

## Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP): tensions and disputes about sex in the bareback curriculum <sup>1 2 3 4 5</sup>

### *A Profilaxia Pré-Exposição (PrEP): tensões e disputas quanto ao sexo em pelo no currículo bareback*

Oliveira, Danilo Araújo de <sup>(i)</sup>

Sales, Shirlei <sup>(ii)</sup>

<sup>(i)</sup> Universidade Federal do Maranhão - UFMA, Codó, MA, Brasil. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3222-3172>, [oliveira.danilo@ufma.br](mailto:oliveira.danilo@ufma.br)

<sup>(ii)</sup> Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais - UFMG, FAE, DAE, Belo Horizonte, MG, Brasil. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4446-9508>, [shirlei.sales@gmail.com](mailto:shirlei.sales@gmail.com)

#### Abstract

This article brings part of the results of doctoral research. The analysis was conducted from a post-critical curricular perspective. We understand in this text that the curriculum is not restricted to school subjects, but constituted in different spaces and cultural artifacts. The methodology used articulated elements of netnography and analysis of the Foucauldian-inspired discourse from a blog and three Twitter profiles. We name the heterogeneous set of statements located on these bareback curriculum websites. The argument developed is that in this curriculum, the position of preper subject is produced, constituted with specific marks based on the demand for the use of PrEP. These marks, in the context of bareback sexual practice, show tensions in how anti-aids pedagogy centered on condoms works as a prevention method.

**Keywords:** curriculum, bareback, PrEP, condom

<sup>1</sup> Responsible Editor: Alexandre Filordi de Carvalho. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4510-9440>

<sup>2</sup> References correction and bibliographic normalization services: Maria Thereza Sampaio Lucinio – [thesampaio@uol.com.br](mailto:thesampaio@uol.com.br)

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<sup>5</sup> English version: Cia das Traduções Ltda - [comercial@ciadastraducoes.com.br](mailto:comercial@ciadastraducoes.com.br)

## Resumo

*Este artigo traz parte dos resultados de uma pesquisa de doutorado. A análise foi elaborada sob a perspectiva curricular pós-crítica. Compreendemos, no presente texto, que o currículo não se restringe às disciplinas escolares, mas se constitui em diferentes espaços e artefatos culturais. A metodologia utilizada articulou elementos da netnografia e análise do discurso de inspiração foucaultiana de um blog e três perfis do twitter. Nomeamos o conjunto heterogêneo de ditos localizados nesses sites de currículo bareback. O argumento desenvolvido é o de que, nesse currículo, produz-se a posição de sujeito preper, constituída com marcas específicas a partir da demanda do uso da Profilaxia Pré-Exposição (PrEP). Essas marcas, no âmbito da prática sexual bareback, evidenciam tensões no modo de funcionamento da pedagogia anti-aids centrada no preservativo como método de prevenção.*

**Palavras-chave:** currículo, bareback, PrEP, preservativo

## Introduction

There are many risks of contracting certain diseases when living the so-called “unprotected sex”. To avoid them, various possibilities exist. The forms of prevention of the human immunodeficiency virus (hiv)<sup>6</sup> and sexually transmitted infections (sti) in contemporary times are no longer restricted to using condoms. On the website of the Ministry of Health, there is a “mandala” presenting all available methods that “can be used by the person alone or combined” (Brasil, not paginated). Among these methods is pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

PrEP combines two medicines (tenofovir + emtricitabine), also known as Truvada, assigned by the company that manufactures them, Gilead Sciences<sup>7</sup>. This combination is used to block some pathways that hiv uses to infect the body. To achieve this, these medicines should be taken daily. Therefore, they will have enough concentration in the bloodstream to block the virus. PrEP began to be distributed free of charge in Brazil in January 2018, aimed at populations considered more vulnerable to hiv infection – gays and other men who have sex with men

<sup>6</sup> We adopted the use of the term hiv in lowercase in this text inspired by the struggle of the author and activist Herbert Daniel, who died in 1992. Using the term in lowercase aims to reduce the weight of being a carrier of the virus. From Herbert Daniel's perspective, the individual cannot be reduced to the virus, nor should this be considered central in his life. For more details on these issues, his life and struggle for diversity see: Green, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> According to Dean (2015, p. 228), “Gilead Sciences is based in Foster City, just south of San Francisco, one of the original AIDS epicenters, and is the largest producer of HIV drugs in the world, with global sales of Truvada earning the company over US\$3b per year”

(MSM), transgender people, sex workers, and serodifferent couples<sup>8</sup>. As PrEP does not protect against other sexually transmitted infections, it should be combined with other forms of prevention, such as condoms. However, the availability of this prevention method has intensified discursive disputes about what is safe and healthy sex and about the conduction of risky behavior in sexual intercourse, thus tensioning the privileged place of condoms among prevention methods.

To problematize these tensions, in this article, we seek to bring part of the results of doctoral research, which aims to analyze the functioning of the *bareback curriculum*<sup>9</sup> in the production of truths, knowledge, and positions of the subject. *Bareback* is a sexual practice of men who have sex with other men (MSM), occasional and/or anonymous partners, without using a condom. It is a practice of premeditation and eroticization of unprotected anal sex (Dean, 2009<sup>10</sup>; Haig, 2006), also known as “barebacking”. This expression refers to the origin of the word *bareback*, which comes from equestrianism and means “barebacking”, that is, riding the horse without a saddle. Barebacking refers to skin with skin, to sex without a condom. Even having this central characteristic, the practice is conflicting, as there is no single way of involvement in it. That is, there are different modes of conduct demanded in *bareback* practice. It is demanded, for example, only that practitioners do not use condoms in sexual intercourse, but without the desire to become infected with hiv, even knowing the risks involved<sup>11</sup>. Together, the exact opposite is incited: the search for infection with the hiv virus<sup>12</sup>. There are also prescriptions that in *bareback* sexual intercourse, some safety is sought through PrEP since treatment with medicines protects from hiv. These demands are located and analyzed from a curriculum cultural perspective, as described in the next topic.

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<sup>8</sup>A serodifferent or serodiscordant couple is one formed between a person living with hiv and another person who does not live with hiv. That is, one of them has already been infected by the hiv virus and the other has not.

<sup>9</sup>We explained and defined in the next topic the use of the term *bareback curriculum* in this article.

<sup>10</sup>Throughout the article, all translations by Dean, 2009, 2015, 2018; Gonzalez, 2019 and Chambers, 1994 are ours.

<sup>11</sup>We specifically deepened this aspect in *Contestações às normas do uso do preservativo no currículo bareback: produção da posição de sujeito unrubberman* (Oliveira & Sales, 2022).

<sup>12</sup>We refer here to the subject positions of *bugchaser* and *giftgivers*. See in the thesis version (Oliveira, 2021).

## **1. Bareback curriculum: discursive practices in cyberculture and the position of the preper subject**

Prominently, we can say that discursive disputes about what is safe and healthy sex and about the conduct of risk behaviors in sexual intercourse are an effect of how the “anti-AIDS pedagogy<sup>13</sup>” works (Góis, 2003, p. 31), which adopted educational practices focused on the use of condoms to change/eliminate the risk of contagion. This pedagogy emerges in the context of coping with the aids epidemic in 1983 and is gaining strength over the years so that “among men who have sex with men (MSM), having anal sex without condoms became a relic of the pre-Aids era, replaced by the condom code” (Gonzalez, 2019, p. 60).

Nevertheless, some inflections began to occur in the late 1990s, with the advent of drug therapies that largely reduced aids-related mortality in populations with access to medicines (Dean, 2009; Gonzalez, 2019). From these drugs, it becomes possible to live with hiv. Among the inflections that have emerged are changes in erotic practices linked to transgressions of the normative prescriptions of the compulsory use of condoms. It is in this context that *bareback* sexual practice emerges, which ended up gaining new supporters and becoming a community and a culture (Dean, 2009). Intertwined in cyberspace, it began to have “its own Web sites, pornography, and subcultural codes” causing “profound cultural transformations” (Dean, 2009, p. 2).

