Magnetic (Serodiscordant) Couples on TV

December 9, 2015 By Shawn Decker

As someone who is HIV positive and in a relationship with someone who is HIV negative, I was excited to hear that a serodiscordant ("magnetic") couple was going to be included in season 4 of Shuga, the fictional series based on real world experiences with HIV. Femi is HIV positive. His girlfriend, Sheila, is HIV negative. I want to share my reaction to what these characters face, episode to episode, and share some personal stories about what my own experiences have been.

Hope you find this insightful!

Episode 1, Season 4

Sheila has planned a family dinner as a way to inform her family of Femi's HIV status. Femi is naturally nervous about how the news will be received and Sheila attempts to alleviate his concerns, promising that everything will be fine. But when an ignorant HIV comment from her uncle is greeted with supportive laughter from her parents, Sheila and Femi decide not to disclose his status...

It's a heartbreaking scene because Sheila expects so much more from her family; only to discover that her lifelong support system has a real hang-up when it comes to HIV. In their final scene in episode 1, Femi consoles Sheila and their love for each other is quite clear, particularly in how they treat one another in difficult moments.

THE MAGNETIC COUPLE ISSUE IN THIS EPISODE: How and when to disclose the positive person's HIV status to the HIV negative person's family.

WHAT THIS WAS LIKE FOR ME: In my relationship with Gwenn, her mom knew my HIV status before we started dating. Also, I was a new person in her life and we lived 8 hours away. Like Sheila, Gwenn is an independent and strong person. Her mom was concerned, but also knew that Gwenn was an HIV educator. Still, her mom didn't know a lot about transmission, so I'm sure that there was still some worry.

When I met Gwenn's mother, things changed for her- I became a real person, no longer overshadowed by a daunting medical resume. Meeting Gwenn's mom in person helped a lot. She got to see me and Gwenn interact in person and could tell that we were really in love. Her concern after meeting wasn't so much that Gwenn would become infected, but how she would react if I got

really ill. A legit concern, because I was just starting HIV meds at the time and in the process of regaining my health.

A few months after that first meeting, I had my first family dinner (Thanksgiving) with Gwenn and her family: and everyone was aware of my HIV status and welcomed me- and most importantly, us- with open arms.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

If you'd like to read the rest of my Shuga Season 4 episode-by-episode posts, visit Shuga's web site. Episode 2 will be up on Friday. To watch Season 4, check out Shuga on YouTube!

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/magnetic-serodiscord