Keep it on the Downlow

April 29, 2011 By Aundaray Guess

As a black man it was hard for me to write about the ’downlow’ term. What you’re reading is the final draft of which several were produced but I felt they didn’t help with what I was trying to say. I first want to say that cheating in a committed relationship is morally irresponsible and selfish, no matter what race you are, yet I have issues with the demonetization of black men when it comes to the term ’downlow’ When people think of ’downlow’ I bet you the first visually image of the word is one of an African-American male. He’s probably more urban looking and he more than likely has AIDS/HIV. Yet for me it’s an inaccurate portrayal and another way to stigmatize black men.

The term came to light based on a story in the New York Times and followed by a show on a episode of the Oprah Winfrey show. Behaviors that were already present were now made aware to the masses. In both cases the focus was on African-American men.

Yet wasn’t it several years ago a married New Jersey governor was caught in an affair with another man. And in the fiction world, didn’t we have a movie with two cowboys go camping in the woods and had a night of passion even though they were both married. What’s similar in each scenario is that each were white and never during the discussion of either the true life affair or in the describing of the movie, “Brokeback Mountain, do we see the introduction of the word ’downlow’, when basically that’s what they were doing. In fact on Wikipedia in its description of Brokeback mountain its described as a ”romantic drama film that depicts the complex romantic and sexual relationship between two men". Now I have to wonder if the actors were black would it still be seen as a romantic film or one of two deceptive men cheating on their wives?

I was asked to write about the subject of downlow and the request itself made itself clear that as a black man I should comment on it as no other race are affected by it. Why me? For me this is a conversation that goes beyond one race and one gender. Especially when you’re looking at the rate of HIV infection which again people want to blame on the DL or “downlow”.

I will admit African-American women are being infected and I know this may sound cruel but it takes two to get HIV/AIDS. According to the CDC report when looking at infection rates among black women 46% did not use a condom in the past two months. 60% did not know male partner’s status and 70% perceived little or no risk of HIV.

What else doesn’t the media tell you?

How about the fact that there’s a high rate of incarceration that take men out of the mating pool and create a system of women sharing the same man; intravenous drug use that accounts for 20 percent of all HIV infections among black women; other untreated sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as herpes and gonorrhea, which make people more vulnerable to contracting HIV once exposed to the virus; and people having unprotected sex, unaware that they are positive, who are going untreated while highly infectiousration

This is not to say black women are at fault, but there’s several things missing. The main thing is knowing your partner and your partner knowing themselves and their status. Sometimes we get stuck in the stereotypes that if a man acts or behavior macho then there’s no way he’s having sex with men.and not to be a hypocrite but this conversation is one that should not only be held with black, but all races.

And not to knock down any relationships but whether you're married, dating or made a promise to be in a monogamous relationship, you still should have discussions about your sexual relations. Just because a ring is on a finger doesn't mean there's total commitment, just look at the sex ads on Craig'sList of married men looking for afternoon fun.

Know who you're sleeping with and unless you've been attached to their hip for 24 hours you don't know- so assume that whoever you're having sex with is infected and use protection.

The link between men on the downlow and the HIV/AIDS virus creates a state of fear and betrayal and chaos in the conscious of black women.

Categorizing a race with a negative term fosters stigma that makes it more likely that someone will not be true about their status, if they know it at all as black people in general based on social barriers such as lack to proper medical coverage, fear of knowing your status and the ostracize reaction they will receive from loved ones and their community.

Yes there are black people on the downlow but also all the other races and ethnicities are as well. If we're in a relationship we have to turn off the television and stop accepting the BS they're feeding us about black men and downlow and start having real talk to each other on our sexual status and behaviors. We have to stop blaming and pointing fingers and know what we need to do to protect ourselves.

Just like AIDS has no color, so does the word' downlow'

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