Considering, therefore, these characteristics and taking them as provocations, we understand that *bareback* practice is inscribed in the present as a cultural pedagogy that is constituted from the perspective of research, to which this article is linked, as a curriculum that teaches and produces a variety of knowledge about ourselves and others. Hence, to research *bareback* sexual practice, we mobilized an expanded conception of curriculum, as described below.

The curriculum “has been conceptualized as a ‘cultural practice’ for some time” (Paraíso, 2010, p. 29). This way of conceptualizing curriculum has implications not only for how we understand curriculum, but also for how we research them. We then understand that curriculum is not restricted only to disciplines or a systematized set of school knowledge, as other broader

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<sup>13</sup>Aids will be spelled in this article in lowercase because it considers it the name of a disease, a feminine noun. In literal citations, we will keep, in respect to the authors, the original spellings used in their texts.

cultural instances teach knowledge, prescribing behaviors, disseminate values, and, therefore, have a curriculum (Paraíso, 2010; Silva, 2020). In other words, Marlucy Paraíso (2010) states that “a curriculum exists not only in curriculum policies, schools, colleges of education, or universities” (p. 37). Therefore, according to the author, it is materialized in different spaces and artifacts, such as libraries, museums, media, games, literature, cinema, music, the internet, etc. A curriculum is, therefore, “an artifact involved in power relations of different types that presents a set of knowledge to be taught to someone who wishes to transform, modify, subjectivize, govern” (Paraíso, 2010, p. 50). Thus, we began to research the existence and functioning of non-school cultural curricula in different spaces, paying attention to the character built, the dimension of cultural artifact, the power-knowledge relations, and the investment in certain types of subjects present in them, seeking to “question what is being taught by the different existing curricula” (Paraíso, 2010, p. 30).

By materializing in cyberspace, the *bareback* culture ends up disseminating and producing meanings about the abandonment of condoms in specific terms, mobilizing another narrative that struggles to constitute itself as truth and comes into a dispute with what is predominantly taught in other spaces about health, prevention, and sexual pleasure. Therefore, considering this aspect and the previous understandings of curriculum, we understand that the *bareback* culture constitutes a curriculum. Given the profusion of material found in cyberspace, we made a focus for this research. Thus, we named a set of heterogeneous statements in cyberspace, specifically on a blog and three Twitter profiles<sup>14</sup>, as a *bareback curriculum*. The blog and profiles were selected from exploratory research that identified the blog as the only one in Portuguese with massive dissemination of the practice. The profiles were selected as they were those with the most followers and, therefore, with wide reach capacity at the time of the research. Therefore, referring to this set and the understandings of curriculum explained here, we will mobilize, throughout the article, the expression *bareback curriculum*. Although, in this text, we focus on the issue of PrEP, the curriculum investigated here is not called the PrEP curriculum since the statements about PrEP analyzed do not represent the totality of what the *bareback curriculum* teaches and demands, but only a part of the profusion of meanings that this curriculum produces, composing the repertoire of meanings associated with power relations of this

<sup>14</sup>Although the blogs and profiles used for this research are public, for ethical reasons, we chose not to specifically disclose what they are, as they can identify the individuals responsible for the publications, considering that they are information that, in some way, “can bring effects to them if used in research” (Recuero, 2014, p. 69).

curriculum. Arguing otherwise, the statements about PrEP make up the *bareback curriculum* but are not exactly the curriculum. Given these understandings, throughout the text we will use the expressions “in this curriculum” and “in the curriculum investigated”, referring to the *bareback curriculum*, which is the focus of our analysis, of which we deal here and of which PrEP is part.

The *bareback curriculum* is, therefore, one of those curricula that “happens in culture, in daily life, and also in the media” (Paraíso, 2010a, p. 11). Like other cultural curricula, they have “a great capacity for seduction, to make things desired, to change perceptions and to model behaviors” (Paraíso, 2010, p. 39). We consider, therefore, this curriculum one of those cultural pedagogies of the present that “cannot be unknown by education” (Paraíso, 2004, p. 60). Considering that culture is understood here as “a discursive practice, a repertoire of meanings, always associated with power relations of different types” (Paraíso, 2010a, p. 35), the curriculum is, therefore, understood as discourse, that is, as productive practices of power that occur under specific emergency conditions. Power, in turn, is “a mode of action upon the actions of others” (Foucault, 2014a, p. 132). It is much more than a negative instance; it is a productive network that “produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse” (Foucault, 2017, p. 45).

Given the specific conditions of contemporaneity and the place of operation of this curriculum, it was necessary to observe aspects of cyberculture, especially those many studies have already highlighted: how the processes of subjectivation in contemporary times occur in an articulated and/or amalgamated manner with cyberculture (Miskolci, 2017; Sales, 2010; Silva, 2018; Zago, 2015). Cyberculture is centrally involved “in the production of ways of life” (Silva, 2018, p. 16), as it disseminates discourses that act by manufacturing varied meanings and senses about the world and things of this world. This process occurs in a conflicting and disputed manner, thus establishing a field of force correlations. The *bareback curriculum* acts, therefore, in cyberspace, where it competes with other discourses to produce specific types of subjects. Considering these specificities, it became necessary to mobilize methodological resources in a certain way, as described below.

## **2. Methodology: initial definitions, procedures for producing the *discursive body*, and analysis of the *bareback curriculum*.**

For this research, methodologically, we articulate elements and procedures of netnography – a methodology derived from ethnography to investigate cyberspace - (Sales, 2010) and analysis of Foucauldian-inspired discourse – a methodology to analyze discursive practices. Articulating netnography to the analysis of Foucauldian-inspired discourse, it was possible to select the blog and the profiles that were part of the research to produce the information and analysis from the curricular perspective.

According to Noveli (2010), “the term netnography, as the denomination itself demonstrates, obviously maintains a relationship with the ethnographic method, intuitively, by trying to study groups or cultures, in the case of netnography, online groups or cultures” (p. 115). It is, therefore, “appropriate for the study of both virtual communities and communities and cultures that manifest important social interactions virtually” (Kozinets, 2014, p. 72). When studying these groups or cultures online, one observes both the culture that is their own and the codes and uses in cyberspace that is also cultural, being, therefore, understood as a composition of cyberculture. According to Lévy (1999), cyberculture specifies “the set of techniques (material and intellectual), practices, attitudes, ways of thinking and values that develop along with the growth of cyberspace” (p. 17). Then, there was a double interest in mobilizing netnography in this research: (1) the cultural aspects of *bareback* practice exposed in cyberculture (Dean, 2009) were considered, as (2) the aspects of cyberculture itself. Netnography was used to analyze cyberculture and to research how the *bareback* culture intertwines with cyberspace culture. The analyses undertaken here are therefore centered on cyberspace research; however, netnography starts from the understanding that “interactions in this space [cyberspace] affect behaviors outside of it” (Noveli, 2010, p. 114). That said, the netnographic investigation of cybercultural practices was conducted in the blogs and profiles chosen.

Some precepts of netnography mobilized in the research were the involvement and immersion in the field selected for investigation, paying attention to the behaviors of the individuals who posted something there, the language used in cyberspace, the practices demanded, the shared meanings, and the social codes triggered in cyberculture (Kozinets, 2014). It was observed, for example, that there are in the curriculum investigated specific modes of

operationalization characteristic of cyberculture, such as communication in the form of a *post*, which appears in some spaces with a reduced number of characters, forms of interaction by also short messages and the use of *hashtags*. Since it is a netnographic methodology, cyberspace constitutes a space for investigation. Therefore, cyberculture tools, such as screenshots, images, phrases, memes, videos, and observation of the hashtags used, were mobilized. Some of these screenshots are analyzed in this article. They happen not only for analytical purposes, but because the information available and produced in cyberculture has a “fluid character, [since] everything is in process and in transformation” (Silva, 2018, p. 40). Thus, capturing is a way to save and archive this information.

