An Amy Poehler Motto for Slut-Shamers and Truvada Whores

January 9, 2015 By Trent Straube

After reading what seemed like the 1,932nd judgmental comment about PrEP--this time from readers of Peter Staley's Advocate opinion piece--I needed to escape the exhausting gay-on-gay infighting. So for levity and laughs, I picked up Amy Poehler's memoir *Yes Please*, which was a much-cherished holiday gift to myself.

The *Golden Globes* host and *Saturday Night Live* star did not disappoint. But I was surprised to discover valuable insight that applied to the very issue I was trying to avoid: PrEP. In fact, I wish everyone in the PrEP discussions would take to heart one of Amy's life mottos.

For those of you out of the loop, I'll save you the trouble of a Google search: PrEP refers to pre-exposure prophylaxis, in this case a pill called Truvada that can be taken daily to prevent HIV. When taken as directed, Truvada is more effective than condoms, though it does squat for other sexually transmitted infections. Truvada's expensive, but most health insurance covers it. And though it's supposed to be used in addition to condoms, a lot of guys are ditching the rubbers altogether (if they were ever using them to begin with). The two sides of the PrEP arguments have painted each other as thus: **Truvada Whores:** irresponsible sex maniacs whose No. 1 concern in life is having as much bareback sex as possible. Best illustrated by: any dude with a cock shot on Grindr.

Slut-Shamers: uptight conservatives who believe sex is for procreation--not recreation--and that responsible gay men always use condoms, at least until they're married and monogamous forever. Best illustrated by: Zachary Quinto.

Amy Poehler does not address any of these topics directly in *Yes Please*. Though she's a smart girl obviously attuned to the gay male aesthetic, even the male-on-male erotic vibe. Just check out this photo from the book:

Amy's brilliant motto comes up in sections where she talks about childbirth and motherhood. Full disclosure: I'm an old-school kinda gay guy. I don't have a wedding ring, a child or a va-jay-jay. I don't know nothin' 'bout birthin' no babies! So when women talk about these issues, I basically shut up and listen. I trust what they say.

And I've been trusting what Amy says for quite some time. We have a history. Back in the day, I

was obsessed with improv comedy. This was in Manhattan around 1997--I was also obsessed with clubbing and ecstasy, so the exact time line's a bit hazy--and one night on the Lower East Side I saw this cool but unknown troupe called Upright Citizens Brigade perform a long-form improv style they called the Harold. Amy was part of the group. At the end of the show, they said they were starting a theater and would be teaching the Harold. I signed up that night. And just as I suspected and hoped, my life changed dramatically. Classes and performances took place at Solo Arts, a tiny walk-up space in Chelsea just a few doors down from a popular gay watering hole called Splash. Today, there are four UCB theaters--two each in NYC and LA--but back then, it was a relatively small and intense scene, despite the presence at each Sunday night's ASSSSCAT show of famous faces like Andy Richter, Janeane Garofalo, some SNL players and this rather quiet but brilliant writer called Tina Fey. Amy was my Level 2 teacher.

In my mind, I can still hear Amy giving us notes after a scene and then adding: "Life lessons! These are life lessons, people, are you paying attention!" I know it sounds vaguely New Age-y or cultish, but when you learn improv comedy by doing the Harold, you do learn life lessons and gain insight about yourself. When you have to create a character on the spot, for example, do you often revert to playing a loudmouth executive, or maybe a toddler--and what does that say about you? When in a scene, are you able to commit to it 100 percent, even if it's the most embarrassing scenario imaginable, or do you make an ironic comment about it and get a laugh that way? Do you go for cheap jokes? Do you say "yes, and" to every challenge? Do you trust the universe for answers? Do you trust your teammates? Do you think too much?

Since I had learned so much from Amy at UCB, I should have expected to learn something from *Yes Please*. After all, the memoir is part self-help book and inspirational guide. Life lessons, people, life lessons! Here's Amy writing about choosing which birthing method was appropriate for her:

I have the Angelina Jolie of vaginas.... But even with my glamorous vagina, I worried about delivery. I have many friends who have had natural childbirth. I applaud them. I have friends who have used doulas and birthing balls and pushed out babies in tubs and taxicabs. I have a friend who had two babies at home! In bed! Her name is Maya Rudolph! She is a goddam baby champion and she pushed her cuties out Little House on the Prairie

style!

Good for her! Not for me.

That is the motto women should constantly repeat over and over again. Good for her! Not for me.

The motto surfaces again when Amy's talking about whether to go back to work after she had her two kids:

I had no plans of being a full-time stay-at-home mother. This is not to say I think being a stay-at-home mother is not a job. It certainly is. It's just not for me. Remember my motto, "Good for you, not for me."

Good for you, not for me.

I wish everyone would study this motto and its underlying message. I wish we all would realize that the entire world doesn't have to conform our own way of life. Why not respect other people's decisions and leave it at that? Imagine how the dialogue around PrEP would change if we all employed this outlook. Let's practice:

You want to go on PrEP to lower your HIV risk?
Good for you, not for me.

You want to use a condom every time you have sex?
Good for you, not for me.

You want to be a good Mormon by overcoming your gay desire and staying married to your wife? Are you freakin' crazy? Do you know how damaging that ex-gay crap is!! What the hell are you thinking?

Well, as I also learned at UCB, some life lessons take a lifetime to learn.

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