



What You See Isn't What You'll Get

By Carly Schlecker, 17, Staff Writer

You've seen it in movies before: It's hot and sweaty. There's lots of heavy breathing. It is so sexy! Lust has taken over both of their bodies, and there is no way to control it or stop it. Not even long enough for an important conversation about latex barriers, like condoms, or anything else for that matter.

Reality check: Sex can be awkward, embarrassing and nothing like the steamy or romantic scenes you see in the movies.

Sex in movies always seems perfect. But when you choose to have sex, there is no way to predict if it will have the romanticism of *The Notebook*, the thrill of *Dirty Dancing* or even the intensity of *Titanic*. What you see in movies can leave you with some great expectations about sex. But these expectations may set you up for disappointment when the sex isn't what was promised by the big screen. And what you see on the big screen certainly doesn't set you up to have those important and necessary conversations about safer sex.

"I don't like how movies portray sex," says 17-year-old Matt from Miami. "They never even mention a condom. I think it's really important to be safe to prevent STDs and prevent getting the girl pregnant."

Matt is absolutely right about movies. They seldom show couples having conversations about birth control or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). And they almost always only depict heterosexual couples, who are usually white. But in truth, everybody needs to be talking about safer sex.

Reality check: If you plan to have safer sex, there are several conversations you should have before things get steamy.

We Need to Talk About STDs

Julia Roberts didn't get an STD in *Pretty Woman*, even though she portrayed a sex worker and condoms were never shown or mentioned in the movie. It didn't happen to her, so why would it happen to me? Because movies are make-believe. We all know that, but notice that we never get to see people have those important conversations about safer sex? You probably aren't going to stop mid-kiss and say, "Oh, by the way, have you been tested?" So, how do you have these serious talks?

You and your partner should be aware of each other's sexual history. Who have you each had sex with in the past? Have either of you had an STD? And if so, were you treated for it? If you don't ask these questions before having sex, then you could be at risk for an STD. These conversations are important even if you or your partner is a virgin. If one of you has had even one sexual partner in the past, then that person could have an STD and not know it. So, it is absolutely necessary for you to get tested.

Although you may think you're being safe by using a condom, some STDs are not only

spread through genital-to-genital contact, but through genital-to-mouth or skin-to-skin contact. You can never be too safe in protecting yourself when it comes to STDs.

When I ask 16-year-old Lindsay, of Millburn, NJ, if she would bring up the topic of STDs if she and her partner were going to have sex, she says, "I probably wouldn't because it's an awkward question to ask." Yes, it is! But would you rather suffer through an awkward conversation and use protection, or end up with an STD?

Talking about STDs can be tough, and you never know how a person will react. Here are some suggestions for talking to your partner about his or her sexual history and STDs:

Pay attention. If the topic of STDs is on the news or if you overhear the topic, that's a great excuse to bring it up with your partner.

Bring up your sexual history and possible risk factors, instead of interrogating your partner about his or her past. Then, ask about your partner's sexual history.

Make a date and get tested together!

I'll Never Get (Someone) Knocked Up

While an unplanned pregnancy is only an issue for male-female couples, it is a major one. Nowhere in *American Pie* do we see the characters discussing the types of contraception they will use or what would happen if the girl got pregnant. The media's fictional portrayal of heterosexual sex never seems to show the risk of an unintended pregnancy. And even when movies, such as *Knocked Up* and *Juno*, do depict an unplanned pregnancy, it always ends "happily ever after."

In reality, teens' lives are changed by pregnancy, and all too often it's not for the better. Only two percent of teen mothers 17 years old and younger complete college and only three percent of teen mothers ages 18 and 19 complete college, according to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. While a show like *16 and Pregnant* shows us the everyday lives of teen parents, most movies never show how a teen's normal activities, such as parties, movies and hanging out with friends, get replaced with smelly diapers and sleepless nights.

Talking about how to prevent pregnancy could seem like a major buzz kill, but the fact is that unprotected sex can result in a pregnancy, even if it is your first time.

If you're going to have sex, you've got to discuss what you would do if you or your partner became pregnant. Would you or your partner have an abortion? Or would you or your partner continue the pregnancy and make an adoption plan? How would you and your partner choose to handle the financial and emotional responsibilities of having a child?

These are all real situations that need to be taken into consideration before you have sex. If you can't discuss a potential pregnancy with your partner, then you may not be ready for the reality of sex.

Only Fun for the Guys

Fast Times at Ridgemont High features a classic example of a younger girl who wants to satisfy an older guy, so she has sex with him. Reality check: Pleasing someone else is not a good reason to have sex. If you decide you're ready for sex, it should be something you want to do for you, and not just to please a partner. The media mostly shows the sexual needs of guys, but in reality, sex should be just as much for the girl as it is for the guy. Sex is a two-way street. Regardless of whether your partner is a guy or a girl, instead of asking, "How can I please my boyfriend or girlfriend?," why not ask, "How can we please each other?" Sex isn't something that should be done just to keep your partner happy or to keep your partner in general.

You shouldn't be pressured into sex if you're not ready. If your partner doesn't understand that you're as much a part of the relationship as he or she is, then why feel the need to please him or her? The decision to have sex is no one else's choice but your own. And if you're going to have sex, you should be able to talk to your partner about safer sex and what pleases you both.

Healthy Relationships Require Communication

The bathtub filled with rose petals was so romantic in *American Beauty*, but our sexual expectations can't be built on these romantic images. And while STDs and unplanned pregnancies seldom happen in the movies, the reality is they can and do happen. When it comes to deciding about sex or being involved in a responsible, sexual relationship, communication is required.

When you talk to your partner, you can both be clear about where you stand on safer sex and what you both feel comfortable doing.

Whether discussing getting tested, using birth control or just making sure that you are ready for sex, no topic should be too embarrassing to talk about with your partner. Just because you're not seeing couples discuss these topics in the movies, doesn't make having those conversations any less important.