By understanding that this set of materials made available within the scope of cyberculture “produces narratives, establishes relationships, links enunciations” (Silva, 2018, p. 40), constituting, therefore, a discourse, we also mobilize elements of the analysis of Foucauldian-inspired discourse, in articulation with netnography. This articulation was also necessary due to the research problem, which focused on producing truths and demands by specific subjects. The analysis of Foucauldian-inspired discourse appears in this article as a way of analyzing “how a certain discourse is established, what are its emergency or production conditions” (Fischer, 2001, p. 216).

The discourse was taken as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 2008, p. 55). Discourse is more than signs used to designate things. This “more” was investigated in the analyses undertaken here, making it appear, describing it, and observing its operation and emergency conditions, tactics, and techniques to form and constitute what is said. This also required a thorough and detailed description of constituent practices, as discourse is a “productive practice that manufactures truths, knowledge, meanings, subjectivities” (Sales, 2010, p. 123). In the discourse analysis using Foucault as a reference, we also seek to understand how “truth effects are produced within discourses that in themselves are not true or false” (Foucault, 2014b, p. 21). Therefore, the truth effects analyzed here are those that, in the curriculum investigated, produce PrEP in a certain way, focusing on the demand for a specific type of subject.

Discourse analysis, inspired by Foucault, refers to the “relation, the coexistence, the dispersion, the overlapping, the accumulation, and the selection of material elements.” (Foucault, 1996, p. 57). To this end, in conjunction with the elements of netnography previously

highlighted, we analyzed the materials made available in three Twitter profiles and a blog. We seek here to gather sets of heterogeneous statements about *bareback* practice without, however, intending to be exhaustive.

In this process, we sought to focus the analyses on the “things said” (Foucault, 1996, p. 22), on what the Twitter profiles and the blog offered as a material of and for analysis. Thus, we explore “the struggles around the meaning impositions” (Fischer, 2007, p. 56). This was done by seeking to “make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault, 2014, p. 110).

Working hard with discourse refers, among other tasks, to analyzing how certain truths circulate in cyberspace, why others are not possible, and what effects they produce when circulating. Thus, we explored to the maximum what was being made available by the field of research, based on the understanding that this occurs as a historical and cultural construction since analyzing discourses, in this perspective, means “to account for historical relations, for very concrete practices, which are ‘alive’ in discourses” (Fischer, 2013, p. 151). In this sense, it was possible to draw a question about the *bareback curriculum*. “why is this said here, in this way, in this situation, and not in another time and place, differently?” (Fischer, 2001, p. 205). In the analytical work, we also sought to interrogate the *bareback curriculum* as a discourse in its “tactical productivity (what reciprocal effects of power and knowledge they ensure)” and in its “strategical integration (what conjunction and what force relationship make their utilization necessary in a given episode of the various confrontations that occur)” (Foucault, 2014, p. 111). Thus, with the discourse analysis, we sought elements not offered by netnography when mobilized as the only research tool.

For these analyses, we also used the concept of sexuality, defined by Foucault as a “set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations by a certain deployment deriving from a complex political technology” (Foucault, 2014, p. 139). In other words, we can understand it as a “social apparatus for producing knowledge and, indeed, for generating a certain kind of truth about human subjects” (Dean, 2018, p. 142). We proceeded with the research procedures described below based on these methodological resources and main concepts.

The first methodological procedure adopted comes from netnography. We initially sought to immerse in cyberspace. Here, it was possible to obtain information on aspects related to understanding cyberculture intertwined with the *bareback* discourse circulating in cyberspace. The first search took place broadly, looking for blogs that addressed the theme, and many results were obtained. Thus, we considered as criteria for choosing between these results: to be in Portuguese and to address exclusively the *bareback* sexual practice. We initially selected two blogs. Nonetheless, as they did not provide enough materials for analysis because they did not update their posts, we decided to do another search for the term *bareback* on Facebook without using any filter. We, therefore, consider publications of all kinds, of any person, of any group, anywhere, and on any date. On Facebook, we found the dissemination of a blog with many posts and content for analysis, which was selected for the research.

From the definition of this blog as an object and place of analysis, we accessed it constantly between August 2019 and March 2020. In some accesses, we prioritized observation as a way to know the blog's operating culture as well as the *bareback* practice disseminated there. This aspect of cyberspace immersion happened in the research's initial phase. We also sought some Twitter profiles to compose the discursive body of the research, considering the same criteria used to select the blog. We chose the three profiles with the most followers, considering the wide dissemination they have in relation to the others as a criterion. After reading the theoretical material and following methodological precepts of netnography combined with the analysis of Foucault's discourse, we began to capture fragments of texts, images, and various statements that could later be used. Above all, this collection took place from a specific way of asking – *what is being taught here?* –, in which elements of netnography and discourse analysis are articulated since we were not only interested in understanding the *bareback* culture, but also in analyzing the effects of truth and demands for specific types of subjects that this culture had when constituting itself as a curriculum.

As we daily accessed the research field, deepening the study of the theoretical concepts demanded to explain the information we found and considering the methodological aspects that apply here, our look at the understanding of the *bareback curriculum* became more accurate. Thus, we could articulate the blog and Twitter profiles statements to reorganize the information obtained so far and redo searches more directed to the research objectives. We then began mapping, organizing, and selecting these statements, separating them into more general categories, but maintaining a basic strategy of describing and analyzing what was being taught

there, what knowledge was being disseminated, and how this was performed. Through these methods, we were able to make records of what was effectively being said, written, and we had direct contact with the cultural elements specific to the analyzed context, such as, for example, apprehension of languages, constructed meanings, existing power relations, disclosed knowledge, in short, how the *bareback curriculum* works. Here, again, netnography and discourse analysis are articulated as we mobilized ways of organizing this material proper to netnography (such as screenshots, language observation) and mapped, organized, and selected these expressions, understanding they comprise a certain discourse.

Considering, therefore, that the curriculum is a discourse – as we discussed in the first topic - and from the methodological procedures presented, we seek in this article to show that “discourse is a practice: it is the space that makes possible the production of truths and subjects” (Paraíso, 2007, p. 54). Truth can be understood as an effect of power-knowledge articulation in discourse, as a discursive construction. It is from this understanding that Cunha (2011) states that “as an effect of this type of discursive articulation, truths establish subject positions” (p. 56). Concerning the curriculum investigated here, the truths about how a *barebacker* subject should be, the statements disclosed, and the divisions raised in articulation demand specific types of subjects. In this article, we focused on producing the *position of the preper subject*.

The term *preper* comes from PrEP. This term is the designation for users of medications for aids prophylaxis. We adopted the term to name one of the subject positions available in the *bareback curriculum*. This position has a mark that differentiates it from the other positions of bareback subjects, *as it is* specifically demanded in the constitution of this position that the individual seeks sex without a condom but relies on the protection that PrEP offers: preventing hiv infection.

