To the Editor

July 1, 1999

Porn Between Two Lovers

David Kirby's article neglected to mention that porn actors work for a paycheck, engaging in sex as directed by third parties, not for their own personal pleasure ("LA Confidential," April 1999). These sexual activities carry a significant risk of transmission if one or more partners has HIV. Getting tested for HIV and other STDs is not a preventive measure. Its only value is to enable someone who is infected to get treated. Prevention requires safer-sex practices, including the use of condoms, latex dams, gloves and non-penetrative acts.

Since performing in pornography is legal in this country, the workers should be protected by occupational safety and health regulations no less than those in a mine, factory or any other work site that has occupational health hazards. And, rather than demand high-risk films to conform with their fantasies, viewers should boycott films that put actors' lives at risk.

Priscilla Alexander
North American Task Force on Prostitution
New York City

Thanks for connecting me in print to Tricia Devereaux. I enjoyed the photo of her with her Samoyed. Is it possible that there's another heterosexual female besides me in the Midwest with HIV and a Samoyed? By all appearances, it is true.

Anne Thom
Via the Internet

Make Me Wanna Scout!

As HIV education coordinator for the Girl Scouts of Broward County, New York, I was disturbed by the statement in Gazette that there is a "lack of HIV education among troop leaders" ("No Brownie Points," March 1999). Since 1993 we've had a pioneering program in which senior Girl Scouts provide HIV education. Anyone interested in learning more about it can contact me at JudiBackof@aol.com.

Judi Backof
Coral Springs, Florida

Hard to Resist

The What This Means on resistance testing ("Not My Type," February 1999) included mistakes, omissions and bias. The statement "no test has FDA approval and insurance reimbursement is difficult" suggests that approval is necessary for reimbursement. Genotyping will likely never be FDA-approved because the FDA doesn't govern the lab industry. Further, our experience with reimbursement has been outstanding.

POZ appeared to highlight the pros of the Virco assay and the supposed deficiencies of the Specialty assay as if giving a "buyer beware" warning. Specialty was the first lab to offer genotyping. The comment that "the marked differences between the two labs probably reflect the lack of standardized methodology" was misleading. The methodologies for genotyping are almost identical. It is the interpretation that differs. Our analysis reflects the consensus statement from the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and our own consultants.

Finally, *POZ* did not disclose that Dr. John Mellors, the source of the piece, is a paid consultant for Virco/ LabCorp. I agree with him about the need to eventually standardize interpretations if possible. Meantime, differences will be scrutinized. So for now, no one test or interpretation tells the complete story.

Dan R. Angress
Vice President Marketing Specialty Labs
Via the Internet

POZ *responds:* *Resistance tests that are in a kit format and shipped across state lines require FDA approval; "home brew assays" performed by commercial labs such as Specialty do not at present—but may soon be regulated under new regulations. Reimbursement varies by insurance company, although state Medicaid programs generally do not reimburse.*

There were significant differences in the kit results, related not only to the labs' differing methods of interpretation but also to each test's ability to detect mutations. Studies have clearly shown that genotypic test results vary from lab to lab even when the same methods are used. These discrepancies are likely the results of nonstandardized procedures.

Dr. Mellors serves as an adviser for several companies that do HIV research, including Virco. That should have been noted.

Truth or Bare?

The bareback articles left the impression that the desire by some positive men to infect others is widespread (February 1999). This is not the case. The misleading information you presented only arms the religious right with yet more ammunition to rant and rave about how people with HIV are a danger to the general public. Can't you visualize them—blood vessels in their necks almost bursting, hands clasping the pulpit, as they wave *POZ* in the faces of terrified parishioners as

steadfast proof of the abominable behavior?

Why would any positive man in his right mind want to willingly infect another? The pain I've experienced in the last 10 years is something I would never wish on even my worst enemy.

David Weiss
Houston

I chose to subscribe to *POZ* because of the bareback articles. There was a time when I would have been terribly upset with anyone who barebacked. But I have since shared a beautiful, no-restrictions relationship with a wonderful man. I would not consider letting latex come between us. Do I seek to become infected? Absolutely not. However, if this relationship results in my becoming positive, will I be angry or upset? No.

Robert George
Dania, Florida

Any HIV negative man contemplating the acquisition of the romantically alluring viral gift of the spirit ought first to treat himself to a big swig of liquid Norvir, to appreciate its striking flavor and subsequent digestive enlivenment, and then tell his family that he is infected, to see how the good news strikes them, before making his final decision.

Michael Willis
Via the Internet

POZ's bareback articles were objective and insightful, and they balanced the tired justification and shortsighted rhetoric of Andrew Sullivan and Michelangelo Signorile. As an HIV educator who works with runaway youth, I appreciate the fact of risk being brought to the table with no judgment. Based on some of your information, I am revamping aspects of our outreach efforts. Thank you for your fearlessness. *POZ* is on the ground putting out the fires, while Sullivan and Signorile sit in their ivory towers watching the world go up in flames.

Darrell Strange
Austin, Texas

There are far better ways than barebacking to achieve a meaningful bond with another man, though many of us seem unwilling or unable to commit the time and effort that go into building intimate relationships. Some may think that receiving the sperm of 20 anonymous partners at a barebacking party establishes a "bond" between them, but that seems to me like a very naive idea of bonding.

It is not surprising that many people, unable to have the real thing, settle for pseudo solutions to their longings. Barebacking is one such solution. It is not the real thing. It's only a fantasy. And a

deadly one at that.

Vicente Garcia-Delgado
New York City

POZ has damaged HIV prevention efforts. If educated people intentionally put themselves at risk for HIV, then publicize and eroticize their behaviors, what credibility does the prevention community have when we advocate for better programs and more funding? If people don't care whether they expose themselves to a deadly virus, will anyone else care when they contract it? It is these questions that *POZ* will need to answer in the future.

Elizabeth Deal
Via the Internet

OK, that's it. I've had it. Sit your infected butts down and listen up. As someone who has miraculously maintained a 20 year or so HIV infection and as a member of a speakers bureau, I feel pretty damn stupid, angry and hurt as I pour my heart out to schoolchildren, warning of the dangers of AIDS, while knowing that the brief pleasures derived from barebacking lunacy are proliferating, in part, due to glamorization of the act.

Showing a gaunt guy on the cover who is sick and tired would have been more effective prevention, and more truthful.

Dano Bell
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Numb's the Word

I'm an HIV positive inmate who suffers from severe neuropathy caused (I'm told) by meds. The more I take, the worse the problem seems to get. I read "Numb and Number" (January 1999) with intense interest. In the sidebar, the anticonvulsant Neurontin was listed. After I made a special request for the treatment, the doctor started me off with a low dose, and two days later I started to feel some relief. Then they increased the dose, and the pain has virtually disappeared! Your up-to-date reports have made a world of difference for me. POZ is a godsend.

John Michael DiNunzio
Carl Robinson Correctional Institute
Enfield, Connecticut

Corrections: *In the May 1999 Gazette,* POZ *incorrectly reported about the safer-sex PSA policy of San Francisco's Bay Area Reporter ("Up Close & Personal"). While the BAR does run such PSAs, it refuses to run PSAs specifically from Aggressive AIDS Prevention for various reasons.*

On the back page of the same issue ("In Memoriam"), POZ *incorrectly stated AIDS as the cause of death for all of those listed. In fact, two— Jonathan Mann and Mary Lou Clements-Mann—perished in last summer's Swissair Flight 111 crash.*

POZ *regrets the errors.*

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