

# 1 HIV/AIDS + Testing

## Graphic Communication: A UK HIV/AIDS Design Archive www.hivgraphiccommunication.com

The design of visual communication about HIV testing in the UK has evolved dramatically since the late '80s, reflecting changes in both availability of treatment options and the social and cultural contexts of HIV/AIDS.

2013

2012

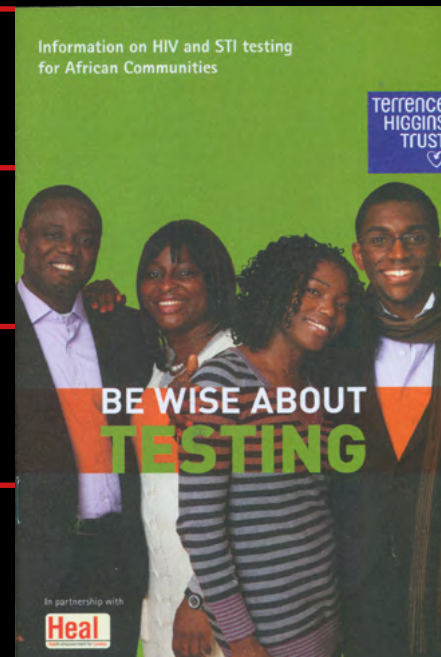
2011

2010



The last decade has seen increased speed and ease of testing, with clinics and testing services referencing the visual language of club flyers. As the promotion of testing as a form of HIV prevention became standard, and organisations piloted home sampling kits, the accompanying advertisements also evolved to be more like those selling a product or service than the text-heavy, uncertainty-laden approaches of twenty years ago.

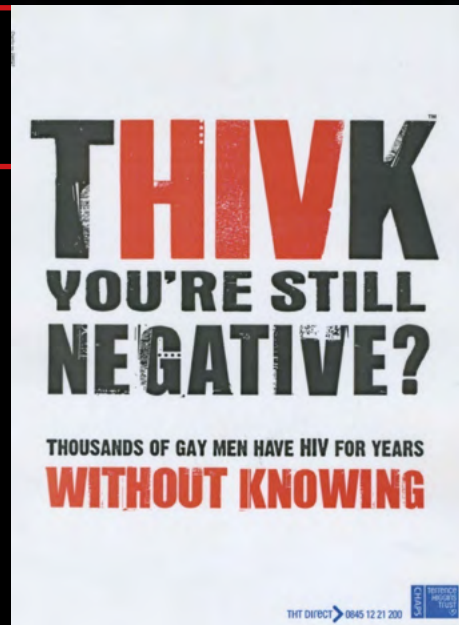
Say Yes To The Test  
with the Brighter Partnership