We consider that new medical treatments, including PrEP, “have profoundly changed how individuals calculate sexual risk” (Gonzalez, 2019, p. 61). Such changes focus on disputes over the production of truths, subjects, and behaviors considered correct. Gonzalez (2019) points out that the emergence of *bareback* and, more recently, the new forms of prevention continue to be followed by a certain panic because they “are based on a rethinking of what counts as ‘protection’ or as ‘safer sex’” (p. 61). Safer sex used to refer only to the use of condoms, but this reference is now, in a way, challenged. These changes affect the *bareback* practice itself, as they seem to “remove the notion and function of transgression from *barebacking*” (Gonzalez,

2019, p. 62). Is there an alternative to condoms here? Does another behavior emerge here from the resources this pre-exposure prophylaxis to hiv provides? These are general issues that mobilize the problematizations in this article and are explored in the argument developed in it that, in the *bareback curriculum*, certain behaviors are prescribed, knowledge is authorized, and truths are disseminated. In the set and amid power relations, these processes characterize the *position of the preper subject*, constituting the marks of this position: seeking information and knowledge about pre-exposure prophylaxis; resorting to the treatment of ISTs without paranoia, despair, and prejudice; knowing the burdens and rewards of PrEP. These marks, within the scope of the *bareback* sexual practice, show tensions in the operating mode of the anti-aids pedagogy centered on the mandatory use of condoms as a prevention method.

In the analyses undertaken here, we considered that “all the practices by which the subject is defined and transformed are accompanied by the formation of certain types of knowledge” (Foucault, 1993, p. 205). Thus, we show which knowledge acquires a true character in the *bareback curriculum*, giving specific marks to the *position of preper subject*. In other words, we can understand that certain truths that this curriculum disseminates can inform specific subject positions.

The subject positions constitute “discursive positions” that produce the subject “in the same operation that assigns them a discursive place” (Larrosa, 1994, p. 66). For Foucault (2008), they are a “determined and empty place that can be effectively occupied by different individuals” (p. 107). Nevertheless, occupying a certain subject position does not occur once and for all. On the contrary, it confers a contingent, unstable and provisional character to the position that a certain subject can occupy. Thus, once again, as Foucault teaches us, we remove the analysis centered on the individual or the subject to think about the production aspect of subjectivities, thus turning to the performance of the discourse or, in the case of this article, to the operation of the curriculum as a discourse. Operating with the curricular analysis, we seek to show how, in the operation of this curriculum, the *position of the preper subject* is made available, which has specific marks. These marks, given by the conditions of discourse production, “narrate histories of wills, say of covetousness, aspire to truths, and incite subjects to be in certain ways” (Cardoso, 2012, p. 154). These are the marks we started to explore.

### **3. *Position of preper subject*: seek information and knowledge, resort to the treatment of ISTs without paranoia, despair, and prejudice, know the burdens and rewards of PrEP**

From the availability of the use of PrEP, rules of conduct are prescribed in the *bareback curriculum*, enabling other negotiations of meanings. Conventional distinctions between norm and transgression, safety and risk, health and disease, and life and death may have tensions and other elaborations. From the use of PrEP, interventions are calculated at the service of sexual desires that are articulated with the values for the behaviors imposed in contemporary times: health care for an optimization of the body (Rose, 2013). This shows that the limit between permitted and prohibited, acceptable and repugnant, is the object of dispute and therefore constituted by power relations. As well as other sexual practices – homoerotic, adultery, masturbation, prostitution, sadomasochism – perceived in different ways throughout history, the negotiation for producing truth regimes about *bareback* results in the “expansion, restriction, or displacement of sexual practices conceived as acceptable, in addition to those that are taken as an object of persecution, discrimination, medical care, or criminal punishment” (Gregori, 2016, p. 23). The *position of preper subject* emerges in this border area, which tenses the discursive limits of what is allowed to sex and sexuality, but which somehow meets the care with life inscribed in the health imperatives. At the same time, a whole field of dispute is opened for a greater liberation of expressions and sexual choices that allow these individuals to conduct their desires more boldly.

Hence, in the curriculum investigated, it is prescribed that the *preper barebacker* is informed and seeks knowledge about pre-exposure prophylaxis. Therefore, videos with medical explanations are indicated in this curriculum. The *preper barebacker* is the one who must use his time not only to obtain sexual pleasure, but to learn about the ways to protect himself. In one of the posts found in the *bareback* curriculum, there is a requirement in this regard:

Figure 1

Screenshot 4<sup>15</sup>



Source: Research archive/Twitter. Post from 17 August, 2018.

The teachings and prescriptions in the statements highlighted can demonstrate the conflicts and tensions of the curriculum investigated. Foucault (2014a) stated that discourse should be understood “as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable” (p.107). Hence, when understanding curriculum as discourse, it is interesting to show “a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies” (Foucault, 2014, p. 110), detailing the power relations that constitute the *bareback curriculum*.

*The preper barebacker subject* must have health care that is peculiar to him and demands some attention. For example, it is unacceptable that *the* barebacker is not aware of PrEP. Thus,

<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately many still don't know Pre-exposure prophylaxis. Several people came into my DM to ask me without watching the great video of @Chados5Oficial. Then it's complicated. You're masturbating for hours, but can't use 30 min with information and knowledge. #PrEP

Public utility

Great video about Pre-exposure prophylaxis, with explanations of an excellent physician. I do #PrEP for 08 months by CRT Santa Cruz in SP. If anyone has any doubts, feel free to ask me. Information and knowledge always.

[link]

the barebacker must correct his behavior if he lacks knowledge about the medicines. The uninformed *barebacker* may have intercourse with the risk of contracting hiv, which is interdicted to the *preper barebacker*. When uninformed, the *barebacker* may have a more open relationship with risk, as there is no concern and/or hesitation about the possible effects that the decision to have sex without a condom can bring, such as, for example, a greater chance of acquiring hiv and other sexually transmitted infections.

Thus, the prescribed, authorized, and accepted behavior for the *preper barebacker* is the search for the deepening of medical knowledge on how to prevent hiv with PrEP. Thus, in the *bareback curriculum*, ways of having sex with maximum pleasure without neglecting health and protecting against hiv are taught. To this end, the behavior of the young *preper barebacker* is outlined and regulated: use PrEP and follow the procedures required in this use. This is a curricular articulation for producing a subject of a certain type. According to Paraíso (2010a), a curriculum “is a cultural selection”; and “constitutes an interested selection of knowledge” (p. 41). The *bareback curriculum* also selects a knowledge: medical knowledge. It is also understood that “every curriculum wants to change behaviors” (Paraíso, 2010, p. 47). This articulation of the selection of knowledge focuses on the intention to change the *barebacker* behavior that the set of statements seems to show.

Medical knowledge seems to guarantee that the *preper barebacker* takes care of himself in sexual practice in the way considered correct. To achieve this, this knowledge is authorized in the curriculum and disseminated as true to conduct the *preper barebacker's* behavior. Attitudes different from this can be considered wrong and disapproved, as not seeking understanding from medical knowledge can raise behaviors that this knowledge does not define as correct. This knowledge seems to be so vital that it is *retweeted* information. Thus, it is reiterated the direction to a video of a physician with the caption: “Great video on Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, with explanations from an excellent physician” (Fig. 1).

The medical knowledge that appears in the *bareback curriculum* composes contemporary biopolitics. According to Nikolas Rose (2013), the politics of life of our century seems quite different, as the poles of disease and health no longer delimit it, nor is it directed to the elimination of pathologies to protect the destiny of the nation. For this author, the “medical jurisdiction extended beyond accidents, illnesses, and diseases to an administration of chronic diseases and death, the administration of reproduction, the detection, and administration of

‘risk‘ and the maintenance and optimization of the body” (Rose, 2013, p. 24). The politics of the life of our century is concerned with the progression of our capacities for control, administration, projection, (re)modeling of our own capacities to live. These modifications were impossible without an intense capitalization of medicine, which opened up a whole field of highly competitive economic exploitation, which deals with health and disease as a field destined for the economy. Therefore, we are the object of financial exploitation in this contemporary biopolitics. This biopolitics, in a way, captures our bodies, our health, our vitality and gives rise to changes in the understanding of what we are while enabling us to make interventions on ourselves in other ways, expanding our capacity for experimentation and contestation of norms and truths then in force.

