

HIV Attitudes

by Ken Hewett

If you haven't read the January 20th issue of *the Advocate*, you really should. Within its pages is one of the most thought provoking articles on AIDS that I've read in a long time. Entitled, "Are Gay Men Listening?" it does not waste its ink with impersonal statistics on AIDS; instead, the article concentrates on the experience of eight gay men with sexual relationships in the age of AIDS. What I found most admirable about this article (despite the lack of African-American and Asian-American voices) is that the men were very diverse; one is a leading AIDS researcher, some are HIV-positive, some are HIV-negative, some have had few partners, some have had

many, some always practice safer-sex, and some don't always practice it. What I found to be very disturbing was one profile, that of a man named Tony Valenzuela.

Tony is a twenty-nine year old resident of San Diego who works as an activist, porn star, and hustler. He is also HIV-positive. An organizer for Sex Panic!, "... a New York City-based group advocating total sexual freedom..." (p.51), he doesn't believe in any sort of sexual boundaries. While I don't know enough about Sex Panic! to form any solid opinions about the group, I believe that Mr. Valenzuela is a very poor representation of any group he belongs to, whether it be Sex Panic!, gay men, or people with AIDS. You see, he claims to have had "As many as 150" sexual partners in 1997 and estimates that his sexual encounters

were "...unsafe about a third of the time" (p.51). He justifies this by saying that "sex with a condom is artificial sex" (p.50), that he can't "...resist the eroticism and joy of unsafe sex with a consenting partner" (p.51), and that people should start paying more attention to their "erotic" health (p.51). While I believe in sexual freedom, I personally think that this is all bullshit because personal responsibility and freedom go hand-in-hand. Still, I'm glad that *the Advocate* printed this story because it raises many questions about sexual behavior in the age of AIDS.

My first question is: What in the hell is this man doing having unprotected sex, especially when he knows he has the HIV virus? He says, "People are always saying that unprotected sex always equals AIDS. We keep pounding into people that they have to think this way. But it's not that simple. It's a complicated equation" (p.51). Obviously, the man is unable to use a little common sense to solve what should be a simple equation. AIDS is transmitted in four ways: blood transfusion, the sharing of needles, from mother to child during pregnancy, and sexual activity. I begin to wonder where Tony thinks AIDS comes from. Yes, transmission through unprotected sex may not be at a rate of 100%, but it is still high risk. I can't believe that not only is he not worried about picking up a deadlier strain of the virus, but that he would be so willing to play Russian roulette with someone else's life. Personally, if I had AIDS, I would be unable to live with myself if I infected someone else because we didn't take the proper precautions.

My second question is: Is this guy really being honest with the men that Tony sleeps with? He speaks of "...making informed decision..." (p.50) and sex being "...with

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