Letters—October/November 2013

September 25, 2013

Opposites Attract

The article "Magnetic Attraction" (July/August 2013) profiled three long-term couples in which one partner is living with HIV while the other is not. Each couple shared their love story and advice for others.

I too am HIV negative and in a relationship with an HIV-positive person. I commend the people who believe that love does not discriminate. I love my girlfriend very much. We met 11 years ago, and she has lived with the disease for over 20 years. I will be here until the end.

Kristin Oliver, Douglasville

I've been positive since 2005 and recently met a great guy. I disclosed my status to him on our third date, not wanting it to go any further without him knowing. I have no clue if we will work out, but stories like these give me hope that love often prevails. I won't let my status stop me from loving.

Fox McCoy, NYC

I found out I was positive almost two years ago, and at first it felt like life was over. A couple of months later, I met the guy of my dreams and I told him about my status on our first date. It was one of the hardest things I have ever done. Although I almost didn't go on the date because I was scared I would be rejected, I am proud to say that we got married this past weekend. There is hope. Just have faith. Having great families and friends has helped us a lot.

Michael

Negative Assets

Our July/August 2013 issue focused on contributions of the HIV-negative community. We applaud the efforts of all those who work to end HIV/AIDS.

I've been reading POZ for the past six months, and the only reason I got the magazines was

because my supervisor told me to recycle them whenever they came in. I couldn't believe it. We are a health care facility, but these magazines are not to be displayed in our waiting rooms? She told me they received complaints from patients. Personally, I think some of the staff here does not want to see it.

My son lives with AIDS every day, and because he does, so do I. I cannot believe in this era we are still afraid to face the fact that we are all the same—individuals, with hearts and feelings. We need to promote health information, not hide it under a rug.

I now put copies [of POZ] in our interoffice mail to different departments within our organization. It's such a sneaky thing to do, but I fear for my job. It makes me feel like I'm still doing something even if it is the coward's way.

Mom J, Wisconsin

A few months ago, my oldest daughter asked if I was HIV positive. After I replied no, she asked why had I become involved in HIV education, testing and counseling. My reply was simple.

I was around when HIV was first identified. I have held the hands of individuals who were no longer being touched because of their status. I cannot forget the pain in their eyes as they spoke of how they missed handshakes and pats on the shoulders. I cannot forget the gut-wrenching sobs as they spoke of being torn from their families because of stigma and fear related to HIV infection. They faced rejection even as the disease took their lives. I cannot forget the humanity of those experiencing this human condition.

It doesn't take a positive status to make a difference. It only takes heart.

Annie Earle, MPH, Hickory, NC

Bareback Brouhaha
The article "Hold Your Horses" (July/August 2013) explored the concept of safer sex and the controversy around the term barebacking.

I applaud you for this article. Thank God some people are choosing to further educate. At the same time, shame on us for allowing issues of shame to dictate any open discussion on this topic. The aversion that has been displayed in regard to this subject is not unlike abstinence-only education in our schools. The more education, the more effective choices each person can make.

Todd, Ohio

For me, this is a nonissue. Gay men should always wear condoms. HIV is not the only STI to be concerned about. Syphilis is on the rise and is a nasty bacterium to cure. There is nothing to negotiate. No euphemistic spin can deny the importance of consistent condom use for all penetrative gay sex encounters.

Oliver, Bridgeport

My partner and I have been together for 17 years, and he has been positive the entire time. I love him and he loves me, and we take precautions to ensure he doesn't transmit the virus to me. However, condoms are not in our special drawer. I would never ask him to wear one. Seventeen years and still negative!

Mark, Atlanta

Finally! Some recognition of reality! Reframing condoms as "healthy and responsible" will not make them enjoyable, and if they're not fun, you're not going to find them on Mr. Happy.

William, New York

It is important to note that about half of gay men have not been using condoms since the mid 1980s. Better to use PrEP [pre-exposure prophylaxis] and protect against HIV—arguably the most serious of STDs—than have zero protection, eh?

People who don't use condoms—for whatever reason—should have choices beyond condoms. Truvada as PrEP is not a perfect choice, but it works really well to prevent HIV.

Jim Pickett, Chicago

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