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p. 41 - diseases in potential recruits

America's
Worst-Kept Secret

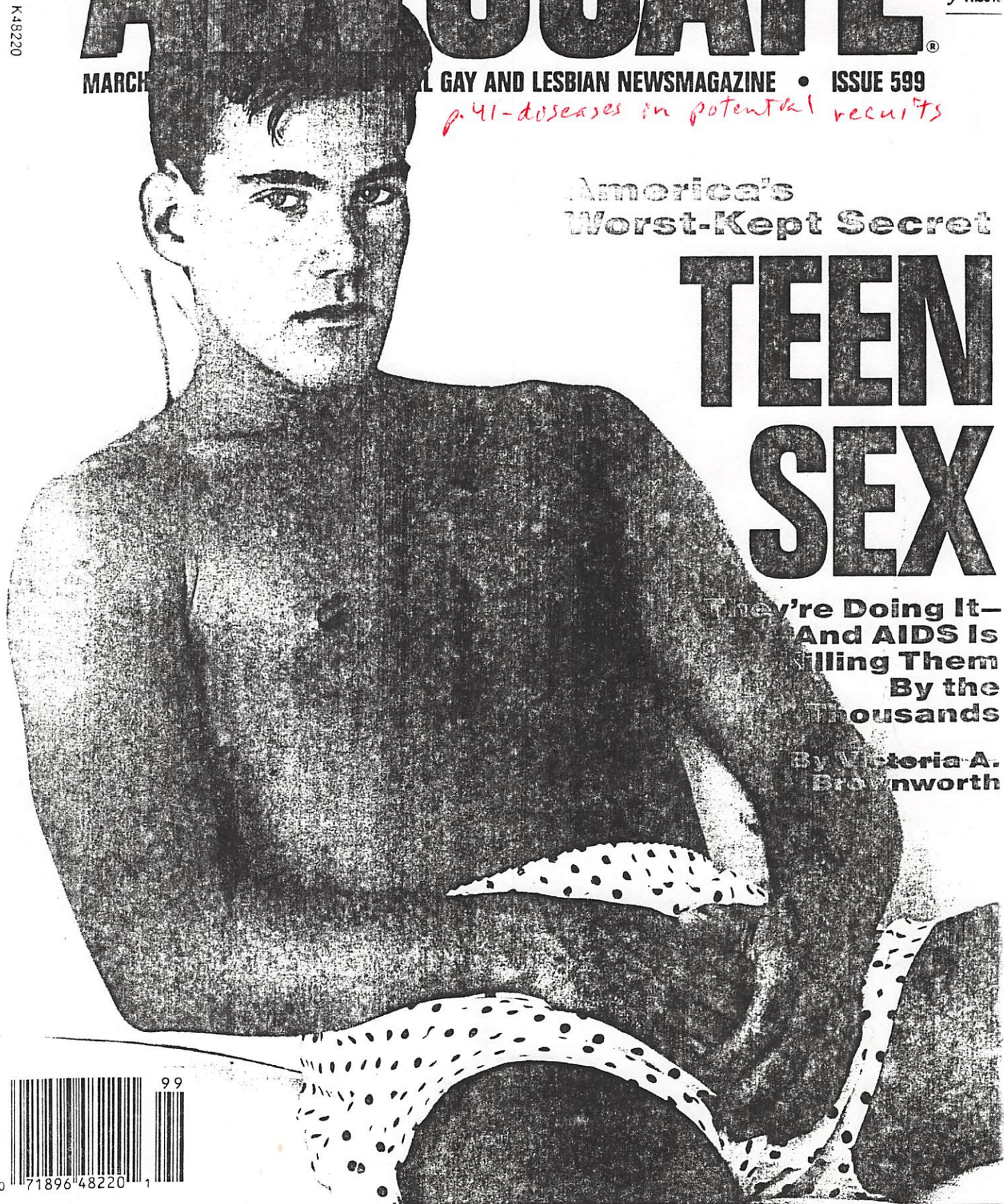
TEEN SEX

They're Doing It—
And AIDS Is
Killing Them
By the
Thousands

By Victoria A.
Brownworth



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positive for HIV.

