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Magnetic Coupling

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Ending a relationship sucks. Dating sucks. Dating in New York City really sucks.

Whoever said that opposites attract was obviously never in a serious, committed relationship. After a while partners begin finishing each other's sentences, start using "we" far too regularly, and yes, even begin wearing each other's clothes (regardless of gender). Bleh. Before you know it they've become a headless hodge-podge of each other. Ah, yes... When you've found the one who makes you so comfortable that you trust them with your dirty laundry (double entendre intended and unintended here) you know you've settled.

However, those of us interested in coupling know that we have to go through strings of potentials before we even come close to feeling that comfortable with someone. Either he's too fat or she's too broke. Too messy or not motivated. I hate his choice of clothing or she talks with her mouth full. Oh, did I mention he likes to belch loudly in public? And, yeah, she does this annoying thing with her lip when we're watching a movie. It drives me insane.

Most of the things that bother us about potential mates send up committal red flags immediately. Often viscerally we without delay discern a problematic situation and begin to shut down the operation now known as "BAD DATE." Being the nice, gentle human beings that we are, we kindly finish the rendezvous, promise to keep in touch, and promptly make a beeline for the nearest exit. It's then on to the next in line. Hopefully this one will only have an orange flag or two.

Two weeks ago I met someone who, on our first date, pulled out a shade of flag I had never seen before. It was colored HIV.

Initially I didn't know how to respond. What should I say? What could I say? Damn it. I've been prepared for a lot, but not this. My immediate reaction was to ask obvious questions like when he was infected and how long ago he tested positive. But was that being too insensitive? Was I sounding too much like his doctor? Fuck. This was the first time my training in human sexuality had really failed me. Of course I know people infected, affected, and living with the virus but for some reason his disclosure had really hit home.

Though only a first date, this new information had given me a lot to think about. He admitted to me that he was prepared for rejection, having experienced it many times before, but I didn't feel that a dismissal was warranted on my part. This had actually been a great date and I really liked this guy. I was just having a problem wrapping my head around the whole HIV thing.

Dating someone who's positive today means something different than it did in the past. Though neither considered a "death sentence" or "gay disease" anymore, living with the infection is still riddled with stigma and fear. Although I was completely cool with our magnetic status (my being negative and his being positive), I couldn't help but wonder how my parents might react... my friends. And if their responses were negative, I wondered what the reasons behind them might be? My overall health? Social status? Fear motivated by antiquated ideas and beliefs?

And of course there was the sex. Given the statistics on MSM (Men who have sex with Men)

in the city, whether they identify as straight, gay, bi, or none of the above, 1 in 3 is infected with HIV and/or an STI and doesn't know it. Given my often blunt and promiscuous behavior, the probability that I've already engaged in a sexual act with one of these men is quite high and yet I'm still negative and disease free. So why should I be so concerned about the sex? It's always been my mantra to entertain the notion that everyone with whom you engage in a sexual act is infected with something so you should be doing all you can to protect yourself.

Yet I was still bothered. What about oral sex? Anal sex? Who likes sucking on a condom? But what if I have a cold sore or my gums happen to be particularly sensitive one day? What if the condom breaks? What about co-infections? What will happen if I do become infected? What about health insurance? Fuck.

I then realized that my worrying was doing me no good. Unless I plan to live my life under a rock (assuming it won't crush me), life is all about taking risks. There's always going to be a threat of impending doom (terrorist attacks, getting hit by a cab, drive-by fruitings). At least in this situation I know that I can take charge of my health and do whatever I can to protect myself. Condoms are considered highly effective in protecting oneself against HIV/STIs and there is some documentation to show that when used properly and consistently the infection rate from one partner to another in magnetic couples is extremely slim.

For now, I've chosen to continue seeing Jose and we'll see if these opposites really will attract.

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