next paragraph ultimately affirms these claims. This linguistic construction in referencing people who live with AIDS ultimately negates the efforts of activists to shape representations and confuses the determination of "appropriate" images of AIDS.

In her article, "Ad Colorizes an AIDS Victim's Suffering," Dottie Enrico criticizes the ambiguity of Benetton's representation and questions the photograph's effectiveness in creating awareness for AIDS. She argues that many consumers who look at the image might think Kirby is dying of cancer, because there is no reason for them to think otherwise. She writes:

The only people sure to figure out what's actually happening in the photo are those who have also lost loved ones to AIDS. They'll recognize this sorrowful image all too well. For them, this ad may do little more than stir up sad memories—not exactly the stuff that sends people out shopping for new sportswear.

Enrico suggests here that the tragic image itself does not seem to link naturally to the sales function of advertising.

Vicki Goldberg notes that while bad news might not seem like the ideal atmosphere for selling casual clothes, Benetton's photographs reflect previous trends in fashion advertising. She cites the example of *Vogue* publishing Lee Miller's pictures of concentration camp victims at the end of World War II and its more recent sponsoring of

photographs on subjects like homelessness. In fact, Goldberg argues that couturier-designed tragedies became high-fashion chic for a period in the seventies. For instance, Charles Jourdan advertised shoes with Guy Bourdin's photograph of the chalked outline of a body on the highway and a lone shoe lying forlornly next to the drawing. Placed within these examples of fashion advertising tradition, Benetton's advertising might not seem quite as profound or shocking.

Dianne Allen writes that although the campaign was created to evoke discussion concerning the issues illustrated, most of the discussion about the AIDS ad has centered around the moral question of whether a company should use such a personal and painful photograph for "commercial" purposes and has not focused on the problem of AIDS itself. The advertisement lacks accompanying text that might have explained the context surrounding the imagery and the many issues associated with AIDS. The omission of accompanying information confuses the intentions of the representation and the campaign itself. The lack of explanation with the photograph is reminiscent of artist Nicholas Nixon's serial of portraits of people with AIDS. The series was exhibited in the fall of 1988 at the Museum of Modern Art, and Douglas Crimp labels Nixon's work both exploitative and damaging (Crimp and Rolston 24). Nixon's exhibition, entitled "Pictures of People," included photographs of PWAs that portrayed the subjects in a series of images taken in intervals of a week or a month. The photographs form part of a larger work-in-progress that was undertaken by Nixon and his science journalist wife, Bebe. The couple explains in *People with AIDS* that their intention is to tell the story of AIDS:

Our purpose from the outset of the project was to record with honesty and compassion what it can be to have AIDS; to show what it can do to those who have it, and to their families, lovers, and friends; and to see why it is the most devastating and important social and medical issue of our time... Though we would not have defined ourselves as political activists, we felt compelled, as a photographer and a science journalist, to make something from our familiarity with pictures and with words, from our own

experience of AIDS. We wanted to tell personal stories of people with AIDS. (vii-viii)

The Nixons' words reflect Therese Frare's explanation that her collaboration with residents of Pater Noster House was formed to tell their stories visually.

Members of ACT-UP criticized Nixon's approach and argued that the photography's imagery dwelt on isolated and defeated victims, not on the political components that accompany AIDS, and not on those fighting back against discrimination and disability (Dublin 225). Douglas Crimp notes, "Part of the context excluded from Nixon's pictures, of course, is everything that kills people with AIDS besides a virus--everything that AIDS activists, PWAs among us, are fighting" (Crimp and Rolston 24).

In the catalogue introduction for Nixon's show, MOMA curator Peter Galassi discusses the relationship between Nixon and his subjects:

Any portrait is a collaboration between subject and photographer. Extended over time, the relationship can become richer and more intimate. Nixon has said that most of the people with AIDS he has photographed are, perhaps because stripped of so many of their hopes, less masked than others, more open to collaboration. (quoted in Crimp, "Portraits" 117)

Galassi explains that the result is in many instances a revealing and intimate partnership that results in a unique, nonstereotypical result. Galassi asserts that due to the diversity of those affected, there can be no representative portrait of a person with AIDS. He then concludes, "Beside and against this fact is the irreducible fact of the individual, made present to us in body and spirit. The life and death of Tom Moran [one of Nixon's subjects] were his own" (quoted in Crimp, "Portraits" 117). The subjects claim their reality through documenting their life experience.

Crimp notes that writers discussing Nixon's project agree that there is a consensual relationship between the photographer and the subject that results in the portraits' effects on the viewer, but Crimp asks the following questions:

But is this relationship one of growing intimacy? or is it one of the subjects' gradual tuning out, their abandonment of a sense of self? And is the result one of according the subjects the individuality of their lives and deaths? or do their lives and deaths become, through some process of identification, ours? ("Portraits" 117-118)

Crimp then suggests that to those people who have paid careful attention to media representations of AIDS, none of these questions seems to matter because the imagery of Nixon's work reiterates "what we have already been told or shown about people with AIDS: that they are ravaged, disfigured, and debilitated by the syndrome; they are generally alone, desperate, but resigned to their 'inevitable' deaths" (118). Crimp's comments are suggestive of issues that might apply to the Kirby image.

In fact, Henry Giroux quotes Crimp's assessment of Nixon's representation of PWAs to apply to Benetton's advertisement showing David Kirby and his family. Giroux writes that the imagery of the Benetton advertisement suppresses the diverse lifestyles, struggles and realities of the people in various stages of living with AIDS. He argues that the Benetton Group's appeal to an aesthetic of realism does little to disturb the social and ideological force of inherited dominant representations found within the media. Giroux then asserts that Benetton relies on the clichés enforced through dominant images and their social effects rather than challenging conventional representations that portray people with AIDS as helpless (18).

Yet Giroux omits Crimp's key observation that most representations feature PWAs as generally alone. In the case of David Kirby's photograph, the imagery shows Kirby's father, sister, niece, and mother. Giroux's omission and reworking of Crimp's phrase seems in itself to downplay the reality of this man, David Kirby, and his

experience of living with AIDS. David Kirby is one of several subjects in the photograph, and his picture says something different from what Crimp defines as typical representations. Not only does the image include the family, but the relationship and display between father and son is featured within the framing of the photograph. The image of father and son is compelling when viewers consider the "typical" scenario of homosexual sons being disowned by their fathers. Of course, Benetton offers no explanation of this imagery to help the viewer make the connection.

The serial of Nixon's photographs includes, in most cases, more than one image of the PWAs represented, while the Benetton Group chose to use only one photograph dealing with AIDS within the 1992 campaign. Both Nixon and Benetton were criticized for not including information about the context of the photographs they presented. In order to contest Nixon's approach to documenting AIDS, ACT-UP members picketed the MOMA show in New York where they also distributed a leaflet that demanded, "NO MORE PICTURES WITHOUT CONTEXT." The fliers asserted:

We believe that the representation of people with AIDS affects not only how viewers will perceive PWAs outside the museum, but, ultimately, crucial issues of AIDS funding, legislation, and education . . . We demand the visibility of PWAs who are vibrant, angry, loving, sexy, beautiful, acting up and fighting back. (quoted in Crimp, "Portraits" 118)

The organization calls to present AIDS in a more positive light because of the impacts of negative imagery on addressing AIDS issues. ACT-UP members seem to fight for representations that promote the concept of overcoming the challenges of living with AIDS.

Steven Dublin notes that artists' dismayed responses to certain representations of AIDS reflect the difficulties that these practitioners have encountered when they have confronted AIDS in their work. He notes that because images not only reflect but help to shape reality, AIDS activists have converted loss and grief into proprietary claims and

have thus attempted to assert "ownership" over this domain (224). The resounding call to include context in Nixon's imagery arose from activists in an effort to police representations of AIDS. In fact, the Nixons later published their project with stories of their subjects.

In a similar vein, critics of Benetton's AIDS/Family ad attempted to control the distribution of the photograph through banning and other measures. Critics have argued that the picture is ambiguous, without captions of any kind, but Benetton responds that the ambiguity has prompted more discussion because people all offer their own opinions of what the picture means (Allen). Photographer Patrick Robert whose two pictures were also used in the 1992 campaign supported Benetton's claim: "the absence of an explanatory caption on my photographs [soldier with human bone, truck bulging with refugees] does not bother me ... for me the objective of the campaign is reached ... to draw the public's attention to these victims" (quoted in Pinson and Tibrewala 11). Critics, however, seem to want guidance in the shaping of that attention.

Luciano Benetton further explains the purposes behind the Benetton Group's imagery:

The company's goal is to communicate, to invite discussion and debate about the universal issues and problems that affect us all. Our advertising is designed to overcome at times with sharp polemic the barriers of indifference everywhere. Sometimes this makes us controversial, but we take pride in the fact that we cannot be ignored. (quoted in Webb)

Luciano's words indicate that viewers will shape their own interpretations of the ads to a greater effect than if the company offered a preferred interpretation.

Otte Rosenkrantz, in support of the Benetton advertisement, writes that the photograph would not have received attention on its own. She argues that in the hands of Benetton, the photograph sparks conversations in classrooms, at breakfast tables, in boardrooms and hospital corridors around the world. That discussion, Rosenkrantz

claims, is exactly what is needed. Ultimately, this discussion is generated through capturing viewers' attention and as the January 25, 1992, edition of *L'Unita* argues:

For the large majority of the population which thinks that AIDS is not their business, Benetton's ads will be a slap in their face . . . and I am sure it will be more effective than every campaign to date by any public or private body.
(quoted in Pinson and Tibrewala 12)

Essentially, the ads are intended to wake up the public concerning issues related to AIDS and the use of advertising as an agent of social commentary.

Rosenzkrants's and Benetton's emphasis on the importance of discussion about social issues seems to reflect Elizabeth Reid's concern about the need to talk about HIV and AIDS. She writes:

The infected need the space and the time to talk to their spouses and their children. Affected families and their neighbours need to talk. The community of the affected includes everyone Thus talking becomes the basis for healing, the basic strategy for responding to the epidemic.
(12-13)

This idea of talk accomplishing a therapeutic function may be evidenced in a January, 1994, column in *Marketing Magazine*. Stan Sutter shares in this column how the Benetton ad encouraged and offered an opportunity for a friend to open up and tell him that he had AIDS.

Luciano Benetton affirms the idea that the photograph in the advertisement speaks loudly and for itself. He recounts:

One is always surprised by bad reactions to things that were done in the best possible faith, and always heartened when people who were at first a little wary come around to seeing the point. There is an Italian journalist who has been writing about his suffering in the press. In today's paper there is a piece saying that there is no difference between that diary of illness and what our advertisement is doing [sic] they are both speaking up on an issue that is in danger of being swept under the carpet. (quoted in White)

Essentially, the story of the journalist and the visual story of the Kirby family share experience and draw attention to lives viewers otherwise might have known nothing about.

In as much as the company has promoted the ambiguity of the advertisement, what becomes clear is that further clarification of the ad is necessary for producer and viewer to find mutual understanding. Evans and Riyait have argued that in order for communication to take place in advertising, the sender and receiver must share a common frame of reference. They argue that without this mutual reference of encoded and decoded meanings, true communication does not take place. They support their view with the knowledge that the term "communication" derives from the Latin word *commus*, to seek commonness. The researchers conclude that, "Advertisers must be aware of the importance of using signs, visual or linguistic, which have a common meaning for the targeted recipients of the message, particularly those working in a multicultural dimension" (291). This caution suggests that the closer Benetton comes to capturing imagery with common meanings, the closer viewers will come to agreeing on meaning.

The Benetton Group has forgone the use of immediately shared references with the use of imagery in the 1992 campaign. Patricia Saraceni, a spokeswoman for Benetton Services Corporation in New York, said the company received many calls about the campaign—many of which were initially hostile. She states, "After we have a moment to talk, they really do change their mind [about the company's motive]" (quoted in Ward). Unfortunately, Benetton associates are unable to talk to the billion people who the company estimates will view the photograph. In this respect, including additional explanation to the advertisement would seem a reasonable measure to take in order to increase effectiveness.

Rather than include this copy, Benetton has chosen to wage a war for understanding through press conferences, company books, interviews, and comment from Benetton officials concerning the campaign. Peter Fressola has countered the criticism of

providing no context by saying that in the United States Benetton ran the photographs of the car bombing, Albanian refugees, and David Kirby together in order to provide a greater context for the ad. By grouping the AIDS picture with others, he said that Benetton wanted to indicate that it is interested in bringing attention to a spectrum of social and political problems and not in bringing attention to itself with one sensationalizing image (Squiers 19). As Carol Squiers notes, "Given the extensive work that's been done on the politics of representation, this assertion can only be categorized as studiously naive" (19). It would seem that the images of refugees and the car bombing, though not as immediately inflammatory as the Kirby photograph, did cause concerns in various contexts. The company effectively has not brought attention not with one sensationalizing image but with three sensationalizing images.

In respect to the criticism recently recounted, AIDS groups urged members to take action against the Benetton Group. According to Amore, ACT-UP urged its 20,000 members and the public to protest "blatant AIDS profiteering." ACT-UP members also demonstrated outside the Oxford Circus branch of Benetton stores in England and rushed inside the store in an attempt to unfold and fling sweaters.

Along with these protests, some urged boycotting Benetton shops. Tessa Hilton offers one example of this sentiment when she explains, "Why I Will Never Step Foot in a Benetton Shop Again":

I resent having my deepest emotions ransacked for the sole purpose of making money for a High Street chain of fashion shops. I am going to respond to their advertising campaign in the only way that will alter their cynical thinking. I am never going to set foot in a Benetton shop again and I urge all Femail readers who feel the same to follow suit.

Hilton seems to take issue with the fact that a for-profit company would generate imagery in the manner of a non-profit agency.

Journalist and fashion historian Jane Mulvagh offers an additional course of action to oppose Benetton's advertising strategy. She explains the dangers of the Benetton Group's promotional efforts when she writes, "As the public increasingly is bombarded with shocking images in irrelevant, yet virtually unavoidable settings, their emotional responses are systematically atrophied, and their resources of compassion exhausted." Mulvagh's concern seems to be that if the advertising forum continues to steal emotion from viewers, then their resources may be tapped dry. If this imagery becomes commonplace, then the content of the visual imagery bank becomes perverted. Mulvagh concludes that apart from joining a voluntary ban on buying merchandise from companies that seek to employ blatant sensationalism for commercial ends, people "should also put pressure on the media to stop adulating fashion magnets until they seriously believe that they have earned a platform for their two-bit philosophizing." In this case, Mulvagh references fashion photographer Oliviero Toscani and company president Luciano Benetton and suggests that the pair's heightened understanding of self and the advertising forum, encouraged through extensive coverage by the media, have led to the abuses of imagery.

An additional area of controversy concerning the photograph of the Kirby family revolves around the Benetton Group's choice to colorize the photograph. Many critics of the Kirby advertisement accuse Benetton of touching up the photograph to create an image of the modern day renditions of Jesus Christ that show an emaciated man in his early thirties with shaggy brown hair and beard. When editor of *Elle* Maggie Alderson refused to put the image in her magazine, she declared that, "They [Benetton] have stepped out of the bounds of what is acceptable, and what makes this so sickening is that they have touched up the photograph to make it look biblical because the Aids victim resembles Jesus Christ" (quoted in Mullin). She commented that the hand-tinting of the black-and-white photograph made the ad look like a tacky religious postcard and objected to the element of preachiness in the spring/summer 1992 campaign (Smith).

Friends of David Kirby, however, are quick to point out that David did bear a striking resemblance to Jesus. Frare confirmed this resemblance in a telephone interview on July 3, 1997. She also noted that the Benetton company consulted with her throughout the entire colorization process. They asked specifically about every part of the photograph in an effort to make the image as close to the actual moment as possible.

Barb Cordle who helped care for David Kirby at the Pater Noster House responded to criticism concerning the controversy of the representation of David:

As far as the comment that it was "touched-up to look like Jesus Christ" please believe me when I say before colorization, before any touching up, it did look like Jesus Christ. It was the agony in the Garden, the agony on the cross in his face and the face of his dear father . . . I know at Pater Noster several times with several clients thru [sic] the years nurses and caregivers have made the same comment, . . . "He looks like Jesus." When they are close to going back to God, perhaps that explains why . . . I have copies of the original slide and prints (and release forms) and untouched they do look like the way many of us picture Jesus. (*Global*)

Cordle legitimately counters criticism about the colorization process and offers insight that viewers may not have.

While these voices offer confirmation, others point to the effect of viewing the imagery as problematic. Dottie Enrico states that Benetton's efforts were shortsighted in their choice to use a picture of a real person who bears a surreal resemblance to Jesus Christ. She argued that colorization of the photograph takes away an edge of reality and softens the blow to help confuse consumers about whether what they are seeing is real.

Oliviero Toscani confronts the reality of the company's advertisement and explains in *Global Vision* how the images dictate the way people respond to the advertisement:

I call this picture 'La Pieta,' because it is a Pieta which is real. The Michalangelo's 'Pieta' during the Renaissance might be fake[.] Jesus Christ may never have existed. That

was real promotion. But we know this death happened.
This is the thing. And the more real the thing is, the less
people want to see. It has always intrigued me how fakes
have been accepted and reality is rejected.

Toscani's words reflect the accuracy of representation that Toscani believes the photographic medium represents.

DISCUSSION

The Benetton Group entered a shocking image of David Kirby into the advertising realm that seemed to defy traditional advertising offerings by fashion companies. The image of a man in his final moments of life challenged expectations for the advertising media and caused many to argue whether images of death or AIDS or social issues ought to be tolerated in the advertising realm if proposed by for-profit corporations. Critics of the ad responded negatively by calling for the removal of Benetton's advertising anomaly. In response Benetton attempted to situate the company's efforts in new categories such as a blend of advertising/news, advertising/activism, and advertising/art. These categories seemed to suggest the extension of advertising's traditional definition and to downplay advertising's sales function and brand marketing. In response to these new categories viewers called on Benetton to assume clearer markings of a charitable orientation through company activity and in future marketing endeavors. (These activities are documented in a later chapter.)

This advertisement of Kirby offered Benetton the opportunity to become involved in a specific social movement. Previous imagery dabbled in multiculturalism and encouraging diversity, as well as ending racism, yet these aims appear quite broad in perspective and execution. By adopting a specific social issue that has been constructed recently in the media and in the AIDS community, Benetton began a journey of developing rhetoric to address the needs of the day. The company has demonstrated the potential of an advertisement to capture attention and to generate or provoke discussion.

The display of Benetton's advertisement in various forums such as on the street, in magazines, billboards, and newspapers, as well as in museums tours and art galleries and schools, has ensured widespread debate over the ad itself and the AIDS agenda. The ad has had the advantage over other advertising of extending its theatrical and activist display worldwide. The ad itself has gained entrance into arenas that an activist agenda might have been denied. In addition, the visual has proliferated throughout the marketplace and incited discussion throughout the advertising community, as well as been displayed within the art world.

According to Michael Nesline, moving activism from the streets into the art world offers added advantage on activism. Nesline explains the experience of Gran Fury, an AIDS activist art collective, and observes the following:

As a nonartist who is a member of an art collective, the thing that is most interesting to me about being part of the artworld is the power that is granted to artists. Mark [Simpson] put it eloquently in the past when he remarked that an artist is one of the few people in our society who can say, "I want to do my piece in the middle of the airport," and actually be permitted to do it. ACT UP cannot have a demonstration in an airport, and that is why it's valuable to me to participate in this artistic endeavor. I'm perfectly willing to exploit the power of the artworld if it will allow us to do what we want to do where we want to do it. (quoted in Deitcher 206)

Nesline's observation demonstrates how tolerances shifts from one genre to another and how activists, even company advertisers, may find freer expression in an art context. By claiming, as Fressola does, that the company's practice is "art," the company also claims permit to the free expression and placement that the art world grants.

Yet even with this understanding of permissiveness that is paired with an "art" label, the Gran Fury collective encountered censorship when producing work for the street. Member John Lindell comments:

There's a sacrifice involved in using the gallery/museum art system. We only get to talk to that world. We wanted to use billboards to speak to a broader audience but were censored by those who control billboard space because of the character of our work. We were also censored monetarily because we need thousands of dollars to rent those billboards. By choosing to use the gallery setting—it's a classic situation—we can say anything we want, but we say it to fewer people. (quoted in Deitcher 207)

The Benetton Group's struggle to establish its advertising efforts as a form of artistic expression in some ways allowed for an added avenue of expression, yet the company too received censorship for imagery placed on billboards on the street.

Ann Thomas, senior curator for the photograph collection at the National Gallery of Canada, offers insight into determining the "artistic" classification and potential of Benetton's advertising and comments:

It's very simple really If these photos did not exist, would we know less about the world? To judge artistic merit, ask yourself if they alter or deepen your appreciation of the world, or make you more aware of a situation in a way you wouldn't be if you watched the same sort of images on the news. (quoted in Greenaway)

Thomas concluded, "Let's call it what it is It's marketing, not art" (quoted in Greenaway). Thomas believes that these advertising images within the 1992 campaign do not deepen viewers' understanding of the world and that viewers respond in a way that resembles watching the news. Yet the advertising perhaps had the advantage over news through incorporating the element of surprise in its execution and capturing attention in a different way from the news. Ultimately the campaign allowed what the news forum could not, a broader visual scope for the campaign distributed through billboards, sides of buses, and placement in print publications.

