

Male condom advertising in United States magazines and on the World Wide Web from 1997-2007: Implications for media literacy and health literacy

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Submitted August 27, 2007; Revised and Accepted June 11, 2008

Abstract

Advertising comprises a key component of media. Condoms are one of the most discussed products of the late 20th and early 21st century. This research was designed to review condom advertising techniques used in the late 20th and early 21st Century, both in print and on the World Wide Web. United States magazines from 1997-2007 were reviewed. Websites from companies around the world were also examined. Condoms advertised include Trojan, Durex, LifeStyles, Kimono and Pronto. Typical ads showed images of the product, the packaging and/or people. Advertising approaches varied, depending on the target audience, the brand and/or where the ad appeared. Generally, specific references to pregnancy prevention or disease prevention/safe sex were avoided. This review of advertising would be useful to high school health teachers and to health educators who teach sexuality, disease prevention or consumer health at the college/university level. Critiquing these ads in an educational setting would also be helpful in enhancing media literacy and health literacy.

Key words: *Condoms, Advertising, Health Education, Media Literacy, Health Literacy*

Introduction

Awareness of mass media is important for health educators.¹ One major component of mass media is advertising,^{2,3} which is one of the “corporate practices having a significant impact on the health of people in the United States.”^{4(p298)} In general, “the role of journalism, entertainment, and advertising in transmitting public health messages deserves more scholarly attention.”^{5(p197)}

Advertising is defined as “paid non-personal communication from an identified sponsor using mass media to persuade or influence an audience.”^{6(p13)} The focus of this research is condom ads appearing in “consumer magazines ... directed at consumers who buy products for their own consumption”^{6(p318)} as opposed to magazines intended for physicians or pharmacists, known as “professional magazines”.^{6(p318)}

Brodie⁷ reports that ads promoting condom brands were printed in newspapers throughout the 19th century: “Advertisements for condoms and diaphragms ... were especially common in the sensational tabloids specializing in sports, theatrical news, murders, police reports, and courtroom dramas.”^(p191) For example, ads appeared “in New York City’s Sporting Times and Theatrical News ... [and in] American Agriculturist.”^{7(p191)} The New York Times printed a condom advertisement in 1861, using a euphemism of the time, for “Dr. POWERS’ French Preventive, the greatest invention of the age. Those who have used them are never without them.”^{8(p6);see also 9}

Zimet and Goodman¹⁰ stated that the first condom ads in magazines written for pharmacists appeared in 1927. Pilpel and Zavin¹¹ reported in 1952 that contraceptive advertisements regularly appeared in journals intended for physicians and pharmacists around that time.

Regarding early condom advertising on the World Wide Web, in 1995 the makers of Trojan and the makers of Marlboro cigarettes cooperated in making an infomercial that was available on the World Wide Web. In this infomercial, the Marlboro man was shown engaging in sex with several women before smoking a Marlboro. Another venture between the two companies was a magazine known as *Poke n’ Smoke*.¹²

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research was to examine trends in condom advertising in United States magazines from the late 20th century into the early 21st century and advertising of condoms on the World Wide Web. These ads can be critiqued as a way to enhance health literacy and media literacy. The ads can be useful in terms of health literacy as they are a source of information about condoms and sexually transmitted diseases. They can be useful in terms of media literacy as they can make students aware of how media messages about condoms are presented in marketing the product.

This study was needed as it provided insight into an important business and marketing practice⁴ and it reviewed an area of communication that is in need of further attention.⁵ Health educators at the high school and college level interested in advertising, media literacy, sexuality education and AIDS/HIV education may find this analysis of condom ads beneficial. The ads would also be useful educational materials in community settings with adults.¹³ Depending on the objectives of the educator and the ad the educator chose to discuss, the benefits could vary, as different educators could use the ads in different ways. The ads, however, would be useful in discussions related to sexuality, contraception, and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Because of the ubiquity of advertising^{2,7} and people’s subsequent familiarity with advertising¹³, using advertisements is a popular educational technique. This description of condom advertisements may prove useful because the approaches used in promoting condoms are likely less familiar to health educators.

