The 360 Approach

February 19, 2013 By Aundaray Guess

Aundaray Guess

As a gay African-American man who has lived with HIV for 26 years, POZ blogger Aundaray Guess understands the challenges gay black youth face against the virus. This edited excerpt from his blog post "Looking Beyond HIV" offers his views on why HIV rates for gay black youth are increasing.

Much has been mentioned about the fact that many African-American men, especially youth, are getting HIV in growing numbers. Many are scratching their heads asking why, especially when almost anyone can get a free condom, not to mention the abundance of prevention messages displayed all over major cities.

When it comes to HIV prevention, the one thing that seems to be missing is something I call the 360 degrees approach. In this approach, all aspects of a person of color's life are looked at. Instead of throwing them a condom, you first ask: What does their world resemble? What are their life circumstances? What societal barriers prevent them from getting the message? Is it poverty, homelessness, unemployment, racism? How do they view themselves, and do they feel they have any worth?

One of the aspects of 360 is helping black men realize that they are visible. That their worth goes beyond their sexuality. That as black men they have legitimacy in feeling they are disenfranchised in a system that was not designed for them. Some in their search for identity often only find sexualized images of gay black men.

When it comes to people who look like me, even removing my sexuality, the absence of my voice in the media is so pronounced. I can flip open magazines such as Out or Details, and I'm nowhere to be found. I look at the television and come up with a channel full of static. Glee currently has a black character who has yet to express his sexuality, but by his mannerisms it's assumed he's gay. As is often the case when it comes to the combination of the words "gay" and "black" in the mainstream, that person more than likely will be stripped of his masculinity. Even if I allow myself the pleasure of going to the movies, I come up absent. What I see are larger-than-life images of black men who roll their eyes and are a guaranteed source of laughter.

The one place I know I will be represented is in an ad or poster with a man of color telling me to

wrap it up. Or, better yet, now that he's on HIV meds he's jumping in the air—because we all know when you take HIV medications that's the first thing that comes to mind. (Slight note of sarcasm.)

HIV prevention specialists have to understand that before many gay black men can even think about HIV they are still trying to grasp three important questions in this order: What does it mean to be black? What does it mean to be a man? What does it means to be gay? Perhaps the reason your message of prevention falls on deaf ears is you're jumping to the last question.

The biggest threat is the cloud of complacency. After so many years of pigeonholing gay black men with one message, we have to realize that it'll start to have the opposite effect. We have to broaden that message and talk about depression, talk about mental health, talk about relationships and, most important, talk about the ability to love one's self.

As black men, no matter how we identify, we must step up to the plate and not only make ourselves visible, but also find comfort in our masculine role. We must see it as a source of strength and not weakness. We have to see where we stand in the 360 and what responsibility we have.

For those who are comfortable with their identity, the greatest thing is to be a role model for a young gay person of color. Maybe in that bonding they will say, "So, that's what it looks like." In that responsible role they help illuminate what seemed to be intangible to some. The person you speak to is way more than the prevention message and has more value than the free condom you get at the clinic.

—Aundaray Guess
blogs.poz.com/aundarayguess

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/voices-march-2013-23486-8846