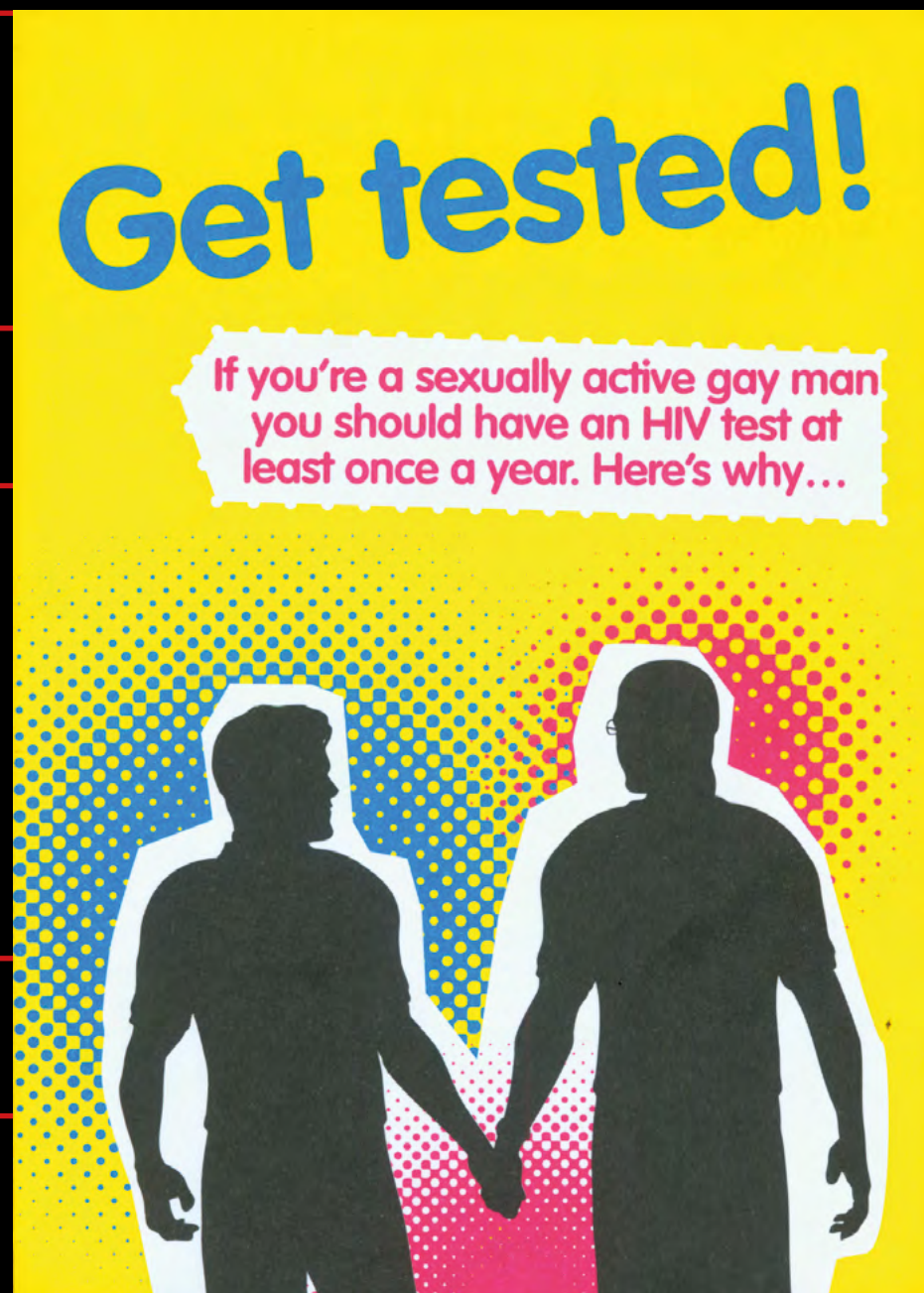
Testing as Prevention

2008

2007



2008: New guidelines from the British HIV Association advocated the widespread expansion of HIV testing services and recommended that in areas of high HIV prevalence, all new GP registrants and general medical admissions should be offered an HIV test.



2008: The 'Swiss Statement' was released by a group of HIV physicians in Switzerland – the belief that people with HIV who were on combination therapy with undetectable viral load and who had no other STI, were not sexually infectious during vaginal intercourse. This added an extra urgency to swifter diagnoses, and HIV treatment has increasingly been seen as a means to prevent new infections. A consensus quickly developed that this was probably the case for anal intercourse also.