Individuals are motivated to be responsible for themselves, their business, and their safety. As patients, they are encouraged to be frequent and responsible consumers of medical services and various products – medicinal drugs, numerous technologies, and tests. Individuals use these services and products made available from the judgments that “make their real and potential choices, decisions, and actions, as they open the way through the practices of contemporary biomedicine” (Rose, 2013, p. 22), which enable “calculated interventions” to be made (Rose, 2013, p.17) at the service of their desires and the types of people they want to be. We are thus optimized when considering contemporary medical technologies. This means recognizing we have improved in some respects by using these technologies or having the perception of “a qualitative growth in our abilities to manipulate our vitality, our development, our metabolism, our organs, and our brains” (Rose, 2013, p. 17). Hence, the author states that these technologies “do not simply seek to cure diseases once they have manifested themselves, but to control the vital processes of the body and mind” (Rose, 2013, p.32). Therefore, for him, they are “optimization technologies” (Rose, 2013, p.32).

Composing these technologies, PrEP emerges as a medicine that allows individuals to manipulate their life, their intimacy, and the ways they have sex, considering their desires and motivations. The issue of contemporary biopolitics invites us to analyze how power infiltrates and shapes life or, as Foucault had already stated, “how power penetrates and controls everyday pleasure” (Foucault, 2014, p. 17). The *barebacker* who triggers the “information and knowledge” of medical knowledge, as prescribed in the curriculum investigated here in the production of the *position of preper subject*, has a relationship of more care and specific attention with the demands of *bareback sexual practice*. The behavior mediated by contemporary biopolitics has already been

investigated in other studies. Gonzalez (2019), for example, shows that “these new biomedical treatments have profoundly changed how individuals calculate sexual risk” (p. 61).

The author not only highlights PrEP as responsible for the change in the behavior of oneself in sexual intercourse but also the medicines made available to those who contract hiv, enabling them to become, through treatment, undetectable, which means that the person carrying the virus, even having sex without a condom, will not transmit the virus. Thus, some practices may already be visible on dating sites and gay apps where it is possible to locate hiv status as “undetectable” or “using PrEP”. Contemporary biopolitics acts in our daily lives, infiltrating our lives and bodies and transforming our behavior. It focuses on our desires.

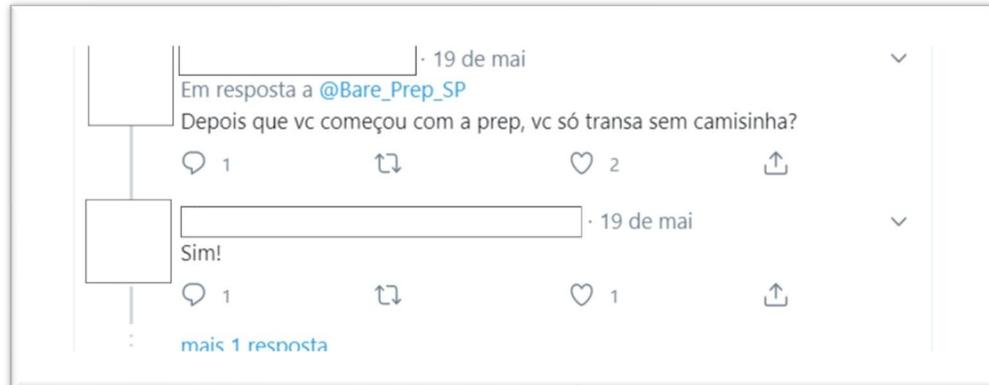
When PrEP is triggered in the curriculum investigated, there is an important inflection in the *barebacker's* behavior, giving him distinct marks, as what is at stake is exactly how he is demanded to seek “information and knowledge” in medical knowledge, use PrEP in *barebacker* sexual intercourse, and not only seek the pleasure that this practice can provide. Thus, it seems to be a pleasure with a specific type of regulation as an effect of contemporary biopolitics. What regulates pleasure is the mitigation of the risk of illness. It is probably through knowledge about other forms of hiv prevention and PrEP that individuals can calculate, in a new way, the sexual risks of contracting stis and diseases that *bareback* practice involves, which is related to tensions about the meanings established around the compulsory use of condoms in sexual intercourse. As Gonzalez (2019a) discusses, the insertion of PrEP as a new pharmacological prevention technology mobilizes a “rethinking of what counts as ‘protection’ or as ‘safer sex’” (p. 61).

According to Gonzalez, “Safer sex’ used to refer to wearing a condom for anal sex. But this new normal of individuals on PrEP - or those on TasP<sup>16</sup>, who are undetectable - now challenges this legacy notion” (Gonzalez, 2019, p. 61). From the PrEP, the power relations around what protection and safer sex mean become fiercer, and if, in some way, the condom was more commonly related to this meaning, it is around it that disputes seem to be more prominent, the conflicts stronger, the questions more incident. Two statements of the *bareback curriculum* that highlight these tensions stand out:

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<sup>16</sup>TasP is the acronym of Treatment as Prevention. Another strategy for preventing hiv transmission, aimed at hiv-positive people. According to Unaid, the use of antiretroviral medicines causes people living with hiv/aids to reach the so-called “undetectable viral load”. Scientific evidence also shows that people living with hiv/aids who have an undetectable viral load, in addition to gaining a significant improvement in quality of life have a much lower chance of transmitting the virus to another person (UNAIDS, [20-?], [not paginated]).

**Figura 2**  
*Screenshot 6<sup>17</sup>*



Source: Research archive/Twitter. Post from 19 May. 2019.

**Figura 3**  
*Screenshot 7<sup>18</sup>*



Source: Research archive/Twitter. Post from December 1, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> After you started with prep, do you only have sex without a condom?  
Yes!

<sup>18</sup> Prep: the HIV contraceptive

The tweet is informative about PrEP, it is not for anyone to lecture saying that condoms are safer. I do PrEP for 1 year and 8 months and so far I have not have any STI. Who does not see a problem in wearing a cover: great, continue to wear it.

In the first statement, a question arises in the *bareback curriculum* that says directly how the condom is still conceived, in the context of sexual intercourse, from the use of PrEP: “after you started with prep, do you only have sex without a condom?”. Questioning mobilizes a thought historically situated, constructed, and manufactured by the discourse of safer sex. Over the past few years, based on a series of strategies and techniques, the latter has invested in constructing a regime of truth that affirms and reiterates the importance and obligation of using condoms in sexual intercourse. It was sought, in the discourse of safer sex, to set and establish this truth as an assumption that individuals must adopt in the conduct of all sexual behaviors. As an effect of this discourse, the question brings a certain strangeness to the option of someone abandoning condoms, preferring to use only PrEP. The questioning seems to show adherence to this established truth. However, it also says about the border that the question still occupies. When the individual is faced with a prevention option other than the condom, he may not only be questioning the other who no longer uses the care that the condom offers but questioning himself and his preventive care. This question seems, therefore, to represent an interstice, an interval between what seemed granted – the condom as the only form of protection – and another thought that PrEP seems to mobilize as a prevention technology. This question comprises the emergency conditions that are building PrEP as a form of prevention that disputes a place previously legitimized only to the condom. By this, we mean that the question opens possibilities to think, question, and problematize the safer sex strictly linked to the mandatory use of condoms.