In June of 1994, a display of the 1992 advertisements hung at Galerie Graff in Montreal. John Weber, owner of the gallery, commented, "They seem pretty straightforward to me, they don't knock you over They were chosen, not on artistic terms, but

to fit into Benetton's social-issues campaign. That's not the way art works" (quoted in Greenaway). Weber's comment suggests that because the images were chosen to fit within an advertising campaign, the imagery works differently than the way art works. Yet by placing the images in his gallery, Weber affords the advertising some type of art status.

Perhaps Weber's opinion of the pieces was influenced by an installation on display at the John Weber Gallery in New York the previous month. The installation featured a display by Hans Haacke, political artist and member of ACT UP, which criticized Benetton's advertising and involvement in social issues. The installation, titled "Dyeing for Benetton," covered two walls. Plastered on one was an excerpt from an interview with Luciano Benetton published in the German publication *Der Spiegel*. The copy stated:

Der Spiegel: "What will your next campaign be like?
More blood?"

Luciano Benetton: "No, we'll present our art school."

Haacke's artistic statement was aimed at Benetton's advertising practices that glorified images of death, including the Kirby advertisement and a spring 1994 ad that featured the blood-soaked uniform of a dead Bosnian Croat soldier. Haacke argued that Benetton does not have the right to use human despair as a marketing ploy and protested against what he sees as Toscani's cynical approach to advertising. Haacke labeled the advertising as exploitative and said:

There are subjects one should not use to sell a product—and that includes death and other miseries. If we see these types of images as advertising, the likelihood that we will be shocked by them will be slimmer and slimmer. We will look at these types of images and think only Benetton. (quoted in Greenaway)

Haacke's criticism reiterated the criticism of others who believe that companies should not combine the sales dimension of advertising with addressing social issues.

Haacke's statement about Benetton's advertising demonstrates a key component on where or how he classifies the company's practice. It is obvious from his artwork that he does not support a reading of the Benetton Group as activist art practitioners. Regardless, Benetton's use of the Kirby photograph comprises a larger activist agenda that traces back to David Kirby and his family. In a special issue celebrating the 60th anniversary of *Life*, the magazine interviewed Bill Kirby about the effect of the photograph and its widespread publication as an advertisement. Kirby recounts that he received many calls from gay men who longed for the support of their fathers. These instances demonstrate the ways in which the ad generated disclosure and talk within the community. Kirby's efforts to raise awareness seemed to have been furthered at many different levels with the use of this photograph by the Benetton Group, the least of which is generating discussion about AIDS.

Frare's work extends to the community and furthers the goal of raising AIDS awareness. Frare's photograph was included in a photography show at the University of Washington where she served as a visiting artist. This placement then allowed opportunity for more discussion concerning the image and about representations of AIDS. She receives calls from people requesting to use the image in encyclopedias and textbooks. When people ask to use the photograph, Frare agrees but asks them to make a donation to an AIDS cause. Through her experience Frare attests that the image had effected social change. She reflects: "It's done a lot at the local, regional, national, and international level" (Personal interview). Her firsthand knowledge of the benefit then bears significant weight in determining whether or not the ad has effectively addressed AIDS issues.

CHAPTER 4: THE HIV POSITIVE ADS

Fashion writer Elizabeth Wilson speculated that fashion for the nineties revolved around clothes for the end of the millennium. She notes, "The cold war has ended, and neither capitalism nor communism appears to work, so there is fear, gloom, and chaos. Blood-red lipstick, gender uncertainty, even uncertainty about where the body begins and ends, with silicone breast implants, tattoos, body piercing—all these are a reflection of that chaos ..." (quoted in Bedell). Wilson's observation of the chaos foregrounding the end of the millennium resounds in the creation of uncertain boundaries in the images of popular culture. In particular, the imagery of the 1993 fall/winter campaign for United Colors of Benetton celebrates the ambiguity of these boundaries and ultimately challenges norms within the advertising realm. On September 16, 1993, the Benetton Group launched this controversial campaign concerning AIDS awareness and received wide criticism from viewers, the advertising community, and the AIDS activist and gay/lesbian communities. The campaign attempted to extend the Benetton Group's involvement in confronting AIDS issues through advertising.

This chapter investigates the imagery of the campaign to account for the controversy it caused. The study of these advertisements serves to explore the furtherance of Benetton's efforts to raise AIDS awareness through the launching of the 1993 campaign and subsequent responses of the company. Discussion will begin with describing and interpreting the imagery itself and will then move to documenting the reactions of the various communities affected by the advertisements and the Benetton Group's response to their criticism.

THE HIV POSITIVE CAMPAIGN

The campaign's imagery features a series of three androgynous representations of body parts stamped with the words "H.I.V. POSITIVE." The first image depicts a side-frontal view of a chest and an upper forearm/lower bicep. The chest itself is muscularly defined but appears relatively sexually ambiguous due to the blurring of the breast region.

The model's right nipple appears to extend from a more voluptuous breast than the left where the left nipple is glimpsed in profile. The chest shot ends within an inch or two of the model's right breast and several more inches below the left. What appears to be the model's left arm is included with the chest shot and is in a clearer focus than the rest of the image. Just below the lower part of the bicep opposite the elbow is the "H.I.V. POSITIVE" stamp that is blue and has bled a little on the skin of the model. The words are formed by placing the "H.I.V." in a straight line in a larger type than the "POSITIVE" type that extends at a 45 degree downward angle from the last period to the "E." On the right margin of the ad just above midpoint extends the company logo, "UNITED COLORS OF BENETTON." A green box surrounds the white letters that are positioned with two words on each line. This box then extends across the arm of the model. The white background color frames the right side of the ad and shows briefly between the arm and the body.

The second advertisement uses no background to offset the ambiguous image of a crevice of the human body. The close-up picture features the unblemished skin of the model and shows the pores of the skin. The image appears to be the partial photo of a buttock but could also be an image of breast cleavage. In the upper right quadrant of the advertisement is the uniform stamp of "H.I.V. POSITIVE." This stamp appears faded and has not bled into the skin. In the lower right quadrant is the company's green box and logo.

The third advertisement features a model's lower abdomen/pelvic region and the beginning of the pubic region. As in the previous advertisement, the image fills the entire space with no background. The ad is sexually ambiguous and stops before the genital area would determine the sex of the model. Along the upper right corner appears the company box and logo. Below the logo and toward the middle of the image is the blue HIV stamp that has smeared ink along the skin. The edge of the stamping instrument has

left an outline along the left side of the "H" and on the right side and bottom of the period after the "V".

The interpretations of these advertisements seem to vary according to the viewers' perceptions. Viewers of these advertisements seem to disagree over the sex of the bodies, as well as over what the resulting representations mean as they interpret this campaign. The images are androgynous in nature and therefore become unsettling to viewers in their anomaly. In order to make sense of the imagery, viewers assess the sex of the owners of the arm/chest, buttocks, and abdomen to reduce uncertainty and to substantiate their readings of the texts.

Close inspection of each image enables reasonable guesses concerning the sex of each model. Many interpret the buttocks in the photograph as belonging to a male subject and immediately associate the practice of anal sex and its relation to the spread of the HIV virus in the homosexual community. Whether male or female, the body in this advertisement suggests the permeability of the rectum in sexual activity that might allow a virus to enter someone's system. The lining of the rectum can become damaged from being pumped against or otherwise sexually manipulated, and tears provide the opportunity for HIV to infect participants. Butler writes in *Gender Trouble* that the fact that AIDS is transmitted through the exchange of bodily fluids suggests within the sensationalist graphics of homophobic signifying systems the dangers that permeable bodily boundaries present to the social order as such. In effect, this permeability suggests that all who are sexually active are at risk, particularly homosexuals. Further, she writes that since anal and oral sex among men clearly establishes certain kinds of bodily permeability unsanctioned by the hegemonic order, male homosexuality would, within such a hegemonic point of view, constitute a site of danger and pollution, prior to and regardless of the cultural presence of AIDS. The imagery itself, when read as a male buttocks and linked to the spread of the HIV virus, then emphatically represents that danger. As Butler notes, those practices in both homosexual and heterosexual contexts

that open surface and orifices to erotic signification or close down others effectively reinscribe the boundaries of the body along new cultural lines (132).

If the buttocks ad were to be suggestive of anal intercourse, then the abdominal photograph seems to offer its counterpart. This “female body” with the HIV stamp suggests the transmission of the HIV virus through heterosexual sex. Most critics of the entire HIV positive campaign, however, refrain from mentioning this ad as representative of heterosexual transmission of the HIV virus. The presentation of typically taboo pubic hair in a public forum made this advertisement the most controversial of the three images and, therefore, the least seen. Either publications rejected it, or Benetton refrained from submitting it under the assumption that publishers would reject it. Yet, the ambiguous imagery suggesting the female genital area presents the equally dangerous potential for the spread of the HIV virus. Even if the imagery were said to be male, the suggestion of what comes below the border of the image suggests a sexual zone.

The chest/arm image, generally not read as representing the sexual transmission of the virus, presents an additional avenue for the spread of the virus. The body, regardless of its sex, and the HIV positive stamp make a symbolic reference to needles, drug use, and the transmission of the HIV virus through injecting drugs and the virus into one’s veins. Placed close to the arm’s major veins, the stamp seems to mark the region and to identify the user as potentially dangerous, a carrier of a rapidly spreading, deadly disease. The male arm and stamp suggest a tattoo that any soldier might wear on his arm. This time, however, instead of the United States Marine Corps, the arm bears the deadly words of infection. The HIV positive status stamped on the arm might even suggest that this condition could unite fellow sufferers into group identification—an identity like military and gang tattooing that could be understood as a rite of passage.

The style of the tattoo is indicative of the international folk style of tattooing and does not reflect the most intricate and detailed work of body artists. Similar to much tattoo artwork, the particular mark of HIV positive in this image is presented on a public

part of the human body—a site that potentially could receive much viewing. Just below the point where a short sleeve could cover the words, the tattoo suggests a permanent marking and labeling of the body as HIV positive. Because the tattoo is in a public place, the tattoo seems to make public information that many struggle to keep private. The image suggests that rather than keep silent or remain ashamed, HIV positive status and the identifying stamp can be a naturalized part of the human body's surface, perhaps one that even connotes group membership and identification. To what end this proclamation of HIV positive status leads, however, is unclear.

Tattoo artist Cliff Raven insists that a tattoo is only a tattoo. He maintains that even in late twentieth-century post-industrial society, the act of putting on a tattoo, as such, does not make a statement about the system; nor does it constitute a revolutionary act. As in all cultures, such meanings and implications depend on the body of attitudes, motivations, and intentions that are brought to the transaction and depend on the nature, size, and placement of the design—whether ostentatious, or hidden, decorative or challenging (Rubin 255). The HIV positive stamp on the arm, then, can be understood only by knowing more information about the wearer than viewers are given in the advertisement. Because viewers do not know, they can make up their own narrative account situating this particular body and tattoo within a time, space, and story.

Muscular, healthy, and strong, the model in this ad does not appear to be a typical drug user. Aside from Benetton's admission that the ads were representative of ways that the virus can be spread, the ad alone might not suggest this scenario at all. Perhaps the wearer was infected with the virus and chose to use his arm as a forum for education like nurse's aide John Baldetta did in Seattle. Baldetta maintains that he had "HIV POSITIVE" tattooed in inch-high red letters on his left inside forearm because he hoped to dispel myths that all people with HIV are too sick to carry on with their lives, as well as to dispel the sense of shame he felt in feeling that he had to hide his HIV status. By tattooing himself HIV positive, he wanted to gain a sense of control over his life with

HIV. Most importantly, Baldetta hoped to encourage discussion of issues related to HIV (Stryker).

Poz, a magazine about living with AIDS, has also featured several photographs of HIV tattoo trends. Editor Richard Perez-Feria calls the HIV tattoo a brave thing to do. He says, "They are very empowering. They are pushing people out of that last closet" (quoted in Snead). Baldetta and Perez-Feria's comments suggest that these tattoos can be a positive experience for the wearer in terms of publicizing the private. By promoting the number of those who wear these tattoos, along with uncovering the status of HIV infection, Benetton seems to advocate acknowledging HIV and generating discussion about issues surrounding infection and transmission.

Baldetta's hope of demonstrating a healthy, active body carrying the HIV virus seems to echo the message of the chest advertisement. The tattoo wearer in the ad appears strong in body and the stamp is clear in announcing the virus. The image, however, is incomplete and does not include the most individually identifiable part of the human body—the face. In one sense Benetton seems to strive to communicate the publicizing of private information--the HIV positive status. Yet the faceless body of the ad undercuts the message of making private information public because Benetton has denied the body an identity. Thus, the fragmented picture of the body serves to contradict the full unveiling of HIV status. A tattoo wearer who must hide his face does not seem to be leaping out of that final closet any time soon. The tattoo then becomes the major identifier in this advertisement. Rather than understood as a whole and healthy person living with the HIV virus, the ambiguous, decapitated body suggests that the only information people should know about the body is that it is HIV positive and thus contaminated. The HIV positive status on the faceless body then suggests that HIV infection is a death sentence for the wearer and that this body could potentially infect other bodies. By denying the body a face and an identity, viewers are not asked to

identify, to feel compassion, to become better educated, nor to perhaps disregard their faulty assumptions about living with HIV or AIDS.

Concerning the stamps on the other advertisements, the stamp on the abdomen is the sloppiest of the stamps and looks the least like a tattoo. The sides of the stamp have left their mark on the skin suggesting that this stamp is not a permanent marking of the body. The impermanence of the mark on one level downplays the risk or danger of HIV infection through heterosexual interactions. If the mark can be easily washed away, the role that the stamp might play in prevention (if any) becomes questionable. Yet Toscani has stated that the ads are not against sex but instead suggest prevention in hopes of generating discussion about prevention (Brown).

THE PUBLICATION STRATEGY

The copies of the advertisements arrived to potential publishers with pages of explanation that reminded the publishers that Benetton is a global company actively involved in promoting AIDS awareness. The company cited its activity of previously launching campaigns featuring colorful condoms, as well as building relationships with 200 associations for HIV-positive people in hope of establishing productive partnerships to further AIDS awareness. This HIV positive campaign was then proposed as augmentation for earlier efforts to raise AIDS awareness. Creative director Oliviero Toscani proposed in the press releases launching the campaign that the HIV positive advertisements not only highlighted the channels through which the HIV virus can be transmitted but also symbolized the dangers of stigmatizing certain social groups.

The Benetton Group designed the campaign for use in at least 100 countries, but not all the images were distributed to each country. The arm/chest ad received the widest acceptance from publishers and became the most viewed of the three. The Group partially customized the campaign for different countries with the British version's inclusion of a national AIDS help line telephone number directly below the Benetton logo. The inclusion of the number was a direct response to criticism of the 1992

campaign that featured David Kirby and AIDS but offered no avenue for those affected by AIDS to receive help. Sarah Mosely from the AIDS charity, London Lighthouse, commented:

We complained to Benetton about the first AIDS campaign featuring the young man. We felt the image was very distressing and it left people with AIDS with the feeling that they had nowhere to go after they'd seen the advertisement. But before Benetton ran the second, tattoo campaign, they came to us and the Terence Higgins Trust (a leading AIDS charity). We insisted that the adverts feature the National AIDS Helpline number so that people would not feel alone, and would know where to go to get advice. (quoted in Woodward)

The advertisements, however, did not include a similar number when they ran in the United States.

THE CONTROVERSY

This step of including a telephone number did not appease all objections to the advertisement and Benetton's motives to provide help to the AIDS cause. As in the previous chapter's discussion of avenues of response to controversial advertising, responses to this advertisement campaign inspired a series of editorial letters that documented both positive and negative reactions from viewers and the AIDS activist community. The Benetton Group also retaliated with company representatives' written responses. In addition, action against Benetton included physical threats and calls to boycott the stores, as well as direct lawsuits.

Perhaps one reason that so many opinion pieces and letters to the editor entered publications concerning Benetton is that the activist community views these editorials as part of an advocacy strategy within its social agenda. For instance, the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) offers information on the group's website aimed at inspiring viewers to "cure the crisis of indifference" and volunteer, advocate, or contribute to the AIDS cause ("Take"). One of the courses of advocacy proposed in the group's literature is to write

opinion pieces and letters to the editor and to submit these pieces locally in order to get the group's message across. This advocacy group believes that these letters serve to spark debate that draws attention and brings about positive results.

Rob Kemp, member of the gay and lesbian direct action group, OutRage, found the imagery of the advertising campaign offensive as a strategy to promote AIDS awareness and prevention. He writes in *The Independent* on September 22, 1993:

... the pictures—of dehumanised body fragments—merely allude to areas of sexual contact and drug injection; they make no reference to the potential for prevention of transmission. Genuine concern about HIV and Aids would have led the company to produce direct—and thus predictably controversial—prevention messages encouraging the use of condoms and clean needles Instead, we see images just vague and ambiguous enough to hide behind. Instead, the spectre of identifying and isolating people who have contracted HIV is resurrected.

The supposed positive value of the adverts—in "raising awareness" to undermine stigmatization—is wholly outweighed by the horrific prejudice with which the pictures identify and to which they lend weight. Included with the images is the telephone number of the National Aids Helpline (NAH). The idea, it seems, is that this will make it perfectly clear that Benetton has no agenda against people who are HIV positive. To me all it says is "Phone the NAH for free branding."

Kemp's editorial raises key issues concerning the advertisements' role in HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention and accuses Benetton of misrepresentation.

Kemp further expresses his disgust with the imagery of the campaign and the apparent link to the gay and lesbian community in that same editorial:

The resonances of these images are powerful and repellant. In the dark days when AIDS was the "gay plague," one notorious bigoted brainwave was that gay men should have health warnings tattooed above their bottoms, to discourage buggery and prevent the spread of HIV. Astonishingly, with these staged scenes of bigotry in practice, Benetton has gone even further than the bigots, acting out a repulsive

concept and projecting the idea that all types of sex and injection of drugs should be seen as a threat.

Kemp's comment references the sentiment of columnist William F. Buckley who proposed in a 1986 *New York Times* opinion editorial: "Everyone with AIDS should be tattooed in the upper forearm, to protect needle users, and on the buttocks to prevent the victimization of other homosexuals" (quoted in Crimp, *AIDS*, 8). This brash statement caused a furious response from the gay/lesbian community. And in November of 1987, members of Gran Fury criticized Buckley's words in their display, "Let the Record Show," which hung in a window on Broadway in New York's New Museum of Contemporary Art. Buckley said that tattoos would be like the Scarlet Letter because they were designed to stimulate public obloquy and that the AIDS tattoo was designed for private protection (Stryker). "Let the Record Show" featured the window display to mark the absurdity of Buckley's words and the inadequacy of public and administrative responses to AIDS.

In the September 24, 1993, edition of *The Independent*, Marina Galanti, Benetton's manager of foreign press relations, responded to Kemp's piece and argued that Rob Kemp's comments were "particularly blinkered." Galanti countered Kemp's assumptions that the buttocks were those of a male: "The fact that Mr. Kemp has chosen to see . . . a male bottom in images that were conceived to be sexually ambiguous is a sign of prejudice on his part, not Benetton's." This comment reinforces the company's belief in the openness of the advertising to be interpreted in multiple ways. A spokeswoman has said that the images were created to be sexually ambiguous because the company did not want to be accused of discrimination (Richard).

Galanti's response draws attention to the intended ambiguity of the photographs and seems appropriate in the case of this particular image and Kemp's complaint. The "appropriateness" measure can be used simply because the advertisements rely on individual viewers to create meaning. I would argue that the buttocks featured in this

advertisement perhaps speak more of a female body than a male body. But this point is easily debated. Determining the sex of the models in the advertisements is a key influence on the readings that viewers make of the advertisements. Once a viewer assigns the body's sex, the viewer can then negotiate meaning, particularly in relation to the potential body orifices Benetton proposes as transmitting the HIV virus. The issue of whether the buttocks is male or the abdomen is female seems to affect viewers' assessment and criticism of whom Benetton targets with the advertising campaign.

Benetton's critics accused Benetton of "preaching to a converted audience" because they proposed that Benetton used the buttocks advertisement to reach a gay audience—an audience well-informed about HIV transmission and one already altering unsafe sexual practices. Though anal sex is practiced in heterosexual couplings, critics narrowly defined Benetton's intended audience as the gay community. Generally, critics focused on the arm and buttock advertisements as portraying the channels of transmission of the HIV virus and discussion did not include the abdomen image.

As in the case of the 1992 advertisement that featured David Kirby, the largest complaint aimed against Benetton and this campaign is that it is exploitative. Many have accused Benetton of playing on themes of Nazi persecutions of homosexuals in concentration camps. Both Barry Adam and Richard Plant argue in their books that these images are reminiscent of the tattooing of prisoners in the camps, and thus, evoke memory of the horrible treatment that homosexuals received under the Third Reich.

The protest against the Benetton Group's use of imagery took several forms. In some instances the protest involved physical violence or the threat of violence. This protest included demonstrations at Benetton stores. For instance, in September of 1993, eight men and one woman demonstrated against what they claimed was the use of "exploitative HIV imagery" to launch Benetton's 1993 autumn and winter collection. The protesters waved posters and chanted slogans at Benetton's offices in Chelsea, London. The nine were arrested after police were called to Benetton's offices. All were charged

with enacting threatening behavior under the Public Order Act, and two were accused of assaulting police.

