Why Aren’t You Out About Your HIV+ Status?

October 19, 2013 By Mark S. King

We have learned through the last decades of the LGBT movement that the most effective way to change perceptions is to come out. It forces people to face their prejudices and it is almost always a positive experience, even in the face of potential discrimination.

So why, then, don’t more people come out about being HIV positive? No one understands the perils of living with HIV in terms of everything from social stigma to draconian criminalization laws more than I do. But it is this kind of repression makes it all the more important that the rest of us make ourselves visible to help change those attitudes.

Who knew that 30 years into the HIV epidemic, it would still be viewed as courageous, even radical, to be public about your HIV status? And *at a gay pride parade?*

And yet there we were recently, a dozen brave souls marching the length of the Atlanta Gay Pride parade with HIV POSITIVE emblazoned on our t-shirts (I got the fab shirts from AIDS Foundation Chicago). I was participating as one of the Grand Marshals for the event, an honor I was prepared to make jokes about but can’t really bring myself to do it. It was humbling in a very sincere way, and since those moments are rare for me, I’m going to leave it at that.

Well, except I’m going to ask you to watch this short video blog of the event, below. There’s something special in it for those of you who are also making a difference when it comes to HIV. Enjoy and share!

I consider it a privilege to be open about my HIV status. I know that I am fortunate not to have consequences as a result -- not from my family, not from my job, and not even from the treacherous dating scene, since I’m partnered to a wonderful guy (although I was out about my status even when I was single). I know that for some people, staying private about their HIV status is a matter of personal safety.

But I believe a lot more people could be open about it, and their only reason for not doing so is fear. That’s a powerful emotion. But fear alone doesn’t excuse us from watching others being stigmatized and not letting our community know that there are more of us than they imagine. Why make those of us who are open about our status look radical, or as exceptions to some social rule that paints a distorted picture of who we are? I’m afraid there are too many people living with HIV that are letting too few of us do the heavy lifting in that regard.

I hope you will give this some thought. What are the consequences of your sharing your status with

others, when HIV enters the conversation? Are they really that dire? Is the risk of some social embarrassment really enough to deny your identity as part of a large group of people battling an indiscriminate virus?

I don’t want to be a radical. I just want to live a truthful life and know who my friends are.

Mark

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/out-about-hiv-status