Methods

Ads were located through a review of magazines from 1997-2007 and through a review of publications from or about the condom/contraceptive industry. Condom ads from various companies were analyzed. Ads that appeared in different magazines were discussed and cited only once.

Condom ads on the World Wide Web were located by inspection of websites of condom manufacturers. References to condom ads on the World Wide Web reported in *Advertising Age* were also used as a guide.

Purposive sampling was used for this analysis. In their explanation of sampling techniques used in

media research, Riffe, Lacy and Fico¹⁴ explained that this is used “because of the nature of the research project.”^(p.86) Zimet and Goodman¹⁰ pointed out that condom ads have been relatively rare historically: after a brief increase in condom ads in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, the frequency of condom advertising declined for a time. They indicated this change was due to HIV/AIDS. In spite of this change, there are still “moral, legal, and ethical struggles inherent in dealing with just how, when, where, to whom (and if) the message of safe sex and protection should be projected.”⁹ In this environment, electronic media are conspicuously absent when it comes to condom advertising; ads are largely limited to certain magazines.⁹ Therefore, the nature of this project necessitated the use of purposive sampling. This technique, also known as “relevance sampling ... aims at selecting all textual units that contribute to answering given research questions.”^{15(p119)} Because of the relative rarity of condom ads and in an effort to include ads designed for different demographic groups, purposive sampling was used. Simes and Berg¹⁶ used purposive sampling in their analysis of advertisements of menstruation-related products.

Results

Ads described a variety of features of condoms, such as preventing disease, contraception, increased sensitivity, pleasure, and others. Of the 39 condom ads reviewed for this study, 27 did not specify pregnancy prevention or disease prevention/safe sex. For example, ads mentioned risk reduction but didn’t specify the type of risk being reduced or the ad emphasized pleasure, sensitivity, strength or other features or benefits the manufacturer associated with the condom (see Table 1 for a breakdown of the qualities associated with the condom). There were seven ads (4 in magazines and 3 on websites) that depicted people engaging in sexual behavior.

Based primarily on the magazine in which an ad appeared, 23 of the ads were targeted to men (these ads were in magazines such as Sports Illustrated and Maxim). Eight of the ads were targeted to women (these ads were in magazines such as Cosmopolitan and Glamour). Ads on the World Wide Web were not categorized as focusing on males or females. Following is a description of the ads reviewed for this study.

Print condom ads from 1997-2007

Some editions of the 1997 Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue contained an ad for Trojans with this question: “C’mon, all latex condoms are the same, aren’t

they?”^{17(p7)} Images of nine boxes of different types of Trojans were depicted and features of each condom, such as sensitivity, strength and thinness, were emphasized. The claim was made that Trojan was “America’s #1 condom.”^{17(p7)} It was claimed using them “helps reduce the risk”, but the risk of what was not specified. This ad provided a URL, or Internet address, for readers¹⁷ (see Appendix 1 for the URLs that appeared in print ads analyzed for this study. Only sites that were working as of January 2008 are listed).

The November 1998 Glamour contained two condom ads, one for Durex and one for LifeStyles. The Durex ad was one of the ads that depicted people engaging in sexual behavior. This ad read in part “the human body has over 45 miles of nerves. Enjoy the ride. Set yourself free.”^{18(special advertising section)} In a new Durex condom, sensitivity of the condom was promoted and the ad contained the company URL where people could learn how to obtain a free Durex condom.¹⁸

The other condom ad in this Glamour was for Lifestyles X-tra Pleasure condom, which was said to be “how 2 have more fun in bed.”^{19(special advertising section.)} The condom was said to increase sensation and to be “shaped for 2.” A toll-free number that people could call to receive a free sample was provided, as was the website link. In addition, it was claimed “LifeStyles never forgets that good sex adds up to two people with smiles on their faces.”^{19(special advertising section.)}

