



# The Viral Lowdown: Word Is Out For New HIVers

Gay Shocker: "What a shame"

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Testing positive in 2000 is "better" than it used to be -- as in better treatments, better prognosis and, most poignantly, "you should have known better." If the medical picture is brighter, the moral one is not. Faced with responses that often range from complacency to rejection -- notably from gays -- of young HIVers new to the club are finding disclosure a more treacherous transaction than in the days of "We Are All Living With AIDS" t-shirts. And according to reports, they are coming out in smaller numbers, to fewer people or not at all. "Getting HIV now is more about drudgery than heroism," said Walt Odets, author of *In the Shadow of the Epidemic: HIV Negative Gay Men and AIDS*. He added that the much-hyped metamorphosis of AIDS into an easily manageable disease has bred ho-hum dismissal, if not utter indifference. "One patient told his sister that he had HIV, and she said, 'Well, you're just going to have to take care of yourself.' Then she proceeded to tell him about her new job."

Tony Valenzuela, 32, who came out with a bang as an HIV positive barebacker two years ago, said he understands why so many twentysomethings take a different tack. "There's a view that in the age of safe sex, if you test positive, you are irresponsible, even crazy," he said, adding that the more things like disclosing change, the more dissing HIVers' sex stays the same, "and that has never encouraged anyone positive to come out."

But if shame is the name of the game these days, critics say, the gay community should blame itself -- and its prevention culture -- rather than its young. According to Odets, HIV has become so central to "gayness" that some young men are drawn to it now as a destiny, if not as a cause. "Only the young men who can think around and through all this can avoid infection," he said.

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