

POS & NEG

Part 1

In the first installment of a two-part article Vic Perri investigates the hiv negative perspective on the many plusses and minuses when a guy of one hiv status gets involved with a guy who has a different hiv status.

There are many successful relationships where partners are of different HIV status. However the HIV Futures II survey filled out by people living with HIV tells us that 48 percent of the respondents agree with the statement "I prefer to have a relationship with someone who also has HIV". Another poignant statistic is that 63.5 percent agree with the statement "Few people would want a relationship with someone who has HIV." While these attitudes exist, it seems that many HIV positive people are quite happy to be in a relationship with negative partners, 58 percent of respondents reported being in a regular relationship with an HIV negative partner. So if your partner loves and respects you, should it matter what their HIV status is? I spoke to Franz, Thomas and Peter who are all HIV negative to look at the issues.

Disruption

"Yes it's bad enough that the HIV positive guy can go through hell but we have to deal with it as well." One common theme brought up was the disruption to their lives. Franz said, "I was with Chad who was on treatments. These gave him terrible side effects. He was always on the toilet, not that interested in sex.... It wasn't just the inconvenience but every time he experienced something I was worried and really felt for him." Thomas also spoke of the overall disruption to what he used to think of as his 'easy going life'. "I can't remember the number of times we had to cancel holidays, or even just going out for a night because, all of a sudden, Brendon would have the shits, literally. It was a real strain when I've never had to worry about such things before." "Don't ever take things for granted, particularly your health" continued Franz. "Many of us have never had to worry about our health except for the odd cold or flu. Chad is generally quite healthy and I see how he looks after himself to stay that way." While many people living with HIV are living a life of uncertainty so are their partners. Thomas reflected, "Sometimes I felt that he didn't really consider my feelings. I felt shut out. I know he didn't mean to and I always understood that sometimes he was just too busy dealing with his side effects to be affectionate towards me. Being HIV negative I would never completely understand what Brendon was going through. At the same time I felt that he had a lack of understanding and consideration for what I was going through. I didn't want him to kiss my feet but at least realise my side of the situation." "On the surface I tried to always be optimistic and believe he would live as long as I would but deep down I felt uncertain how long Chad had to live and that really saddened me." Franz stated tentatively, "Oh don't get me wrong. There have been some tough times but it has been worth it. The main thing my positive partner taught me was to look at life in a different way... He showed me how to value the things that really mattered. Things like my relationship with family and friends are now more important to me than ever before because of him."

Sex with condoms

"While I accepted the decision we made from the start that we would always practice safe sex, sometimes I just hated it," lamented Peter. "I hate condoms. Not just because of the lack of feeling and sensation but they are a symbolic barrier to the intimacy and real bond that I could have with Huong. I can be in love with him so much I just want to truly feel him inside me." "I used to stress out so much over crap," said Peter. "I look at my partner and the calm way he deals with problems always saying 'Well that's the way it is. Some things you just can't do much about. So live with it.' It makes sense to me."

The Way Ahead

Thomas acknowledged there were times when he wanted to get a clearer perspective on his relationship with Brendon. He decided to speak to someone about it. "...Anyway I got in touch with the AIDS council and started seeing a counsellor. I very quickly learnt that I wasn't alone. The counsellor I was seeing had other clients in the same situation. It started off so well and I was really benefiting from it, Brendon and I decided

to see the counsellor together. We soon realised we could have seen the counsellor together from the start.” Do Franz, Thomas and Peter regret their pos/neg relationships? They seemed to have the same philosophy. They loved the man. Despite the minuses there were always the pluses so why pass up an opportunity to have a caring and loving relationship. It seems communication and honesty about feelings makes all the difference.

By Vic Perri - Lifeblood – Victorian AIDS Council