Members of Outrage and ACT UP organized the protest. They claimed that images of the HIV positive campaign pandered to hostility and prejudice against people living with the virus. The nine were later cleared at Wells Street Magistrates' Court, Kent, on January 21, 1994. The protesters denied all charges against them. Commented Chris Taylor of OutRage, "With the trial, Benetton are [sic] once again attempting to silence the legitimate concerns of the communities affected by HIV and AIDS. They are exploiting the suffering of people living with AIDS as promotion for knitwear" (Mills). Taylor's words level accusations that Benetton presents a contradictory message concerning HIV and AIDS and does not truly represent the agenda of those affected.

In addition to protesting and picketing in front of Benetton stores, many advocated the boycott of Benetton stores and products. France's former Environment Minister Segolene Royal called on French women to stop buying Benetton clothes for their families. She said the advertisements exploited the suffering of people found HIV positive (Saini).

Editorials in certain publications also called for readers to boycott Benetton stores. Editorials like that found in the October 17, 1993, edition of the *Sunday Telegraph* demonstrate the way in which people attempted to influence the public:

For some time now, Benetton has produced deliberately provocative advertisements. On the whole, newspapers have resisted commenting on them on the grounds that the only purpose of the advertisements was to incite comment, so denying Benetton the publicity it craved. The latest advertisement depicts a male torso with the words "HIV Positive" tattooed on the man's arm. We feel it is worth breaking silence just to say that we hope none of our readers will buy anything from Benetton until the advertisement is withdrawn and apologised for.

Editorials such as this one call for the retraction of advertisements and an apology and for people to vote against Benetton by withholding purchasing power.

The above editorial was naive in its assumption that other publications had resisted the urge to comment on Benetton's practices, but it is instructive in its portrayal of the manner in which people tried to influence others. This overt request for people to boycott Benetton stores also parallels a later boycott attempt initiated within the fashion sector itself. In November of 1993, an AIDS charity headed by Pierre Berge, the chief executive of Yves Saint Laurent, used the advertising forum to urge a boycott of Benetton products. Berge commented on Benetton's ads, "I was scandalized by it.... It is a shame to create this sort of publicity based on the suffering of AIDS. Benetton should be boycotted throughout the world" (quoted in Spindler). Berge's efforts attempted to unite the fashion industry against Benetton.

The protest advertisement featured a photograph of a condom stuffed full of currencies from various countries with the tag line "United boycott." This tag line was printed to mirror Benetton's signature typeface and the green colored box that surrounds it. Bernard Melka, owner of the B. Mad (Bernard Melka Art Direction) advertising agency, and Alain Benoist designed the advertisement. Melka explained his motivation: "The Benetton ad concerned those of us in advertising. By attacking Benetton, we are attacking an idea. To make money on this kind of thing is wrong" (quoted in Spindler). Melka and Benoist then presented the advertisement to several nonprofit groups battling AIDS. Arcat Sida, or the Association for Research Against AIDS, the French nonprofit organization whose membership includes many who work at fashion companies, was the first to sign the advertisement.

The "United boycott" advertisement ran in the French news magazine *Actuel*, in the Paris newspaper *L'Officiel*, and on a billboard in Paris donated by the French company Avenir. The advertisement also ran in Germany and Italy.

As Goldman and Papson note in *Sign Wars*, more and more advertisements today either refer to other ads or are about the subject of advertising itself (15). The "United boycott" advertisement is an obvious example of this media self-referentiality or intertextuality. Goldman and Papson go on to say that spirals of referentiality are a function of the continuous process of lifting meanings from one context and placing them into the advertising framework where they become associated with another meaning system. Each time this change occurs, meanings are modified and chains of signification are constructed (16). In this light, the "United boycott" advertisement attempts to reframe the imagery of a condom, found repeatedly in Benetton advertising (and explained fully in chapter five), and adds the international currencies to layer meaning and criticism.

Benetton's countering comments to this boycott advertisement posit that the ads have helped contribute to the demystifying of HIV. Benetton's director of public relations in New York, Peter Fressola, said the company had been unprepared for the degree of vehemence that the HIV ad inspired. Fressola stated:

There are a lot of people who believe the greatest foe in the fight against AIDS is invisibility... It takes a shocking image sometimes to jar people out of complacency. The purpose of these ads is not to sell clothing, but the caveat is that Benetton is in business to sell apparel. These ads are designed, at the same time as they raise awareness of a serious issue, to make awareness of our label. (quoted in Spindler)

Fressola highlights the company's interest in drawing attention to AIDS issues through challenging advertising norms and summarizes the company's interest in brand marketing

One month before the "United boycott," a Benetton protester mirrored the spirit of criticism represented by that campaign in the creation of his own advertisement that ran in the newspaper, *Liberation*. In October of 1993, Olivier Besnard-Rousseau launched a poster featuring his own gaunt face with the words "HIV Positive" printed in the corner. The caption underneath read, "During the agony, sales continue." In smaller type he

included the words, "For the attention of Luciano Benetton from Olivier Besnard-Rousseau, ill with Aids, the terminal phase." This advertisement attempted to draw attention to the monetary gain of a company using AIDS and to register protest that selling sweaters does not work to end the AIDS crisis.

This advertisement cost Besnard-Rousseau \$14,000 and appeared as a full-page advertisement. The image was also glued by protesters to the windows of Benetton shops in Paris (Spindler). The picture of Besnard-Rousseau relied heavily on *pathos* to persuade others that Benetton's practices were wrong and should be controlled and stopped. Besnard-Rousseau said when he first spotted the Benetton poster, "I felt like I was punched in the stomach. I wanted to cry." He continued, "There is too much pain, physical and mental, in Aids for that to be acceptable" (quoted in Lowry). Besnard-Rousseau then suggests that the appropriateness of for AIDS imagery lies outside the scope of fashion or commercial advertising.

Besnard-Rousseau's advertisement, which depicted the reality of a body dying from AIDS-related causes, is reminiscent of the earlier Benetton advertisement that showed a reworked photojournalistic image of David Kirby in his last moments of life. Benetton too had attempted to show the pain involved in AIDS deaths by using Kirby's image and was met with criticism. While the two images are similar in nature, Besnard-Rousseau's advertisement did not seem to attract outrage concerning the image of sickness and AIDS. Instead, the pasting of Besnard-Rousseau's picture to shop windows might indicate the level at which activists embraced his attempt to spread a message against Benetton. This expression of anger against Benetton was embraced as an activist endeavor in ways that the Kirby family's activist agenda concerning the spread of a message of AIDS awareness was not.

Benetton chose to take action against criticism to its HIV positive campaign by funding another AIDS awareness-raising activity clearly promoted as a partnership with an activist group. On International AIDS Day in December of 1993, Benetton

collaborated with France's ACT UP and placed a giant pink condom over the 75 foot obelisk in the Place de la Concorde in Paris. According to a press release on the Benetton website, the record size nylon contraceptive was over 22 meters tall, 3.5 meters wide, and weighed about 35 kilos.

The account of the collaboration was reported by Nicholas Powell in the December 4, 1993, edition of *The Herald*. Powell said that the police allowed the group to hoist up the giant prophylactic on the condition that it did not stay there all day. Organizers explained that the condom was intended to attract the attention of the public—to be a traffic-stopper—to combat public indifference to the ever-growing problem of AIDS. The 'preservatif rose,' as the company labeled it, was visible the length of Champs Elysees and across the river to the National Assembly. Some people, like the concierge at the Hotel Crillon that faces the Place de la Concorde, were not so sure of the condom's message and thought it was a joke ("Benetton, AIDS").

The Benetton Group's cooperation on this project was controversial because of the earlier launching of the HIV positive campaign. Though many AIDS activists expressed concern that these advertisements were impeding the AIDS effort, ACT UP organizers seemed to disagree and said that they did not care so long as Benetton helped pay for the project. One organizer claimed, "There is not a Benetton scandal, but there is an Aids scandal. We don't give a damn about Benetton. We want the slaughter to stop" (quoted in Powell). This sentiment seems to place the importance of the activist agenda above the interpretations of the ad campaign. Both logos for the groups declared boldly the sponsors' involvement.

To AIDS activists, the site of this event in Paris, France, is particularly significant in respect to the AIDS problem facing that country. According to Powell, the Paris region alone has more cases than the whole of the UK. And in 1993, France was among the worst countries affected in Europe with over 24,000 declared cases as compared to some 7,000 in Britain.

The Benetton Group, however, explains their interest in being involved with this effort from a different angle than the activists. The December 2, 1993, edition of *Women's Wear Daily* cites Peter Fressola's public comment on Benetton's involvement in the project: "The reason we did this in Paris was because of the degree of opposition we got from AIDS organizations and Pierre Berge to the ad campaign.... So we took the initiative one step further." Through this "preservatif rose" display, Benetton attempted to reaffirm its identity as a company concerned with AIDS and the surrounding issues.

By sponsoring the AIDS activist group's project, the Benetton Group attempted to discredit those French critics who oppose the HIV positive ad campaign. Fressola commented:

We find their approach and response to the Benetton ads very patronizing to the AIDS community, almost as if they feel they have to protect AIDS victims. They seem to be more interested in controlling the message rather than engaging in public discussion about HIV.... That these people presume to speak for the HIV community is ludicrous. ("British")

Perhaps the French Retailers Association would agree, as the group awarded the advertising campaign with the "Enseigne d'or 94" for the best campaign of the year.

Following the condom operation, ACT-UP staged a public protest that was attended by around 4000 people who marched from the *Republique* in the east end of Paris to the Opera in the middle. The marchers used two giant projectors at the head of the procession to flash slogans onto buildings along the way including slogans such as, "Silence equals death," "Anger equals action," and "Action equals life" (Powell). These giant slogans then reinforced the scale of the condom project.

Along with using countering advertisements to protest Benetton's practices, as well as to influence consumers not to frequent Benetton stores, many groups advocated the simple banning and removal of the Benetton HIV positive advertisements. Benetton chose to debut the arm and buttocks advertisements in Ireland but was met with criticism

from the Dublin AIDS Alliance. The group said the advertisements imply that HIV is an issue merely for the gay community and drug users. The Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland requested that the advertisements be withdrawn immediately. Two Swiss cities, Lausanne and Zurich, also banned the advertisements.

Members of the British charity ACET (AIDS Care Education and Training) also demanded the withdrawal of the advertisements from UK newspapers and the French metro system. Maurice Adams, the executive director of ACET, commented:

The image of branding when it comes to HIV/Aids is one we have all worked hard to get away from to reduce the stigma of Aids.... I hope these offensive images will be withdrawn. If they consider this working for charity, then this kind of help we can do without. (*Financial Times*)

This criticism from a charitable AIDS organization questions the efficacy of the advertisements in aiding the social agenda of activists.

Additionally, Adams extended his call for the removal of the advertisements and played within an editorial war that waged in *The Independent*. The dialogue began with Outrage member Rob Kemp's previously mentioned article of September 22, 1993, which criticized Benetton and culminated with these comments:

The supposed value of the adverts—in "raising awareness" to undermine stigmatization—is wholly outweighed by the horrific prejudice with which the pictures identify and to which they lend weight.... There is, and can be, no possible reason for manufacturing images that act out the pipe-dreams of those who seem implacably opposed to the very existence of drug users, gay men, lesbians and people with HIV or Aids. To say this is not to seek to censor reality but simply to argue against wholly artificial, offensive images of a nightmare future that I hope never to see.

Kemp's view of the advertisements seems to rely heavily on additional issues of discrimination and stigmatization that these groups experienced historically. The history of persecution of gays and lesbians is long and troubling. Kemp's view of the advertisements seems to be inseparable from that knowledge. In one sense, Kemp

communicates a fear of continued persecution by suggesting that these advertisements will work to encourage further prejudices. Additionally, the criticism stems from the threat that homosexual and drug-using bodies may be marked permanently against their will.

Benetton quickly responded to Kemp's article with a letter to the editor by Marina Galanti, Manager of Foreign Press Relations, which ran in the September 24, 1993, edition. Galanti wrote to justify Benetton's advertisements by claiming that they were simply part of a larger campaign effort that promotes prevention and social awareness and the issues surrounding HIV/AIDS. Galanti noted that in 1993 Benetton distinctly aligned itself with AIDS causes when the company became the first corporate signatory to the "UK Declaration of the Rights of People with HIV and Aids." She then suggested that the HIV positive campaign served to expose the plight of human beings who are dehumanized by society because they have HIV or AIDS. She wrote:

Our three pictures are intended to symbolise the social complexities experienced by people, who, in the eyes of society, are at once victims, or threats, but rarely just human beings. They provide a reminder to our collective memory of the danger of stigmatising minorities, and the "dehumanising" consequences this may have. They are also, of course, symbolic of the main channels through which HIV can be acquired, if preventive measures are not taken. They are not easy pictures: this is not an easy issue.

With these comments the company attempts to explain its effort to humanize the issues of people living with HIV/AIDS.

After Galanti's response ran in *The Independent*, Maurice Adams then became involved in the editorial commentary war. Adams countered Galanti in the September 28, 1993, edition calling Galanti's response both naïve and patronizing. He wrote that members of ACET, the UK's largest independent provider of AIDS education to schools, spend their lives dealing with messages and images to confront the prejudice and stigma of AIDS. He added that they have fought to eradicate the image of branding when it

comes to HIV/AIDS for five years. Citing the sentiments of his fellow workers, Adams then suggested that the HIV positive images undermine the work of those involved daily in face-to-face AIDS education. He wrote, "All of us know that images tend to give an over-riding message that may well not be what is intended. In our view, these images serve to further stigmatise Aids." Adam admits that the company may not have intended to send a negative message but that the images are damaging nonetheless.

In October of 1993, *The Irish Times* also featured somewhat of a war of editorials concerning the Benetton Group's HIV positive campaign. This exchange began with an article by Ger Philpott published in the October 4 edition that proposed "Benetton Images Gave Chance for HIV Education." Philpott, director of Aidswise, wrote:

The knee-jerk responses of those critical of the Benetton campaign depicting body parts--an arm and a buttocks--tattooed with the words "HIV positive" have obscured the underlying issues raised by the advertisements. At the very least, criticism of the billboard posters because the images stigmatise intravenous drug-users and gay men...has ignored their usefulness to highlight that unsafe involvement with shooting drugs and anal sex can be the primary routes of transmission of this deadly disease. The public display of these posters presents an opportunity to direct a much-needed debate on HIV infection.

Philpott's view opposes that of the previous critics and affirms the company's desire to create opportunities to discuss HIV/AIDS issues.

Philpott continued that the public display of the Benetton posters presents an opportunity for those interested to direct public debate on HIV infection and noted that gay men are not the exclusive practitioners of anal sex. Further, Philpott declared the campaign to have much to do with contamination and stigmatization but not in an exploitative way. He wrote, "It does not take an inordinate stretch of the imagination to see the parallels between these images and the stigmatisation recently doled out to the HIV-positive Cubans quarantined, by the Clinton administration, at Guantanamo Bay."

To Philpott, the representation of stigmatization as a result of contamination does not exploit because it indicates the reality of the status quo.

Philpott offered a personal response to the posters that he filtered through his own life experience and interaction with HIV infection and AIDS. He argued:

Measured analysis will reveal these posters to be positive because they challenge the all-too-frequent and disempowering "victim" label attached to people with HIV and AIDS. Regrettably, the kerfuffle leading to the removal of the images has hampered the potential of the campaign for HIV prevention. This is a classic case of inability to distinguish the wood from the trees, and it behooves those working in the field to reappraise their responses.

Viewing the advertisements as potentially powerful agents in HIV prevention efforts, Philpott challenges those who oppose the advertisements and asks them to analyze their response concerning the subjects represented in the ads.

Deidre O'Brien commented in the October 13, 1993, edition of *The Irish Times* that she found the content of Philpott's article, as well as the notion that Benetton's advertisements could be seen as an educational tool, astonishing. O'Brien countered:

As director of Aidswise Mr Philpott must realize that most thinking members of society know that unsafe IV drug use and unprotected gay sex are primary causes of the spread of the disease. What every thinking member of society does not necessarily realise is that unprotected heterosexual sex is just as likely to cause the disease to spread. While drug users and gay men appear to be heeding the writing on the wall—or get the posters on the billboards—sadly the same cannot be said of the heterosexual section of the community.

O'Brien's concern is that the advertisements do not seem to effectively reach the heterosexual section of the population and that Philpott seems to ignore this factor. O'Brien further wrote:

Mr Philpott said that "gay men did not invent and are not exclusive practitioners of anal sex." Is he suggesting that

because of this the picture of a HIV-positive branded buttock is really getting the message to heterosexuals albeit in an obscure way? Was the advertising campaign telling heterosexuals that they should refrain from practising anal sex as this was dangerous, but not to worry about vaginal sex? He cannot seriously believe that the general public would receive this cryptic message even if it was what was intended by the advertisers which of course it was not.

O'Brien ultimately argued that if the campaign was doing anything apart from sensationalizing the issue, it was preaching to a converted audience of gay men and abusers and endorsing stigmatization. She noted that any connection between the campaign and the reality of living with HIV was elusive, as was any connection between HIV/AIDS and casual clothing.

The inspiration for O'Brien's letter to the editor seems to be that Philpott serves in a distinct capacity as the director of Aidswise and that O'Brien understands there to be certain realms of belief and advocacy for someone in this position. She argued that those given a public voice ought to use it responsibly:

Mr Philpott drew to a conclusion by saying that the thrust of the campaign was that everyone was vulnerable to the epidemic but that "some of us are at a significantly higher risk than others." Did he mean that these others can afford to be less careful? Long live freedom of expression but people in his position, as director of Aidswise and someone personally affected by the disease through the loss of a loved one ... can have a powerful influence on public perception. As such they should be careful about the signal they send out.

O'Brien adamantly affirms the need for everyone to be proactive in HIV prevention and that certain risk groups should not be singled out for prevention messages at the cost of creating a sense of disaffection. As a side note, O'Brien then also declared that she would "never darken the door of any Benetton shop again."

Ger Philpott responded to O'Brien's "Viewpoint" in the October 22, 1993, edition of *The Irish Times*. Philpott wrote that the key point of the Benetton series was that they got people talking and writing about AIDS again, thereby delivering needed information.

Philpott argued that O'Brien's observation that unprotected heterosexual sex was just as likely to cause the spread of HIV as unsafe drug use or unprotected gay sex was a case in point:

If one reader of *The Irish Times* had missed, or mentally denied, this point up to now, Ms. O'Brien's feature will have done that reader a good service—but the opportunity to do this service was created, indirectly, by the Benetton advertisements. To that extent, the Benetton images got AIDS back up in the public consciousness—they created a peak of awareness.

Philpott advocates that this opportunity to discuss HIV or AIDS is inherently the positive function of the advertising campaign.

Philpott agreed with O'Brien that it is important to be careful about signals and noted the following information related to the AIDS crisis in Ireland:

If HIV prevention is to be taken seriously, Department of Health surveillance figures on reported HIV infection must be organised in a way that, publicly, yields an age, gender and regional breakdown of data. This is necessary to better inform the design and direction of HIV prevention initiatives. Given that the overall level of new reported HIV infection has increased here at a sustained level of approximately 10 percent over the past number of years, it is crucially important that this type of system be in place without further delay.

It would seem from Philpott's observations that research concerning the spread of HIV would better influence the public if it were clearly applicable to specific population groups.

Philpott further argued that in order to manage the prevention of HIV infection, cultural barriers, such as homophobia and its effect of fueling the complacency of officials, must be overcome in order to implement realistic HIV prevention work with gay men in Ireland. Philpott attributed these sources with the 19 percent increase in the

level of new reported HIV infection in gay men for the 12-month period to September 1993. Philpott noted:

This is the biggest increase in any group for this 12-month period. The statements of official spokespersons, and others, without supporting evidence, alleging that "gay men have changed their behaviour," or gay men have "converted" to safer sex practices, are thinly disguised codes, the essence of which amounts to an undervaluing of gay lives.

Philpott notes that at least in Ireland the spread of HIV within the gay community appears to be rising not slowing. This trend reflects a rise within other countries and cultures as well. For instance, the September 29, 1997, edition of *Newsweek* documents an alarming trend within the gay community in the United States to abandon the dogma of safe sexual practice lulled by the notion of that HIV infection is on the decline.

Reports promoting the spread of HIV as declining within the homosexual community have encouraged the experimentation of unsafe sexual practices. Marc Peyser reports that a study conducted by doctors at the University of California, San Francisco, and published in the August 1997 *New England Journal of Medicine* found that 15 percent of the men surveyed had already engaged in higher-risk sex because they're less concerned about AIDS (76). This rise in risky sexual activity is a response to information campaigns and new treatments for slowing AIDS-related deaths.

With this information of increased infection rates within the homosexual community, Philpott counters the accuracy of O'Brien's observations about the spread of HIV and groups most significantly affected, particularly in Ireland. Philpott concludes his response using the image of AIDS in Ireland as a coin. He poses that if one side of a coin were to represent the care and management of AIDS and the other were to represent HIV prevention, then past official responses to the epidemic have split the coin to the detriment of HIV prevention. He writes, "Imperatively, it is against this background, and the lack of resources available for HIV prevention work, that one must grab and exploit

every opportunity for consciousness-raising (such as that offered by Benetton)." Again, Philpott affirms the value of any effort that will aid the cause.

What we see in the dispute between Philpott and O'Brien are strains of the difference between an activist agenda and one caught in ideas of corporate gain. Ger Philpott is readily involved in the AIDS activist agenda and because of this involvement finds the imagery helpful rather than exploitative. His angle of using the imagery to create awareness mirrors the activist mindset of the Kirby family. Both the Kirby family and Philpott are concerned with generating discussion. Therefore, because the advertisements of both campaigns have done just that, they can view the advertising as successful. Ultimately, they have taken artifacts that fit within the ideology of corporate gain (advertisements) and shaped an understanding of the texts as something that promotes their own agenda. O'Brien seems unable to view that understanding as empowering. Maurice Adams also does not seem to view the ads as productive and reinforces the idea that the activist community obviously does not agree on appropriate messages concerning HIV/AIDS.