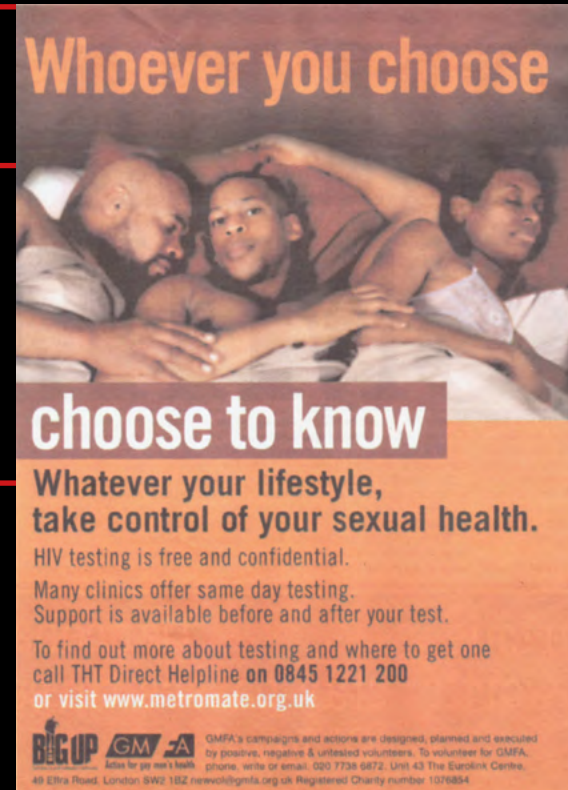
As a consequence of these changes in testing policy and practice, the number of HIV tests offered and taken in the UK increased enormously.



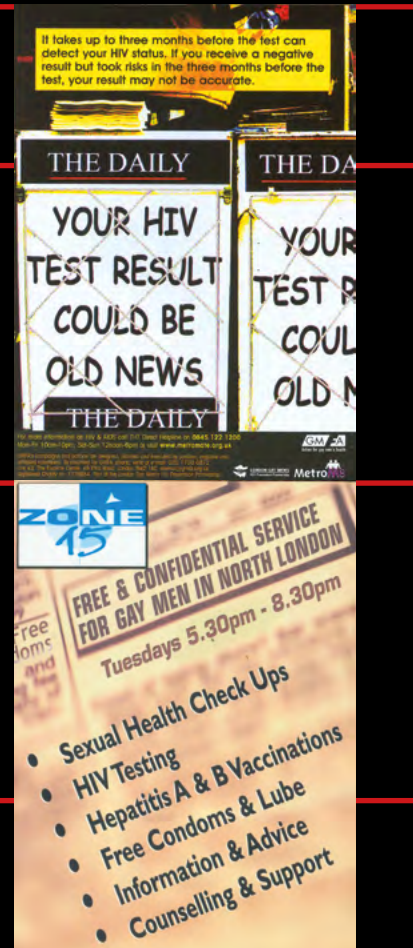
2004

2003

2003: The Chief Medical Officer's Report suggested that gay and bisexual men should be offered an HIV test every year (although it did not state who should do the offering).



2001: The National Strategy for HIV and Sexual Health recommended universal offers of HIV tests in GUM clinics and the UK began to move from opt-in testing policies (where clients had to request a test and make it through gatekeepers to get one) to opt-out policies (testing as a routine part of general STI screening).



By the mid 2000s, 'taking control' and knowledge of status were the key empowering messages promoted in adverts and posters.

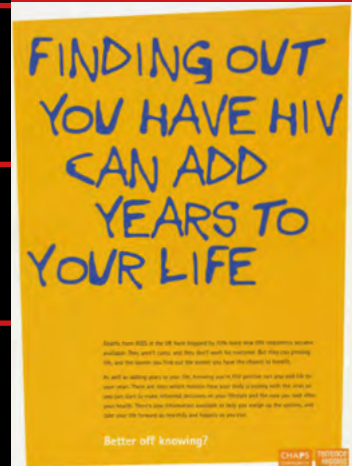


2001

By the early 2000s, adverts were listing more positive reasons for testing and the colour palettes also became brighter and more upbeat.