The June 1999 Maxim contained an ad for Durex Ultra Comfort, also depicting people engaged in sexual behavior. It read in part “during lovemaking, sexual stimuli travel to the brain at 170 miles per hour. Fly first class.”^{20(p107)} It was claimed “now safe sex doesn’t have to feel that way” and that Durex manufactured “the most exciting condoms ever made.”^{20(p107)}

Trojan advertised in the October 1999 Maxim. The ad pictured a woman with a Trojan Shared Sensation wrapper tucked inside her bra. The text read in part “Trojan shared sensation. Why wear anything else?”^{21(p159)} This condom was said to be “a special shape for him. A unique texture for her. So get it on and share the pleasure.” The condom was also said to “reduce the risk”, but the risk of what was not specified.

An ad for Durex High Sensation condoms also appeared in the October 1999 Maxim: it depicted people engaged in intercourse.²² The condom was promoted as increasing endurance: “The energy

created during sexual intercourse is roughly equivalent to climbing two flights of stairs. Get ready to walk up the Empire State Building."^{22(p171)} Enhanced sensation was also said to be a benefit of the condom: "Now safe sex doesn't have to feel that way."^{22(p171)}

The August 2000 Maxim contained an ad for Durex Natural Feeling condoms that pictured a couple engaged in sexual behavior.²³ These condoms were said to allow the user to "feel what you've been missing With an ultra-smooth water-based lubricant, Durex Natural Feeling Condoms are the next best thing to wearing nothing. Love has never felt like this before."^{23(p71)}

A Durex Ultimate Feeling ad appeared in the March 14, 2002 Rolling Stone. Inviting readers to "have the sex you tell your friends you have",^{24(p30)} the ad claimed that using this condom would lead to "pleasure like you've never felt before. For you and for her. Be wild. Be free. Make the love you're supposed to be making".^{24(p30)}

A LifeStyles ad appeared in the June 2002 Maxim. A woman was pictured looking directly into the camera. The text read, "are you thinking what I'm thinking?"^{25(p191)} A man was pictured in the background. The slogan was "LifeStyles. It feels right."^{25(p191)}

The August 2002 Maxim contained an ad implying that sex with a Durex High Sensation condom was better than sex with another brand of condom. Above the caption "sex with an ordinary condom"^{26(p31)} was a picture of a hotel room door with a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door handle. An accompanying picture of a store's dressing room door with a bra draped over the top had the caption "sex with a Durex condom."^{26(p31)} Other claims for the High Sensation condom were that it was "specially designed for sensual performance and superb protection. Enhanced ribs are positioned just right to make her feel incredible. Once you've had sex with a Durex High Sensation condom, you'll wonder what you were having before. There's sex. And then there's Durex."^{26(p31)}

A similar ad, for Durex Extra Sensitive condoms, appeared in the September 2002 Maxim. According to the ad, this condom "lets you feel everything, without worrying about protection. And silky smooth lubrication enhances your experience even more. Once you've had sex with a Durex Extra Sensitive condom, you'll wonder what you were having before."^{27(p203)} The same picture of the hotel room

door described above was shown. The accompanying picture (with the caption "Sex with a Durex condom"), however, was of an airplane lavatory door with the occupied sign visible,^{27(p203)} indicating that a couple inside the lavatory was joining the "Mile High Club".

Two Durex ads appeared in the November 2002 Maxim. The first described a contest stated co-sponsored by Maxim and Durex inviting readers to describe "the craziest place you've ever had sex!"^{28(p78)} Contestants were asked to "submit the most outrageous, risky original place you've had sex with a Durex condom."^{28(p78)} First prize was two tickets to the 2003 Super Bowl. Second prize was a year's supply of Durex condoms; contestants had to have used a Durex condom during the sex act.^{28,29}

The other ad in the November 2002 Maxim, for Durex High Sensation condoms³⁰, had text identical to the text in the August 2002 Maxim.²⁶ The pictures in this ad, however, were of identical beds. The bed pictured with the caption "sex with a Durex condom"^{30(p79)} had a fire extinguisher above it. The other bed did not.³⁰

The 2003 Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue contained a Trojans ad.³¹ It pictured a woman from the chest down wearing a see-through shirt (though entire breasts were not visible) and a bikini bottom. Tucked inside the bikini bottom was a Trojan condom in its wrapper. The text read in part "Trojan latex condoms. What everyone will be wearing this year."^{31(unpaged)} Using Trojans could "help reduce the risk"^{31(unpaged)}, though the risk of what was not specified.

