



Kudos for Saying That

RuPaul's Drag Race contestant Q discusses her HIV disclosure becoming a meme.

May 13, 2024 By Mathew Rodriguez

Disclosure can be difficult for people living with HIV even when a TV camera isn't filming their every move, which helps explain why *RuPaul's Drag Race* contestant Q's announcement that she is HIV positive not only made for an emotional scene but also went viral. Q makes it clear that the moment wouldn't have happened if she hadn't felt secure in this reality-TV sisterhood. "I would have felt comfortable telling any of those girls," she tells POZ, citing her fellow queens on season 16 of the Emmy-winning show. "They all made it feel like just a safe space where I could feel free to come out with that information."

When she came out as HIV positive, Q joined a lineage of people who have shared their status with American TV audiences, including pioneers like *The Real World's* Pedro Zamora and past *Drag Race* queens Ongina and Trinity K. Bonet. While speaking with POZ, Q also discussed the red ribbon dress she crafted for the runway, her relationship with her care provider and what it was like to see her moment of disclosure become a social media meme.

When you were diagnosed as HIV positive in 2021, at age 24, what went through your mind?

I was diagnosed in July of 2021. When you're diagnosed, you feel so isolated; you feel very, very alone. It almost feels final, like the end. I think that's why it's so hard for so many people and definitely why it was so hard for me.

When you were diagnosed, you had already been doing drag. Did your art as a drag performer—or your drag community—help you process it at all?

My drag family supported me so much when I told them. I was lucky to have them and lucky to have my husband. Some people go through it alone. I can only imagine how hard that would be, because I definitely give a lot of [credit for] how well I moved on from that diagnosis to my drag family, my husband and the people around me.

I want to ask about the dress you made for Drag Race that featured the AIDS awareness red ribbon and art inspired by Keith Haring. Can you talk about where you got the idea for the dress while you were making your runway package for the season?

When I knew that we were doing an '80s runway, I thought this was an opportunity for me to be more open about my status and give myself an ultimatum to talk to my family about it and be a voice for anybody who felt as scared as I did. I just really wanted to pay homage to the generation of queer people that we lost and that could still be alive and thriving today had politicians and government and health officials taken it more seriously and cared more about queer people in general.

I saw it as an opportunity to be a visual for anybody who is positive or who is recently diagnosed and feeling the same things that I felt because maybe they don't have anybody at home with them. And if they see me, you know, maybe they at least feel not so alone.

Q wears a red ribbon dress on Drag Race@rupaulsdragrace/Instagram

You mentioned on the show that you had not discussed your HIV status with your family before talking about it on Drag Race. Disclosure on national television is such a huge deal. Were you

more worried about disclosure to your family or being so visible to the world?

I honestly have no problem being publicly visible as someone who's living with HIV. It's not something I carry shame for. Sometimes, with the stigma that you have to face, people want you to feel shame for it. But I myself got into a place where I want to live openly about it and be a public figure and a visual aid for people living with it.

But I was more scared for my family. I talked to my mom before the episode aired—she knows, and my family knows. My mom worries when it rains too much outside. Thinking about her worrying about that—that's what made me anxious. I know how I've been treated differently by some people because of my HIV status, which definitely made me cautious about telling certain people.

When you came out on Drag Race you mentioned that you had faced stigma from health care providers. What was that like, and what is your relationship with your doctor like now?

I have a primary care physician right now that I'm close with and who's not queer but deals with a lot of queer people and is super knowledgeable. I went to a dermatologist because I had issues with my skin, and getting them to move past thinking that what was going on with my skin was HIV related was a challenge. It had been going on since before my diagnosis. Facing that was difficult.

The dermatologist was seeing you only as your status.

Yeah, exactly. It's honestly just hard to find doctors to trust or to find doctors that are versed in queer culture and the community. My husband and I are in an open relationship. My original HIV doctor just seemed to have no grasp on queer relationships or the community that I live in. It was difficult to even talk to them sometimes just because they were so out of touch.

For people with HIV, disclosure is such a big deal. And now you've done that on a national stage. Do you have advice for people with HIV struggling with or thinking about disclosure?

Definitely do it when it feels right for you. Don't let anybody let you feel pressured because ultimately the decision is up to you. That's your life. That's your business. But if you do, make sure you have a good support system and people around you that love you. No matter how your disclosure is taken, there are people out there that love you and support you and see you for the amazing person you are.

When you did disclose on the show, you chose to share with Plane Jane. Was there a reason you came out to her specifically?

We worked together that episode, and we were sitting by each other, and Plane's also somebody I got close with on the show. Honestly, I would have felt comfortable telling any of those girls because we all got so close, and we've all been such big supporters of each other. They all made it feel like just a safe space where I could feel free to come out with that information.

That moment has become kind of a meme, specifically with Plane saying, "Mama, kudos for saying that—for spilling." What is it like for you to see that go viral?

It's so weird, because it didn't feel like something that was super funny or awkward in the moment. Seeing it out of context, I can definitely see how it's an awkward phrasing of, "Oh, mama, kudos for spilling," after something so sincere. When she said that in person, she was very sincere, and it didn't come off as not caring. We didn't even think about it as something that would blow up or be funny. Somebody sent me one where Grindr posted a version with someone listing a million things they're into, and somebody replied, "Mama, kudos to you for spilling," and I was like, "Oh my God!"