Normalisation of Testing

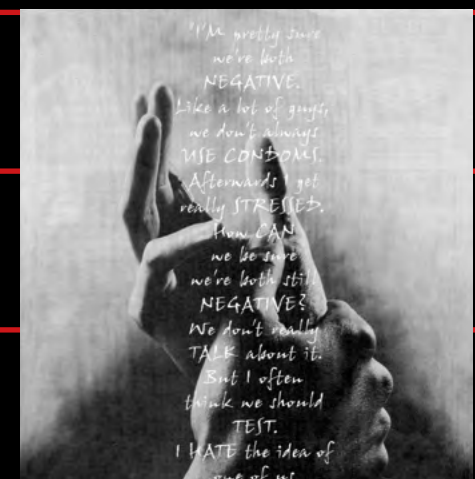
1999



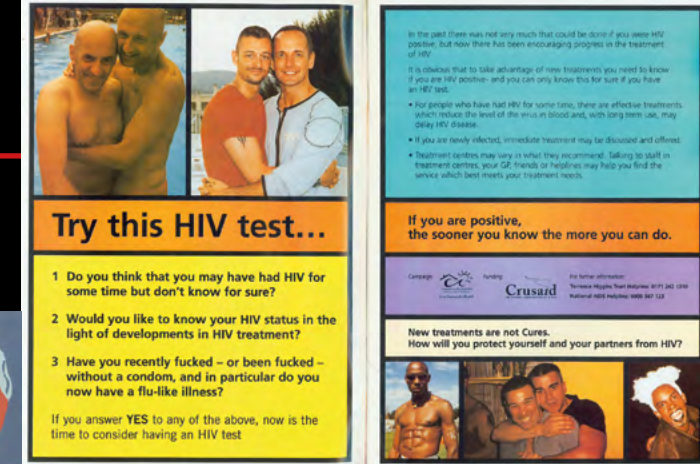
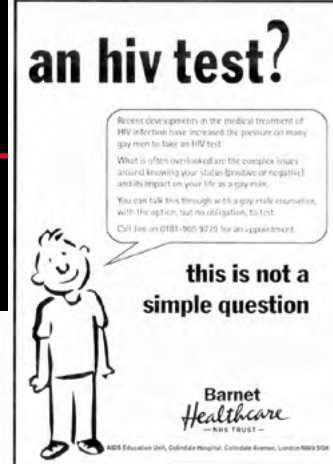
1998



1997

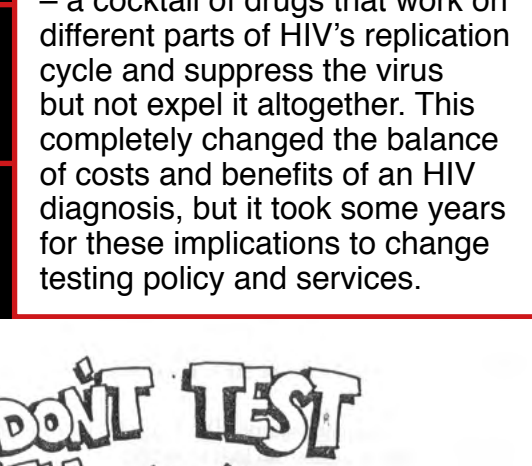
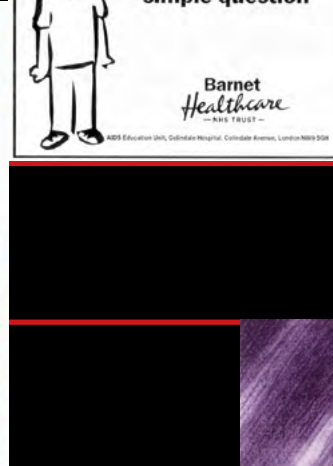
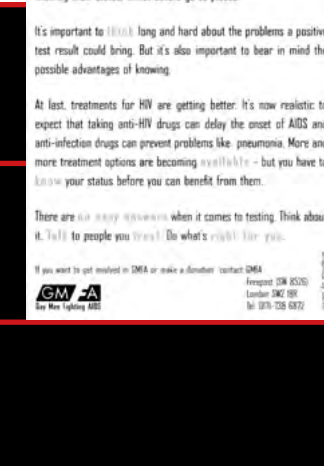
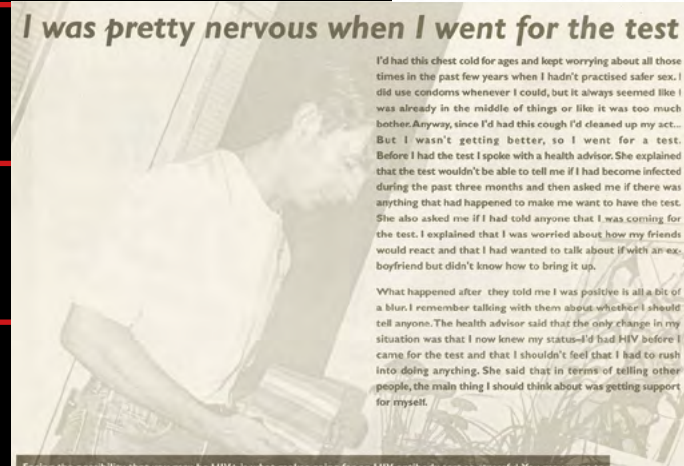