The advertisements of this campaign provoked extreme reactions from viewers inspired to write letters and opinion pieces, picket stores, assault shops, boycott purchasing, take out confrontational ads, and poster store windows. This protest activity also extended to the court systems to challenge the appropriateness of the advertising campaign and to control the use of the imagery. Once groups demanded the removal of the advertisements and then filed lawsuits in several European countries, governing bodies were called on to determine how to address the problem of displaying Benetton's advertisements and the viewers' responses.

Protest began in France with a lawsuit filed the week the campaign was launched in September of 1993. The French Agency for the Fight Against AIDS (AFLS) and the National AIDS Council filed a civil complaint against Benetton and demanded that an unspecified amount of damages be paid to agencies fighting AIDS. They said that the

advertisements evoke in the collective memory Nazi practices¹ and demanded that Benetton take down the posters and pay the unspecified damages. The AFLS accused Benetton of "deforming a humanitarian cause for a commercial end" ("Benetton, AIDS"). Citing a law banning exploitation of illness and suffering for commercial gain, the government bodies subsequently asked a judge to ban the posters showing the naked buttocks and arm. The court, however, ruled in favor of Benetton on November 24, 1993.

The effort by the AFLS to ban Benetton's use of the posters, as well as to get Benetton to pay money to AIDS agencies to compensate for the use of the images presents a problematic view of the AIDS activists' interest within the AIDS agenda. Ultimately, it comes across as a selfish attempt to acquire more funds to promote their agenda. The accusation that Benetton deformed a humanitarian cause for commercial gain seems to disregard the potential of advertising's role in social activism and the medium's potential for reaching large numbers of people with a message. The accusation that the advertising deformed the AIDS social cause actually raises questions about the activists' own deforming of due process for their own commercial gain. The AFLS essentially accuses Benetton of illegal activity and of evoking Nazi practices in the collective memory. They build this accusation on their interpretation of the advertising campaign as one that perpetuates the hate inherent within the Nazi movement. They then attempt to hold Benetton accountable for their interpretation. A ruling in favor of the lawsuit by AFLS risks establishing a precedent whereby people disturbed by advertising images can sue the producer of those images for monetary compensation based on faulty perceptions of damages.

¹ The opposition to the representation of the HIV tattoo posits that the ad serves as a reminder of the Nazi branding of homosexuals during the Holocaust. Interestingly enough, the gay movement adopted a symbol from the Nazi regime that served to identify homosexuals like the yellow Star of David identified Jews. The pink triangle has been used since the 1960s as an emblem of gay empowerment.

Nevertheless, in another instance plaintiffs suing Benetton for defamatory advertising and breach of privacy did receive a ruling against the company. The National AIDS Federation and three HIV positive people—Erik David, Eric Eme, and Elisabeth Da Paz—filed this lawsuit in a French court. The court said that the campaign was an abuse of freedom of expression and "a provocative exploitation of suffering" but rejected the claim that the advertisements had invaded personal privacy (Deeny).

The Paris High Court ordered Benetton to pay Eme and Da Paz \$9,600 each and David \$11,500 in damages, as well as to pay the National AIDS Federation \$1540 (8,001 francs)—one symbolic franc in damages and the rest for a breach of civil procedure. The court also warned that Benetton would be fined a further \$9600 if it attempted to reprint the offending advertisements. The court also ordered the Benetton Group to take out notices publicizing the decision in three French daily newspapers—*La Croix*, *Le Monde* and *Liberation* (Deeny).

The court said in the ruling that the right to liberty of expression in the French constitution had a limit and that Benetton's advertising had degenerated into an abuse. It continued:

Evoking images of Nazi barbarism or branded beef ...
when no caption explains their sense constitutes, at the very
least, an equivocal and questionable message which permits
unfavorable interpretations about the causes of AIDS.
(quoted in Deeny)

The court's response introduces the notion that because the advertisements allow for unfavorable interpretations about the cause of AIDS, they must be controlled. Incredibly enough, this ruling proposes that artists may be held accountable for others' interpretation of their work.

During the trial, the Benetton Group argued that the company had previously supported research into a cure for AIDS, made donations to AIDS causes, and undertaken other actions worldwide. Nevertheless, the court stated that Benetton's prior involvement

in combating AIDS did not make the 1993 campaign's message clear. A spokesperson for Benetton in Italy countered, "It's clear that a company that has been communicating for 12 years about tolerance isn't going to put out a campaign in favor of discrimination. They focused only on the emotional side effects of the campaign and not on the positive things we have also done" (quoted in Deeny). Along similar lines, the official press release from Benetton's Paris office continued:

The Benetton company is astonished that the court at no time took into consideration the numerous messages of support and even enthusiasm received both from associations and suffers [sic], which remain for the company proof of the usefulness of its action. (quoted in Whitney)

The company's frustration involves the notion that its advertisements might be interpreted out of context of its overall offerings and proposed AIDS agenda, and that the diverse voices of those in favor of the advertising campaign seemed not to be credited.

Some public criticism concerning the effort to censor Benetton ran in the February 13, 1995, edition of *Advertising Age*. In the article "Why Praise a Censor?" editors remarked that the *Paris Tribunal de Grande Instance*, the country's highest civil court, had gone too far by granting damages to the people with AIDS suing Benetton. The editorial continued:

Are their ads in bad taste? No doubt about it. A waste of money? Probably. But a punishable offense? No way. Perhaps France does not value freedom of speech as it is valued in the U.S.

Advertising Age editors quoted Jacques Bille of the French Association of Advertising Agencies as saying that he found the court's decision very satisfying. Bille further explained, "Bad advertising has never caused any good to the advertising business, especially when it is against the rights of the people and the tastes of society. Provocation does not pay anymore." Editors at *Advertising Age*, however, choose to hold firmly to the ideals of freedom of expression even if the advertising is provocative.

For clarification, Bille countered the editorial in the February 27, 1995, edition of *Advertising Age* and recapped the conflict between freedom of (commercial) speech and the law. Bille maintained that once the court determined the Benetton campaign was exploitative, detrimental to others, and outside the domain of commercial activities, Benetton became unlawful and liable to punishment. He further stated that because the French support the International Chamber of Commerce Code, no one in France feels that the advertising industry should support campaigns ruled illegal even if for the theoretical sake of freedom of speech. Further, Bille extends his argument beyond the legal and ethical factors of Benetton's campaign to include the effect of that campaign on the advertising business in general. He writes:

From the very beginning, Benetton chose to ignore our common rules of self-regulation and thus has endangered the reputation of self-regulation, its practice, procedures and its bodies both nationally and Europe-wide. The overwhelming majority of advertisers, agencies and media in European countries have considered this an irresponsible attitude. It has created considerable instability and has posed a threat to the advertising community as a whole since regulators, legislators and governments are, as a result, more inclined to distrust self-regulation and set up new, stricter rules. This we do not want either.

To Bille, the policing of Benetton's activity appears prudent because it attempts to support the structure supporting self-regulation.

While the HIV positive advertising war waged in France, another European country also grappled with addressing Benetton's advertising within the judicial system. In March of 1994, a German Court banned the HIV advertising campaign saying the advertisements were both obscure and tasteless. The Center Against Unfair Competition, a nonprofit advertising watchdog group, filed this case. The Frankfurt court said the campaign, which focused on the plight of AIDS patients, breached German advertising laws and was in bad taste because it evoked memories of World War II concentration camp victims. Benetton appealed this decision, but the Federal Court of Justice in

Karlshue ruled that Benetton violated competition laws by exploiting human suffering. The court ruled on the HIV positive campaign, as well as one featuring a duck trapped in an oil slick and one featuring Latin American children performing hard labor. The court wrote:

Benetton is trying, through its depiction of the intense suffering of living things, to evoke a feeling of compassion on the part of the consumer, and to suggest that it is sympathetic.... In this way, Benetton tries to enhance its name and its business in the mind of the consumer. (Walsh)

Ultimately, the court determined that this effort to establish Benetton as sympathetic to these social issues through advertising was inappropriate.

The court's ruling ultimately referred to the display of all Benetton advertisements in Germany that violated German standards because they sought to make consumers feel pity for the suffering of people and animals. The court suggested that using such intense emotional appeals to sell products is immoral and added that the picture of David Kirby used in the Benetton Group's 1992 campaign strips HIV positive people of their dignity. Kirsten Moehrle, an official at the Center for Fighting Unfair Competition, commented, "The point of our case was that you cannot use advertising to shock people and create sympathy and then try to sell clothing to them" (quoted in Nash). With this statement, Moehrle establishes her point that a social agenda does not naturally combine with a commercial agenda.

Benetton spokeswoman Marina Galanti said that the clothing company's lawyers considered whether to appeal to Germany's specialized Constitutional Court because the firm believes that important issues of corporate free speech were at stake. She argued that the very nature of advertising is to make intense emotional appeals and that other companies just use different emotions—greed, lust, whatever (Walsh). Galanti's espousal of the appropriateness of appeals to *pathos* seem inherent to the advertising forum and persuasion.

Creative director Oliviero Toscani commented that this case in particular reflects a culturally specific response to the Benetton advertisements and the historical references made concerning the advertisements. He said, "I think the Germans are particularly sensitive about this matter because they possess a great sense of guilt" (quoted in "Graphic"). He stressed the importance of Benetton's campaign in raising social awareness:

This case shows the campaign does not just have commercial ends.... It makes people think about the issues we highlight.... There are children dying in Sarajevo and all most of us are worried about is our summer holidays. (quoted in "Graphic")

To Toscani, the presence of social ills mandates the use of advertising to address social issues, and he focuses attention on the results of his advertising efforts that increase awareness and generate discussion.

The efforts to ban Benetton's advertising also extended to the company's native Italy. In February of 1994, an Italian consumer organization named *Federconsumatori* asked Italy's Antitrust Commission for a ban on the HIV positive campaign on the grounds that Benetton's approach was contrary to fair trading principles and constituted unfair competition. The commission, however, ruled for Benetton. In a second decision, the commission ruled that Benetton could not reuse the 1992 David Kirby ad in Italy because its content could be disturbing to children and adolescents. A Benetton spokesperson commented, "How they arrived at this decision, given that most children have access to images that are far more disconcerting on evening television, isn't really clear" (quoted in Forden). This ruling does not seem to cover the use of the image in museum gallery spaces and only controls its use as an advertisement in traditional advertising venues.

The decisions against Benetton and the attempts to police the display of Benetton's advertisements required Benetton to rethink its AIDS/HIV advertising images.

Benetton appeared to respond by creating less controversial future advertisements dealing with this topic area. Nevertheless, the controversy and spirit of toning down content defies the creator's understanding of his images. Oliviero Toscani blatantly asserts: "I don't think I have to justify the adverts.... I've got children and they keep asking me what's going on. I don't see why people get shocked" (quoted in Brown). Toscani firmly espouses the function of Benetton ads: "The adverts are not to boost sales, we are using communications to raise awareness of the Benetton brand, to do charity, both" (quoted in Brown). Toscani claims that advertising provides a forum in which companies can raise awareness about social issues and market their name. He states, "Benetton gives me the possibility to say these things. Anybody can hire Claudia Schiffer to make their product sell, but I think companies have a duty to take a position on the larger issue" (quoted in "Benetton's"). That belief, however, appears to be where the activist community, advertising industry, and the company disagree.

DISCUSSION

Essentially it seems that the Benetton Group proposes that they are taking a position on larger issues in the company's advertising though the position they take is unclear. On one hand, company officials brag about the ambiguity of their imagery and on the other they claim to be sending a message about the places that HIV may enter the body and the dangers of stigmatizing certain social groups. The specific message of danger surrounding the stigmatization of people with HIV or AIDS is unclear though the proposition suggests there is danger in placing a mark of disgrace or shame on certain social groups. Whether or not this particular mark of the HIV tattoo is intended to be a stigma is not obvious though the tattoos are placed on parts of the body symbolic of the virus' entrance into the body. Those opposing the imagery of the 1993 campaign argue that the company's advertising sends a message that the company supports stereotypes concerning population groups and the spread of HIV, and they believe that those stereotypes are bad. These depictions reference the ads as promoting a branding of

bodies with HIV infection, and groups who take offense attempt to impose this interpretation on others. While this interpretation may not be dominant in viewers, they privilege their interpretation and demand action and compensation.

The action of the courts to intercede in the conflict surrounding the advertisements is particularly troubling, especially in instances where people are awarded monetary damages because they do not like the advertising imagery (or their interpretation of the imagery). The notion that the representations cause enough damage to require the imposition of fines on the company does raise questions about the appropriateness of using the courts to control advertising. If everyone were to sue over imagery that they found distasteful or that they believe violated their privacy, we would make a complete farce of the advertising world, as well as the court systems. The notion that advertising that makes no untrue product claims and that makes no claims concerning the competitor's products is somehow contrary to fair trading principles and constitutes unfair competition seems nonsensical.

In addition, the French court ruled that the campaign was an abuse of freedom of expression and somehow exploited suffering, yet the subjects in the advertisements do not seem to be suffering. The bodies of the subjects are not malnourished. They do not seem to be exposed to severe temperatures. There is no sign of physical abuse or bruising on the forms. The bodies simply have a stamp of HIV (probably done with water-soluble ink and easily washed off) on certain parts. If the issue for the court is that some viewers suffer as a result of viewing the ad and due to the consequences of the ad, then I would like to receive compensation from those manufacturers who promote busty women with tan skin as quintessential beauty in their advertising imagery, because I suffer psychological damage as a result of viewing and the promotion of such imagery.

A key area of challenge within the AIDS activist community in addressing this campaign appears to be the lack of unification in the ideals of AIDS organizations to promote HIV/AIDS imagery and messages. The group's disagreement about what

images are helpful and what images are damaging seems to send a contradictory message about the AIDS cause and offers a contradictory strategy in shaping effective representations. For example, critics reviewed the 1992 image of AIDS activist David Kirby as presenting a damaging image of AIDS, yet an activist in opposition to the 1993 advertising campaign promoted an advertisement of himself that portrayed a clearly ill body that the community rallied behind. Both images portrayed a representation of AIDS involving sickness and death, but one involved a message produced by a company and the other a personal statement. Though the Kirby family intended the ad to send a message for them, viewers were not quick to associate the family's activist agenda with the ad probably because copy was not included in the ad. The association of corporate gain attached to Benetton's controversial imagery seemed to block interpretations concerning the message the ad sent about AIDS. These advertisements demonstrate the lack of clarity within AIDS efforts to agree on images that challenge the public and effectively address AIDS issues.

The cries of outrage by Benetton's critics raise the question, why should the view of those who oppose the ads be privileged and result in censor, banning, and monetary compensation simply because the images are unexpected for fashion advertising and because they are presented by a clothing company? Essentially, this activity of censoring Benetton attempts to privilege certain representations concerning AIDS and HIV. Representations of any group are political by design, as are interpretations. The representations of women and minority groups in the media have undergone close scrutiny over the years, and advertisers have shaped images to produce more politically correct offerings. Obviously there are still concerns about the way these groups are portrayed. In fact, Benetton officials reference the effects and potential harms that presenting glamorous beauty in ads causes on impressionable youth.

Maybe by protesting the AIDS imagery within this campaign, activists are further promoting their own social agenda of attracting attention to AIDS causes. The Benetton

imagery itself attracts attention because of its introduction of topics typically not addressed in the advertising realm. The attention that this advertising attracts then gives the activist community an opportunity to shape attention and invite even more discussion concerning AIDS issues. Perhaps the critics of the ads, so accustomed to using strategies of protest to express their opposition, naturally incorporated these protest strategies in response to Benetton advertisements and as a way to promote their own agendas. Benetton offered a starting point with images not currently under discussion and allowed/encouraged the opportunity for more discussion. These activist communities then responded from that point. That the groups found the Benetton images offensive appears unimportant. The calls to ban the ads, however, seem to oppose the progress of promoting HIV and AIDS issues through open discussion.

CHAPTER 5: ADDITIONAL AIDS-RELATED PROMOTION

The Benetton Group's agenda concerning AIDS is extensive though the evolution of philanthropic service was haphazard and slow to unfold. In 1992 Benetton offered the advertising image of AIDS activist David Kirby on his deathbed to increase interest in AIDS issues, but the company was not prepared for the reaction that this image caused. In retrospect, the ad seemed to serve as a catalyst to spur the company to pair good intentions with action and to help Benetton formulate a more active involvement in the AIDS cause.

Many critics were interested in knowing how the Benetton Group planned to justify placing unexpected imagery into the advertising forum beyond calling it "art with a social message." At a February 13 press conference in 1992, reporters asked Luciano Benetton directly how the company planned to further the AIDS cause beyond simply advertising the Kirby image. Benetton seemed to hedge in response while noting that the controversy had surprised the company. He added through a translator, "We would like to answer that personally at a later date. We're in touch with many organizations and will attack the problem at the end of the campaign" (quoted in Palmieri). Robert Parola noted that even if the company was surprised, it was shocking that Benetton still had not formulated what its next step would be. Benetton later stated, "We will address [charitable donations] individually and privately. This is not a vehicle to promote where the family chooses to donate money" (quoted in Ward). Later, Benetton would decline further involvement with charity donations.

In a February 16, 1992, article, Lesley White quoted Luciano Benetton as saying:

We do not envisage giving any money to Aids research charities People who expect us to do that are not being realistic. There are so many fund-raising organisations in the world that people could say we should be giving money to all of them. I do not give to any charities, but I do help out by co-operating with certain schemes [sic] last year we

helped the mayor of New York to distribute condoms in schools.

This \$50,000 project helped to set up the HIV-AIDS Education Fund, an AIDS education program for New York City's public schools, which was implemented by the Minister of Education, Fernandez ("Aids and Benetton 1991").

At a press conference launching the campaign at London's Royal College of Art on February 19, reporters asked Luciano Benetton if the Benetton Group gave money to relevant charities. Benetton responded that the Group had no such plan: "We are not interested that this should form part of our communications and publicity" (quoted in Russell). Further, Benetton clarified, "As far as making charitable contributions is concerned, that isn't our job. The state must be present in those circumstances" (quoted in Mead, "Watchdog"). He had stated the previous week that "part of the donation to society is that these issues are being raised" (quoted in M. Moore).

The Benetton Group has argued that the advertising itself is a donation to society because of the social issues it addresses. Pascal Sommariba, Benetton's International Advertising Director, explained the company's position on donations and the service of its advertising: "If a company makes 10% profits and takes 20% of it for charity, this is 2% of its turnover. If you take just 1/3rd of a communication budget of, say 5% of turnover, you are already there and it does not look like a charitable company, it is fairer" (quoted in Pinson and Tibrewala 13). According to the company, this plan of using the advertising and associated budget for a social issues campaign means that Benetton is giving more and doing more than those who make ordinary donations.

The basic no-charity stand on donation explains Benetton's previous response to critics' call for Benetton to back up company rhetoric with concrete action. Luciano Benetton remarked during an interview with the German publication *Werben und Verkaufen* in 1989, "I believe only people with a bad conscience demand from us that we act on the ideas we introduce . . . we don't have a bad conscience that we need to ease.

Benetton does not make donations" (quoted in Greenaway). This statement comes across as outrageous for a company determined to establish itself as socially-concerned.

Benetton soon chose to reverse its no-donation policy and eventually gave money to Pater Noster House, where David Kirby received care. The money was used to repair and remodel several houses in the area in order to provide care for persons with AIDS. The Kirbys oversaw much of the dispersal of the money and became house parents in one of the facilities. Their goal of providing better care to people with AIDS was furthered through Benetton's donation. Photographer Therese Frare, whose image the company used, notes that when she and her family returned to Ohio on vacation, she happened to tour one of the homes and found a friend living there. She said that after all the controversy surrounding the photograph and the complexities of the advertisement, all that mattered at that moment was that her friend was receiving the care that he needed (Personal interview).

The donation to Pater Noster was somewhat of a quiet one from the Benetton Group. The company did not receive much press from the donation, since it came after the controversy surrounding the campaign. Benetton had not formulated its plan for giving before the launch of the campaign and was not able to use media coverage to promote its involvement. Benetton officials have since pointed to the donation to Pater Noster House to counter criticism that Benetton's commitment to AIDS is shallow.

The viewing public increasingly demanded more involvement from Benetton to resolve the uncertain position of Benetton's advertising efforts within a social issues agenda. The company's philosophy on advertising and donations soon evolved. Company officials initially bragged that Benetton spent relatively little on advertising in comparison to companies like Fiat. Those savings were not designated clearly for any alternate uses. The company spokespersons, however, soon reworded their message to specify a positive purpose for that money to help people. Maurio Benetton, Luciano's son, commented on Benetton's evolved outlook on donations:

With other adverts you just have to change the label at the bottom of the page and you probably would not be able to tell the difference. We don't want to communicate the same advertising as the others or spend money on this. We prefer to spend some money helping AIDS associations or children's associations. (quoted in Gillan)

In 1992 the company supported the *Associazione Solidarietà AIDS* (ASA) in Italy with a donation, and the company's website indicates that Benetton in fact made various Christmas donations in 1993 to organizations such as Act Up France, A.S.A. Crusaid, Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe, Horizontes Abiertos, Propositivo, Stiftelsen Noaks Ark-Röda Korset.