The June 10, 2003 issue of The Advocate contained an ad for LifeStyles, with the claim that the condom allowed users "to get wet and wild without the worry!"^{32(p.19)} The lubrication and the "stretchability"^{32(p.19)} of the condom were stressed as well.

Trojan advertised in the September 30, 2003 The Advocate. Condoms were promoted as the best way to decrease the odds of contracting a sexually transmitted disease and HIV, focusing on features of condoms and the most appropriate uses of particular condoms, pointing out that condoms with spermicides were only useful for contraception, were not appropriate for anal sex and "that condoms with spermicidal lubricants are NOT for more than once-a-day vaginal use"^{33(p33)}.

YM carried two Trojan ads in June 2004, both with the slogan "Bring your own Trojan."^{34(p42), 35(p43)} The

rest of the first ad was all text and provided statistics about both sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancies. Readers were encouraged to consult a health care provider with questions about “potential risks of unsafe sexual practices.”^{34(p42)}

Readers uncomfortable with asking these questions were encouraged to visit the Trojan website for information and to “always carry a Trojan condom for yourself or a friend.”^{34(p42)}

The second condom ad in the June 2004 YM pictured a smiling woman with a Trojan wrapper tucked inside her slacks. The slogan “bring your own Trojan”^{35(p43)} appeared several times: the text read in part “why rely on the guy? Bring your own Trojan, America’s #1 condom, trusted for over 80 years.”^{35(p43)}

The June 2005 Maxim contained a Trojan ad featuring “The Trojan 100.”^{36(pp108-109)} It featured five women (out of a pool of 100) selected by Maxim readers. Each of the five identified her favorite Trojan condom. In addition, Trojan surveyed the original pool of 100 women to determine which Trojan each preferred: 53% chose Her Pleasure condom, followed by Warm Sensations and Magnum condoms with 14% each, Twisted Pleasure with 9% and Trojan-Enz with 6% (with 4% unaccounted for). The condoms were marketed based on their design, lubrication, size and safety.³⁶

A Durex ad for the Warming Pleasure condom appeared in the July 2005 Maxim.³⁷ Scissors were depicted along with a cape containing the Durex label: a dotted line surrounded the cape, which was labeled as “your very own wiener cape.”^{37(p101)} Before the man engaged in intercourse, he was told to “remove his cape and be astounded by the mighty powers of a Durex.”^{37(p101)} The link to a Durex website was given: though there is no nudity, visitors to this site are asked to confirm they are 18 or older.³⁷

The October 10, 2005 Us Weekly contained an ad for Alexa, a male condom “designed from a woman’s perspective.”^{38(p9)} Three versions of Alexa were available: “Ultra Sensitive Condoms, Stimulating Condoms [and] Natural Feel Condoms”.^{38(p9)} Alexas were “thoughtfully available in the feminine care aisle.”^{38(p9)} The ad depicted packaging of the various kinds of Alexa condoms and provided a link.³⁸

Durex had an ad in the January 2006 Maxim for Tingling Pleasure condoms.³⁹ The scissors and dotted line were next to the depiction of a boxer’s championship belt that read “durex champion.”^{39(p22, lowercase in original)} The ad also read in

part “a Durex penis isn’t afraid of a low blow. ... But for goodness sake, unbuckle the belt and lace up one of our finely crafted gloves before entering the ring.”^{39(p22)}