1996

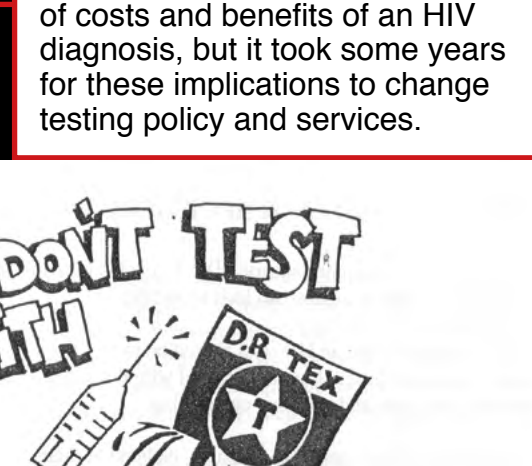
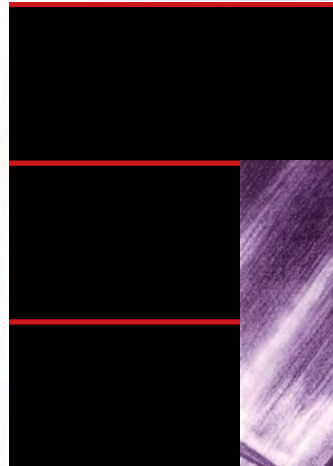


1996: World AIDS Conference, Vancouver. Data demonstrated the efficacy of combination therapy – a cocktail of drugs that work on different parts of HIV's replication cycle and suppress the virus but not expel it altogether. This completely changed the balance of costs and benefits of an HIV diagnosis, but it took some years for these implications to change testing policy and services.

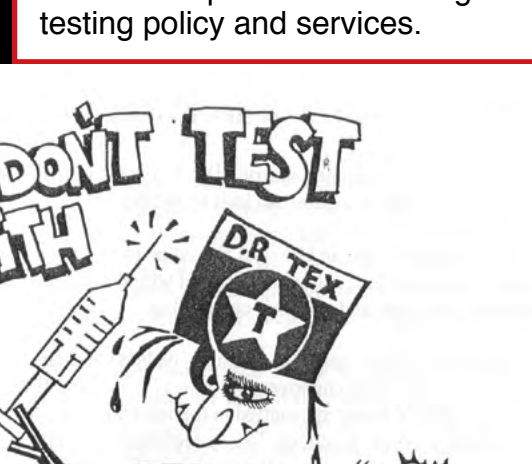
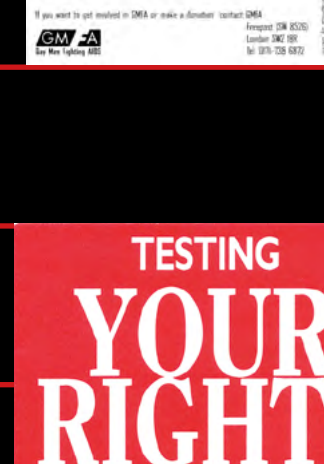
1995



