Valentine Series: The Dilemma of Dating Positive!

February 12, 2014 By Rae Lewis-Thornton

It occurred to me that sometimes I make dating with HIV look easy, but it's not by any *stretch* of the imagination. I started thinking about this after I received an email last night from a woman with herpes who is afraid to date.

When I was first diagnosed with herpes, I was afraid. I remember trying to get an ex-boyfriend to have sex with me and he flat out turned me down. That was a blow.

Months later, I slowly started to venture out and found that while it was some hard shit disclosing, men actually respected me even more. I lucked up and met a guy that I dated for over a year. But low and behold he had herpes too.

After that relationship was over, disclosing became easier, mainly because I rarely had an herpes outbreak. For a long time I would only have an outbreak once every three years or so. Then came HIV, then came AIDS, then came fame and they were all game changers.

HIV positive people have the fear of rejection but also the burden of the disease. When I first learned my status I was scared beyond belief. “Who the hell was gonna want me,” was all I could think about. I was young, pretty and upwardly mobile - all the things that would make me perfect in the eyes of a man, so I thought, but then came HIV.

I remember right after I was diagnosed with HIV, I was a hot freaking mess. A guy that I use to talk to moved to Washington where I was staying at the same month. I avoided him like the plague. Then I gave in and had dinner with him one night. I write about this in my memoir, the guilt that swarmed over me having sex with him, and not disclosing my HIV status. But it was so new for me and I was so afraid. The good thing, he was always a condom guy, so I didn’t have to convince him to use them, but the guilt I felt was insurmountable, even with “safe sex.” After that night I totally shut down and stayed clear of men and dating.

Then I met this guy that I really liked. I put on my big girl panties and told. Now, how do you tell a person that you have an STD? For sure at the kitchen table with your clothes on. Sexing and disclosing at the same time is dangerous.

Disclosing your status, there is always the fear of rejection and judgment, “what will he think of me?” But I couldn’t see myself making a judgement for another person’s body. While I could have rationalized that I’m keeping him “safe” by using condoms, as the saying goes, “shit happens” what if ? … and I never wanted that burden, so I always disclose.

I fundamentally think that you take away a persons choice when you don’t disclose and you have no right to make that decision for another person’s body. It just might mean that causal sex gets thrown out the window. Simply because no one really wants to disclose to someone that they are not planning to be serious with, but the fact remains serious or not, that person is baring some risk each time they lay down with you. No one has the right to decide for another person’s body. So, hell or high water, I disclose.

And sexing without disclosure in these times that can be dangerous. Remember the young lady Cicely that I blogged about, who was murdered after she disclosed her HIV status but after she had sex with a guy? Read HERE! I don’t know what he was thinking when she disclosed, but she for sure took away his choice. He was not infected, but just the thought that you put me at risk without my permission is a hard one to stomach. So now she is dead and he is in jail.

For sure, over time dating with HIV became easier, but disclosing was never easy. Even today, while most men that approach me know that I have HIV, I still have to disclose the herpes. For a

long time, I didn't talk about herpes publicly, unless in a gig if someone asked if I ever had another STD. I think I didn't talk about it because I was not affected by it up until 7 years ago when out of nowhere I developed this drug resistant herpes. I'm not gonna to rehash my herpes drama you can read HERE.

Now take the guy I'm talking to now, *Mr. Handsome*, when he approached me he knew that I had HIV, but I remember about a week in I said to him, "I need to let you know that I have herpes" when I tell you the 5 seconds it took for him to return a response I felt like I was going to suffocate. His response, "I know, I read it in one of your blogs," and he didn't miss a beat, "that's what condoms are for," and we went on to the next topic.

In the twenty-nine years that I have known my HIV status disclosing has never gotten easy. You always think, “What will he think of me. Will he still want me?”

This is what I found. A relationship was easier while I was living in secret with my status. Since my divorce fifteen years ago, dating the public me has been difficult. I have had some relationships but they have been far and few. The fact is, I’ve had more sex than relationships.

While men still want to have sex with me, my hardest hurdle is the fact that I’m such a public

person. Who wants to date a woman when everyone knows she has HIV and herpes.

Just recently one of my mentee's told me that she was talking to a guy and things were going great until some of his boys met and recognized her. They said, "Man you know she use to date, Tom and she gave him HIV and he's dead now." I'm going to deal with this kind of branding in another blog for sure, but the fact is, the guy backed all the way up once it was clear that others speculated that she was infected.

Not only do I have the burden of being this public person, I blog about my freaking life. So any man that dates me, run the risk that I will blog about where our lives intersect. For sure *Mr. Handsome* recognizes my gift and supports my work, but the relationship is very young, so there's a part of me that wants to keep him shielded from raw public scrutiny until we get pass this "super

new stage”. He told me case in point, “I don’t give a fuck what a person thinks about me being with you”, now that’s a man, who is his own man.

For sure dating with a sexually transmitted disease is hard. I don’t want you to think I’m bushing over that fact. But honestly up front is always your best bet. Since I’ve started blogging about my herpes, I’ve had some people to reach out and say that they are starting to be more comfortable in their skin since I’ve been blogging about my own herpes drama. I’m glad that my transparency is helping others.

The bottom line, you will never know if a person is willing to be with you unless you make the attempt. This is what I want you to get, **the rejection isn’t of you, it’s of the disease;** the fear of the disease, the lack of education and understanding of the disease but mostly the stigma of the disease.

Now I blogged about dating sites for positive people with STD a while back. I signed up but nothing came of it. In like 2 weeks I had over 500 views of my profile but no conversations that lasted beyond a wink. Then it hit me, I said in my profile that, “I’m a very public person with my status and people will know that you are dating a women with AIDS” DEAD! LOL!

I just went ahead and deleted my profile and honestly, I was already talking to *Mr. Handsome* and good lawd, he had all of my attention. I don’t double dip even in early stages. I want to give him all of my attention so we can bond without other barriers.

But one of my avid readers who is HIV positive reached out to me about Positive Singles for my private opinion. I told her that she had nothing to lose. The most recent report is that she is actually talking to someone she met on Positive Singles and they were planning to meet soon. So dating sites are an easy place to meet someone positive. At least formalities are out of the way. You both come to he table on equal footing and thats a good thing. Remember, meeting a person does not always mean that you are compatible. You can checkout my blog post on dating positive HERE Part One! Part Two HERE!

As we are all thinking about Valentines Day and the possibility of being alone. I want to encourage all my positive readers: **Don't give up on yourself!** You deserve the best! The fact is, God woke you up this morning and that means there is still an earthly plan for your life. I believe that there is someone for everyone. Continue to live in your truths and your worth.

Don’t let people horde space that don’t deserve your worth. There is no need to sacrifice yourself respect for companionship. There is no need to let stigma keep you in a faux of fear. Be clear, your worth is not rooted in your status, but rather in that fact that you were created in God’s image, wonderfully made.

I know, I know, you’re saying, it’s easy for me to say, when I will be spending Valentine’s Day with a wonderful man who respects me and likes the fuck out of me. I understand your fear and loneliness. It’s been at least 3 years since I’ve been on a date and 4 1/2 years since I’ve had sex. I’m a living witness that if you continue to be your best you, you create a positive energy that will come back to you. Don’t give up on yourself because God as not given up on you.

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