While a corporate philosophy developed concerning donations, the Benetton Group was also involved in additional activities to promote AIDS issues. The remainder of this chapter first looks at the company's AIDS advertising before the Kirby image and explore the emphasis Benetton has placed on condoms as a type of public service advertising. I then extend my investigation beyond Benetton's advertising to include information on Benetton's collaboration with AIDS organizations to develop safe sex education. Finally, I discuss the messages within an AIDS edition of Benetton's company magazine, *COLORS*, in relation to educating about HIV/AIDS. Finally, I document Benetton's extended contributions to AIDS efforts through sponsorship and fund-raising endeavors.

CONDOM ADVERTISING AND CAMPAIGNS

The debate about condoms, and safe sex education generally, is one of the most alarming in the history of the AIDS epidemic thus far, because it will certainly result in many more thousands of deaths that could be avoided. (Crimp, "How" 256)

With this statement Douglas Crimp suggests that conflicts over safe sex messages and the use of condoms in safe sex campaigns have led to the disruption of AIDS campaigns that could save lives. Many fear that images of condoms and depictions of

sexual practices condone behavior when used in materials that address AIDS. Attempts to address audiences without causing offense have incorporated many strategies, particularly when addressing a general audience. For instance, a PBS broadcast of *AIDS: Changing the Rules* attempts to talk directly to men about condoms but demonstrates the application of a condom on a banana. Producers of this material most likely hoped to avoid offending viewers by using the banana rather than a penis in the demonstration. But protest over the banana's use indicates the hyper-sensitive responses of those associated with particular messages.

The president of the International Banana Association, Robert M. Moore, wrote the following in a letter to the president of PBS:

In this program, a banana is used as a substitute for a human penis in a demonstration of how condoms should be used I must tell you . . . that our industry finds such usage of our product to be totally unacceptable. The choice of a banana rather than some other inanimate prop constitutes arbitrary and reckless disregard for the unsavory association that will be drawn by the public and the damage to our industry that will result therefrom The banana is an important product and deserves to be treated with respect and consideration The banana's continued image in the minds of consumers as a healthful and nutritious product is critically important to the industry's continued ability to be held in such high regard by the product I have no alternative but to advise you that we intend to hold PBS fully responsible for any and all damages sustained by our industry as a result of the showing of this AIDS program depicting the banana in the associational context planned. (quoted in Crimp, "How" 255-256)

Moore's response to the video demonstrates the inanity and complexities encountered when designing safe sex messages to reach audiences. Essentially there is no guarantee of "safe" safe sex messages, and attempts to address condom use are particularly controversial as Moore's "unsavory" reaction demonstrates.

Against the backdrop of a politically charged environment where the government and public censor awareness efforts², enter United Colors of Benetton and condom advertisements that address the AIDS crisis. The Benetton Group asserts in *Global Vision* that the company's concern for the AIDS problem dates back to 1991 when they released six ads featuring photographs of pastel-colored condoms in a campaign titled "Aids and Safer Sex." Peter Fressola explains the company's motivation in using this condom imagery: "I think it's time to take the gloves off and put on the rubbers and address these issues" (quoted in "1991"). With this statement Fressola refers to the importance of increasing knowledge about safe sexual practices that include taking precautionary measures such as using condoms.

The company website claims that the ads caused "a great deal of confusion" in Italy and the United States. This confusion seemed to stem from Benetton's challenge to social norms that limit the acceptance of condom imagery within a popular forum. Wellings and Field indicate that images of condoms in the media have led to political resistance in some countries when promoting safe sexual practices. Safer sex campaigns typically promote using condoms or restricting the number of sexual partners. The second alternative sits better with those who believe that portraying condom imagery condones sexual promiscuity. Wellings and Field write, "The message to be monogamous has the advantage of being compatible with the traditional values while the pragmatic message to use a condom might be seen as undermining them, appearing to encourage casual sex" (32). Essentially, the authors argue that safe sex campaigners have been forced to determine whether a 'moral' message to practice monogamy or restrict numbers of partners or a 'pragmatic' message to use a condom is more politically feasible, rather than basing a decision on what is desirable in public health terms (32).

²Crimp specifically indicts the government in thwarting the efforts of safe sex campaigns to address the needs of specific communities, particularly the measures taken to deny funding for developing safe sex materials geared to the gay community.

An example of this tension may be seen in Italy. In December of 1988 the Italian Minister of Health sent a letter to each household in Italy addressing the use of condoms in sexual activity:

Anyone who says that contraception offers total safety is, according to all the experts, lying. Informed American opinion is that "the contraceptive is far from safe." We write: "It isn't completely safe." The condom today is the only barrier against dangerous sexual relations, but it's a limited barrier. (quoted in Wellings and Field 202)

The Health Minister offers hedges in advocating condom use and, according to Wellings and Field, AIDS campaigns in Italy have omitted addressing the use of condoms in public communication efforts. In response to the neglect of condom imagery in advertising, the Benetton Group offers an approach to promote condom use and to reduce perceived stigmas surrounding condoms.

In addition, the company claims that including images of condoms in Benetton ads triumphs over existing forms of censorship that govern the portrayal of condoms by the media. In the U.S., for example, network television does not accept condom commercials though local stations might accept them. In Italy, condom advertising is not permitted on private and public television until after 10:00 p.m. The image of condoms in these two countries is slowly shifting. Stuart Elliott has suggested that essentially it took a plague to effect any change in media acceptance of condom ads ("Brochure").

Fressola comments that in the United States the subject of condoms in ads has been taboo: "Condoms never came out from behind the dark, dusty counters of pharmacies It was sepulchral" (quoted in Elliott, "The Nation"). Benetton's efforts have focused on re-inventing the image of condoms. The company claims that Benetton's condom advertising attempts to "demystify condoms by presenting them as fashion items in a humorous and colorful light" ("Confusion and Condoms").

Benetton's condom ads were not accepted outright by publications, and Fressola notes that the floating condoms ad of the 1991 series was refused initially by every magazine in the company's regular media plan. Within six to nine months he describes the controversy as dying down: "No one thought any longer that the image was too hard-edged. With no other ad have we seen public opinion change so quickly to accept an image" (quoted in Elliott, "The Nation").

In 1994 the tolerance for portraying condoms in advertising seemed to broaden in the U.S. with the government's anti-AIDS campaign that incorporated animated condoms in ads. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention attempted to persuade men and women from ages 18 to 25 to use condoms or practice abstinence. Benetton's Peter Fressola commented positively about the government's involvement in the AIDS effort, "The Clinton Administration, thank God, has decided to take the gloves off" (quoted in Elliott, "The Nation"). Fressola seems to view the government's involvement as a natural sequel to the company's efforts to normalize condom imagery. Yet, an editorial in *Advertising Age* proposes that this campaign sets the stage for a debate over government advertising's future role in fighting AIDS and other issues related to personal sexual conduct ("AIDS").

John Leo, a commentator for *U.S. News and World Report*, describes the government's effort as ineffective in its purpose. He claims that propagandizing to the whole nation about condom use is a "stupefyingly ineffective way" to fight AIDS and states, "Hunters rarely succeed by spraying shotgun pellets in all directions all day. It's usually better to aim directly at the duck" (quoted in "AIDS"). Leo's observation notes the broad message of the campaign and suggests that it might fall short of reaching a target audience and distinctly affected risk groups. The U.S., however, simply joins the ranks of European companies who have developed similar print and commercial campaigns.³

³ Wellings and Field investigate public education campaigns in Europe that promote condoms in *Stopping AIDS*. Research indicates that figures for condom use show remarkable achievements over the period of the most intensive campaigning, 1986-1989. They note that the most noticeable change in sexual behavior is an increase in condom use among those at risk. The risk-reduction strategy was taken more significantly

Greater tolerance for the use of condom imagery in advertising may be seen in France where the Benetton condom ad received an award in the outdoor category at the International Advertising Press and Poster Festival in Cannes, France, in 1992. French response to the condom campaign was for the most part positive. In fact, Benetton collaborated on a national AIDS prevention campaign in the summer of 1991 that took up the colorful condom theme. Benetton and the Joker agency developed the French ad for the *Association de lutte contre le sida* (AIDES). The ad featured five colorful round condoms in a straight line against a white backdrop. Above the condoms, a red cursive text read in French, "One always has a favorite garment." Underneath the row of condoms and identifiers for AIDS organizations, was the black typed message in French, "THE CONDOM: FOR OUR PROTECTION AGAINST AIDS." No Benetton identifiers (other than the familiar condom imagery) indicated the company's involvement with these efforts. The message is attributed to AIDES, an organization developed in 1984 with volunteers and 100 staff in 72 towns in France and the French territories.

Wellings and Field note that although France is a staunchly Catholic country and attitudes towards contraception in France traditionally have been hostile and restrictive, there have been few political problems over the representations of issues relating to sexuality and condoms in AIDS campaigns. Since 1987, prevention policy in France has followed two basic objectives: to fight against the spread of the epidemic through information and condom use campaigns, and to prevent the social stigmatization of HIV infection through solidarity campaigns with HIV positive people. Before AIDS public education campaigns, condoms had a poor image and were little used—condoms were associated with illicit sex and prostitution and fewer than ten percent of the French

in countries where condom use messages were stated unequivocally and with authority, and where the confusion of mixed messages was avoided.

population used condoms before the AIDS epidemic. Before January of 1987, condom imagery was not permitted on television.

Condom imagery in AIDS prevention messages began earnestly in France in November of 1988 when the French Committee for Health Education (CFES) launched a humorous and light campaign to remove barriers to condom use and to encourage their everyday use. A campaign in 1989 also addressed these areas and attempted to eroticize condom use. Subsequent French campaigns have continued to involve condom imagery.

The open-minded acceptance of condom imagery in advertising, however, does not extend to the United Kingdom, where the Advertising Standard Authority oversees advertising. The ASA deemed Benetton's condom campaign too strong for delicate dispositions, and thereby limited Benetton's future advertising involving prophylactics. A British Rail advertisement in the early nineties encountered a similar fate as the Benetton ad and was banned for causing widespread offense. The ad featured 12 yellow condoms in a circle against a blue background and promoted the Young Person's European rail pass.

In 1987, the United Kingdom lifted regulations prohibiting the commercial advertising of condoms and condom companies began advertising their product, but non-condom-related companies that use condom imagery have been censored. The standards for controlling condom advertising, however, may differ for charitable public organizations and for-profit companies. The Health Education Authority (HEA) in the U.K. began using condom imagery in 1988 in campaigns designed to encourage young people to discuss and use condoms. A campaign in 1990 encouraged young people to use condoms while on holiday. Efforts to encourage condom use in 1991 created characterizations of condoms that normalize condom use and break down the embarrassment associated with condoms. In addition, advertisements through 1992 and 1993 also attempted to establish condoms as an everyday practice. Few reacted negatively to the use of condoms in the public service prevention context and to reminders such as the HEA's explicit airport posters that caution, "Going Far? Wherever you're going, remember to buy some condoms before you travel."

With the ban of the above for-profit advertisements, the U.K. seems to make an apparent distinction in determining appropriate agents who could use condom imagery. Essentially, the ASA has given license for governmental agencies to address AIDS and safe sex prevention, but for-profit companies are deemed inappropriate presenters of safe sex messages. The ads of the for-profit agencies are banned for causing widespread offense and perhaps promoting a liberal message that raises concerns.

Charles Gallichan, HEA's head of advertising and corporate affairs, asserts that the public opinion is not moving unambiguously towards increased liberalism in portraying HIV and AIDS in advertising and that the educational organization too has experienced some backlash for its campaigns. He reports, "When the pandemic started, no one knew what the rate of spread was going to be and people were dying very unpleasant deaths. Permission was granted to start addressing things in a way that had never been done before" (quoted in Summers). The public's response over time to these messages, however, has been to become increasingly disaffected, and Gallichan asserts that the challenges to education campaigns are great because viewers do not want to hear about HIV and AIDS.

Benetton personnel believe that the company's efforts to place condoms in the media mix have encouraged tolerance shifts. In South America in particular the company notes the success of condom imagery used in 1993:

Throughout South America, and in the face of opposition from various forms of official censorship and pressure groups (such as the Catholic Church), Benetton succeeded in demonstrating the possibility of depicting condoms in the media. This represented a major step forward in promoting the efficacy of condoms in preventing AIDS. ("Aids and Benetton 1992")

The company's efforts suggest that real progress in preventing the spread of HIV is linked to the increased awareness and use of condoms.

With the release of the "Prohylactics ads," the Benetton Group staged a worldwide campaign distributing condoms free of charge in all Benetton stores. This

condom dispersal, along with the ads, was an effort to normalize the appearance of condoms in the media and the marketplace. The company website describes the American public's response to focusing on condoms:

This move was met with general disapproval from older adults but enthusiasm from younger customers. In the U.S. the image was censored by the media, on the grounds that it was "pornographic" and thus inappropriate for distribution through traditional press outlets such as supermarkets. ("Confusion and Condoms")

Through devotion to depicting condoms, explaining their use, and distributing free condoms, the company hoped to reduce the shock caused by speaking frankly about condoms.

In 1992, Benetton attempted another effort to demystify condoms and their efficacy in preventing AIDS through billboard placements. The company displayed a giant 24 X 26 meter billboard poster of a colored condom throughout Italy. This poster strategy was also explored in South Africa where the Benetton Group collaborated with the Medical Research Council in South Africa to display large posters featuring condoms in front of five South African hospitals in Capetown, Durban, and Pretoria. The Benetton website claims that these billboards were displayed at the request of the Medical Research Council and that a donation was made to this association.

In July of 1992, Benetton followed the advertisement of David Kirby with an ad furthering the condom theme. On the opening day of the Barcelona Olympics, the Group published double-spread ads featuring Olympic condoms in special game supplements of at least three major Spanish newspapers. The Olympic ad showed five rolled up condoms in green, purple, pink, and two shades of red in the interlocking ring formation of the Olympic symbol. Dick Pound, International Olympic Committee vice-president and marketing chief, called Benetton's use of the ad parasitical and referred to it as an attempt to ambush the games by marketing an Olympic tie-in but paying no sponsorship fees

("Pound"). Committee members threatened legal action against Benetton based on copyright laws and the use of the Olympic symbol.

A Benetton spokesperson at company headquarters responded to the criticism by downplaying negative criticism of the ad: "As in all our publicity, it is our contribution to the social scene, and we have a clear conscience. It is a highly pertinent theme, condoms being under discussion at the Amsterdam AIDS conference and there is a massive public interest in the subject" (quoted in Williams). The company highlights the motivation for the ad as one that draws attention to issues.⁴

SAFE SEX EDUCATION

In addition to advertising that focuses on AIDS, the Benetton Group has tried to become more active in the fight against AIDS through involvement with associations already at work. Perhaps Benetton's greatest contribution to raising AIDS awareness was the development of informational safe sex guides in conjunction with various organizations worldwide. In the summer of 1992, Benetton forwarded its charity work on AIDS when the New York subsidiary of Benetton sponsored the distribution of 585,000 brochures about AIDS prevention. The eight-page brochure, called "A Guide to Safer Sex," cost Benetton Services under \$100,000 and was bound into the July issue of *Spin*, a monthly magazine covering rock music and other youth-oriented topics. The brochure was proposed by sales executives at *Spin* and Media Buying Services International in New York, which handles media buying for Benetton Services.

According to Stuart Elliott, the brochure was written by the Gay Men's Health Crisis in New York, the largest AIDS service organization in the United States and the U.S. AIDS group most vocally critical of Benetton's use of the Kirby photograph as an

⁴ United Colors of Benetton preceded this Olympic ad with the 1992 David Kirby ad discussed in chapter three. The company followed with the 1993 HIV-positive ads addressed in chapter four. In 1994, the fall campaign featured imagery drawing attention to AIDS and included a mosaic of 1000 faces arranged to softly highlight the word AIDS. In 1995, Benetton revisited the theme of condoms and AIDS awareness by republishing ads from previous campaigns.

advertisement. According to a GMHC spokesman, the collaboration of Benetton with the GMHC marks the first instance that a for-profit company helped to distribute GMHC material ("Brochure").

Benetton spokesman Peter Fressola said that the brochure was by no means an effort to "make amends" for the confusion over the Kirby ad. Rather, he explained that it offered an opportunity to do something good in the context of what the company was already doing. Fressola commented, "To anyone who says we're just doing this to sell sweaters, I say I hope we sell a million sweaters and save a million lives, and the hell with them if they can't deal with that" (quoted in Allen). Fressola's response confronts criticism concerning the corporation's combination of commercial and social agendas.

David Eng, spokesman of GMHC, commented, "We did not approach it thinking, 'Now we'll make them pay for the bad thing they've done' Of course, everything they did transpired after the ad. But this is a wonderful opportunity to reach a lot of people we couldn't probably reach on our own" (quoted in Allen). Partnerships like this one helped unify AIDS efforts and extended a message more broadly and succinctly than each group would have been able to do working individually.

The brochure discussed subjects like the transmission of HIV and the use of condoms. The language was frank and straightforward to target the 18 to 34-year-old age group that reads *Spin*. The brochure included no advertising aside from a "sponsored by" acknowledgement and three small Benetton logos that appeared within the pages. The sale of related t-shirts raised \$12,000 for GMHC (*Daily*).

Along with the brochure, *Spin* editors included a letter that readers could sign, tear out, and mail to then President George Bush, urging him to "show true leadership" by intensifying federal efforts against AIDS. This letter symbolized much of the criticism and activity of activist groups like ACT UP whose graphics and literature were equally critical of Bush's efforts to further AIDS research and to make drugs available to people with AIDS. The effort to send a message to Washington highlights the desire to

bring about changes in legislation, as well as to increase funding for AIDS-related projects, and demonstrates the purposes within Zeigler's distinctions for issues advertising outlined in chapter two.

Also in 1992, the Benetton Group cooperated with the *Grupo de Apoio à Provenção à AIDS* (GAPA) in Brazil to sponsor the insertion of a safe sex guide into the three largest national daily newspapers. The company's website claims that 500,000 copies of the brochure were distributed in 1992 to universities, cultural centers, and to the general public, including prostitutes in the "favelas" of Rio de Janeiro. The company distributed these guides in the shanty towns of Rio "because it was important that even people who could never buy a Benetton sweater should get the basic communication" (quoted in Pinson and Tibrewala 9). Benetton also distributed free condoms and organized events to raise funds for GAPA to enable them to publish literature on AIDS. Benetton collaborated with GAPA again in 1993 to produce and distribute more booklets on safe sex and condoms. In 1995, the company organized the distribution of free condoms during the Rio Carnival.

The effort to distribute safe sex guides extended throughout the rest of South America. In 1993, Benetton collaborated with the AIDS organization, *Marco Aguayo*, in Paraguay to distribute condoms and 30,000 guides on safe sex in the country's most popular newspaper, *Ultima Hora*. In Uruguay, Benetton extended its efforts from creating and distributing guides to event sponsorship and further development of literature. Benetton formed a partnership with the Ministry of Health to distribute 75,000 booklets on safe sex and 25,000 condoms throughout Uruguay and also displayed posters featuring condoms in universities to heighten public awareness of HIV and AIDS. The company then sponsored the first congress on AIDS to be authorized by Uruguay's government, as well as sponsored the first book on AIDS to be written by a young man living with AIDS. In 1995, Benetton distributed an informative kit that documented

worldwide activities in the field of AIDS prevention throughout the course of 105 conferences on AIDS organized by Uruguay's National Health Institute.

In Argentina, Benetton organized a fund-raising festival in 1993 in collaboration with FUNDAI, the largest association in Argentina involved in the fight against AIDS. Benetton and FUNDAI also collaborated on the production and distribution of a guide to safe sex to university students. In addition, Benetton supplied materials to the patients and doctors of the only hospital in Argentina (in Muniz) to treat AIDS patients. Benetton's website explains that the company was active in generating great interest and prompting much discussion of AIDS through congresses and conferences across the country ("Aids and Benetton 1993").

In Chile, Benetton worked alongside *Proyecto Alerta*, which in 1993 was the only organization in Chile involved in the fight against AIDS. Benetton contributed funds for educational materials, including a guide to safe sex. These guides and condoms were distributed on World AIDS Day at a festival Benetton organized to raise funds for *Proyecto Alerta*.

Benetton's efforts extended beyond South America as well. In 1993, a new guide to safe sex, produced in association with Japan's Ministry of Health, was distributed in Benetton stores, universities, and at special events.

In Benetton's home country of Italy, the Group collaborated with the Lega Italiana Lotta contra l'Aids (LILA), a national association providing services and support for people with AIDS/HIV, to develop a safe sex guide in 1992. LILA has been an outspoken critic of government AIDS policy and in 1997 collaborated with the United Colors of Benetton to develop an advertisement to mark World AIDS Day. The campaign consisted of three photos featuring models wearing Undercolors, the Benetton underwear brand, and a red ribbon.

In 1995, Benetton collaborated with the Portuguese organization dedicated to the fight against AIDS, Abraço, to design an informative booklet on AIDS prevention.

During June and July, five thousand copies were then distributed. Abraço is the most visible non-government organization in Portugal and was established in 1992 with the aim of demonstrating solidarity and support for people with HIV. The group raises funds and trains volunteers to run prevention campaigns and to work with people with AIDS/HIV. Abraço produces information leaflets for World AIDS Day each year and in 1993 distributed leaflets, stickers and condoms in Lisbon. Abraço's main message is solidarity. Their second message is prevention through condom use, although this use is not specified in terms of anal, vaginal, non-penetrative sex, or number of partners. An underlying aim of their campaigns is to facilitate talking about safe sex and to encourage the negotiation of condom use in sexual encounters (Wellings and Field).