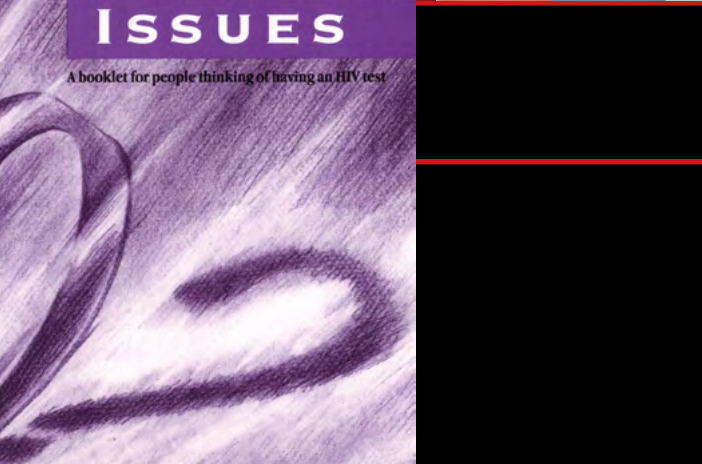
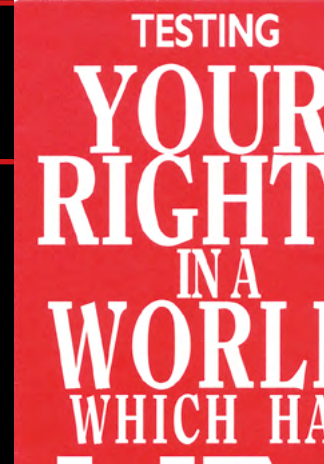
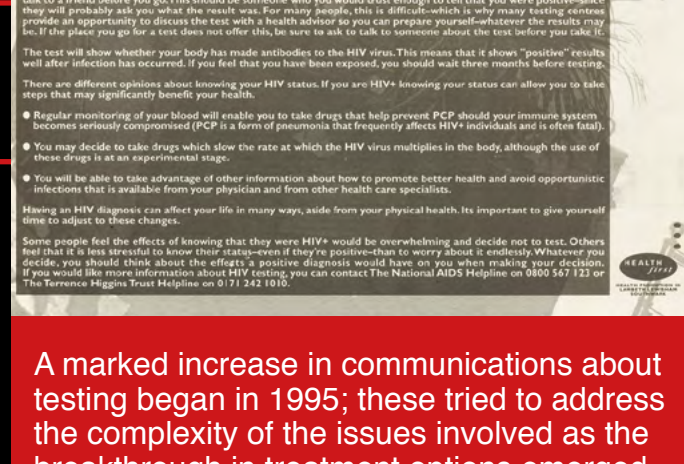
1994



