

Howard Student Broadcasts Controversial Essay for National Public Radio

Contributed by Aleesa Mann -- Black College Wire
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"Sex Without Condoms Is the New Engagement Ring"

"For a lot of my friends, the transition from having sex with -- to sex without -- a condom is seen as a symbolic engagement," says Pendarvis Harshaw, junior telecommunications major and Freelance Content Producer for National Public Radio's (NPR) Youth Radio organization.

"It shows trust, commitment, and the prospect of a shared future," he adds.

As bold as the statement may be, it is a part of Harshaw's essay, "Sex Without Condoms Is the New Engagement Ring," where he explores the way today's youth approach monogamy in relationships.

The essay was submitted as a part of Youth Radio's "What's the New What?" series, which highlights new trends in youth culture.

In the on-air essay, Harshaw acknowledges the dangers of contracting STDs and the risk of unexpected pregnancies. He emphasized that while youth may ditch condoms in their sexual activities, other forms of birth control are still widely used.

After conducting an informal survey, Harshaw said he came up with the leading argument for his essay.

"[I spoke with] everybody from friends, to co-workers, to residents about relationships-how to approach getting into a monogamous relationship, and I saw a consistent trend," says Harshaw. "A lot of people were talking about the most major step is the step toward unprotected sex."

The controversial issue tackled in Harshaw's essay has definitely raised eyebrows among the NPR audience and has received harsh criticisms and empathetic remarks alike.

"I believe the feedback was mixed because older folks just plain do not want to hear the truth about young people encountering heavy sexual situations at younger ages. These situations are definitely adult, and used to be taboo to even talk about, but children have been bombarded with so much sexual imagery by the media, that the situations themselves have become common," says senior Matt Cody, film production major and founder of HowHood University Records.

Harshaw, who set out to shed light on youth perspective of monogamy with this essay, has been surprised and pleased with the feedback surrounding his argument.

"This is like I set off a fire alarm or something, really it just went haywire," he says almost incredulously. "I love the fact that people are talking about it. I love the fact that people are disgusted by it and I love the fact that people who aren't of the demographic I surveyed, actually agree with it."

Many Howard students have also shown support for Harshaw's essay. "His essay really does make a valid point and raises the question about the meaning of sex to our generation," says Joya Dupre, junior biology major.

Dupre feels students may be weary of traditional engagement practices, and marriage altogether, because of increasing divorce rates. Yet, considering the risks of sex with a condom Dupre said, "So many couples today are engaging in unprotected sex but not getting engaged. In fact, they believe that sex without a condom is less risky than tying the knot, when in actuality it isn't."

Brandon Williams, a junior international business major, also feels Harshaw's essay gives voice to a rising sentiment among youth.

"When I look at the younger generation behind us I see that what they hear, see and learn they attribute to their daily lives," Williams says. "Marriage is just as common as divorce now, so for a younger generation to feel safe they may say that unprotected sex lets them know how committed to the situation [a] love interest may be."

{moshaloscan}Aleesa Mann writes for The Hilltop, the Howard University student newspaper, which originally published this article.