An Alexa ad in the June 2006 Cosmopolitan asked readers to consider “why are men in charge of condoms? What? He touches it first – he thinks he owns it?”^{40(p159)} Alexa was promoted as “the first condom for him to wear but designed to feel better for [women]”^{40(p159)} and was “designed by women to feel better for women”.^{40(p159)} Alexa was said to have “low latex odor, silky lubricants, and a selection of styles and textures for your pleasure.”^{40(p159)}

Trojan repeated its Trojan 100 campaign in 2006, again featuring five women voted on out of a pool of 100. This ad appeared in the June 2006 Maxim.⁴¹ The Trojan 100 again identified their favorite Trojan: 40% chose the Trojan Ultra Thin, 20% chose the Pleasure Pack, 12% chose the Magnum and 9% chose the Vibrating Ring. The additional 19% was unaccounted for. These condoms were promoted on the basis of thinness, stimulation, comfort and pleasure.⁴¹

Durex also advertised in the June 2006 Maxim. One page of this two-page ad was the same as the cape ad that appeared in the July 2005 Maxim, except that this ad featured the Durex Pleasure Pack⁴², not the Warming Pleasure condom.³⁷ The other page portrayed a calendar covering June-September 2006. One featured day was “National Take Your Penis to Work Day”^{42(p124)}; readers were asked “have you ever explained your job to your penis?”^{42(p124)}

The October 2006 Maxim contained another two-page Durex ad, also with one page depicting a calendar.⁴³ This calendar (referred to as a “malendar”^{43(p104)}) featured “sex holidays”^{43(p104)} from October 2006 to January 2007: “Halloweewee” for October, “Erection Day” for November, “Boxing Day” for December and “Horny New Year” for January.^{43(p104)} The other page featured Pleasure Max condoms and the scissors-dotted line theme. In this ad a crown and a king’s robe were depicted: “A Durex penis is King of Bangola. ... If you don’t appear at your partner’s quarters bearing a sheath for your sword, then to the stockades with you Fool!”^{43(p105)}

LifeStyles condoms were advertised (along with Excite Sensual Gel) in the November 2006 Shape.⁴⁴ Readers were told to “go wild with Excite Sensual Gel by the makers of LifeStyles Brand Condoms”.^{44(p115)} The LifeStyles Pleasure Pack,

containing a variety of LifeStyles condom brands, was shown (along with other LifeStyles products).⁴⁴

The November 2006 Maxim had an ad, for Trojan Ultra Thin Condoms, with the slogan “Condom Thinimus Protection Maximus”^{45(p97)}, though protection against what was not specified. The Ultra Thin was said to be Trojan’s “thinnest latex condom ever,”^{45(p97)} allowing the user to “experience the ultimate sensitivity.”^{45(p97)}

The March 2007 Maxim carried an ad for Trojan’s Pleasure Pack which told readers to “impart variety to thy scepter.”^{46(p71)} The website was provided, but no specific claims about any of the condom varieties were given.⁴⁶

Trojan began its Evolve campaign in 2007 with two ads, in Sports Illustrated⁴⁷ and Glamour⁴⁸, among other magazines.⁴⁹ Trojan’s magazine ads and the ads designed for television could also be seen on the World Wide Web.⁴⁹ The magazine ads were similar, but females were the intended audience for one and males the intended audience for the other. The picture was the same in both ads but the caption was different. The picture was of several people and a number of pigs inside a bar. In the ad with men as a target audience, the caption read, “evolve. Be a man. Use a condom every time. Nobody likes a pig.”^{47(p141)} The caption in the ad designed to reach women read, “evolve. Choose the one who uses a condom every time.”^{48(p129)}

Condom ads on the World Wide Web

An ad for Kimono condoms played on poker’s popularity. There were two players (one male and one female) and three observers (all male). No words were spoken: at one point the woman bid an unopened Kimono condom instead of chips. The male player reacted by going all in with his chips, where the commercial ends with the display of these words: “Kimono condoms. When the stakes are high.”⁵⁰