Organizations in several other countries also worked with United Colors of Benetton to distribute materials. In Mexico, Benetton collaborated with *Conasida* in the distribution of a booklet on safe sex and organized debates on AIDS-related problems in four universities. In Turkey, a guide to safe sex was produced in association with the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Istanbul where over 100,000 copies were distributed in 30 universities. In the Caribbean, a guide to safe sex was produced in association with Shine, though the company website claims that the project was hindered by the reticence of the various governments who feared that information on HIV levels would be detrimental to the islands' tourist industry ("Aids and Benetton 1993").

The Benetton Group also designed and distributed a pocket-size booklet on safe sex to students and other target groups throughout India in 1995. The company aimed at creating an impact on people's attitudes and behavior toward AIDS. Benetton's website indicates that this campaign was congratulated by the Ministry of Health of the Government of Maharashtra who requested the material for its own use ("Aids and Benetton 1995").

According to Oliviero Toscani, this Indian campaign was part of "Benetton's worldwide commitment to communicate on contemporary social and universal issues"

(quoted in "Benetton India"). The company website indicates that a recent study by the World Health Organization suggested the presence of 4.5 million AIDS cases worldwide and projected that by the year 2000 India was expected to have four million cases of HIV positive infection ("Benetton India"). With this campaign Benetton hoped to slow the growth of HIV infection. The company website quotes Sandeep Mathur, Managing Director of Benetton India, concerning the use of this campaign:

All of Benetton's communications the world-over deals [sic] with global issues of social importance. We are pleased that with the launch of this campaign, India will be effectively integrated with Benetton's communications strategy worldwide. (quoted in "Benetton India")

Part of this campaign in India entailed the placement of billboards showing the colorful condoms imagery from 1991 and the AIDS Faces image from 1994. These advertisements were displayed in Bombay, Calcutta, and New Delhi, as well as in the national press throughout October. The company website features a press release of this campaign that describes the campaign as a long term and sustained commitment toward educating people on AIDS through institutional advertising and the sponsorship of events targeted at high risk groups and young people ("Benetton India").

In addition, in 1995 Benetton collaborated with several English organizations to produce "A Few Words About HIV and AIDS," a pamphlet on prevention and on how to live with HIV. At least 125,000 copies were distributed.

COLORS AND PROMOTING AIDS AWARENESS

In addition to developing safe sex materials, the Benetton Group also acquired advertising space and donated it to different organizations promoting AIDS causes. The French AIDES ad discussed earlier is one example, and there are several other examples involved with the company's magazine. For instance, in 1992 Benetton granted free advertising space in *COLORS* to EuroCASO, the European Council of AIDS Service Organizations. EuroCASO is an association that represents all the European associations

involved in the fight against AIDS. EuroCASO works to provide opportunities and information to enhance collaboration between countries. Benetton's sponsorship of EuroCASO in *COLORS* attempts to authenticate Benetton's involvement in a social issue and draws attention to the value of collaboration and collective action. *

To extend involvement in sponsoring safe-sex messages, Benetton devoted the seventh edition of *COLORS* to promoting AIDS awareness. The Group distributed over 500,000 copies internationally, and the edition won gold medal distinction in 1995 in the United States' Society of Publication Designers' Award series. This publication allows the opportunity to more fully investigate the company's opinions and beliefs about AIDS, its approach to safe sex awareness, and its relationship with AIDS organizations. Essentially, this edition demonstrates the potential for a fashion magazine format to address AIDS.

The publication arrived to consumers wrapped in plastic with a two-inch round warning label proclaiming the following in English and Italian:

WARNING
COLORS talks openly
about AIDS (that's
why it's sealed in plastic).

The name of the magazine appears on the cover in yellow one and a half inch letters, while the word "AIDS" in four inch gray letters peaks around a red-rubber-gloved hand with the middle finger sticking up. The picture and text are offset by a black background, and copy along the bottom left in English and bottom right in Italian reads the following:

Let's talk about fashion.
Let's talk about sex.
Let's talk about death.
Let's really talk about Aids.

The invitation to readers to "let us talk about . . ." issues reveals the focus of the publication on fashion, sex, death and AIDS. The finger and hand in this photograph appear to be symbolic of the phallus and represent a culturally specific and obscene

gesture. A 1992 edition of *COLORS* indicates that this nonverbal may be read as an “unfriendly offer of anal stimulation” (5). The fact that the hand wears a rubber glove seems to invite a sexual reading of the hand in its latex covering and symbolizes the covering of prophylactics and precautionary sexual measures. The entire publication, wrapped in plastic with a warning label, seems to suggest the “dangerous” contents of the magazine. The warning label concerning the explicit nature of the text suggests the irony of the magazine’s interest in talking openly about AIDS and yet the magazine arrives sealed in plastic.

A warning box on the inside cover indicates that the purpose of the magazine is to shed light on the AIDS topic. Copy explains that there are things scientists do not know yet about AIDS and that HIV perhaps is evolving faster than anyone is aware. “We could wait forever,” copy asserts, “Or we could tell you what we know so far. If you want to take care of yourself and others, learn as much as you can about AIDS. One thing we know for sure is that transmission can be prevented.” This idea of enlightening as part of prevention then motivates the content of the publication.

The AIDS information within this text is presented through a trendy fashion lens. The construct of the magazine *COLORS* resembles television in its reliance on visual imagery and the downplaying of text. The reminder of its fashion parentage is the edition’s emphasis on condoms and fashion. An assortment of fashion condoms is presented, and imagery explores an array of latex clothing options: dresses, bodysuits, head caps, underwear, and gloves. In fact, the latex fashion spread photographed by Toscani was honored in the United States with a merit award for design from the Society of Publication Designers. Information on purchasing the unique condoms and clothing is included in the yellow pages found at the end of the magazine.

This edition of *COLORS* features relatively few references to the Benetton company. The only Benetton clothing identified in the edition is Benetton Blue Family Jeans worn in a photo promoting “dry-humping.” Copy across from two photos of this

activity indicates, “DRY FUCKING Studies have shown that you don’t need to wear Benetton jeans to do it dry. As long as you’re covered, you can grind all you want” (75). The use of Benetton jeans was later identified in the yellow pages where copy reveals, “By the way, you caught us; the “dry-humpers” are wearing Benetton Blue Family Jeans” (130).

Another photograph in the magazine might also include Benetton products, though the clothing is not identified anywhere. In the opening of a section aiming to define “AIDS,” a picture of a woman resembles a traditional Toscani-style photograph used in Benetton’s advertising in the late eighties with subjects wearing colorful clothes against simple backdrops. The female subject in this photograph wears a colorful headwrap, dangling earrings, mustard colored t-shirt, and denim jacket. Credits in the back of the magazine indicate that Michael Goldman, rather than Olivieri Toscani, took the photograph, though the image may still include Benetton apparel.

The United Colors of Benetton logo appears twice in the publication—in an ad following the table of contents pages and an ad inside the back cover. The first two-page spread features a head shot image of a female in profile with her hand reaching up behind her neck and off the page. On her wrist is a large multi-colored watch above a yellow sweater sleeve. This sweater appears multi-colored in orange and red at the shoulder. The profile, particularly the nose of the model, points the viewer visually to the left page of the ad where Benetton’s familiar green logo appears just below the center of the page and beginning at the side edge. The background of the photo, and most of the left page is a blank beige. The closeness of the photo, as well as the serious expression of the model create a pensive feel to the ad. The hand reaching just below a gold hoop earring to draw the model’s arm along the neck and chin seems a familiar gesture for one rubbing the back of one’s neck to relieve a headache or tight neck muscles. The model’s features are slightly shadowed and the ethnicity of the model in profile is indeterminate—perhaps Indian, perhaps of African descent, perhaps Hispanic. This ad is representative of a

noncontroversial Benetton advertising image where the model wears Benetton clothes (sweater) and accessories (watch). Tiny white letters along the left side edge identify the company: "United Colors of Benetton and Sisley are trademarks of Benetton Group SpA, Italy. Photo: O. Toscani."

The focus of the magazine is not on Benetton's apparel line. Page three of the magazine identifies the special topic of this edition as "What is AIDS?" The table of contents reveals the magazine's light-hearted answers to that question: AIDS is a one-night stand, a love glove, latex fashion, a test, a new idea about sex, a world traveler, a new language, 37 pills a day, a killer, and not the worst virus. Within the magazine are a variety of subjects: the myths surrounding AIDS and HIV infection; how HIV is transmitted; the importance of condom use; the varieties of condoms available; information on HIV testing and personal accounts of the testing experience; HIV infection and its relation to countries worldwide; prevention propaganda worldwide; current drug treatments for AIDS; insight of those dying of AIDS-related causes; information on viruses worse than HIV; and yellow pages containing contact information for AIDS organizations, materials/products for sale, miscellaneous information and trivia concerning AIDS/HIV, locations for HIV testing, and facts concerning COLORS and items in this and previous issues.

Overall, the content of the magazine is fairly straightforward. Pictures include full-page close-ups of genitalia and sexually provocative poses. The sections concerning entrances of HIV into the body are visually explicit as are the pictorial affirmations to practice sexual play rather than full-fledged intercourse, such as "dry fucking," ear love, and stimulating erogenous zones. This graphic material seems to be the reason why the magazine was carefully wrapped in plastic and included a warning label concerning content. The tone of the publication appears to be educational in nature and content affirms the widespread problem of HIV transmission worldwide. The edition presents countless images and varieties of condoms available to consumers and explains that

condoms are key tools in preventing the spread of HIV. The magazine also includes instruction for using condoms.

The tone of the material attempts to pique the reader's interest, and articles addressing these topics tend to be directed to audience members with distinct "you" language: "AIDS kills you by destroying your immune system. Your body becomes incapable of fighting off even the most benign infections" (14), or "Your immune system stops working. You become an easy target for pneumonia, cancers, parasites, or other infections. When you are infected with HIV and contract one of these, you have AIDS" (16). The language attempts to make a strong connection between the written copy and the audience member so that readers will take to heart the messages directed at them: "If you're sexually active you should be tested every six months" (67). Though this "you" language is used for several of the articles, the words of interviewees generally vary in terms of their addressee.

The instructive tone of the magazine changes in some sections, however, and assumes a political commentary on AIDS and on the responses of the government and church to aiding AIDS efforts. For example, the Catholic Church and Vatican are openly criticized for their stance on condom use. Concerning the Vatican, writers assert:

Tiny and sparsely populated—none of its 1,000 residents are sexually active—the Vatican establishes policy for the world's 900,000,000 Roman Catholics. The Vatican has officially responded to the world AIDS epidemic by refusing to encourage or even condone the use of condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS. In a 1993 revision of Church doctrine coyly entitled *Veritas Splendor* (The Splendor of Truth), condoms are branded "irremediably evil." (87).

The Church's refusal to endorse the use of condoms in stopping the spread of AIDS radically undermines Benetton's efforts to encourage people to use condoms. *COLORS* identifies this contrast in ideas and characterizes the Church and its officials in a negative light.

The *COLORS* edition constructs this criticism by providing information concerning AIDS in Uganda and the Catholic Church. The AIDS problem in Uganda is extreme, and the magazine highlights Uganda's Rakai district as possibly the global epicenter of the AIDS epidemic. By 1994, seventy percent of the sexually active adults in Rakai had died. In Uganda's capital city of Kampala, one in four adults carried the virus in 1994 alone. In addition, AIDS kills more quickly in Uganda than other countries. In fact, one in four AIDS deaths occurs within two years of infection, while in most other countries, people live with HIV for more than ten years before AIDS develops.

With these large numbers of Ugandans affected by AIDS, *COLORS* views the Catholic Church as a potentially powerful influence in reaching the nine out of ten Ugandans who do not use condoms. The population of Uganda is 45% Roman Catholic, and when the Pope visited the country in 1993, he addressed the country with the message that "the sexual restraint of chastity is the only safe and virtuous way to put an end to the tragic plague of AIDS" (89). The magazine seems to view this statement as an irresponsible approach to AIDS and an ineffective message for curbing its spread. The magazine further indicts the Catholic Church's response to the spread of AIDS by citing comment from Cardinal Tomko of the Vatican's political wing, the Roman Curia. When asked in 1992 by the *New York Times* why the Vatican would not ease its opposition to the use of condoms to save lives, Tomko responded, "... the Church does not change its own moral teaching according to the situation. The Church does not accept the so-called ethic of the situation" (87). Tomko's reference to situational ethics points to the church's anti-birth control stance and the fact that condoms are classified as a form of birth control within the Church. Tomko explains that the Church will not support the use of condoms simply because condoms may be helpful in slowing the spread of HIV. The magazine hints that the ramification of the Church's response in Uganda will mean death for the population. A subtitle reads, "Wait Till His Holiness Runs Out of Food Because the Farmers Are All Dead" (89).

Commentary such as the above is sprinkled throughout the publication, using sarcasm and humor to emphasize its points. For instance in an article focusing on AIDS in the United States, a subtitle reads, “Don’t miss the world famous Statue of Liberty” (87). The text continues:

The symbol of America’s welcome to arriving immigrants is inscribed with the words, “Give me your tired, your poor/Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free/The wretched refuse of your teeming shore...” It is U.S. policy to deny non-immigrant visas to anyone discovered to be HIV positive. (87)

Messages such as this attempt to point out contradictions in governmental policies and take aim at perceived biases against those with HIV and AIDS.

The magazine takes aim at other governments as well and includes comments from the Soviet President of the Academy of Medical Sciences, Valentin Pokrovsky, in a state-funded pamphlet in 1989. Pokrovsky reportedly said that the retreat of people into drugs and sex under capitalism is responsible for the AIDS epidemic. Editors positioned this information under the subtitle, “Discover the Colorful Folk Wisdom of an Ancient Culture” (82). This construction takes aim at the propagation of myths concerning AIDS and charges governments with promoting poor information.

Another area revealing the editors’ opinions is labeled, “an editorial,” and is entitled, “hero.” This editorial entails a photograph and text concerning former United States President Ronald Reagan. The picture is a distorted image of Ronald Reagan with Kaposi’s Sarcoma lesions and a thin face, and the text takes aim at Reagan’s response to the AIDS epidemic while he was President of the United States. The editorial fictitiously notes that Reagan died from AIDS complications in February of 1993 and remarks that in his death the world lost a courageous leader.

The editorial offers a summary of Reagan’s purported “heroic” actions:

Reagan is best remembered for his quick and decisive response to the AIDS epidemic early in his presidency. In

June of 1981, against the counsel of his closest advisers, the President interrupted national television programming to explain the findings of his emergency health task force and urge the use of condoms. (121)

The editorial then outlines that within a week of Reagan's report on television, he nationalized the condom industry; called for the free distribution of condoms in all public buildings, including schools, post offices and prisons; required media groups such as television, radio, newspapers and magazines to devote specified portions of their advertising space to AIDS education; and ordered all public and private schools to provide immediate compulsory education on sex and AIDS.

Reagan then reportedly called an emergency world summit the next month to develop a global AIDS-prevention strategy. In addition, the United States funded AIDS-awareness projects worldwide, sent hundreds of AIDS advisors overseas, and coordinated an international AIDS-research effort. Editors then note that in 1986 Reagan was diagnosed with AIDS. The editorial states that despite his illness and hospitalization, Reagan managed to introduce revolutionary national health care legislation, as well as divert nearly half of the United States' defense budget to AIDS research and education.

The editorial then memorializes Reagan with the words of Margaret Thatcher, the United Nations Secretary of AIDS Services, who eulogized at the Ninth International AIDS Conference in Berlin, "Ronald Reagan will be remembered for his courage and foresight but above all, for his boundless compassion" (121).

Many authors have characterized the American government's response to the AIDS crisis as a failure in leadership.⁵ Ronald Reagan himself did not speak openly about AIDS until 1987. The editorial, characterizing Reagan as quick and decisive concerning AIDS sets a satirical tone for the rest of the editorial, suggesting in part what Reagan ought to have done in the midst of this new illness.

⁵ In "AIDS Equals Politics" Stella Theodoloulou cites Freudenberg (1990), Gostin (1989), Kirp and Bayer (1992), and Shilts (1987).

The editorial suggests that in June of 1981 Reagan would have had the foresight to form an emergency health task force to investigate the AIDS-related illnesses and would have considered the findings so important that he would have gone against popular wisdom to share those findings with the world. The timeline for the editorial's proposed action is exaggeratedly short in terms of allowing time to formulate the task force, as well as to produce significant findings that determined the causes for illness of the five cases previously mentioned. To then suggest that Reagan ought to have known the impact of condom usage as a way to slow the spread of a virus that in June of 1981 had yet to be determined as such seems to be an illogical suggestion for addressing the AIDS epidemic even in hindsight. Knowledge concerning the importance of condoms in spreading AIDS developed more slowly. The possibility of a United States president going before the nation to explain a health crisis and to advocate the use of condoms seems implausible. Preaching condom use is politically very different from preaching to kids to say no to drugs.

The editorial attempts to criticize Reagan's real actions concerning AIDS by "documenting" exaggerated and fictitious actions within the editorial. This editorial's satirical praise of Reagan's involvement in addressing the AIDS crisis seems to present the editor's speculated ideal of appropriate responses to the crisis. Within a week of Reagan's report on television, the editorial claims Reagan took various actions such as nationalizing the condom industry, distributing condoms in public buildings, requiring media groups to address AIDS education, and ordering public and private schools to develop compulsory AIDS and sex education. While the efficacy in addressing AIDS with these actions may be debated elsewhere, the important concern to note is that several of these actions would have been impossible for the President of the United States to take regardless of the time frame. The suggestions in part violate the idea of free trade and Constitutional matters such as free speech, freedom of the press, and states' rights.

The editorial's timeline shrinks again for the President when editors claim that within a month of the June 1981 declaration, Reagan called an emergency world summit to develop an international strategy to address AIDS-prevention. The United States supposedly funded international AIDS-awareness projects, coordinated global AIDS-research efforts, and sent hundreds of AIDS advisors around the world. The editorial suggests that Reagan would have demonstrated true leadership worldwide by coordinating these prevention programs and by funding research.

In reality, in July of 1981 the global effects of AIDS were not known, the cause of AIDS was unclear, and information was speculative at best. Certainly more knowledge developed in time associating AIDS with the HIV virus, but knowledge and myths concerning AIDS required sorting. For the most part, large numbers of people had yet to be diagnosed. Privileging AIDS research with mass funding when the problem was not even established as international in scale would probably have been irresponsible for a president. Sending hundreds of ignorant AIDS advisors overseas to address the global spread of "gay pneumonia" would not have been much of a solution either. Inviting world leaders to be part of the solution also proves problematic when diagnoses of AIDS were for the most part unidentified at the time. Why would world leaders address a problem that was without proportions and yet to be identified in their countries?

Essentially, the editorial documents what activities Reagan should have done concerning AIDS to earn the title of courageous leader. Editors note that in 1986 Reagan was diagnosed with AIDS. This diagnosis would have been two years into his second term as President of the United States. In the midst of illness and hospitalization, Reagan reportedly introduced revolutionary national health care legislation, as well as diverted a large portion of United States' defense budget to AIDS research and education. This diversion of half of the U.S. defense budget in the midst of the Cold War to any effort would have been unthinkable. The U.S. spent large amounts to outspend the Soviets because Communism was a perceived threat to national security. By suggesting that

Reagan should have spent billions on AIDS research and education efforts worldwide rather than on building a defense program, the editors equate the health threat of AIDS with a threat to national security.

The President of the United States is not the only person named in the editorial. A characterization of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as a leader in providing international AIDS services also implicates her responses to the AIDS epidemic while she was in office. The editorial positions Thatcher as the United Nations Secretary of AIDS Services, openly speaking before the Ninth International AIDS Conference in Berlin and highlighting the qualities of courage, foresight, and compassion in addressing AIDS. By emphasizing these qualities, the editorial suggests that both Reagan and Thatcher failed to demonstrate these qualities.

In addition to implicating someone else in poor leadership, the editorial also seems to send a contradictory message about appropriate action concerning AIDS and the former-President's role. Within the editorial, the fictitious efforts of Reagan to address the issue, to prevent the spread of AIDS, and to find a cure only result in his own death from AIDS complications. By positioning the person who accomplished these great acts, the hero, as dead, the editors seem to undermine the idea that progress might have been made if all the measures suggested in the editorial were implemented. In addition, the great acts of extensively funding AIDS research and introducing health care legislation do not seem openly heroic or selfless for someone who suffers with AIDS and who has everything to gain, particularly extending his life, from the efforts. Nevertheless, the characterization becomes a poignant reminder that those fighting most actively within the AIDS agenda are people with AIDS.

Reaction to the image was predictably negative due to the shocking imagery and politically charged text. Former president Ronald Reagan's spokeswoman called the rendition of Reagan with AIDS offensive and said that it exploits human suffering. In an article compiled from news dispatches, spokeswoman Cathy Busch declared, "Benetton

apparently believes that offensiveness and bad taste will sell its products to the American people” (quoted in “Reagan”). Her comments seem to echo those for Benetton’s other images, such as the David Kirby ad and the HIV positive campaign.

Criticism of world leaders and governments in their response to AIDS represents a popular political strain and motivation for activist protest. This message affirms the idea that inaction kills. For example, the dictum within gay activism is that “Silence = Death.” The editorial symbolically protests the manner in which government has addressed AIDS education and the way that effective education has been left up to the communities most affected. Crimp emphatically notes in “How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic” that in the United States and Canada not a single piece of government-sponsored education about AIDS for young people has been targeted at a gay audience (270). The message from Benetton through the Reagan editorial emphasizes the need for the governments to take action.

