Condom Conversation

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When it comes to HIV many should be aware that an effective tool to prevent exposure is using a condom. In fact there are those who feel that there's no excuse for someone to get HIV today especially with all the information out there and the vast availability of condoms whether free or by purchase. Yet what if a condom isn't simply a condom? What if the condom has more of a symbolic meaning, a subtext to one's relationship that doesn't make it so easy as to strap one on before sex? What if it represents an unspoken communication in your rapport with someone else that raises other issues besides HIV? How do you have a conversation about introducing a condom when you're having the discussion with someone mid-stream that you've been in a long-term relationship with and not a one night stand?

When looking at HIV prevention posters there seems to have one thing in common. The message seems to be directed to those who are not in a serious relationship and may have multiple partners. One message that is not effectively communicated are HIV campaigns that address those who are in a committed relationship. The feeling may be if one is in a relationship then there has to be an expectation that both couples are monogamous yet there are many statistics that shows that infidelity remains one of the big problems in any relationship, whether t's same sex or opposite sex couples. Focusing on LGBT couples statistics on infidelity among same sex couples show an unusually high rate of infidelity among lesbians and gays. One study of male homosexuality found that few homosexual relationships last longer than two years. Data from the Gay/Lesbian Consumer Online Census shows that only 29% of gay/lesbian relationships last more than 7 years. In forming this relationship one may feel that since being in a committed relationship there is no need for a condom.

I personally knew of such a couple. They had been together for eight years. One had started to communicate that they had suspicions that the other person was cheating but didn't know how to approach it. There was even a case where they had an STD scare but later found out it was a simple cold sore. Yet that fear alone didn't give my friend the strength to not only talk about his suspicions but to also talk about start using a condom. So it became a waiting game until finally the partner was caught cheating and during that time my friend didn't know if his ex was using protection with the other person and if not was possibly exposing my friend to any STD. My friend also didn't bring up the condom conversation as he fell into an old belief that acknowledge their partner may be having sex with someone else, which was only sex , but they are the one they love.

To introduce a condom in an established relationship is difficult. One partner in a relationship may

feel different and may want to start using a condom for many reasons, yet by doing so the condom takes on a new meaning. It's no longer simply about prevention, but the introduction by the other half of the partnership may view the condom as a lack of trust. Perhaps the other person may feel their partner is not being monogamous and want to protect themselves against other HIV/STD. In the book Sex in America: A Definitive Survey, by authors Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, and Kolata they found that they may also fall into another statistical fact that gay couples who remained together past the 10 year mark were able to do so only by accepting the painful reality of infidelity in their relationship. In this unspoken knowledge a partner through the acceptance of the fact my still not bring up the issue of using a condom and may feel that whether their partner cheats that they trust their partner enough to not be exposed to HIV or any other STD.

There may also be an acceptance based on another aspect of the relationship that makes discussing condom usage difficult. That is one of power dynamics within the relationship itself. One power can be focused on the one who is considered the major bread winner or supporter of the household. In some unions it's equal/equal but in some relationships one person may have an advantage over the other as they may take care of most of the major expense which can include housing, bills and living expenses. This unequal equity balance may make feel they have little leverage to introduce a condom into their relationship. And that by doing so will create a possible situation where by doing so will create an environment where the financial aspect is restricted or removed all together.

Another power dynamic can be an inter-generation one where one person is many years older than someone they are in a relationship with. The younger may not discuss it as they feel that the older person, in their maturity, will protect them from harm and may see the older as having most of the power in the relationship. The issue of trust also replays itself and the younger may feel that they are no longer desired and to raise such an issue shows their immaturity. Especially for those who are new to their sexual knowledge and experience they may leave the decision of whether to use a condom to the older partner who they feel have more experience.

As HIV changes the approach to it also has to change. A more recent study on the rate of infidelity among lesbians and gays done by Alliant International University in San Francisco found that the number of gay men in committed relationships who engaged in infidelity has dropped in recent years. This is a chance for prevention methods to start including couples, especially long term couplings, in the discussion of HIV.

Introducing a condom in a relationship can be difficult to approach but the conversation has to start from someone especially if you're the one in the position with doubts of fidelity. In those cases it's not simply about HIV or other STD's but one about the state of your relationship in general. Empowerment is the key and in that power recognizing that even in a coupled situation you still have to make decision as an individual especially when it affects your health. Not having that talk is a realization that by placing your head in the sand you may place yourself in a position where the relationship may be over but your life with an STD especially HIV is just beginning.

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