The website for Pronto condoms contained two “light-hearted [advertisements with] “a distinct South African flavour.”⁵¹ One ad featured Manto, a South African woman, who placed the condom on a carrot. The other ad featured Jacob, a South African male, who placed the condom on a penis model. The face of these individuals was not shown. In both ads, sound effects played a role at the time the moment the condom was applied, enhancing the notion of speed.⁵¹ Each ad ended with the slogan “the quickest way to get it on”.⁵¹

An ad in video (available in a Dutch, English and French version) and a different print ad for Zazoo condoms can be found at the company website. The theme of difficult to care for children was used to encourage people to “use condoms”.⁵² The video ad portrayed a child having a temper tantrum in a supermarket as his exasperated, frustrated father looks on. The print ad (featuring the Zazoo label and reading “Use condoms”) showed a father, covered with food, attempting to feed his young child.⁵² The video ad has also been featured on the Salon Magazine website⁵³ and can be found on YouTube.

Early in the 21st century Trojans condoms were promoted to United Kingdom residents through the “Trojan Games”, a take-off of the Olympic Games, in which competitors incorporated the use of Trojans into the competition. These ads are more explicit than the ads on the World Wide Web discussed previously, with the women being partially nude in two of the ads and sexual intercourse being depicted in all three ads (as there is nudity in these ads, the link is not provided). Judo, weightlifting and gymnastics were the sports parodied in these ads.⁵⁴ In 2004 it was reported that the website where the ads appear was among the most popular in the United Kingdom,⁵⁵ and Kirby reported in 2004 that the site was “seen by over 25 million people globally since the site launched in October 2003. In its first month alone, over six million people visited the site.”^{56(p33)}

Discussion

Parpis⁵⁷ reported in 2001 that condom manufacturers and creators of condom advertisements were changing the theme of their ads. There was a shift from a focus on safer sex, possibly frightening consumers, to a focus on enjoyment. One example of this focus on pleasure is the Durex ad telling readers “the human body has over 45 miles of nerves. Enjoy the ride.”^{18(special advertising section.)} A second example is the Durex ad claiming that the condom “lets you feel everything, without worrying about protection. And silky smooth lubrication enhances your experience even more. Once you’ve had sex with a Durex Extra Sensitive condom, you’ll wonder what you were having before.”^{26(p203)}

Mutual pleasure was also emphasized in ads. The LifeStyles ad¹⁹ appearing in Glamour in 1998 is one example of the focus on shared enjoyment, claiming that using LifeStyles was “how 2 have more fun in bed.”^{19(special advertising section.)} This pleasure was to be experienced by both men and women.¹⁹ The 1999 Trojan ad claiming the condom had “a special shape

for him. A unique texture for her. So get it on and share the pleasure”^{21(p159)} is another example of a focus on mutual enjoyment.

Ads encouraging women to be proactive in the purchase of condoms were also seen. Examples are the “Bring Your Own Trojan” campaign^{34,35} and the ad for Elexa, “the first condom for him to wear but designed to feel better for [women]”^{40(p159)}.

A humorous approach was also seen more often, as this was considered the most effective way to reach men in their late teens and early twenties.^{57,58} This change is exemplified by the Durex ads claiming that the condom made the user “King of Bangola”^{43(p.105)} and by the Trojan Evolve campaign.^{47,48} Ads analyzed for this study are much different from the first condom ads appearing in U.S. magazines. Those ads focused on prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, were all text and were not in any way intended to be humorous.^{59,60}

The promotion of condoms in publications primarily intended for gay men has been relatively infrequent since at least the 1980’s.^{9, 61, 62.} Sender⁶² wrote in 2003 that “both Out and the Advocate ... would accept condom ads”^(p. 345), implying that the condom manufacturers were not seeking to advertise in these publications. Though two condom ads were found in the Advocate in 2003 as part of this research (the identical ads appeared in other issues of the Advocate through 2006, though none were found in 2007 issues), the paucity of condoms ads in publications for gay men is worth noting.

