



U=U as a Black Trans Woman in the US

There's an old saying, "Knowledge is Power." U=U is power.

This is a guest blog by Tori Cooper, Director of Community Engagement at the Human Rights Campaign.

June 4, 2024 By [Undetectable = Untransmittable](#)

Being Black is a wonderful gift. Being a woman is beautiful gift. Being transgender is a magnificent gift. As fortunate as I am to be me, I understand that these intersecting identities make me less valuable, less beautiful and less worthy in many parts of this country and across the world. For Black trans women like me, and especially for those living with HIV, I want to share another wonderful, beautiful and magnificent gift with you. That gift is the knowledge that we know as U=U. Yes, I consider U=U a gift of knowledge. Knowing that Undetectable equals Untransmittable has the ability to change the way you see yourself and the ways that others see you. Let me explain.

I describe stigma as fear. And fear is only real to you. Stigma has a way of impacting how we see ourselves in the mirror and in relationships. Stigma impacts how we take care of ourselves and the people that we love. Stigma can be the difference between life and death for many people. Stigma is the catalyst for barbaric HIV criminalization laws and policies that are hostile, and sometimes deadly, for transgender and LGBTQ+ everywhere. U=U is a science based statement that confirms that people with an undetectable viral load cannot, will not, and do not pass HIV to their sexual partners. That single statement can change the way a person living with HIV comes to acceptance about their HIV diagnosis. It means that all people living with HIV, even Black trans women, non-binary individuals, and everyone else, can have loving, consensual and fulfilling sex lives without the fear of HIV transmission. I don't think that most people take their medicine simply to have sex. But I do know that people who are educated and more confident, have more meaningful and fulfilling lives. I know that sexual and physical health are important in developing meaningful relationships. That doesn't mean that PLWHA will all get fairytale endings. But it does mean that HIV won't be the reason why those happy endings aren't possible.

The knowledge and power that comes from U=U means that people in unhealthy relationships are better equipped to make healthier choices. U=U means that you don't have to stay if it's not working out. It means that serodiscordant dating is normalized, without stigma. It means that you can prioritize your own health and happiness in all of your relationships. It means that the person you see in the mirror is wonderful, beautiful and magnificent, in spite of an HIV diagnosis.

Across the world, there are many ways that cultures describe the transgender experience. In the US, we use the word transgender to describe a wide range of diverse people whose gender is different than what was assigned to them at birth. Many of us are vilified for simply being who we are. Add to that, being discriminated and ostracized because of an HIV diagnosis and that can be a recipe for disaster. No one should be discriminated against simply for who they are. Trans and non-binary people are disproportionately diagnosed with HIV. There are many factors that contribute to this. Trans and non-binary people also experience higher levels of unemployment, discrimination and violence. These can be contributing factors to transactional and survival sex work. When a person receives a message like U=U, it has the ability to positively impact the way they think about themselves in every relationship. We want all of our folks to know that HIV is not a death sentence. Take every opportunity to create the life that you want for yourself. And know that you are worthy of love and happiness.

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[Tori Cooper](#)

Human Rights Campaign

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[Prevention Access Campaign](#) (PAC) is a global non-profit organization dedicated to saving lives and ending the HIV epidemic by making Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) a reality for all people living with HIV. U=U means that a person living with HIV who is on treatment and has an undetectable viral load cannot sexually transmit HIV.

PAC launched U=U in 2016 by mobilizing global scientists and health leaders to confirm the science of U=U and ignited a worldwide movement of partners in over 100 countries to share the message and advocate for universal access. Together, we are changing the narrative for people living with HIV and accelerating an end to the epidemic.

For all inquiries, please contact PAC at info@preventionaccess.org

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#UequalsU
