My Reality Check: Dating with HIV

September 24, 2011 By Anonymous

In my individual therapy session this past week I realized that since my last blog entry in June, I haven't spent much time reflecting or dealing with my relatively recent HIV diagnosis. It has been several months since I've been back to my HIV support group, almost three months since I've blogged, and my therapy sessions were mostly spent talking about other issues in my life (stress, school, family, my summer crush), without delving into the proverbial 'elephant' in the room - how HIV effects these aspects of my life. So when my therapist said to me, "you're the same person you always were, but now you are a healthy person *living with HIV*," I noticed my chest tighten. Her words seemed to come at me hard, giving me that reminder I needed that HIV is a real part of who I am now, and does have a real impact on almost all aspects of my life. I made a decision to go back to support groups, start blogging again, and to stop running from this part of my new reality.

Just a few days after this eye-awakening therapy session, I was again confronted by the reality of HIV - in one of the most difficult aspects of life for those of us living with HIV - dating. I attended a 'bar night' for students at my graduate school, and met a fellow student there for the first time. After a few drinks, and with our inhibitions down, it became clear that we were interested in each other. Long story short, he came home with me, and we spent the night together. When I stopped him from taking things too far sexually, he seemed confused (after all, I brought him back to my apartment, so I'm sure a "slow" approach was not exactly what he was expecting.) But he respected my wishes, and we went to sleep.

The next morning he asked me about my seemingly contradictory behavior, checking in to make sure he wasn't pressuring me too much. I told him that no, he was not coming on too strong, it was just that I needed to take things slow (even though a part of me didn't want to) because I had been through a difficult break up and was dealing with a lot of emotional baggage. He told me that he understood, and empathetically accepted my half-truth.

I silently debated telling him everything then and there, but decided against it. After all, I didn't really know him, and if he did not react well, I feared that he had the ability to make the next two years of my educational experience socially complicated. (Even if we don't continue to date, this is someone who I will inevitably run into again on other student bar nights, or in the hallways of my school, and someone who I am bound to have friends in common with.) So I decided against

disclosure, at least for now.

We ended up spending the entire morning together. We talked, laughed, listened to music, cooked breakfast, watched a movie, cuddled in my bed, and had a really great time. Conversation was comfortable and interesting, our music tastes were aligned, and he softly bit my bottom lip when he kissed me - a girl couldn't ask for much more!

Before he left he asked for my phone number, and I gave it to him happily. I was on cloud nine. It's been a long time since I felt that good--since I felt that joy that comes from comfortably sinking into another person's arms, and that exciting feeling of wanting to see someone again, believing that real chemistry and potential is there. But my 'high' only lasted so long before I started to feel the stress of the inevitable questions popping into my head; how and when do I disclose? Will he still be interested in me if he knows about my status? Will he be mad that I didn't tell him sooner?

Those of you who have read my previous blog entries know that the last (and only) time I told a potential partner about my status, it completely ended our relationship. Although he was kind and supportive, once he knew about my diagnosis, our relationship came to a screeching halt, and I never saw him again.

But this felt different. Good, different. So I'm trying to stay optimistic - maybe this guy feels what I'm feeling too, and when he hears my story, he will not run away from fear but will instead give dating a try, even once he knows my whole-truth.

So in preparation for seeing him again, I'd really love some advice from you all out there - has anyone else been successful disclosing to a negative partner? And if so, how did you do it? How long did you wait before disclosing? Did you use literature (as some people have suggested to me before), or did you just talk?

Thank you in advance to all who read and respond! Your support means more than you know!

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