

The PrEP Diaries: A Safe(r) Sex Memoir

Evan J. Peterson

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Peterson's (dark) humor and willingness to share help make this an accessible introduction to a complex but unquestionably important moment in our cultural relationship with HIV/AIDS.

Since the early 1980s, HIV/AIDS has consumed conversations of sexual health and behavior, shaping relationships to sex in the nightly news and in our own bedrooms. Now, written from what may be the forefront of a new era in the history of HIV/AIDS, Evan J. Peterson's new collection of essays, *The PrEP Diaries*, is a look at the cultural impact of the virus and how the drug Truvada, a reliable preventive for HIV, interacts with contemporary conversations around HIV/AIDS. Why, Peterson asks, are we still talking about HIV/AIDS as an unstoppable killer when a preventive treatment is no longer a hypothetical but something we can literally hold in our hands?

Following the outburst of the plague that tore through the lives of LGBTQI, brown, black, and other marginalized peoples, a rhetoric of fear has dominated society's relationship with the virus. Peterson grounds his memoir in his experiences as a member of the first generation to grow up in the shadow of HIV/AIDS, when the fear of the virus seeped into everything from sex-ed curricula to overheard conversations between adults, ultimately turning it into a bogeyman lurking on toilet seats, on syringes on the streets, and, of course, in sex.

Internalizing this fear as a form of cultural trauma, Peterson struggled to reconcile it with his own sexuality as a gay man. The beginning of the end for his fear-based relationship to sex is his introduction to PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) with the drug Truvada, which offers 99 percent effective protection during exposure to HIV.

As he begins to understand what PrEP means for his own life, Peterson takes a look at the cultural responses to PrEP, responses ranging from embracing it to ignoring it to outright condemnation.

Peterson's writing is snappy and heartfelt, producing essays that could be published as stand-alone pieces but that are interconnected enough to maintain a strong narrative when read all together. His ability to depict and seriously engage with opposing points of view on PrEP without equivocating the known scientific facts about the drug's effectiveness allows Peterson to maintain journalistic credibility without giving equal weight to unsubstantiated or discredited "facts."

When dealing with unfounded critiques of PrEP, Peterson is sympathetic: "I had difficulty accepting it at first. It's not that my rational mind found it illogical. It's that my superstitious mind found it contradictory to everything I'd known my whole life."

For such a short memoir, *The PrEP Diaries* encompasses a wide variety of themes, paying attention to the way in which PrEP can prioritize non-HIV-positive voices in conversations around HIV, the realities of obtaining medication in America, the perpetuation of slut shaming from within gay communities, and more.

Peterson's (dark) humor and willingness to share moments that he may not be proud of help make this an accessible introduction to a complex but unquestionably important moment in our cultural relationship with HIV/AIDS.

CONSTANCE AUGUSTA A. ZABER (April 18, 2017)

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