Straight To The Heart

September 1, 2000 By River Huston

I tend to stay away from social gatherings of HIV positives because, after a few, I knew that I was looking for more than tall, dark and diseased. What makes me bristle more than anything is being given one more label—heterosexual. Can we at least say “straight”? Is there possibly any other title besides “HIV positive heterosexual”?

So I wasn’t exactly thrilled to be going to the first Pos Hetero Summit. I had been busy touring a one-woman performance piece, and I was beat by the time my cab pulled up to the Quality Inn Resort in San Diego. The first person I ran into was Sherri Kaplan, the pioneer founder of Miami’s Positive Connections. She looked as tired as I felt, but it was good to see an old friend. Then summit director Adam Lee Khuni breezed effortlessly into the lobby and got us checked in and on our way.

I was still drained, but I wanted to survey my surroundings. The hotel bar was filled with self-identifying HIV positive, full-blooded heterosexuals laughing, drinking, flirting and shooting pool. There was an excited buzz, and my edginess started to fade. What’s another label when you’re having fun?

The more than 500 Summit participants were diverse, and, better, there was an even mix of men and women, a rarity for the HIV conference circuit. Many of the men were virgins—this was the first conference they’ve attended, as straight men are rarely acknowledged in any material pertaining to AIDS. Unlike other social hetero events I’d done, the summit—put together by HIV positive people for HIV positive people—emphasized learning and networking. But hooking up—couples who took the summit subtitle “Reignite the Passion” literally—is inevitable when you have a group of horny heterosexuals in one place. (Then again, that can be said for horny homosexuals, or any kind of group that tacks sexual on the end of its name.)

I’ve been attending this kind of event regularly for a decade, but this was the first time I left feeling hopeful and with a fistful of numbers from people I will actually call. I guess I have finally found my tribe. Just call us The Heterosexuals.

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