’There Is Tremendous Ferocity in Being Gentle’

January 5, 2015 By Visual AIDS

Magical Pill, Carlos Motta, 2014

For the Time Is Not a Line issue of the WE WHO FEEL DIFFERENTLY journal, Carlos Motta and Nathan Lee shared their thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to the availability and use of pre-exposure prophylaxis, otherwise known as PrEP, the newest tool in HIV prevention. Read the beginning of their conversation below.

June 17, 2014

Dear Carlos,

I’m glad we’re having this conversation about PrEP, and I’m glad it makes me uncomfortable. It should: Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis is a perfectly overdetermined object of consternation, a jagged little pill to drive everyone crazy. PrEP triggers anxieties about sex and sexuality, economics and access, moralism and shame, self-determination and the well being of communities. There are no answers with PrEP, only the mobilization of problematics.

Two of these are of particular interest to me: The first issue is the fact that men who have sex with men enjoy doing so without condoms, and how this quite understandable desire has undergone extraordinary complications since the advent of HIV/AIDS. PrEP reminds us that the introduction of condoms into queer sex is an extremely recent phenomenon, as well as how profoundly the AIDS crisis has shaped the practice, discourse, and ethics of our sexuality. PrEP has the curious effect of being a highly artificial means to protect people from the effects of “natural” sex, which is to say it participates in a project of denaturalizing sex whose genealogy passes through feminism and birth control, queer theory and ACT UP, the mainstreaming of LGBT representation and the rise of transgender activism.

The second problem that interests me is the nature of the human-pharmaceutical machine inaugurated by PrEP. I think it’s reductive to condemn PrEP on the one hand as the latest, most insidious penetration of Big Pharma into our lives; it is, after all, the direct result of the work of AIDS activism during the crisis years to develop effective drugs to combat HIV. On the other hand, however, there are dangers to embracing it as a fabulous twist in better living through chemistry, the slutty buddy to our daily multivitamin.

I’ve put a lot on the table to get us started, so let me backtrack a bit to clarify the stakes of this conversation. We both take Truvada. You recently started a PrEP regimen as part of a behavioral study; I’ve been taking Truvada (along with Reyataz and Norvir) since 2008 to treat my HIV infection. PrEP, then, is something “outside” me, just as HIV positivity is something “outside” you. I’m interested in how this difference affects our practices and our thinking, but also the ways in which the future of our bodies remain indeterminable, open ended, the site of conflicts, questions, experiments.

Why did you start taking PrEP, and how do you feel about it?

Read the rest of the discussion: There Is Tremendous Ferocity in Being Gentle. We Who Feel Differently Journal is a sporadic online publication that addresses critical issues of queer culture. It features analyses and critiques of international lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer and questioning politics from queer perspectives.

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