# Let’s Talk About Raw Gay Sex at Therapy [VIDEO]

“A lot of gay men clearly value sex without condoms.”

March 29, 2017 By Trent Straube

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“Let’s go to Therapy and talk about raw gay sex,” I suggested to my partner. He was up for it, so we met at Therapy, a New York gay bar in Hell’s Kitchen, for a panel discussion titled “Gay Sex: A Raw Conversation.”

Led by gay app Hornet and moderated by its senior health innovation strategist, Alex Garner, the event produced a refreshingly frank and fun-filled evening of real guys’ thoughts about condomless sex. The panel included, as pictured in the above photo from left to right:

- Noël Gordon, an HIV prevention and health equity specialist at the Human Rights Campaign (HRC)
- Jeremiah Johnson, an HIV prevention and research specialist from the Treatment Action Group
- Demetre Daskalakis (a.k.a. Dr. Demetre), of the NYC health department
- Boomer Banks, adult film performer and fashion designer
- Jesus Barrios, prevention and outreach supervisor at Callen-Lorde Community Health Center

Full disclosure: I approach this topic as a gay dude who came of age at the height of the AIDS epidemic. I graduated high school in 1987, in rural Missouri, and came out at the end of my freshman year of college: a time of all condoms all the time. To be honest, I didn’t have a problem with this, both theoretically and in real-world practice, until very recently. Which is to be expected—it’s not like I still listen to music on cassette tapes, if you know what I mean.

Several panelists, in recounting their first time hearing about HIV and bareback sex, could have been talking about my own life, regardless of our ages. They learned about these topics in the context of disease control and judgment. Failure to use condoms was a moral failure.

But as any POZ reader knows, knowledge about HIV transmission has changed drastically recently with the advent of treatment as prevention (TasP) and Truvada as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). TasP is the idea that an HIV-positive person who takes daily meds and maintains an undetectable viral load has a virtually zero percent chance of transmitting the virus. Similarly, an HIV-negative person adhering to the daily pill Truvada is protected against the virus by more than 99 percent. With TasP and PrEP, condomless sex is safe sex; it's actually safer, in terms of HIV, than condoms.

Hearing the guys on the Hornet panel talk about barebacking honestly and intelligently and without the requisite finger waving and pearl clutching sounded, well, revolutionary. I guess it is.

And yes, it was stressed many times that TasP and PrEP don't protect against other sexually transmitted infections and that there's nothing wrong with condoms if you like them and are able to use them. BUT…what about the reality of barebacking? As Alex says in the video above, "A lot of gay men clearly value sex without condoms." And there are a lot of reasons why they do—and it's time we start talking about it so we can enjoy the relationships and sex we want while staying healthy.

I appreciated the many aspects of raw sex that were discussed and the larger context the topic was placed in. Jesus made the excellent point that gay men should view non-procreative sex (not just male-male condomless sex) as a human right that has value. And Dr. Demetre suggested that it would behoove us to decouple sex and disease and to speak in broader terms of sexual health, pleasure and intimacy.

The racial and economic aspects were not glossed over, nor were the pros and cons of hooking up and communicating via social media. "People used to never talk about this stuff," Dr. Demetre said, "but [on social media] you can have a conversation that might be less threatening than face to face. The level of communication that's happening today is amazing."

So prick up your ears!

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