

# Silence III Address The Issue: Unnecessary Censorship in HIV/AIDS

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815 Words  
APA

Figure 4. Early sexual activity and HIV prevalence in girls in rural sites<sup>21</sup>



It is possible to suggest that monogamy (much



between two and three premarital... The stick figure... message... In the same study... women and one quarter of women

...ed... with... people other... their... marriage

In... HIV is... from... lifetime... against... must have... a condom... But let's be... are to be... in... which hasten... HIV epidemic

...resistance to... being... in... accompanied... HIV infections... The... this rise... countries... have risen... companies... on... have reported a surge in demand in... but a few... countries

Encouraging... for... there is... one... against... by... can be... in many... to calculate. A... 60 per... parents... not... 3

... of... and... established a... some have... the... to... 1999... has... about sexual

behaviour and... condoms... of... if they... of a moral... of the... past

silence

Tom Philips is no stranger to the humement method wandering outside the pages of W. H. Wallock's novel. He has even seen his method reproduced on the inner and outer surface of skulls. However, that a global health class at Duke picked up his technique to apply onto an archive by a medical anthropologist would be intriguing. However, the genesis of this particular humement project was much unlike how Philips chanced upon the Victorian novel *The Human Document* in 1966. This project was the brainchild of Prof Karrie Stewart, a global health professor with an interest in the health humanities, Maria De Bruyn, a medical anthropologist and Kelley Swain, a poet familiar with the humement technique. While they worked to set the stage, the students of Global Health 302 were the actors, presenting their own unique re-imaginings of the archives. A keen difference between Tom Philips and the students of the class would be the serendipity with which Philips approached his art. College students are unlikely to treat their graded assignments with the same serendipity and their treatment of the pages from the Maria De Bruyn collection showed that conviction with which they approached their work, highlighting overtly oppressive statements about women and homosexuals, painting painful personal illness narratives and pushing against the social stigma surrounding the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Lai, in his own re-imagination, hopes to make a statement on the problems silence and censorship creates, when trying to combat social stigma.

Given the depth of the Maria De Bruyn archives, we need to understand Lai's background to comprehend his choice of material for this project. As a Life Sciences Major, Lai's background is heavily steeped in the sciences rather than the arts. It may not be a surprise, therefore, that he landed on the familiar aesthetic in the journal *Reproduction Health Matters*. The bar graphs and the distinctive split page creates a clean and organised look, very different from the complexities layered upon in an art piece. Lai hints at this contrast between the two disciplines by leaving most of the original page visible through '#' signs, rather than painting over the page more commonly seen in Tom Philip's Humement. Lai also leaves distinctive elements such as the figure label and graph axes untreated where he positions the comic book panels, as if questioning whether these panels can be interpreted as cleanly as a scientific figure should.

*Silence III Address the Issue* contains panels from the Global AIDS Programme comic advocating the use of condoms to sex workers. While the comic contains graphic images, the panels chosen had no graphic content. However, as Lai obscures the panels with "unnecessary censorship", the innocuous depictions suddenly seem questionable. These censorships beg the questions "What exactly is this woman offering the man that he would first refuse and even counter offer a large amount of cash for?", "What kind of woman is this and where is she hurting?" ('Dóí!' means 'It hurts!'). The censorship of the eyes, breasts and genital area of the women draws the instinctive curiosity of viewers. However, in creating this portion of the artwork, Lai simply used all the statistics in that paragraph to censor the woman's body. Yet, the spacing and alignment of this self-created rule unintentionally creates an obscenely censored image. In this blur of serendipity and intent, Lai creates a metaphor for the confusion censorship creates.

The large, red '!' and the first word of the poem creates an oxymoron. *Silence!* is usually a command given by those in power. In presenting silence in such a way, Lai recreates the shock those intimidated by people in power feel when encountering such opposition. He draws inspiration from the frustration of HIV/AIDS activists when fighting the South African government and Thabo Mbeki with his refusal to acknowledge HIV. The rest of the poem directly echoes the artist's thoughts on how censorship and avoidance affects the social problems surrounding HIV/AIDS. However, there is also meaning in what was not said. Rather than directly mentioning HIV/AIDS, Lai creates a satire within the few words chosen. In not mentioning HIV/AIDS throughout the piece, there creates a clamouring ambiguity in the poem. What hypocritical art critiques the silence surrounding the HIV/AIDS epidemic yet chooses to censor his own work of all mentions of the disease? In this deliberate choice of words, Lai invokes the ire and annoyance of the viewer through his own satirical form of censorship.

Through a satirical presentation of censorship on the AIDS programme comic, Lai invites viewers to take on a new lens when reading scientific journals. Are these journals truly illuminating key issues which the global community needs focus on in combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic, or could they be unknowingly obscuring angles which have yet to be discovered? As with the art piece, the answer lies in what is not being discovered in these journals, rather than what lies within them.

**Duke University, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library  
Maria De Bruyn Archives (1988- 2012)**

Box 7:

1) Pisani, E. (2000). AIDS into the 21st century: some critical considerations. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 8(15), p72.

Box 21:

2) So Com Preservativo, Financiado pelo CDC- Global AIDS Programme, p 6.