In the second statement, it is the condom that appears as a focus once again. First, PrEP is compared to a contraceptive in a video disseminated in the curriculum. It is clarified: “The tweet is informative about PrEP. It is not for anyone to lecture saying that condoms are safer” (Fig. 3). The comparison in question (from Prep to contraceptive) is due to the need to take the medicine daily. If use is stopped, the risk of hiv infection rises again. If the contraceptive is related in any way to pregnancy prevention, to certain protection of something that may be unwanted at a certain time, it is these meanings that PrEP seems to produce to be used as a possible substitute for condoms, thus instituting in the curriculum investigated a dispute for the conduct of sexual behaviors. The manufacture of PrEP as linked to “prevention”, “protection” is not done without tension, without disputes. The following post shows a confrontation of the truths already agreed, established, and disseminated, which insist on affirming the condom as indispensable in sexual intercourse and which reiterate its use as “safer”. Thus, this curriculum

uses the dissemination of a video about PrEP as educational. Nonetheless, the information on how they are disseminated seems to diverge from some already established truth about the compulsory use of condoms. This truth prescribes that condoms are a safer method of prevention, something that, from the power relations that produce this curriculum, is seen as a “lecture”.

The term “lecture” is commonly used to tell someone what is right and wrong. Someone who supposedly practices what they say and intend to impose on others what they believe and what they do may prescribe to others some “lecture”. However, this imposition can be taken by the one who receives this lecture as something negative, pejorative, and arbitrary because this other understands that this imposition, the imperative of the “lecture”, aims to curtail other modes of thinking and regulate different behaviors to impose something as absolute and true. This understanding appears in the statement (FIG. 3) as a confrontation of a possible reiteration that condoms are a safer preventive. Therefore, this reiteration is seen as a “lecture”, thus constituting an attempt to disqualify the arguments contrary to PrEP in the discursive dispute about the meanings it establishes about safety in sexual intercourse.

Hence, the strategy of characterizing the truth that condoms are safer as a “lecture” also involves resisting interdictions or prescriptions, neglecting a set of values incorporated in this truth. Thus, it is contested, in this curriculum, the value of condoms as safer, as can be seen from the statement of the subject that, after a period of using PrEP, there was no sti, thus disseminating the safety that the medicine offers (Fig. 3). At the same time, there is a provocation for those who continue to use the condom: “Who does not see a problem in wearing a cover: great, continue to wear it” (Fig. 3). The problem expressed in this statement may be related to the disputes that already organized the imperative of condom use in sexual intercourse, but it may also be associated with discomfort, whether physical or even political, of resistance to a prescription as a norm that organizes the lives of many MSM. Thus, if “wearing a cover” is considered a problem in this curriculum so that this action is refuted, PrEP is presented as a solution, seeming to acquire, in this curriculum, qualities to replace the condom.

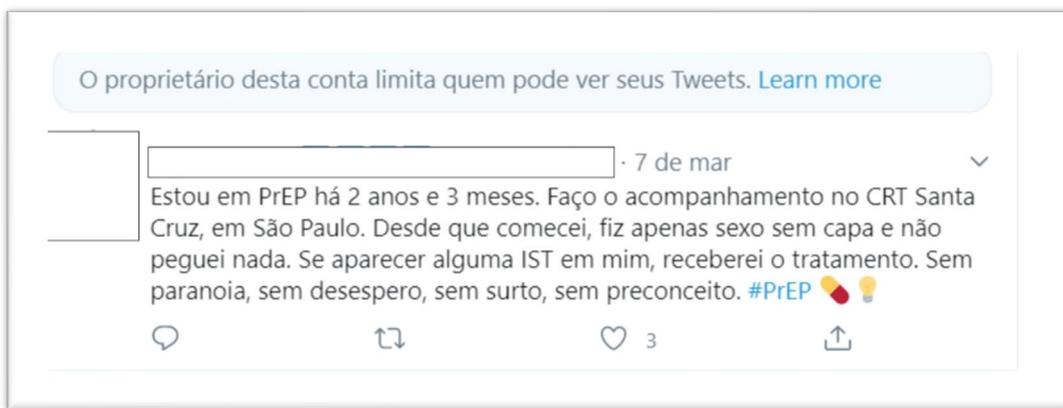
The safety issue appears once again here associated with PrEP. Safety or “safer” is no longer something exclusive to condoms, something that somehow opens more possibilities for individuals to engage in sexual situations considered at risk within the discourse that prescribes the mandatory use of condoms. But safety is not total. Although PrEP protects against hiv,

other risks are involved, such as the side effects of medication<sup>19</sup> and the possibility of acquiring other sexually transmitted infections.

In the *bareback curriculum*, ways to conduct the PrEP users' own behavior are disseminated, which seem to be marked by more fearless and risky attitudes. The risk of contracting other sexually transmitted infections seems to be minimized in favor of engaging in sexual intercourse without condoms. This also seems to be the following strategy:

#### Figura 4

#### Screenshot <sup>920</sup>



Source: Research archive/Twitter. Post from 7 March, 2019.

From what is stated in Figure 4, it is possible to notice that the chance of contracting some other sexually transmitted infection in the “sex without a cover<sup>21</sup>” is not ruled out. Still, this risk seems to be calculated: “if any sti appears in me, I will receive treatment” (Fig. 4). Somehow, to contain oneself in the face of this possibility would be, according to the curriculum analyzed here, “paranoia”, “despair”, “outbreak”, “prejudice”. Thus, what is prescribed here is that the individual has “sex without a cover” and, if any sti appears, he resorts to “treatment” in a very specific way.

<sup>19</sup> The side effects of PrEP can be short- and long-term: “In the list of passing symptoms are stomach pain, nausea, altered bowel rhythm, and gas. In the long-term, the risk is altered renal function and bone loss. These problems, however, are reversible. That is, when one stops taking the medicine, renal function and bone mass return to normal” (Andrade, 2018, [not paginated]).

<sup>20</sup> I've been in PrEP for 2 years and 3 months. I undergo follow-up in CRT Santa Cruz in São Paulo. Since I've started I only had sex without cover and I got nothing. If any sti appears in me, I will receive treatment. Without paranoia, without despair, without outbreak, without prejudice. #PrEP

<sup>21</sup> Cover here refers to the condom. So, no cover means no condom.

The production of the *position of preper subject* in the *bareback curriculum* occurs through complex power relations. What appears in dispute in this production is the meaning attributed to sexually transmitted infections. In this statement of the curriculum, discontinuities are engendered regarding how we are taught to sexually conduct our behavior in relation to sexually transmitted infections in the safer sex discourse that establishes what is healthy, responsible, and correct.

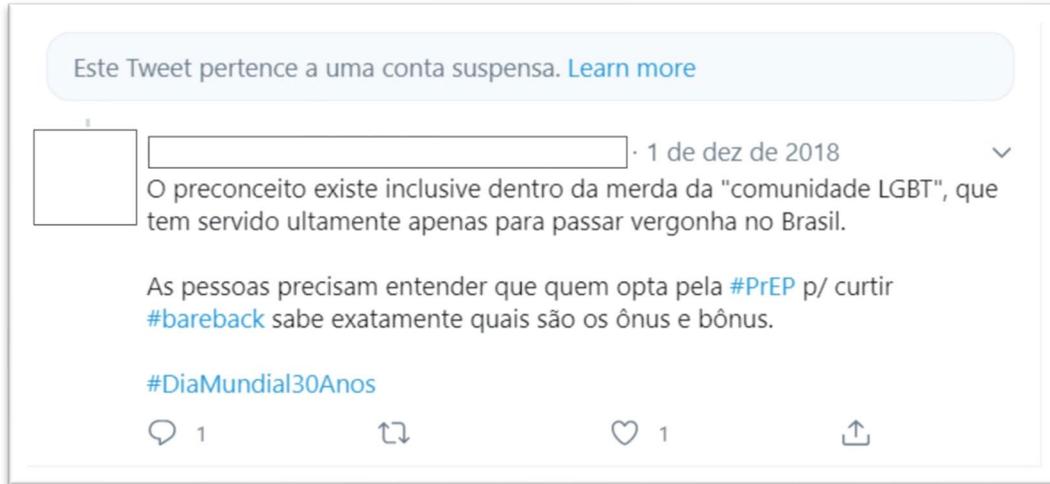
The truth that seems more crystallized, prevalent, and reiterated is that we must avoid the risks of these infections by obeying the prescription of compulsory condom use in all sexual intercourse<sup>22</sup>. There is an intensification in power relations around these meanings. Teach the individual to have “sex without a cover” and if any sti appears, he resorts to “treatment”, “without paranoia, without despair, without outbreak, without prejudice” (Fig. 4) is something valued in the conduct of the behavior of the *position of preper subject*, as other truths are made available, from which it is possible to rethink the ways of having sex.

