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MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF HEALTH AND EDUCATION

**Commentary on *Positive Hell* - a film by
Andi Reiss and Joan Shenton**

Kevin Corbett

18th APRIL 2016

Background

The film *Positive Hell* is a 30-minute exploration of five Spanish AIDS patients and their rationale for rejecting mainstream antiretroviral therapy. This film was initially selected for public screening by the organisers of the London Independent Film Festival (LIFF), but was then “pulled” from the schedule by LIFF Director (Erich Schulz).

The LIFF Director stated that four HIV/AIDS charities urged LIFF not to screen *Positive Hell*, and warned of protests to LIFF, their screening venue and their sponsors, if LIFF did not comply. LIFF also received over twenty protest letters, including one from a university LGBT society. The selection committee then decided to back track on their previous decision to screen *Positive Hell*.

Positive Hell was subsequently screened at an alternative venue before an audience of approximately 50 people at the Soho Screening Rooms, 14 D'Arblay Street, London W1, on Sunday 17th April 2016.

17th April Screening and the Q&A Panel

This film *Positive Hell*, directed by award winning film maker Andi Reiss, is the work of the British Medical Association award-winning journalist, Joan Shenton, a noted UK “AIDS dissenter”, who together with a group of renowned scientists, challenges the infectious hypothesis for HIV/AIDS, despite decades of evidence on research and HIV testing confirmed by the AIDS scientific mainstream.

I was asked to join the Q&A Panel, which took place after the 17th April screening, because of articles I had previously published in the London-based *Continuum* journal. Other members of the panel included the film maker, Joan Shenton, the director Andi Reiss as well as two of the film's protagonists, all of whom reject mainstream HIV treatment, Dr Manuel Garrido (physician) and Manoel Penin.

The Q&A Panel was filmed by London Live (the Evening Standard owned TV channel) and a news item was shown on the London Live News programme 18th April 6pm. Joan Shenton and Andi Rees also organised a short film of the proceedings. (See Links to both of these clips below).

I viewed the issues raised by the Q&A Panel as a social scientist and a health professional. Firstly, as a social scientist it was important to place this event in its broader context of historical debates about the uncertainties in science and technology, whilst noting the interaction of various mainstream and alternative theories, but all the while maintaining a healthy scepticism about these debates. Secondly, as a health professional, my intent was to illustrate the fact that, just like every other field of healthcare practice, whatever the mainstream 'evidence base' for HIV therapies, and its 'overwhelming nature', clinicians are charged with enabling the public to self-determine whether they want to accept or reject evidence based therapies. This is a fundamental right of the patient and it is also a hallmark of the professional licensure for the healthcare professional, or should be, as, leaving aside the issue over those 'lacking' mental capacity, licensure is not about coercing medication compliance.

The five protagonists in Joan Shenton's film all reject orthodox antiretroviral HIV therapies whilst, simultaneously, directly contesting and challenging the underlying model by which those therapies were created (what dissenters call the 'HIV/AIDS' model). This double rejection troubles the mainstream which has been set since the 1980s on eradicating HIV as a sexually transmitted disease. It explains why this whole phenomenon of what is erroneously called 'AIDS dissidence' (c.f. a political categorisation) is perceived by mainstream health authorities and their associated agencies/charities as a 'dangerous' discourse. This ensured that the film was proscribed and subsequently 'no-platformed' by LIFF. However, like it or not, this phenomenon of public challenge to medical science and technology is emerging across many fields in healthcare practice e.g. vaccination, psychiatry, diabetes etc.; wherever one looks one sees a similar phenomenon in the public arena where the uncertainties of medical science and technology are fleshed out for all to see by critical groups of patients, activists and non-mainstream scientists.

As a health professional, I believe in dialogue, and not coercion, and that those who are labelled as 'AIDS dissidents' - or more perniciously 'HIV denialists' - (often for discursive reasons more associated with trying to delegitimise their claims) - have as much right as anyone else to voice their acceptance and / or rejection of 'evidence-based' interventions, and indeed, such decision-making, in and of itself, also constitutes an alternative form of narrative evidence, one which 'talks back' and critiques the evidence manufactured by the mainstream. If today's health professionals are unable to ethically accommodate such challenges, then that's a sad measure of where we are in the politics of healthcare, because we were taught to approach the public in a dialogical, rather than a coercive manner; but something seems to have gone awry in practice, perhaps due to our collective perception of the overwhelming legitimacy of the 'evidence based ideology' and its application (or possibly 'imposition'?) systemically within the healthcare professions. But that's another story or perhaps another film?

Please see listed below a collection of sources relating to the Q&A Panel, to which I was invited to participate after the film had been screened. This invitation followed a recognition by Joan Shenton of my work on user involvement in HIV/AIDS, especially in respect of ensuring that patients' voices are heard, even when what they are saying is not something that the health authorities wish to hear i.e. rejection of the 'medical model' and its associated drug therapies.

Below is a selection of links to the screening of the film *Positive Hell* and the subsequent Q&A panel on Sunday 17th April 2016 at the Soho Screening Rooms, London W1:

LONDON

Joan Shenton interviewed on London Live, April 15th 2016:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3kH2kjuW6Q&=

London Live TV [18/04/2016] (after clicking on the link below please wait a few seconds until the advertisements have finished):

<http://www.londonlive.co.uk/news/2016-04-19/screening-of-positive-hell>

Joan Shenton's record of the 17/04/2016 screening – a short clip that was taken of the screening and the Q&A afterwards:

ojr55@hotmail.com
sent you some files

[Download](#)

Spiked online

<http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/positive-hell-silencing-the-hiv-heretics/18243#.VxaXNjGtEpk>

Press Dispensary

<https://pressdispensary.co.uk/releases/c994040/Banned-HIV-AIDS-film-Positive-Hell-screened-to-full-house-with-no-protests.html>

GLOBAL

New York City, New York, U.S.A.

Celia Farber's 'Truth Barrier' website:

<http://truthbarrier.com/2016/04/18/watch-positive-hell-the-film-banned-by-the-london-not-so-independent-film-festival/>

Liberty Beacon website

<http://www.thelibertybeacon.com/watch-positive-hell-the-film-banned-by-the-london-not-so-independent-film-festival/>

Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Alberta Reappraising AIDS Society

<http://www.aras.ab.ca/> [click on latest news]

OTHER RELEVANT SOURCES:

See also: the original film 'POSITIVE HELL' (c. 30 mins long)

<http://www.positivehell.com/>

See also: interview with Joan Shenton by U.S investigative journalist Liam Scheff [6 minutes]:

<http://liamscheff.com/2014/07/joan-shenton-positive-hell-the-seven-minute-interview/>

See also: the precursor film 'Positively False':

<https://vimeo.com/118469350>

PUBLIC HEALTH ENGLAND:

'HIV in the UK' [Public Health England]

https://www.gov.uk/government/.../HIV_in_the_UK_2015_report.pdf

'HIV: surveillance, data and management' [Public Health England]

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hiv-surveillance-data-and-management>

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