

RESEARCH PROFILE

Disclosure of Personal Information • Kathryn Greene

People disclose information in a variety of contexts including interpersonal relationships and healthcare settings. Professor Greene's research demonstrates the importance of disclosing information about relevant topics such as HIV/AIDS.

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Many college students are exploring relationships in the process of dating and meeting many new people. One issue that arises in dating or meeting new people generally is what information to share with this person, especially as it relates to health. My research focuses on the area of privacy and disclosure of HIV diagnoses. This work examines how people balance competing needs to disclose and protect privacy. Overall, my research indicates that people choose to disclose an HIV diagnosis to those they feel close to, when they expect a positive response to sharing the information, when they need support, and only after they have adjusted to the diagnosis. These decisions to disclose to family members, children, and partners are especially difficult.

Some of my research examines attitudes toward privacy, and other work examines disclosure behavior or intentions to disclose. For example, I conducted interviews with African American pregnant teenage women with HIV about how they choose to share

their diagnosis. This research on disclosure and health also provides added understanding about how risk decisions are made, for example the roles of stigma, relational variables, and the family. My most recent project in this area is described in a co-authored book, *Privacy, Disclosure of HIV/AIDS in Interpersonal Relationships: A Sourcebook for Researchers and Practitioners* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003). This particular line of research is expanding to include examination of the role of stigma in health decision making. Other emerging research focuses on the role of social and personal relationships in the context of health conditions. My research explores factors such as social support, coping, and disclosure in relationship management.

The value of this research examining privacy, disclosure, and stigma is particularly apparent in the application to HIV and AIDS. Because people with HIV need support and also can transmit the virus to partners, studying disclosure has potential benefits in multiple ways. Disclosing can help people access support, can possibly protect someone from contracting HIV, yet it is risky to tell others. To help apply the knowledge gained through research, I work with various local and regional HIV service organizations and several school districts and health departments on issues related to communication and disclosure.

- Partners are able to anticipate or deal with potential problems at an early stage.
- Partners have the benefit of knowing how each other perceives and feels about the relationship, its development, and each other's contribution to it.
- Partners have the opportunity to work together to meet challenges and solve problems.
- Partners can monitor the relationship, and that process will provide an additional source of intimacy and commonness between them.

Family Relationships

Families, and our images of families, are based on, formed, and maintained through communication. Family members and family relationships simultaneously influence and are influenced by each other.¹⁴