

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

## Spectrum

### Only six fluids and ignorance cause AIDS

By Victoria Rosner

College students think about sex a lot, even if only to bemoan its absence in their lives. Yet very few students give much thought to one important sexual issue: AIDS.

AIDS is the leading killer of men and women ages 25 to 30. Since the virus can take up to seven years to manifest itself, 25-to-30-year-olds are being infected right now, in college, when many people first experiment with promiscuity. In fact, a recent study conducted by the American College Health Association projected that two students per thousand are already testing positive for HIV, the virus believed to cause AIDS.

Of course, this doesn't have to drive us all into enforced celibacy. Everyone knows by now that wearing a condom helps to prevent infection. Condom vending machines have become commonplace at many universities, and even the Surgeon General loves rubbers. Safe sex and AIDS awareness advertising is now widely accepted and even endorsed. Nevertheless, a March '89 readership survey conducted by *Consumer Reports* found that only 13 percent of the respondents had refused to have sex without a condom. While this figure may sound unbelievable, I think it accurately reflects the situation at Columbia.

"I totally knew it was dangerous, and that made me uptight. But we were so hot and heavy into it that we couldn't deal with reality," recalled one Columbia College senior. In spite of the flood of educational material gushing from campus mailboxes, bulletin boards, and the AIDS Peer Educators, AIDS is still not a reality for many students.

There are several explanations for this lack of attention. Although news of the epidemic's spread leaps out of newspapers daily, many students do not personally know anyone with AIDS. As a result of the lag time between exposure and seroconversion, men in their college years (ages 20-24) make up only four percent of the national total of AIDS

20-24) make up only four percent of the national total of AIDS cases. I certainly don't recommend it as a positive growth experience, but watching someone you love sicken and die of AIDS conveys a graphic message: you can get it, too.

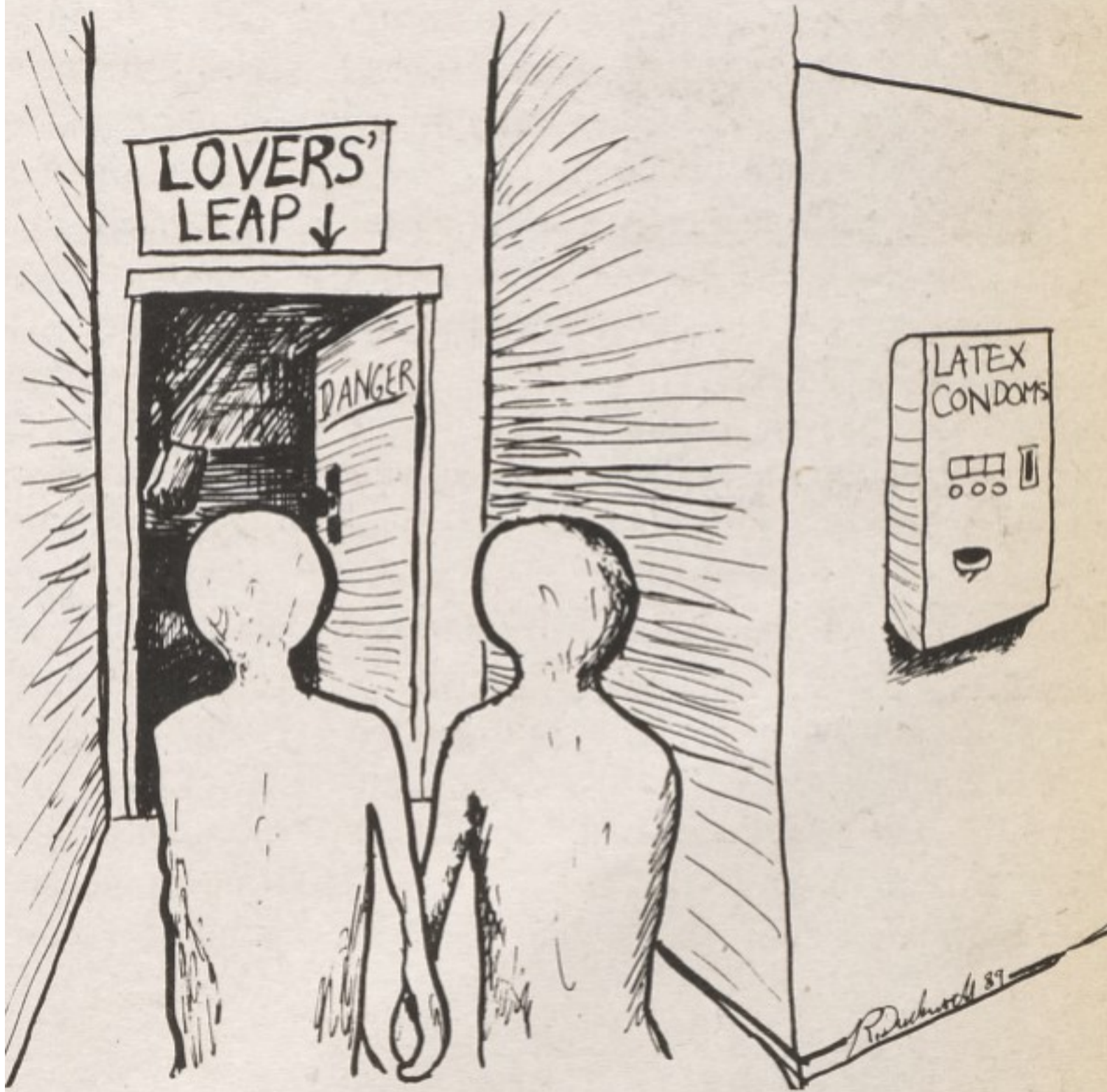
Many people avoid confronting AIDS by using the old myth of the "risk group" to reassure themselves. When AIDS was first noticed in the United States, it was popularly (and mistakenly) believed that IV drug users (or their sexual partners), hemophiliacs and homosexuals were the only groups who were contracting the disease. A lot of people were hurt, harassed, and discriminated against because of this misconception. No one talks about "risk groups" anymore. "Risk behaviors" are the important factors in determining the likelihood of infection. It's not who you are that counts. It's what you're doing, or what the person with whom you're doing it has been doing.

So this is AIDS by substitution. You can get it if you don't shoot up with dirty needles; you can get it if you don't engage in anal intercourse. In New York City, 22 percent of the 2,691 reported cases of infected women contracted AIDS from having sex with men at risk. Or what about having sex with a woman who had sex with a man who was at risk? A campus environment leads to some quasi-incestuous partner-swapping. Some late night, try and figure out how many links it would take to promiscuously connect everyone at Columbia.

College students believe in their inalienable right to let loose. They don't believe in AIDS, but neither do they believe in drunk driving or cocaine heart attacks. They think they're immortal, and they're almost right. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, they get lucky and survive the bad acid and the midnight joyride. But AIDS is different. There's no luck involved. If you get it, you die.

There's been more than enough paranoia, fear and hatred generated by fear of infection. For the record, six and only six body fluids can transmit the AIDS virus: blood, semen, pre-cum, menstrual fluids, breast milk and vaginal secretions. Wearing a condom or a dental dam is a pretty good safeguard, if worn throughout sexual activity. So why doesn't everyone do it? It's an important question, because students are not integrating AIDS awareness and education into their daily lives, and in 10 years that information gap could prove fatal.

**Victoria Rosner is a Columbia College senior.**



Spectator/Rob Duckworth