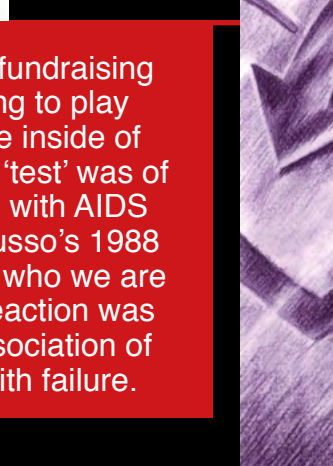
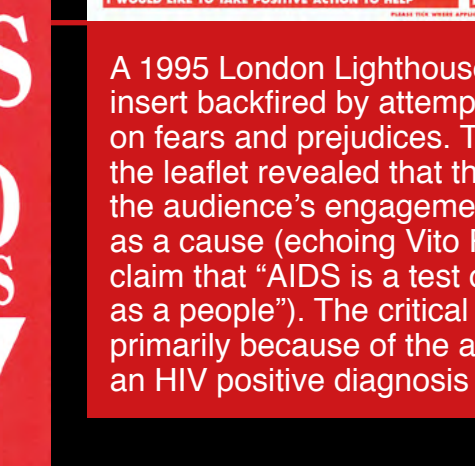
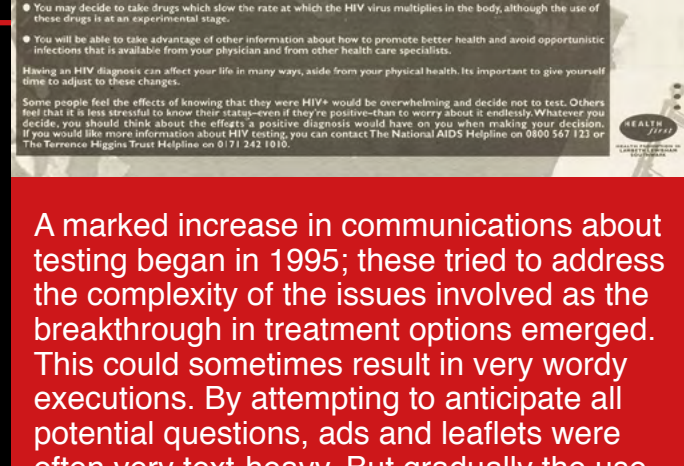
1993



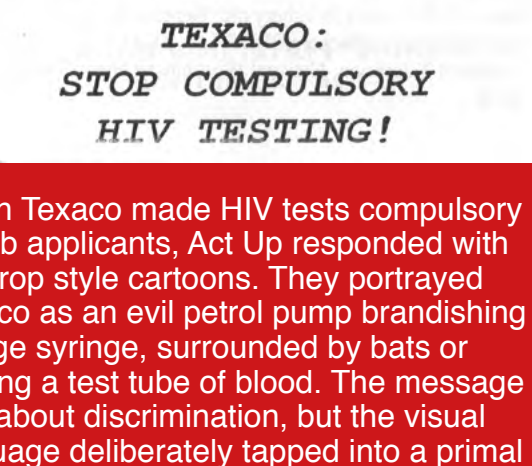
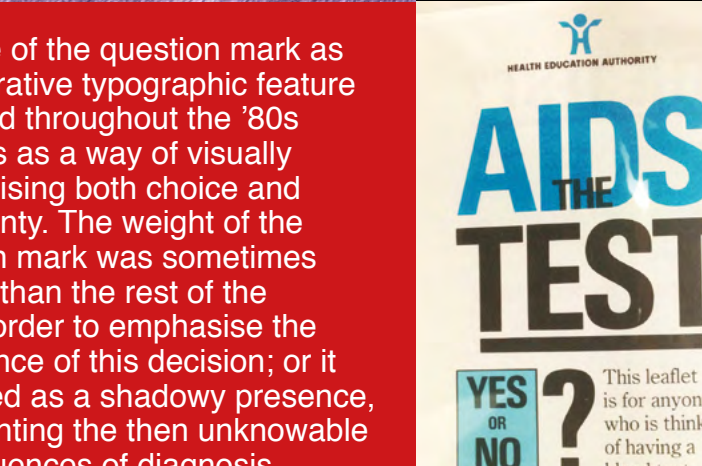
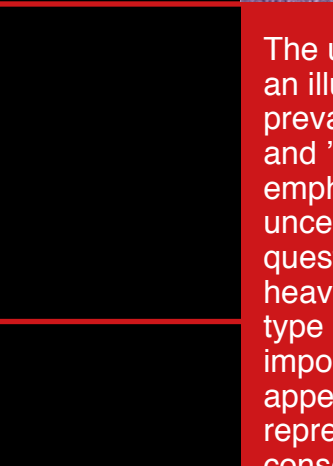
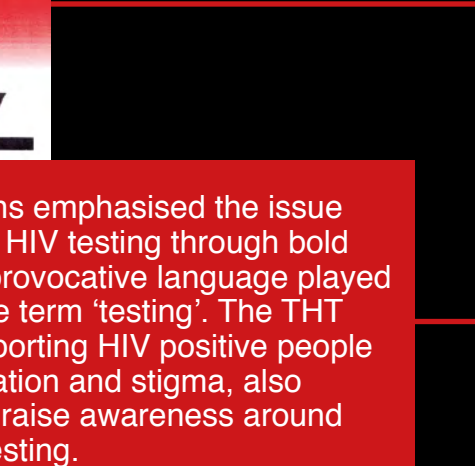
1992



1991



1988



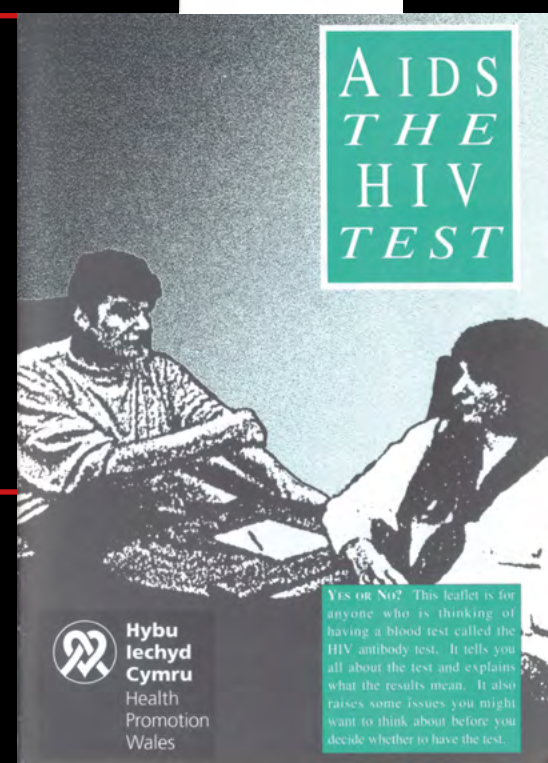
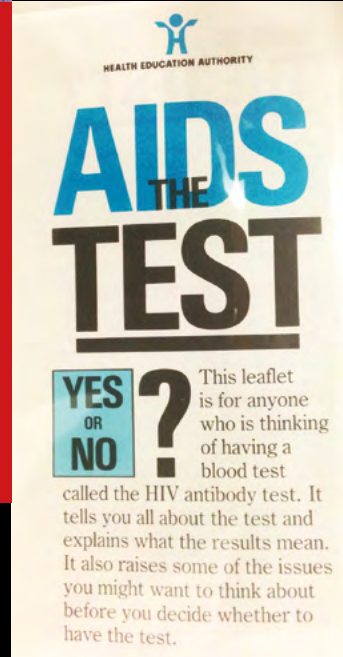
1986



The HIV-antibody test was first publicly available in the UK towards the end of 1984. It quickly became widely accessible and was free, voluntary and confidential. However, it was not 'promoted'. There was little change in testing policies over the following 12 years.

Advocacy organisations emphasised the issue of 'rights' in relation to HIV testing through bold type and colour. The provocative language played on the ambiguity of the term 'testing'. The THT Advice Centre, in supporting HIV positive people dealing with discrimination and stigma, also created advertising to raise awareness around issues of consent in testing.

The use of the question mark as an illustrative typographic feature prevailed throughout the '80s and '90s as a way of visually emphasising both choice and uncertainty. The weight of the question mark was sometimes heavier than the rest of the type in order to emphasise the importance of this decision; or it appeared as a shadowy presence, representing the then unknowable consequences of diagnosis.



When Texaco made HIV tests compulsory for job applicants, Act Up responded with agitprop style cartoons. They portrayed Texaco as an evil petrol pump brandishing a large syringe, surrounded by bats or holding a test tube of blood. The message was about discrimination, but the visual language deliberately tapped into a primal fear of needles. The sinister, vampiric 'mad scientist' figure equated testing with dangerous experimentation. The overall communication was strongly anti-testing, not just anti-Texaco.

Testing and Uncertainty