Thus, it is possible to perceive that, in the *bareback curriculum*, meanings, knowledge, truths, and values that contribute to subjectivation processes are incorporated and produced. Individuals are taught to become subjects endowed with specific qualities, which, in this case, corresponds to the one who, “without paranoia, without despair, without outbreak, without prejudice” (Fig. 4) of sti in sexual intercourse without a condom, uses PrEP. Therefore, power relations penetrate and control daily pleasure, establishing disputes that are in operation daily, demanding specific types of subjects, and regulating their most intimate pleasures.

There seems to be, in the *bareback curriculum*, a recognition of the conflicts that can occur in the negotiation of the meanings disseminated about PrEP when prophylaxis is used in *barebacker* sex. Thus, this curriculum does not operate only by producing meanings about ISTs, minimizing their effects as we have just shown. It is also disseminated that there are “the burdens and rewards” (Fig. 5) in deciding to use PrEP and have *bareback* sex.

<sup>22</sup>One of the last campaigns of the federal government invests exactly in provoking the fear of acquiring a sti and thus conducting juvenile behavior: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2019/10/governo-aposta-em-medo-e-repulsao-de-efeitos-de-dst-em-campanha-para-estimular-camisinha.shtml> Accessed on 1 Feb. 2020

Figura 5  
Screenshot 10<sup>23</sup>



Source: Research archive/Twitter. Post from December 1, 2018.

In this curriculum, a specific mark is given to the *position of preper subject*, saying that he “knows exactly” what are “the burdens and rewards” of opting “for PrEP to enjoy #bareback” (Fig. 5). Having *this knowledge seems to attribute to the position of preper subject* a knowledge of what is implied in his behavior, which may be not only pleasure (the rewards), but also, perhaps we could say, the possible side effects and the probability of contracting sexually transmitted infections (the burdens). There is a double movement here that situates the *position of preper subject* in a place where he has to deal simultaneously with the burdens and rewards of that option.

In the *bareback curriculum*, it operates, therefore, with a certain set of burdens and rewards, locating the *position of preper subject* in a specific place of great dispute between adhering or contesting the behavior that this position of subject demands. Nevertheless, there is also an investment in minimizing the burdens if we consider them the possibility of contracting ISTs. Thus, the discursive strategy of teaching the individual to react in a particular way to ISTs seems to value more the rewards, which can be opted for “for #PrEP to enjoy #bareback” (Fig. 5).

Among the “burdens”, not only is the possibility of contracting ISTs. Both in this last statement highlighted as in the previous one, the word “prejudice” appears, which seems to

<sup>23</sup> Prejudice exists even within the damn "LGBT community", which lately has only served to embarrass us in Brazil.

People must understand that who chooses #PrEP to enjoy #bareback knows exactly what are the burdens and the rewards.

indicate another “burden” to the decision to choose “for #PrEP to enjoy #bareback” (Fig. 5). This prejudice may be related to the way PrEP, as a substitute for condoms, is still understood by many people. It involves, therefore, as already shown, disputes about what is understood as protection and understanding of safer sex. It also concerns the ways of relating sexually prescribed from the use of PrEP and how these modes can be understood. The non-use of condoms “violates obligations to other gay men and, in the opinion of some, obligations to a larger community”<sup>24</sup> (Chambers, 1994, p. 353). There is, therefore, a fear that this truth about the refusal of condom use and its meaning, as cited by Chambers (1994), will be destabilized. The expression of this fear may require the interdiction of practices that abandon or replace the use of condoms and may be interpreted as a “prejudice” in the curriculum investigated.

There is still another meaning that we can attribute to the word “prejudice” triggered in this curriculum. As Gonzalez (2019) points out, “the profound shift in sexual risk and public health that PrEP represents does not come without a moral backlash” (p. 62). The moral backlash to which the author refers is the construction and mobilization of a discursive strategy that associates PrEP users with promiscuity. Among the techniques triggered in this strategy is the dissemination of the expression “Truvada Whore” to designate those people who are using the medicine. “In a free translation, we can say that the expression frames the users of the medicine as having ‘promiscuous’ sexual behaviors. The word ‘whore’ was used purposely to denote a negativity in the expression” (Bastos & Ventura, 2017, p. 1). The uses of this word establish power relations that produce individuals who use the medicine as “irresponsible people who would use the drug to expose themselves to the practice of *barebacking*” (Bastos & Ventura, 2017, p. 1, emphasis added).

Thus, sex without a condom seems to be authorized only for monogamous relationships, activating an old narrative; “that anal sex between men is still, first and foremost, a matter of hiv, stis, and sexual risk” (Gonzalez, 2019, p. 63). The expression thus composes the discontinuities that contribute to the production of truths about what PrEP means, which means being a preper “to enjoy #bareback” (Fig. 5). The expression implied in power mechanisms constitutes a strategy of control and regulation of the behavior of the other. The “negativity” attributed to the *position of preper subject* can, thus, compose the “burdens” of this

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<sup>24</sup>Original in English.

position since the prescribed behavior for this position of subject is the target of interdictions, which, somehow, seems to be something to be faced with possible tensions.

Nevertheless, this burden seems to have already been destabilized, as the expression has been re-signified and appropriated differently (Bastos & Ventura, 2017; Gonzalez, 2019), showing how power relations are unstable. *Truvada Whore* became “a movement for Truvada” (Bastos & Ventura, 2017, p. 3), replacing the negative and pejorative meanings initially attributed. The journalist who coined the expression changed his opinion and openly regretted that his invention had become a stigmatizing label.

In any case, the meanings of Truvada are under construction and in dispute; they are not fixed. Conflicts still persist since sometimes they can acquire a positive meaning, sometimes a negative one, thus seeming to demand the *position of preper subject* a certain relationship with this instability and, mainly, with the negative and pejorative meanings attributed to the use of PrEP. This is because, as we discussed, the moral backlash to using the medicine is directed when it is associated with bareback practices. The explicit burden in the *bareback curriculum*, therefore, may be the demand to deal with these conflicts, which happen in a game with the rewards, associated with the pleasures that using PrEP can offer, through the abandonment of condoms. Therefore, we have another mark attributed in the bareback curriculum to the position of preper subject: the one who “knows exactly” what are “the burdens and rewards” of choosing “PrEP to enjoy #bareback” (Fig. 5).

To this end, the manufacture of the *position of preper subject* in the curriculum investigated emerges as an effect of regimes of truth. According to Marisa Vorraber Costa, also based on Foucault, we consider that: “what we call ‘truth’ is produced in the form of discourses about the things of the world, according to regimes governed by power” (Costa, 2000, p. 76). Until the advent of PrEP, there seemed to be a more prominent regime of truth about the notion of what would count as “protection” and “safer sex.” This notion was more prominently linked to the mandatory use of condoms, which focused on the behavior of many individuals and the production of specific subjectivities. Nonetheless, as Sales (2010) indicates, “subjectivities are never finished, set, and fixed. On the contrary, they are produced in a contingent and provisional way, always the target of intense political, social, and cultural confrontation” (p. 57). Thus, if the subjectivities demanded by a certain narrative that linked “protection” and “safer sex” to the compulsory use of condoms were already subject to certain tensions, these tensions seem more

intense with the emergence of PrEP, which brings another regime of truth that will compete with that already commonly accepted politically, socially, and culturally.

According to Costa (2000), the expression regimes of truth “suggests a conception of ‘truth’ understood as a way of regulating and controlling, and that does not concern only those discourses we consider ‘dominant’ or ‘dominating’” (p. 76). Thus, even if we have a certain discourse considered dominant that prescribes what “safer sex” is and what counts as “protection”, others are in dispute seeking to regulate and control the behavior of individuals. Hence, we can understand that “if truth exists in a relation of power and power operates in connection with truth, then all discourses can be seen functioning as regimes of truth” (Gore, 1994, p. 10). Thus, we understand that a regime of truth is disseminated in the *bareback curriculum* that produces another narrative about “safer sex” and “protection”. A narrative that can be perceived, for example, when it is disseminated that, after starting to use PrEP, the condom is no longer used, when it is stated that it is a “lecture” (Fig. 3) saying that “condoms are safer” (Fig. 4) and also when it is shown that “so far” (Fig. 3) of a certain period of use of the medicine they had no sti, although some “burdens and rewards” are recognized (Fig. 5) of that decision. We understand these statements of the curriculum as instances “of meanings that prevail and have effects of truth” (Costa, 2000, p. 77).

The understanding that truths “are constituted within power correlations and power games” (Costa, 2000, p. 76) focus on the understanding that the truth effects that the set of these statements acquires are in dispute with others already in circulation, in a way socially sanctioned. Therefore, the emergence of this set of statements generates so many tensions in the curriculum investigated, bringing the “burdens and rewards” (Fig. 5) to the position of subject produced by him. This is due to the emergency conditions of this set of statements, with the narrative built on the condom that is in dispute with something we “consider dominant”. As Gonzalez (2019) analyzes, “the condom code instituted at the beginning of the AIDS crisis is still the dominant socio-sexual form for most of us worried about hiv transmission - which is to say almost everyone” (p. 65). In the production of the *position of preper subject*, it is required that the individual has sex without a condom, but with special care regarding protection against hiv, something that is possible from the use of PrEP. There is an important inflection here in which *bareback* and hiv are no longer inevitably united. However, given this character of truth, a narrative that has linked the condom to “protection” and “safer sex”, together with the construction that links homosexuality and hiv, the truth effects of some statements of the

curriculum investigated here are produced with instabilities. Thus, “the epidemiological risk surrounding hiv is almost neutralized by PrEP, but the moral hazard remains an open question, disregarding, for a moment, the predictable cultural hysteria occasioned by the advent of PrEP and the predictable personification of this panic in the genesis of the Truvada whore” (Gonzalez, 2019, p. 65).

Discursive disputes about what is “safer” and what counts as protection established from the manufacture of the *position of preper subject* in the *bareback curriculum* show that condoms are no longer the only option for safer sex between MSM in the present, or that they may never have been.

This assumption caused controversy when the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved PrEP treatment on July 16, 2012. This decision seems “to concede that advocating condom usage was no longer working as prevention policy”<sup>25</sup> (Dean, 2015, p. 228). Even though condoms are highly effective in protecting against hiv, as well as against other sexually transmitted infections, there are failures in use and adhesions to condoms can be intermittent. In this sense, prevention campaigns with condoms alone cannot ensure a zero rate of new hiv infections.

However, PrEP does not yet appear to have strong adhesion. In Brazil, according to infectologist Rico Vasconcelos (2019, [not paginated]), according to “the Ministry of Health’s latest survey, we have just over 13,000 [men] using PrEP for free throughout the country, 77% of whom are gay and bisexual men.” The physician also states, “this is undoubtedly a much smaller number than the ideal, showing that there is still a large portion of this unassisted population, but it is already a beginning”. This can happen because few people know what it is, which may show, among other reasons, that dissemination has been affected by the division of opinions among those who believe that the widespread use of PrEP will lead to an explosion of unprotected sex between gays and MSM. But some find in medicine an additional form of protection. In other words, as highlighted by Dean (2015), while some fear that PrEP will end the commitment to condoms, which has already been increasingly lower than expected, “others celebrate the paradoxical possibilities of risk-reduced *bareback*” (p. 229). These are important

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<sup>25</sup>Original in English.

issues that make the thread that links sex, risk, and health even more tenuous in the *bareback curriculum*.

## Final Considerations

We discussed how the emergence of PrEP is associated with creating new rules, negotiations, and meanings in the conduct of risky sexual intercourse, within the *bareback curriculum*. We also showed how it is interwoven in the production of subjects. By focusing on the *position of preper subject*, we brought statements from the curriculum investigated to discuss specific demands directed to this subject: seeking information and knowledge about pre-exposure prophylaxis, resorting to the treatment of ISTs without paranoia, despair, and prejudice, knowing the burdens and rewards of PrEP. This implies that the *preper barebacker* is the one who has sex without a condom, but is committed to performing a series of practices for the maintenance and promotion of personal health. We consider, therefore, that, amalgamated with the discursive practices of cyberculture that constitute the *bareback curriculum*, PrEP is not just a medicine. Although we refer to it throughout the text because it is also a medicine, our analyses also problematize what the use of this medicine produces under specific conditions. It causes problematizations in the context of sexuality and the production of subjects not previously thought.

About bareback, Dean (2015) helps us to problematize some questions: “Given that hiv now concerns ways of living rather than certain death, how might a biopolitical perspective illuminate the current situation of men who have sex with men?” (p. 227). Although hiv, in contemporary times, does not mean risk of death, carrying the virus alters the individual’s control of their health because hiv requires intensified care with immunity. The possibility of acquiring diseases that can quickly become complicated increases when it is below normal levels. Furthermore, numerous social and psychological outcomes affect virus carriers.

By preventing aids, PrEP expands the vital capacity of the *barebacker*. But not only that, it reconfigures the way *bareback* is seen and makes the long history of the medicalization of homosexuality embark on a significant new phase, as defended by Tim Dean (2015). The author states that medicine seems to license pleasure without limits, crystallizing as a mediating idea about what could be carefree sex among men in the 21st century. This is a mediation of intimacy

that triggers a technology that is not only pharmacological, but also a technology of power, which focuses on the production of specific subject positions, such as the *position of preper subject*, constituting prescriptive practices, molders, and unique organizers of behaviors.

Even bringing discussions on protection negotiations within the specific scope of the *bareback curriculum*, the issues raised here deserve to be expanded. This is because, according to research by the Ministry of Health<sup>26</sup> released in 2015, despite most Brazilians “knowing that condoms are the best form of prevention” of stis and aids, 45% of the sexually active population continues not to use condoms in “casual sexual intercourse”. Combined prevention between PrEP and condoms is an option in coping with the growth of new cases of hiv in the country. This alternative, however, involves disputes of meanings and senses about what individuals do with the prescriptions demanded of them and about those crystallized truths about what protection is. Considering that, in Brazil, PrEP is a free public policy, such disputes and meanings seem to be denser, especially concerning the expansion of access to PrEP, in relation to which the country still faces some challenges. Not everyone has access to medicine, which means that the characteristics conferred to the *position of preper subject* are perhaps available to a restricted privileged group, which can calculate and negotiate in a broader way the ways to fulfill their desires and live their sexualities.

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<sup>26</sup>For more details see: <https://cutt.ly/lx2WOTL> Accessed on 29 Mar. 2021

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### ***Corresponding author:***

*Oliveira, Danilo Araujo de - Universidade Federal do Maranhão – UFMA, Avenida José Anselmo, 2008 - Codó, MA, 65400-000.*