Poz Coverboy Takes On Oprah

October 23, 2009 By Shawn Decker

Apparently I missed Oprah's recent show on HIV/AIDS; sounds like I saved myself a bunch of grief. Instead of having positive examples on prevention and awareness, it sounded like yet another "positoid-as-monster" story.

Jack Mackenroth is a proud positoid, Poz coverboy and Project Runway runaway star. He saw the show, and here's a portion of his open letter to Oprah:

"My first issue with the show was that several of the women on the panel chose to wear disguises. I understand that there is a huge stigma about being HIV positive but if they wanted to remain anonymous then they should not have gone on national television! By appearing in disguise they only reaffirmed the idea that being honest and open about having HIV is NOT OK. That was a huge disservice to the HIV community. By not being open and honest they sent the message that people with HIV should hide and keep it a secret, which only adds to the stigma of living with the disease. Would someone with cancer wear a disguise? If we are taught that HIV is shameful then how can we expect people to willingly go get tested?"

To read the rest of Jack's open letter, visit his blog.

I know that getting a fair shake might not make for good TV, but positoids need to stand up whenever we are defaced or are presented as one-dimensional, sex-obsessed monsters, and I applaud Jack for doing so. Fear-mongering is not good HIV prevention, and because of this episode alone I will probably have to answer questions about the lowest of low risk (nearly zilch) of the possibility of transmitting HIV domestically with Gwenn, because some doctor on the show didn't explain that the daughters of the infected mothers- despite their concerns- aren't at risk of contracting the virus from common household items.

This takes away from my ability to educate about real risk- the risks involved in assuming someones' HIV status by looking at them. The risk involved in thinking that every person living with HIV even knows their own status.

Thanks, Oprah.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

Listen to me and Gwenn discussing HIV/AIDS issues with Jack and Robert Breining last August.

Shawn on: Shawn’s book Decker’s Daily Coffee

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