Condom Confidential

October 22, 2008 By Regan Hofmann

Two nights ago, while flipping around the channels, I came across an old (Season 3) episode of Seinfeld in which Kramer gives George some free, promotional condoms he was given. George uses them and has a scare with a new girlfriend because her period is late and they think she might be pregnant (she wasn't). I remembered seeing the show when it first aired and being amazed that in 1992, on prime time cable, on a hit TV show, people were talking openly about condoms. And it made me wonder: Where are the condoms on TV today? Has anyone seen one brandished recently?

Not only are we missing educational and prevention opportunities by avoiding talking about condoms in the context of cool, sexy shows, I don't get how today's TV writers can resist having fun with the latest technological developments in the world of condoms. I, for one, am amazed at the volume of choices we have now (One of my new faves? Planned Parenthood's totally prettily packaged sets of condoms...try the "Dots" version for a subtle sensation enhancer...).

I'm not a big TV watcher, so I could be missing condom's guest appearances, but I'm pretty sure that mention of them is more scant then the outfits worn by The Girls Next Door. Even on shows where sex is central to the plotline (like Gray's Anatomy, Gossip Girls, Entourage, etc., etc.) the conversation almost never turns to condoms. Just once, I wanna see a TV hottie whip it out (the condom I mean) when things get super steamy.

Earlier on the night I saw that Seinfeld, I went to the 50th anniversary celebration for Harlem's Iris House which benefits folks living with HIV/AIDS. There was faux-gambling and Wii bowling and billards and awesome '80s music and cake - and speeches by people whose lives have been turned around in the right direction by the mighty Iris House. There were also little black velveteen pouches that they passed out on your way out the door containing three NYC condoms (the packaging is designed to look like the signage in the New York City subway; they were produced and given out for free by New York's Department of Health) and two shiny packets of lube. On the pouch, gold lettering read: Power in Prevention. It made me think about the notion of "power in prevention" and how I've journeyed from being embarassed to buy condoms to feeling totally empowered and badass every time I do.

Recently, I stopped at a Walgreen's (okay, I'll admit I intentionally chose one far away from my home town but when I explain you'll see why) to get some condoms. Several of my friends had confessed that they were "uncomfortable being seen buying condoms." So, I volunteered to go get the goods for them. Let me remind you, we're talking middle-aged women here...like the folks on Seinfeld. I found their discomfort a little shocking in a way I would not, say, had they been awkward teens, but if it meant they'd use 'em, I'd buy 'em for 'em. And who was I to judge? I'd once been just like them. Too scared sometimes to save myself. I wonder how many people would rather risk their lives having unprotected

sex with a partner of unknown status than they would face the pain of a few tense moments at the drug or grocery store check out?

I cruised the aisles, made my selections based on my rather long and elaborate list (the greatest part was seeing what everyone else preferred. Did so-and-so really need the Magnums? Hmmm.) While I was at it, I took a good close look - for the first time - at all the options. In the past, I'd done the quick "grab and go" approach to condom selection. But somehow, perhaps because I knew I was shopping for others too, I let myself linger and study the lineup of latex. I threw a few new options into my cart (e.g. Trojan's vibrating ring condom and some sort of his-and-hers lube that I think heats up when things get hot and heavy - or maybe it generates the heat; I'll have to report back later)

It was funny that even though I was miles from my home town in a strange drug store minutes before they closed (so I was one of the last people there) I found myself justifying to myself what I was doing. I told myself: I was protecting my body. Saving another person's life. Preventing an unplanned pregnancy. Being responsible, disciplined, health concious and mature. And I wasn't only doing it for myself...but my girlfriends as well.

Still, as good as I felt, I couldn't help but be a little self conscious when the cashier dumped my bounty out on the counter and slowly lifted each box, turning it over and over, on purpose, I'm sure, searching for the price. A middle aged man stood in line behind me. I could see his neck craning to see my items. In the old days, I would have stood, uncomfortably looking at the floor, begging the cashier silently to hurry up. But, since I try to practice what I preach, I straightened my spine, dropped my shoulders and, with a little flip of my hair, turned and looked at the surburban man who wore a wedding ring and was in his fifties and, judging from the children's cough syrup he was holding, was probably a dad and therefore had had sex, looked back at the counter, looked back at him, and smiled and nodded slightly. As in: Yeah, daddy, they're all for me! (Which, of course, they were not.)

I wasn't ashamed. Why should I be?

I don't think he knew what expression to wear, which may have explained why his face contorted under my stare. It was really satisfying to realize that I'd made that critical transition from shame to power that must happen if we, especially women, are to be in a place to protect our health.

Thinking back, I so wish I'd had that little satchel from Iris House. If I had it in my purse as I do now, I would have handed it to him on the way out and whispered in his ear, "Here ya go. Prevention is power. Pass it on."

I can only imagine what his face would have done then.

Maybe I'm not giving the guy enough credit. Maybe - as I did when I saw that George was willing to lay on the latex - the guy in Walgreen's thought I was cool for caring to use condoms. Even better, maybe, someday, he'd tell his own kids how he once saw a middle aged blonde lady not yet quite past her prime buy every condom in his local Walgreen's. And if so, maybe his kid would grow up thinking that buying, and using, condoms was anything but embarrassing.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.