Pardun⁶³ suggests that as sex is such a commonly depicted theme in media and that young people are frequently the recipients of these messages, both media executives and the advertising industry should be encouraged to more frequently use advertising to transmit safer sex messages. Executives of condom companies have expressed frustration with the unwillingness of media outlets to accept condom ads, however, as there was still opposition to running these advertisements.⁵⁸ Therefore, it may be it’s not the advertising industry that needs to get the message, but the media owners and executives who are often reluctant to accept these advertisements, as Felman pointed out in 1979.⁶⁴

Reviewing ads of all types has long been advocated as a technique in health education.^{65,66} Analyzing the impact of media is part of the second national health education standard.⁶⁷ Proserpio and Giola suggest that educators need to adapt their teaching styles to the learning styles of “the virtual generation.”^{68(p.70)}

Therefore, showing condom ads found on the World Wide Web, as well as the more traditional showing of ads in magazines, has the potential to be a useful teaching tool for students and can improve media literacy and health literacy.

Before discussing these ads, health teachers need to be certain that discussion of condoms is acceptable in that school for students of that age. Some ads, especially those with nudity, would undoubtedly be unacceptable in many school districts. If ads containing nudity or other things students might find disturbing are permissible and will be used in the classroom, the students should be notified about the content of the ad before it is shown.⁶⁹

Cross-cultural comparisons of condom ads would also be useful. What are the differences between ads designed for residents of different countries? Do the students believe ads designed for United States residents would be acceptable to other cultures? Would ads from other countries be acceptable to United States? Why or why not?

The World Wide Web is especially suitable for this type of comparison. In addition to the possibility of the ads found on the World Wide Web being of more interest to students simply because they are on the World Wide Web,⁶⁸ condom ads in print can be difficult to locate. Even if they are found, many of the magazines in which these ads are likely to be found (such as Maxim or Playboy) are likely to be considered unacceptable for most high school settings. Regarding televised condom commercials, these can be difficult to find as well, at least on United States television channels. Apart from the practical difficulty of knowing exactly when and where a condom advertisement would be shown, television executives in the United States have long been less than enthusiastic about accepting condom advertisements.⁵⁵ Therefore, health educators with an interest in using non-print condom advertisements are likely to find the World Wide Web the most useful source. Condom manufacturer websites and sites such as YouTube are the best sources for these ads. Ads on video discussed here, as well as a number of condom ads not discussed in this article, can be found on YouTube and similar sites.

Condom Advertising and Media Literacy

Health students in high school or college, education majors, and current teachers should be taught to critically analyze ads and other principles of media literacy.^{70,71,72} While appropriate for college courses, some of the ads discussed here would likely be unsuitable for high school students. The following

questions, based upon the work of Berger⁷³, can be used to analyze ads based upon their content.

- How can the images of people or cartoon characters be described? Factors to consider include “facial expressions, poses, hairstyles, age, sex, hair color, ethnicity, education, occupation, relationships (of one to the other), and so on”.^{73[p189]}
- What are the functions of the condom in modern society?
- What’s the theme of the ad? Potential themes include “jealousy, faithlessness [and] passion.”^{73[p189]}
- Does the text of the ad provide information, trigger emotions or both?
- “What sociological, political, economic, or cultural attitudes are indirectly reflected in the advertisement?”^{73[p189]}

See Appendix 2 for a worksheet that could be used to analyze condom advertisements. Themes⁷³ of the ads could be assessed through the use of this media literacy worksheet. Teachers need to use their judgment regarding what ads would be acceptable, taking into account the age of the students and the content of the ad. This worksheet could be used to trigger discussion about the condom ads. These discussions are a more appropriate way to enhance media literacy than reciting facts or telling students what to think.^{70,71}

Condom Advertising and Health Literacy

Discussing these advertisements would also enhance health literacy related to condom use. “Health literacy is of great importance with regard to the proper use of over-the-counter (OTC) contraceptive products.”^{74(p59)} The “Bring Your Own Trojan” campaign^{34,35} could be discussed in terms of responsibility of males and females regarding contraception. Along the same lines, the Elexa campaign, asking questions such as “why are men in charge of condoms? What? He touches it first – he thinks he owns it?”^{40(p159)} could be discussed. Do these campaigns shift responsibility for condom use from the male to the female? Is this appropriate when considering other types of contraception?⁷⁵

