Why should it matter?

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Disclosure can be a tricky topic. Living with HIV means having to decide who to tell and when. The issues involved are complicated and differ from person to person.

Usually telling family members and sexual partners poses the biggest challenge to people, and no wonder. The intimacy and gravity of those relationships adds intensity and complexity.

Disclosure discomfort has two main ingredients for me. One is the potential that the person will react badly- that they will judge me, shun me, discount me. Nobody wants to be rejected or treated as less than- but it is always a real possibility.

The second facet is the internal- what it brings up inside my own psyche to disclose. First there are the self -judgments, the self-shunning, the self-discounting. Then there is the simple issue of privacy- who has the right to know, who do I want to know, who is going to find out anyway?

The odd thing for me is that I struggle more often with telling people whose reactions shouldn't mean as much. When I learned I had HIV, I called my family immediately. I always tell my sexual partners.

Where I find it more challenging is when I meet new people- new friends, friends of friends, or when I reconnect with lost friends. The internet has made it possible for me to find and be found by a good number of people I have lost track of over the years- classmates from high school, my punk rock comrades from Syracuse, friends who moved away.

I always wonder if people know already. For example, I went to a tiny high school- there were 36 in my graduating class. I have found a few on Facebook recently, and am getting together for coffee with one of my classmates, Liz, later this week. I find myself wondering if she knows, and assuming she doesn't, will I disclose (probably) and how.

Liz and I weren't super close in school, and have not been in any contact in almost 25 years. So why does it matter a whit to me how she might react to my HIV status? Don't know, but there you go.

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