

Destructive Attitudes
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Introduction

For Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) such as HIV, gender roles often take center stage in the discussion of the social factors that lead to infection. However, this dynamic between women and men is often explored with a focus on women empowerment. Empowerment is a common theme in HIV/AIDS interventions as well as in artwork from numerous cultures. However, this focus on empowerment often leaves another, just as important, aspect of this gender dynamic unexplored: the attitudes that men have toward gender, sexuality, and their risk of HIV infection. These attitudes manifest themselves as roles that men should fill and strongly influence how men act and think. Some of these attitudes are just as destructive as the disenfranchisement of women, especially in the context of HIV/AIDS, because they promote a culture that not only increases a man's own risk of STIs but also elevates the risk of their already disenfranchised partners. From the careful selection of phrases to the integration of strong visual imagery, these attitudes and their repercussions are embodied in *Destructive Attitudes* by Hemal Patel.

The Original Document

The document is originally from Maria Debruyne's Box 6 and is from an activity conducted in Nairobi that explored gender roles and attitudes in various news articles. This document specifically contains two of these news articles. The top article describes the aftermath of a mass sexual assault committed by teenage boys on their female counterparts. This led to 19 deaths, and the author of this article laments the need for such "a tragedy to startle people from the old – and destructive – attitudes" (PANOS/IRIS East Africa Regional Workshop). This comment is where the artist draws inspiration for the title. Moreover, the artist uses a quote by the deputy principal of the school where this attack occurred to highlight one of these destructive attitudes.

In contrast to the top article, the bottom article is about family planning and the importance of both parent in this process. However, the artist, in the true sense of *A Humument*, utilizes "a process of erasure [and] cutting away" (Smyth) to reinterpret this article to embody some destructive attitudes men, especially in LLMIC, often hold towards the process of family planning and their risk of STIs such as HIV. The artist's choice of phrases from these articles serve as startling examples of these attitudes, but the ramifications of these attitudes are captured in the visuals of this piece.

The Visuals

The inspiration for the graphics of this piece come from a scene in the first episode of the anime series *Attack on Titan*. In this series, some humans have the voluntary ability to become powerful titans (such as the one pictured in the top center of the piece), but at the cost of shortened lifespans and initially uncontrollable rampages that the individual cannot remember and can require up to months of physical recovery. By drawing a parallel between this titan power and these attitudes, the artist illuminates the fact that these attitudes are detrimental to men who hold them, but are arguably more detrimental to the people around them, which is illustrated by the vast destruction that the titan has caused.

Moreover, the fact that this titan is the shell of a musculoskeletal system represent the dehumanizing nature of these attitudes. An example of how destructive attitudes towards HIV/AIDS dehumanizes individuals is found in *The Book of the Dead* by Kgebetli Moele in which HIV is given agency as a virus with a maleficent agenda to

spread death and disease. In this book, the humanity of characters is diminished as they merely serve as “soldier[s] working for [HIV/AIDS] tirelessly night and day” (Moele 138). The artist argues just as characters in *Attack on Titan* lose a part of their humanity to become titans, so too do men to hold these attitudes.

To highlight that men are the ones that hold these attitudes, the artist chooses to depict a faceless, but clearly masculine, individual with a backwards Mars symbol (♁) on his cloak as the centerpiece of this piece. By incorporating a backwards Mars symbol, the artist communicates the idea these are attitudes that are detrimental for men to hold.

Moreover, the artist uses thought bubbles to depict that this character, as well as the titan are having these destructive thoughts. However, by using thought bubbles, the artist fails to incorporate the idea that the man in cloak can become a titan and that this titan and the destruction it causes is the result of these attitudes. Nonetheless, the thought bubbles are constructive to this piece as a whole because they illustrate the prevalence of such thoughts.

In conclusion, attitudes such as the ones highlighted in this piece play an integral role in how men detrimentally view gender roles, sexuality, and their risk of STIs.

Works Cited

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