The Kimono condom ad could be discussed as well: “Kimono condoms. When the stakes are high.”⁵⁰ What are the health-related stakes of using (or not using) condoms? How do stakes in poker differ from stakes in unsafe sex practices? Other health-related topics discussed could be the uses and benefits of condoms or any data or facts presented in the ads. Again, the age-appropriateness of the ad needs to be considered. In addition, the health messages of

interest to the health educator need to be considered when choosing condom ads.

These are just a few examples of how these advertisements could be discussed in a health education setting. The other ads described here could be critiqued as well, depending on the setting and what is considered appropriate.

Advocating for Additional Condom Advertising

Following Freudenberg’s⁴ recommendation that health educators advocate changes in corporate practices that negatively influence health, health educators could encourage media outlets and companies to be more willing to accept condom ads. In 2007 Fox and CBS refused to accept television ads for the Trojan Evolve campaign. These networks will accept condom advertising if HIV prevention is the focus, but are unwilling to accept the ads if pregnancy prevention is mentioned or could be inferred from the ad, which Fox acknowledged.⁴⁹ Health educators could encourage executives at these networks to change their policies, possibly using the 1987 American Public Health Association policy statement about contraceptive advertising⁷⁶ as a foundation for this advocacy. In 1979 Felman called for more condom advertising in electronic and print media.⁶⁴

Conclusion

This review was designed to provide insight into condom advertising. Health educators are encouraged to discuss these ads, or other condom ads, to improve the media literacy and health literacy of their students. Awareness of the techniques used in condom advertising, such as those described in the article, would serve as a foundation for the implementation of this education.

It is also recommended that health educators advocate additional condom advertising. There is a large difference between the number of television ads for contraceptive products and the number of ads for erectile dysfunction products or ads for sexually transmitted diseases. If ads for erectile dysfunction are accepted and considering the sexual nature of much of television, it is hard to justify the relatively small number of television ads for condoms or other forms of contraception.^{76,77} More to the point, increased condom advertising could increase the usage of condoms. The use of advertising in disseminating the message that condoms are beneficial in reducing the transmission of sexually transmitted infections and in reducing the number of

unintended pregnancies could be especially useful for sexually active adolescents.⁷⁸

An understanding of how and where condoms are advertised can be useful for health educators. This article provides background in the ways condoms are marketed in magazines and on the World Wide Web. It is hoped that health educators can use this information in improving the media literacy and health literacy of their students.

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Table 1 Features or Benefits Specified in Condom Advertisements, 1997-2007

<u>Feature or benefit of condom</u>	<u>Number*</u>
Pleasure	26
None specified	9
Protection (without specifying against what)	9
Safe sex/Disease prevention	8
Sensitivity	6
Lubricated	5
Comfort	4
Larger size	4
Pregnancy prevention	4
Thinness	3
Strength	2
Low latex odor	1
Non-lubricated	1

* N of ads = 39. The number of features or benefits is greater than 39 because ads typically featured more than one condom or mentioned more than one feature or benefit.

Appendix 1. URLs of Websites Mentioned in Print Condom Advertisements

<http://www.trojancondoms.com>¹⁷

www.durex.com¹⁸

www.lifestyles.com¹⁹

www.durexdickorations.com³⁷

www.elexabytrojan.com³⁸

<http://www.trojanevolve.com>^{47,48,}

Appendix 2. Condom Ad Assessment Worksheet (adapted from Potter^{2(p150)})

- Condom brand being advertised:
- Primary claim or claims made for the product:
- Are the claims clearly stated or are they implied?
- Does the advertisement “raise ethical considerations”^{2(p150)}?

If so, what are they?

- What “values”^{2(p150)} are shown in the ad?
- