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Queer Affect and Protease Community

While the introduction of more effective HIV treatment combinations in the late 1990s was the source of much enthusiasm and hype, the lived experience of treatment was more ambiguous. Achieving viral suppression involved the adoption of demanding regimes, often associated with a host of noxious physical effects. The emotional investment in treatment meant that its difficulties and failures commonly materialized as a matter of personal failure, while patients were sometimes encouraged to ignore what was happening to their bodies for the greater good of treatment compliance. The “protease moment” thus produced an unexpected privatization of HIV experience. In this paper I consider the mobilization of queer affect in a specific intervention, “The Wheel of Misfortune”, in terms of how it countered these effects. I argue that camp humour provided a mechanism through which participants could bring their less-than-ideal experiences of treatment into articulation with the idealized narratives of medical compliance, making a sort of counterpublic out of bodies on treatment. The analysis focuses on enactments of queer community, highlighting the operation of specific affects in the creation of biosociabilities.