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Outspoken

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By Trevor Hoppe

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As a young gay man who came out at 14 with the Internet as a resource, I have witnessed a change in sexual norms online. Up until recently even the mention of the word bareback would have caused controversy. Today, it seems users barely bat an eye when greeted with propositions for "raw" sex.

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This shift has caused older gay pundits to point their fingers, demanding that we quit our "irresponsible screwing and grow up." What these pundits don't understand is that most of us didn't know very much about condoms before becoming sexually active. The sex education I experienced in public school in Charlotte, N.C., promoted fear and abstinence, two options not particularly compelling to anyone fresh out of the closet. Worse yet, the one resource that should have taken up the slack—my hometown's LGBT youth group—did not do so. Their programming never emphasized gay history or sex education.

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decline in intergenerational dialogue. As older gay men point fingers, young gay men are not hearing much about our community's painful history with AIDS. History, for our people, can be understood as something passed down from generation to generation. Since the mainstream does not record our accomplishments or our failures, we must do the work ourselves in order to survive. The decline in dialogue has disrupted this process. The result is a generation of gay men who, without any knowledge of LGBT history beyond Ellen, take for granted the status quo.

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As evidence of a rise in risky behavior builds, younger gays will face a choice. We can continue to live in silence, or we can take proactive steps to destroy any potential for a rise in new infections. We have to begin talking with each other openly about sex—unafraid to make mistakes, to ask questions, or to step outside generational boundaries. And we must see the need for using a condom not as an act of individual protection but as an act of protecting our community.

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