The editorial using Reagan’s imagery in the June 1994 edition of *COLORS*, however, was unknowingly ill-timed. The image came after Reagan ended his service as president in 1988 and was published just months before the Reagan family disclosed on November 5, 1994, that Ronald Reagan had been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. When the *COLORS* image was first released, the image came across as a shocking and provocative, if not extreme, commentary on Reagan’s tenure. The editorial raised questions about what action would have been appropriate for the President of the United States. Once Reagan was diagnosed with the debilitating disease of Alzheimer’s, the AIDS imagery of Reagan in indicting his leadership as president seemed excessive and cruel. In fact, in the fictitious world of the editorial, Reagan received an AIDS diagnosis in 1986. What’s probably truer is that Reagan received a life-changing Alzheimer’s diagnosis around this time. Reality was in this instance both ironic and sad, and the editors’ efforts represent the risks of presenting controversial imagery and messages.

In addition to voicing the company's politics, this edition of *COLORS* reveals foundational beliefs concerning the company's understanding of HIV and AIDS and the promotion of prevention. These beliefs then affect the development of the messages that the company promotes through its literature. For example, the section of the magazine devoted to discussing viruses indicates a belief in the viral nature of AIDS and that HIV causes AIDS. An article within the magazine discusses the experience of taking an HIV test and encourages those who are sexually active to be tested every six months. Information in the yellow pages then identifies where these tests may be taken. As noted earlier, the belief both in the viral nature of AIDS and in the HIV=AIDS hypothesis have been challenged in medical and scientific circles. The magazine presents these beliefs as scientific fact and encourages practices that relate to those beliefs.

Another function of the edition of *COLORS* was to authenticate Benetton's concerns for AIDS issues by emphasizing its involvement with organizations working for AIDS causes. The company attempts to validate its socially-concerned image by associating itself with charitable AIDS endeavors that are perhaps viewed more positively than a for-profit company. A listing along the margin of the yellow pages provides contact information for 65 organizations in countries around the world. In addition, the body of the yellow pages provides information for various AIDS groups, summarizes the work that they do, and gives direction for obtaining materials.

An additional message to validate Benetton's involvement in AIDS activism is found within one of only two Benetton advertisements in the magazine. The Benetton logo marks this image as an advertisement, and the ad is located on the inside of the back cover. The vertical two-page spread features a photograph of Benetton and ACT UP Paris' World AIDS Day project of December 1, 1993. As chapter four describes, the groups joined forces to place a giant pink condom over a 75 foot obelisk in the Place de la Concorde in Paris. Copy along the top right hand side of the ad says, "Paris, December 1st, 1993 World AIDS Day," in five languages (English, Italian, French,

German, and Spanish.) Below this copy is the green Benetton logo, and below the logo are the words, "In collaboration with" in the five languages. Copy below these words reads, "ACT UP PARIS," in bold purple letters. Along the upper left side of the page is a clear company marker with the words in small, black type, "United Colors of Benetton and Sisley are trademarks of Benetton Group SpA, Italy."

On the tipped condom itself are stickers identifying ACT UP Paris and United Colors of Benetton. The condom stands out from the background of the sky, the city and the streets filled with cars. No demonstrators or other people walk along the base of the obelisk. The photograph seems to capture dusk or dawn as the headlights of cars and the lighting from buildings indicate.

The image testifies to Benetton's involvement in an AIDS activist agenda and collaboration with ACT UP. This ad attempts to document Benetton's activity and the spirit of collaboration within AIDS efforts in a manner symbolic of EuroCASO's advocacy to join together to confront AIDS. The partnership with ACT UP Paris and Benetton to draw attention to AIDS efforts serves to authenticate Benetton's role within the fight against AIDS. The symbol of a condom reinforces the company's earliest efforts to promote the use of condoms in preventing the spread of AIDS.

The ad itself reaffirms Benetton's overall philosophy of promoting social issues through commercial advertising. The company affirms its belief in the possibility of using the advertising form for combining a marketing function and a charitable function with the placement of the Benetton logo on the photograph. The Group could have placed a photograph of the pink condom in the magazine with the Benetton and ACT UP stickers identifying the authors of the stunt, but the logo sends a message reinforcing earlier advertising campaigns.

This edition of *COLORS* also emphasizes the company's support of activist art practices through the inclusion of excerpts from Derek Jarman's film *Blue*. The entry features vignettes of quoted material from the film's soundtrack against a reinforcing blue

background and attempts to simulate the experience of viewing the film. A summary of the film at the end of the segment describes it as 76 minutes of film where the only visual image is a blue screen with an occasional shadow. The audio paired with this blue screen is a soundtrack of music, sounds, and actors' voices reading lines from Jarman's evocative hospital diaries. Jarman wrote and directed *Blue* while he was losing his eyesight, a side effect of AIDS. In 1986 Jarman tested positive for HIV and died on February 19, 1994, at the age of 52, after finally refusing the medications that had kept him alive. Jarman, an admired English filmmaker, was also an actor, writer, painter, set designer, and gay rights activist.

Blue is a provocative and poetic account of Derek Jarman's experiences socially, politically, emotionally, and physically while he battled AIDS. He comments in *Blue* in the midst of his struggle:

The virus rages fierce. I have no friends now who are not dead or dying. Like a blue frost it caught them. At work, at the cinema, on marches and beaches. In churches on their knees, running, flying, silent or shouting protest.

It started with sweats in the night and swollen glands. Then the black cancers spread across their face—as they fought for breath TB and pneumonia hammered at their lungs, and Toxo at the brain. Reflexes scrambled—sweat poured through hair matted like lianas in the tropical forest. Voices slurred—and then were lost forever. My pen chased this story across the page tossed this way and that in the storm. (116)

Jarman represents an artist using his voice to comment on his concerns and to continue his life long-battle for gay rights. The inclusion of *Blue* in this edition of *COLORS* attempts to unite the magazine with activist and artistic expressions concerning HIV and AIDS. The yellow pages at the end of the publication detail in four separate listings where consumers may purchase videos and soundtracks for *Blue*.

Another function of this edition of *COLORS* is to educate people concerning HIV and AIDS. The company documents the writing and research of the publication with a bibliography listing information sources within the scientific and medical communities. Magazine writers effectively identify and dispel popular myths and preconceptions concerning HIV and AIDS. Excerpts of interviews with people who have been tested and those who are dying poignantly give a voice to the realities of living with HIV and AIDS, the spread of HIV, and the devastation and hope found within infection and sickness. The impact of HIV is widespread through countries worldwide. Focusing on specific countries helps to enlighten readers concerning cultures that they otherwise might have no knowledge about, and the lengthy listing of AIDS organizations in the yellow pages arms readers with contacts.

The Benetton Group extended the company's charitable contributions with the magazine by donating copies of this edition for educational services to the Buddy Service Fund Raiser in Hong Kong. This edition of *COLORS* was also part of a fund-raising effort at the 10th World AIDS Conference held in Yokohama, Japan, where Benetton supplied the uniforms to the convention personnel and organized its own stand with international information on AIDS.

Individuals interested in educating others about HIV and AIDS also have used this edition of *COLORS* to increase awareness concerning AIDS-related issues. Professor William Aseltine demonstrates how the Benetton Group's materials may be used to expand the education campaign proposed by the company. In a law course focusing on AIDS, Aseltine uses the seventh edition of *COLORS* as part of the candid discussion surrounding AIDS, sex, transmission, and the use of condoms. Aseltine states that he

wants to focus on some of the social and medical issues surrounding AIDS to help students understand what the legal issues are. Aseltyne advocates that usual teaching methods are not as useful in discussing AIDS because case law takes time to develop, whereas press reports and scientific journals address current controversies. Many unpublished court decisions of interest will never appear in case books, but materials such as the edition of *COLORS* are timely and explicit (McKee).

FUND-RAISING AND SPONSORSHIPS

In addition to educational measures in addressing AIDS awareness, the Benetton Group has also explored the potential for sponsorship and fund-raising activities to support AIDS issues. These activities have allowed them to collaborate on AIDS efforts with other organizations.

For instance, Benetton became involved in addressing AIDS in Germany in collaboration with Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe. In Germany, the Federal Center for Health Information (BZgA) takes responsibility for developing and conducting health education on behalf of the Ministry of Health. In 1985, the BZgA began general population information campaigns and distributed a letter to every German household highlighting the dangers of and possibilities of protection from AIDS. In 1987, Germany developed an overall strategy to fight AIDS, and the government officially adopted an AIDS prevention and control program. The basis for the federal German government policies concerning AIDS revolves around the three major goals: to protect the public from infection, to give persons with HIV infection or AIDS optimal counseling and care, and to avoid isolation and discrimination of people who are afflicted. Campaigns to address these issues have been undertaken in collaboration with the AIDS center in Berlin, an

interdisciplinary scientific advisory body within the Federal Health Office established in January 1988 (Wellings and Field).

AIDS prevention campaigns in Germany have been built on the assumption that success depends on close cooperation between governmental and non-governmental agencies. Principal among the groups to cooperate with the government is the Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe. This nonprofit organization was founded in Berlin by gay men in 1983 and is funded by the BZgA to function as a national networking body and coordination agency for 130 regional organizations combating AIDS. The Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe immediately began developing a strategy for HIV prevention.

The Benetton Group became involved with the German fight against AIDS in 1992 when the company helped to sponsor a major project aimed at raising funds for the fight against AIDS. The event took place in the 100 largest discotheques in Germany in association with *Deutsche AIDS Stiftungen* and famous German pop stars such as Nina Hagen and Skorpions. In 1993, Benetton joined efforts with the Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe to expand the fundraiser to 200 discotheques ("Aids and Benetton 1992").

Also in 1993 the Benetton Group became the larger of the two shareholders in the Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe Communication Fund, which was established during the International AIDS Conference in Berlin. Benetton provides the fund with financial and creative support for the promotion of AIDS communication projects. One example of this support is that Toscani designed posters to raise funds for Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe and sponsored the guide to the cultural events during the conference ("Aids and Benetton 1993").

In many instances, Benetton's fundraising efforts revolve around the product of the company—fashion—and events using the fashion show forum to raise money for various organizations and research. An example of this type of sponsorship to raise money for AIDS research occurred in Vancouver, British Columbia, in April of 1993. Benetton hosted "Benetton on Tour," a fashion show fundraiser yielding \$4,000 for St. Paul's Hospital Foundation for AIDS Research (*Daily*). Virginia Leeming of the *Vancouver Sun* described the show as a not-so-controversial AIDS fundraiser that featured current trends in fashion from Benetton. Gary Cristall, artistic director of the Vancouver Folk Festival, arranged entertainment between fashion segments with performances by international dance and music artists. For the show's finale, a tall black male model carried out an Asian baby.

The fashion show reinforced the image of multiculturalism in early Benetton advertising campaigns. The contrast in clothing colors, as well as models, promoted images of diversity. The performances by Brazilian and Japanese artists shared cultural traditions and presented a reinforcement of ideals to blend cultures and promote racial harmony. This fashion show explored the multicultural identity of the company and paired this identity with an AIDS agenda.

In addition, in Toronto in 1994 Benetton sponsored a multi-media fashion/entertainment event entitled "Unite to Fight AIDS" that raised over \$18,000 for research at Mount Sinai Hospital's Department of Microbiology. In 1996, Benetton held another "Unite to Fight AIDS" in Toronto to raise funds for AIDS research and CANFAR, the leading Canadian AIDS organization. A company press release cited on

Benetton's website estimated that the fund-raiser would raise more than \$50,000 and would draw over one thousand guests ("United").

Benetton's involvement in fashion fundraising also extended to Thailand where in 1994 the Group participated in the annual charity event "Red, Hot and Positive" in December. During this event, Benetton donated proceeds from the sale of Benetton accessories to AIDS charities. In addition, Benetton's distributor, Benethai, set up a booth to sell Benetton accessories and donated 70% of each dollar earned to orphans with AIDS in Bangkok ("Aids and Benetton 1994").

In the United States, Benetton held an AIDS benefit in 1994 entitled "Divine Design" during which Benetton stocked a mini-boutique with 600 pieces of merchandise that were sold to raise money for DIFFA/LOS ANGELES and Protect Angel Food. Benetton also made donations in 1994 to the AIDS Resource Center ("Aids and Benetton 1994").

In Japan in 1994, Benetton supported the fundraiser, "Fashion Aid for AIDS." And in 1995, it again took part in the three-day fund-raising event to assist the Japanese AIDS foundation. Benetton then presented a fashion show on June 28th and distributed safe sex leaflets throughout the event ("Aids and Benetton 1995").

Perhaps one of the more interesting fund-raisers that Benetton conducted took place in the spring of 1995 at a dinner following the opening of an exhibition of Benetton ads at a Swiss museum. The dinner seemed to combine a number of Benetton's advertising themes on social issues together in one place—most specifically, world hunger and AIDS. Diners at the event expected to enjoy a nice, four-course Italian dinner

following the exhibit opening. Instead, children served guests bowls of rice and cups of tea. Over the table hung the following sign:

The unbearable lightness of these few grains of rice and the perfume of this tea symbolize the daily fare of most of the inhabitants of the globe. The children who are serving you this essential meal are affiliated with the As'strame Foundation; the money that might have been used for this dinner will be donated to it. (quoted in Snaije)

The children serving the meal were either HIV positive themselves or had parents with the virus. They wore oversized t-shirts with emblems that read, "Benetton by Toscani."

This fundraiser dinner seems to resemble a performance art event that invites audience members to become involved with world hunger by denying diners a full meal. The HIV positive children bringing the rice and tea are meant to symbolize the beneficiaries of the fundraising efforts. By having these diners interact with the children, the event is encouraging the personalization of social problems and interaction with need. That the beneficiaries of the fundraising efforts are the ones who deny diners their expectations would seem to place the children in an awkward position of responding to diners' disappointment, particularly if these diners were hungry.

Benetton's fundraising efforts also minimally addressed drug-related HIV preventions and in 1993 Benetton raised \$30,000 through t-shirt sales in Benetton stores to benefit a drug rehabilitation center in Toronto, for 'NARCONON.' That same year Benetton also sponsored a film festival on drugs in Austria . The company website explains that Benetton sponsored the film festival because of the fact that drug use is clearly connected to the spread of HIV ("Aids and Benetton 1993").

In addition to fundraisers, the Benetton Group also sponsored AIDS awareness in several other media. The company organized several film festivals and sponsored the viewing of film projects dealing with AIDS issues. In 1993 and 1994, the Benetton Group sponsored the annual gay film festival in Turin, Italy. Benetton also sponsored the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival at the American Center in Paris December 15-19,

1994. Benetton provided the following creative production and media promotion for the festival: 3500 posters, 2000 programs, 1500 postcards, 1000 invitations, and one PG4C in Actuel + Génereux ("Aids and Benetton 1994").

In addition to sponsoring festivals, the Benetton Group has also sponsored the showing of various films dealing with AIDS. On World AIDS Day in 1994, Benetton sponsored the film *ZERO PATIENCE* in Vienna, Austria. The title of this film plays on the wording of "Patient Zero," a gay flight attendant mythologized to have knowingly spread AIDS infection throughout the world. In Germany, the company sponsored the film *Grief* by Richard Glatzer at the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in Munich from November 9-16, 1994. Film sponsorship ultimately led to film production, and in France Benetton co-produced one of the ten award-winning films in 1994 about the 2,000 people who took part in the "SIDATHON" day ("Aids and Benetton 1994")

In addition, Benetton has funded various other media forms and in 1993 sponsored "Blowing Bubbles," a competition of television commercials dealing with AIDS-related topics. In Uruguay in 1993, Benetton also sponsored several radio programs aimed at informing people about AIDS and organized a "Summer of Love" festival and then donated proceeds to the Institute of Hygiene ("Aids and Benetton 1993").

In England, Benetton took part in the "Quilts of Love" demonstration in 1994. The event featured the display of quilts made by friends of those who have died from AIDS in order to remember them and to heighten public awareness. Specifically, Benetton designed and produced the information catalog in association with event organizers. The Benetton Group also produced and displayed a quilt in memory of Pierre Rapin who died of AIDS ("Aids and Benetton 1994"). This project resembles the Names Project in the United States inaugurated in 1987. Through individual quilt panels loved ones memorialized those who had died of AIDS. These panels were then assembled into an enormous quilt.

DISCUSSION

The Benetton Group's donations and activities in creating AIDS awareness extended the company's advertising message. While some would argue that the ads the company produced were profit-motivated and too ambiguous to result in specific action, the previously discussed education campaigns, fund-raisers, and sponsorships were clear in their desired response from viewers: take a condom, use it, learn about safe sexual practices, talk about HIV, give money, or dance in a discotheque. These events were then the interpretation of the advertisements and extended the intention of promoting community involvement in the AIDS cause. The company's efforts attempted to transcend the assumptions that philanthropy and corporate profit are separate entities.

In *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, Douglas Crimp offers a key rationale behind using art strategies to address the AIDS crisis. While Crimp may not recognize Benetton's advertising as art, he does suggest the opportunity for reshaping the potential of art, and he believes that art can be powerful in addressing the AIDS crisis:

Raising money is the most passive response of cultural practitioners to social crisis, a response that perpetuates the idea that art itself has no social function (aside from being a commodity), that there is no such thing as an engaged, activist aesthetic practice . . . art *does* have the power to save lives, and it is this very power that must be recognized, fostered, and supported in every way possible. But if we are to do this, we will have to abandon the idealist conception of art. We don't need a cultural renaissance; we need cultural practices actively participating in the struggle against AIDS. We don't need to transcend the epidemic; we need to end it. (6-7)

Crimp's analysis of art reinforces the power of art to make a difference. In this vein, Benetton's advertising also has the potential to make a difference.

On one hand, the Benetton Group falls victim to Crimp's criticism of the passivity of fund-raising and donating money because the Group used this strategy once faced with

opposition to its advertisements. The company's choice to be involved in the monetary fight against AIDS was delayed but soon became incorporated in the Group's practices. The company's initial reluctance to donate money or to concern itself with raising money for AIDS was an effort to keep its advertising/art practice separate from the fund-raising/donation side of activism. Yet, used in conjunction with the Benetton Group's measures to educate and promote AIDS prevention through information campaigns, the fund-raising becomes part of an active response to the AIDS cause. By creating relationships with groups actively involved in social struggle, the company aligns itself with an activist agenda. Through sponsoring AIDS conferences and contributing to research efforts, the Benetton Group authenticates its concern with social issues. The company's efforts to get people talking about the social issues of AIDS then progressed into getting people to do something about the social issues surrounding AIDS.

Benetton's advertising and safe sex literature are part of mass media campaigns to address the AIDS crisis. The Benetton Group designed AIDS materials that are part of a network of information produced by government and AIDS organizations. Company officials have indicated that the Benetton materials are intended to draw attention to condom use and safe sex practices in order to encourage people to adopt a healthier lifestyle. The aims of the company seem to parallel those of mass media campaigns and in part address resistance to behavioral changes. Wellings and Field site research from 1990 indicating that people rationalized their reluctance to use condoms by understating the seriousness of the HIV epidemic or by exempting themselves from risk. Others rationalized not using condoms by claiming they used alternate risk-reduction strategies. Research revealed that people give excuses for not using condoms. They also feel

embarrassed when buying condoms in public and find it difficult to raise the subject with a partner. Many also may not know how to use a condom properly (76).

Against this backdrop the Benetton Group has produced materials that promote condoms as a non-threatening fashion item that comes in countless shapes, sizes, colors, and textures. The company also provides how-to information and freely distributes condoms in public spaces. Most importantly, the open display of condoms in Benetton materials encourages viewers to transfer that openness into their relationships and talk about condoms and safe sex.

The question ultimately arises whether Benetton's efforts are successful. The answer to this question is difficult to formulate because the results of Benetton's efforts are hard to measure. Empirical studies determining the role of the company's advertising in affecting safe sex behaviors do not exist. It would seem reasonable to speculate that condom awareness at least increases as condom images enter our frames of reference. However, the effects of Benetton's promotional materials on behavior are probably best assessed through personal responses to the texts.

Wellings and Field indicate that the role of mass media campaigns in changing health behavior is uncertain, but the authors claim that there are certainties about mass media campaigns. They determine mass media campaigns remain an important source of AIDS information. The campaigns act as an indicator of the seriousness of the problem, as well as help to reach hidden groups within the population. In addition, mass media campaigns validate and legitimate community interventions and keep AIDS on the social and political agenda (6). These certainties concerning mass media campaigns such as

Benetton's and those of AIDS organizations indicate value in their existence—they are the evidence that a serious problem exists.