In November the CDC reported that the highest number of new cases of AIDS in the nation is among men and women between the ages of 20 and 29. Surgeon General Antonia Novello says she finds this trend "extremely alarming. What we are seeing is that more than 20% of our AIDS cases today are among young men and women in their 20s. There is no question that those cases were contracted during adolescence."

"Not all of us knew about AIDS when we were in high school," says Tyrell, a 16-year-old gay youth living in Philadelphia. "I have a lot of friends that are 20, 22, that have AIDS now. They got it in high school. But they didn't show the signs until later."

GAY MALE YOUTH HIT HARDEST

Experts say that more than half of the adolescents with AIDS are young gay and bisexual males. Dr. James Mason, assistant secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) and director of the Public Health Service, reports, "Gay males between the ages of 15 and 19 are showing a marked increase in the disease."

Carmen Vázquez, coordinator of lesbian and gay health services in the San Francisco Department of Health, concurs. Vázquez says a study conducted in San Francisco in 1991 among gay males under 21 found that 12% were HIV-positive. "We also found a big increase in hepatitis B," says Vázquez. "Over 26% of the boys in the study had it. So this means we are not reaching a certain population with our education efforts. We are seeing an overall decline in new AIDS cases among gay adults, but

HIV Transmission Routes in Adolescents Aged 13-21 in the United States

Homosexual/bisexual males	51%
Transfusion recipients	22%
Male homosexual intravenous drug users	8%
Heterosexuals	8%
Intravenous drug users	6%
Other	5%

These statistics are taken from the study "AIDS Among Adolescents," published in the October 1990 issue of the *American Journal of Diseases of Children*.



Carmen Vázquez, health-services coordinator with the San Francisco health department "We are not reaching adolescents with our education efforts."

adolescents are not getting the same messages."

Brad Brusavich, coordinator of the youth AIDS education project at the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center (GLCSC), argues that mistreatment and neglect of young people place them at greater risk of infection. "We could be stopping a lot of adolescent AIDS simply by treating our youth better," Brusavich says. "Many of the kids who come through our center are runaways, throwaways, kids who have had some kind of terrible falling-out with their parents. Once a kid is living on the street, anything can happen—prostitution, drugs, even casual sex with people they feel safe with [can put them at risk]. All of this contributes to the epidemic. About 25% of the clients we see are HIV-positive"

"These are vulnerable kids," adds Gabe Kruks, director of public policy and planning for GLCSC. "If you leave home because you've been kicked out for being gay or because you can't cope with the homophobia of your surroundings and you go to a totally different city, you are alone, isolated, on the streets, and very, very vulnerable." Kruks is harsh about the facts of life for kids on the street. "These kids are

at the highest risk for HIV and for spreading HIV," Kruks says. "Gay boys and straight girls who are having sex for money, shelter, love—they are at risk. And our community, the gay and lesbian community—and I particularly fault gay men here—has done nothing to try and help our youth. Gay men view these boys as recreational toys to be used. I have heard many stories of HIV-positive men having unprotected sex with boys. They don't think it matters. If there is a single reason why so little is being done in this country about adolescent AIDS, it is that as a nation we are terribly afraid of the sexuality of our teens. These kids, no matter how they identify, gay or straight, need more than condoms and instructions on how to use them. They need someone to talk to, a support network, a place where they can feel safe and secure and where their confidentiality and personal histories are going to be protected and respected."

William Cannon, who is the program coordinator for the Adolescent AIDS Program at the Montefiore Medical Center, believes that many teens with HIV are angry at adults who blame them for their disease. "Most of the teens we see here are gay young men," Cannon says. "Some of them

If new gay recruits do not have these diseases when they enter the military, there is a high probability that they will become infected soon after!
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