Wellings and Field claim that social marketing has made major progress in creating a more accepting climate in which to discuss condoms. Promoting condoms and advice on how to use them has proved challenging in AIDS education because the moral lobby in many instances believes condom promotion undermines moral values, and censorship ensues. The AIDS epidemic has opened the doors for addressing social issues in new ways. The mass media have helped change the social environment and made significant contributions to creating tolerance and allowing opportunities for discussion, particularly through social advocacy. Wellings and Field propose, “In the long term, changing the wider social environment, as opposed to changing individual behaviour, may turn out to be the principal contribution social marketing can make in AIDS public education” (96).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The parallels between Benetton's activity and those AIDS activist groups who have used art to intervene in the crisis or those who have developed safer sex materials are significant. Benetton's overall activities within the AIDS movement seem to reflect an activist agenda but also seem to suggest the spirit of an art collective in addressing AIDS. An example of a group with a similar, though decidedly more fervent, agenda than Benetton's demonstrates the use of imagery in the style of Benetton's to raise social consciousness. The art collective Gran Fury describes itself as "a band of individuals united in anger and dedicated to exploiting the power of art to end the AIDS crisis" (Crimp and Rolston 16). The group named itself to mark an emotional response to the AIDS crisis, as well as in reference to the Plymouth model that the New York City police used as undercover cars. Michael Nesline comments about the group's intentions:

I'd say that all of us are interested in creating art work—or propaganda—that addresses the AIDS crisis and that will be seen by different parts of the public and affect their understanding of this crisis. It would provoke them, cause a reaction, make them think, and hopefully educate them. Our projects should have the effect that a demonstration by ACT UP has. (quoted in Deitcher 198)

Nesline's words direct the power of the art collective to reach an audience through the art medium in a manner similar to that of other activist groups who do not use art as a strategy for confrontation. Gran Fury served for a time as ACT UP's unofficial propaganda ministry and guerrilla graphic designers. The art collective aided efforts to demand increased spending on AIDS research, health care, social services, and legal protection for those infected with the virus. The group also incorporated ACT UP's strategy to use civil disobedience to effect change (Crimp and Rolsten 16).

Members of Gran Fury generated a number of graphics on stickers, posters, billboards, and t-shirts that were placed throughout New York City and later were placed in

in other locations. Douglas Crimp writes in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* that activist art involves questions not only of the nature of the cultural production but also of the location, or the means of distribution, of that production (12). In Gran Fury's case, some of the artwork produced resembled traditional advertising forms in its imagery, graphics, and display.

By borrowing from advertising, the group attempted to surprise viewers with unexpected content. In a group discussion conducted by David Deitcher, Gran Fury member Avram Finkelstein explains:

Some of it has to do with putting political information into environments where people are unaccustomed to finding it. It's confrontational. By placing an image like ours alongside advertising posters, people are not in the mindset to deal with our kind of information, and it creates a whole other context—a whole other environment. People are less defensive. It's very different from being handed a leaflet where you automatically know someone's trying to tell you something and you may not be receptive to hearing it. But when you're walking down the street and you're gazing at advertising art, who knows what goes through people's minds? So it's an appropriation tactic that's somewhat confrontational and has been very effective for us. (quoted in Deitcher 198)

This attempt to reach viewers relies on the element of surprise by catching people's attention with unexpected imagery. Instead of advertisements, viewers are confronted with activist art messages that designers hope will break through the visual clutter facing consumers. This strategy seems reminiscent of Benetton's advertising efforts that also present unexpected imagery within advertising campaigns to challenge viewers' perceptions of the object or the ideal advertised.

Gran Fury member Robert Vasquez explains that using the art medium stimulates thought and brings a whole new vocabulary to bear on the AIDS health crisis. Their efforts attempt to provide a new viewpoint that is different from what the mass media present. One example of this material was the Art Against AIDS project that they

developed to look like a trendy Benetton ad. Gran Fury was asked by the American Foundation for AIDS Research (AmFAR) to participate in the Chicago exhibition of "Art Against AIDS," a national fund-raising effort to increase AIDS awareness and spotlight both national and local arts talent. The 1989 Chicago event included a public art component called "On the Road," which placed artists' works on billboards, exterior bus panels, interior bus and subway cards, and bus shelters in cities such as San Francisco, Washington D.C., New York, and Chicago (Dublin 222). In New York this project was sponsored jointly with Creative Time.

Gran Fury contributed a design that mimics United Colors of Benetton imagery of the late eighties that showed various models kissing. The banner was previously displayed at the Whitney Museum in 1989 as part of "Image World: Art and Media Culture," where it was prominently displayed so that it could be seen by passersby on Madison Avenue. The poster presents three couples kissing, and the copy reads, "Kissing Doesn't Kill: Greed and Indifference Do." The first couple pictured is comprised of a black male and a white female. The second couple is a white male and an Asian male. The last couple is two females of color. Placed to the right side is the additional logo, "Corporate Greed, Government Inaction and Public Indifference Make AIDS a Political Crisis."

This poster became the most widely known of Gran Fury's work. Some viewers were surprised and disturbed by the imagery and copy on the poster. AmFAR requested that Gran Fury modify the poster to drop the second logo, and the poster has been displayed with and without the additional logo depending on the venue. When the second logo was dropped, the Art Against AIDS logo was then inserted.

Gran Fury's work offers one example of how political activists/artists are able to use art and public space to promote images and ideas that reflect their social concerns and interests. In instances both within AIDS activism and other activist causes, artists have reworked popular advertisements and media forms to produce artwork that resembles and

makes use of other artifacts. Their work seems to blur the line between advertising and art. David Deitcher comments in his discussion with Gran Fury members that:

It seems ironic that Gran Fury has actually revitalized a strategy that—at least within the context of the art world . . . business-as-usual—has become a cliché of academic postmodernism, a non-issue. Among the "happening" artists, dealers, and critics nobody talks about appropriation any more, but in a discussion of activist work like . . . [Gran Fury's] it's still meaningful. Perhaps that's what happens when you return appropriation to its functional, political roots in Dada. (203)

Deitcher notes that while this strategy of appropriation may not be noteworthy in the present art world, the revitalization of the strategy for the street creates resonance for the art's effects.

The 1989 use of the Benetton-style advertisement by Gran Fury demonstrates that the visual imagery that Benetton proposed later in its advertising campaigns legitimately carries the potential and motivation to bring attention and to initiate discussion and action concerning social issues. The Benetton Group appears also to be an example of a group that explores the potential for advertising, art, and activism with the bulk of its energies devoted to AIDS-related issues. This comparison of Gran Fury's and Benetton's efforts, however, would offend some in the AIDS movement who argue that Benetton's promotional material does not seem to transcend company promotion and its commercial underpinnings. These opponents would most likely argue that a clothing company or corporation does not have the right to speak for people with AIDS.

The involvement of art with advertising strategies and advertising with art strategies demonstrates the blurring of categories representative of postmodernism. The confusion generated by Benetton's advertising efforts results from viewers' attempts to

deal with all of the different meanings and frames of reference found within Benetton's company promotion. The fact that a clothing company draws attention to social issues through a commercial vehicle frustrates those who cannot create a new category for this type of anomaly. Critics who believe that Benetton should not play a role in the AIDS crisis essentially challenge the *ethos* or credibility of the company's rhetorical efforts. Throughout Benetton's AIDS efforts, the company attempted to justify its involvement with HIV/AIDS and created new forums for its involvement, such as fund-raisers, fashion shows, film festivals, art shows, and art venues.

Benetton's use of company promotion that features HIV/AIDS seems to exemplify the need to further activity beyond an advertising image in order to validate the company's efforts and involvement in AIDS issues. The anomalous nature of the ads does not allow the ads to stand on their own in communicating a social message. The controversy and attention drawn to the ads allows the company the opportunity to "spin" and further shape its brand marketing. The ambiguity within Benetton's efforts as a commercial company or as a contributor to art does not seem harmful to society though those upset enough to sue the company over its advertising obviously would not agree.

The company's efforts to define itself and its intentions due to advertising confusion has not been limited to AIDS issues. United Colors of Benetton built the framework for its corporate communications on promoting racial harmony and images of multicultural diversity. Though this study has focused on AIDS- and HIV-related activities, the heart of the Benetton Group has been to present images of the potential for people to coexist peacefully. The Group has explored various contrasts and pairings of imagery to demonstrate the significance of death, destruction, and refusals to make peace,

as well as to show an idyllic world where peace reigns. Benetton attempted to draw consumers' attention to racial issues and world peace but ultimately formulated activity to bring about world peace. So far discussion has revolved around Benetton's attempt to solve problems for AIDS, such as the need for education, raising funds, increasing awareness, and distributing condoms. But what does a company do to enact social change along the lines of bringing about peace?

As in the company's AIDS advertising, the company began by offering images. The imagery espoused racial harmony and the destruction within war. Once criticism ensued, the company then expanded company promotion to include activity to strengthen the company's ethos. For example, in February of 1994, the Benetton Group launched a controversial \$15 million campaign in 110 countries that featured the bloody clothes of a soldier killed in the former Yugoslavia. The story of the advertisement began in the fall of 1993 when a 21-year-old woman who fled Sarajevo after her family was killed in the bloody war wrote to Benetton's Oliviero Toscani. She asked, "Why don't you do something on what's going on in my country?" (Levin).

Toscani's response was to enlist the help of a Benetton representative in Trieste, Italy, which borders on the former Yugoslavia. The representative reportedly visited a morgue in the war-torn country and began contacting families of slain soldiers with requests to photograph the possessions that were left behind as a reminder of the war's horrors (Levin).

The photograph taken by Oliviero Toscani in 1993 was the result of this effort and featured the remains of 29-year-old Marinko Gagro, a Bosnian Croat killed in a battle at Hum near Mostar in Bosnia Herzegovina. A company press release called Marinko

Gagro, "The Known Soldier," and explained that Gagro was "shot down by enemy fire which pierced the heavy silence of a hot July day in 1993" ("The Known"). The release described Gagro as an agricultural science student who only needed to pass two more exams to graduate and who planned to marry his longtime girlfriend, Gordana. The press release further explained:

His sister says that he was a young man like many others: he loved going out with friends, having fun and travelling. He was buried in Blizanci, the town in Herzegovina where he was born. With him, were buried his dreams, his illusions, his ambitions, his plans, his sudden fears and his spontaneous courage. His belongings remain in the attic of the Gagro home. ("The Known")

Finally, along with announcing the latest campaign and imagery, the release noted, "Marinko's parents mourn him with the dignity of those who do not wish to forget. His clothes, pierced and contaminated by the violence of the war, await an explanation."

This ad caused controversy with publications refusing to publish it, and with the Vatican calling it "advertising terrorism" (Giobbe). As in the case of the AIDS ads, the soldier ad inspired people to write editorials, threaten to sue, and challenge Benetton's ethics. The company then attempted to authenticate its advertising efforts by opening a store in Sarajevo and holding art exhibits, particularly one in Zagreb at the HDLU Museum. In 1994, Benetton also sponsored a communication event in Johannesburg to celebrate free elections in South Africa. This two-day event featured music, theater, entertainment, and special readings.

Opening stores in new territories, hosting festivals, and advertising social messages does not bring about improvements in cultural relations. So in 1995 Benetton debuted a project entitled "The Colors of Peace" to further its belief that peace can be taught. Benetton executed the project during the 1996 school year and explored the premise that peace can be taught to any child from any country, using the same methods and the same materials. Teachers and students of elementary schools in Italy, Germany,

France, Belgium, and Spain participated in the peace-oriented educational program aimed at promoting positive relations between different cultures. Benetton supplied 130,000 school children and 16,000 teachers around Europe with educational materials such as books, exercise workbooks, and posters. These materials aimed at encouraging children to respect cultural differences and to learn tolerance, as well as to think about the challenges surrounding peace (“The Colors”).

Essentially, the Colors of Peace is a kit consisting of original materials designed to be playful and highly interactive. The kit includes a teacher’s guide with instructions concerning the kit, as well as ideas for further reading and a summary of theories of intercultural education. An article, “Peace Can Be Taught,” on the company’s website further outlines the kit.

Each class receives an oversized album with steps to invent “Everybody’s Land,” a fictitious place where all are equal. Instructions also guide students to make up a name, flag, anthem, and emblem for this new country, as well as to determine the country’s geography, history, customs, language, festivities, flora, and fauna. The class also plays a game to test knowledge and attitudes and to overcome obstacles to enable everyone to win the game by landing in “Everybody’s Land.” The end of the album asks the class to organize an intercultural festival called the Festival of Colors within the school or area.

Each student also receives a personal album to guide the student through an adventure to meet a person from another culture. The company website explains:

Meeting another person is a moment of discovery, one that arouses curiosity. But it is also a problematic moment. Stereotypes and prejudices are a breeding ground for intolerance and discrimination, hence the proliferation of and man’s violence towards his fellow man. (“Peace”)

According to the company, the Colors of Peace initiative attempts to bring a glimmer of hope for a better future. Creators would like to see children declare themselves citizens of Everybody’s Land, and the kit works to get students to make a

solemn commitment to respect human rights. The ideas and games are geared to encourage the children to think about ethnic identity, prejudice, racial discrimination, and stereotypes. “These are easy concepts to understand,” Toscani comments, “and children would absorb them quite naturally if they were not hindered by the overwhelming intolerance that exists between sexes, races, and religions” (quoted in “Peace”).

Toscani reveals beliefs and observances that serve as the foundation for this project. In April of 1994, the title of his article on the company website asks, “If We Were Blind, Would We Still Be Just as Racist?” He writes:

While photographing children, at least to the age of nine or ten, I realized that they did not stress race differences. They would say, “he’s black”, in the same way as they would say “he’s tall” or “he’s thin”. Then slowly, as the middle class ideology instilled at school begins to take hold, they start to notice that behind each difference there lies a story, a fabrication maybe, but a story nonetheless. This usually coincides with the onset of puberty, the first uncertainties, the first weaknesses; a fertile ground for racism, which preys on those who are most fragile and at least well equipped to defend themselves. The fact is, that racism is taught in the same way history and geography are taught; discrimination is taught. This has to stop; future generations should no longer be taught racism.

The basis of his observance is the belief that racism has ancient cultural roots that are extremely difficult to eradicate. He asserts:

Since childhood, we are taught to mistrust all things unlike us. Racism thrives on our insecurities and physical differences are brought into play—the colour of one’s skin, the shape of one’s eyes—as is social status. It becomes uncomfortable to live near someone who is not as white as us, who does not share our habits, our values, someone who eats spaghetti with jam or who does not eat spaghetti at all. (“If”)

He concludes that the problem rests in not accepting diversity.

The kit, with colorful images designed by Toscani and Italian artist Emanuele Luzzati, consists of Luzzati's illustrations of Toscani's photographs. Luzzati comments that he really enjoyed "translating" Toscani's photographs into illustrations and explains:

This is mainly because his messages have always attracted me, and I must say they are the only advertising images which I actually remember, because they make an impression that goes beyond the message itself. (quoted in "Peace")

The text of the kit was written by Mario Salomone.

The project was entirely sponsored by United Colors of Benetton and had the support of Italy's president. Organizations such as, Ecole Instrument de Paix (E.I.P), Associazione per la Pace, the Institute for Multi-Racial Studies (ISMU), and SOS Racisme, also backed the project. This support built on Benetton's prior associations with humanitarian organizations.

In 1995, Benetton forged a link with War Child, a charity that helps children in war zones across the world. At the United Colors of Benetton stand at the Clothes Show Live Exhibition in London, visitors received posters of Benetton ads signed by Oliviero Toscani in return for a contribution to the War Child charity ("Benetton Forges").

Also in 1995 Benetton collaborated with SOS Racisme in France and Associazione per la Pace in Italy to raise donations to aid African countries and war victims in Bosnia Herzegovina. Teaser advertisements of Toscani's famous images were published in the French newspaper *Libération* and the Italian newspaper *Repubblica*. The ads encouraged viewers to donate money and receive photographs of Toscani's work in return:

If you would like to receive Oliviero Toscani's most beautiful, best-loved, and most controversial photographs for Benetton, just send a donation to SOS Racisme/Associazione per la Pace. ("Benetton in Action")

This request was followed by the addresses and current account number of the two organizations.

Benetton has been involved throughout most of the history of the SOS Racisme organization. Established in 1983, founders set up the organization to combat racism and to defend human rights in France and throughout the world. SOS Racisme has formed twenty international committees throughout Europe, Africa, and America. Within France more than 300 committees have been set up in French high schools and neighborhoods, and about fifteen youth centers called *Maisons des Pôtes* (Friends' Houses) are currently open. The organization also supports around 100 legal centers in France to offer practical help, information, and advice to those in need ("SOS Racisme").

SOS Racisme also supports "Education Against Racism" programs in schools where the group organizes a series of debates with pupils to increase awareness of racism and to introduce practical steps to combat discrimination. Additional activities include concerts, shows, information drives, audio-visual campaigns, and volunteer service coordination to provide humanitarian help.

In 1996, Fabrica, Benetton's communication research center, hosted the 1st International Convention of SOS Racisme. Forty delegates from sixteen countries discussed intolerance in the modern world over two days of meetings. Participants also included Tahar Ben Jelloun, Aldo Busi, David Grossman, Predrag Matvejevic, Velibor Colic, Rawinder Randawa, and Benedita da Silva. Fabrica later published the book, *SOS Racisme: Acts of the 1st International Convention*, in June of 1997 in collaboration with the Feltrinelli publishing house to document Fabrica's work.

The spirit of SOS Racisme can also be evidenced in the additional humanitarian activity of the Benetton Group. The United Nations declared March 21, 1997, as World Day against Racism. To mark this day, Fabrica produced six advertising spots against racism for MTV Europe that ran March 21-25.

In 1999 Benetton launched the clearest link to the 1994 soldier ad with an image of a bloodstain on a white field to remind the world of the value of peace and to support the humanitarian action of the people of Kosovo. The ad was developed together with aid organizations, primarily the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, which works to provide help and welcome the refugees. The campaign carries the logos of United Colors of Benetton and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees together with a toll-free number and current account details to make citizens aware of the urgent need for concrete aid programs. The Benetton website indicates that with this campaign Benetton chose to face reality and to provide a strong and concrete answer to an extremely serious problem. In Italy, the campaign supported *Missione Arcobaleno*, *Consorzio Italiano di Solidarietà*, and *Associazione per la Pace* to collect funds (“Benetton for Kosovo”).

Toscani explains the purpose of his ad in this way:

The only form of communication that doesn't seem to notice that we are at war is advertising. We are seeking to make up for such thoughtlessness with this image, hoping to attract the attention of those who want to be really committed to humanitarian aid. We make no distinction between victims amongst the attackers and those who are being attacked. Children, women and old people, whether killed by bombs or as a result of ethnic cleansing are still children, women and men. This mark will stain the pages of our newspapers alongside advertising that wishes to gloss over and wipe such images from our consciences. (quoted in “Benetton for Kosovo”)

This ad, paired with extended humanitarian activity, then works to bring about social change and reinforces the previous promotional activity of United Colors of Benetton.

The Benetton Group's involvement in addressing issues related to race and injustice mirror the aims of activist theatre groups such as El Teatro Campesino, who worked to confront the exploitation of farm workers in California, as well as to confront racial discrimination. El Teatro concentrated on portraying a theatrical reality

representative of the experiences of audience members in an effort to inspire social action and change conditions for Hispanics (Van Erven). In a similar spirit the Benetton Group presents a vision of the solution to cultural conflict and injustice within its representation of racial harmony and the advocacy to accept diversity. Both groups aim at changing the status quo.

This condensed example of Benetton's involvement in racial issues and the previously discussed AIDS activity indicate that advertisements may not have the potential to bring about social change on their own. In the Benetton Group's case, advertising merely becomes a starting point that leads the company to additional activity that engages and activates viewers. When Benetton moves beyond the visual play of advertising imagery into involvement in social activity within the community, then change potentially follows. Playing a game that teaches a child to accept difference or giving someone a condom and showing how to use it may ultimately bring about the company's desired ends in ways that advertising may not. Yet, Benetton's advertising is the starting point in the company's brand marketing efforts and beautifully demonstrates the play of images within the global marketplace.

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VITA

Heidi Jolene Brough was born May 23, 1971, in Yakima, Washington. In June of 1989, she graduated from West Valley High School and in the fall of 1989 entered Northwest Nazarene College in Nampa, Idaho. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in speech communication from Northwest Nazarene College in June of 1992. In the fall of 1993, she began graduate study at Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts, and graduated in August of 1993 with a Master of Arts degree in communication studies.

In the fall of 1993, Brough entered the doctoral program in speech communication: performance studies at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Her major focus of study revolved around performance, but areas of interest included cultural studies, advertising, literature, linguistics, oral history, anthropology, and dance. The degree of Doctor of Philosophy will be conferred in May 2001.

Brough taught at Northwest Nazarene College from 1996 to 1998 in the department of speech communication and also served as the college's director of forensics. While at N.N.C., she taught an array of communication courses and directed several chamber theatre productions, including a stage adaptation of Denise Shekerjian's book, *Uncommon Genius*. In addition, she directed a production of Flannery O'Connor's short story, "Revelation."

Currently, Brough serves as the director of community relations and marketing at Karcher Estates, a Life Care Centers of America retirement facility, in Nampa, Idaho.

DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Heidi Jolene Brough

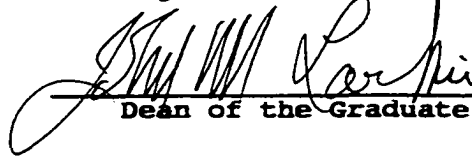
Major Field: Speech Communication

Title of Dissertation: Activist Advertising: Case Studies of United Colors of Benetton's AIDS-Related Company Promotion

Approved:

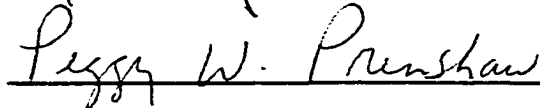
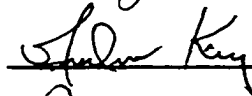
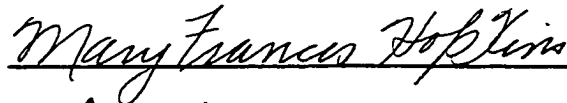


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EXAMINING COMMITTEE:



Date of Examination:

December 1, 2000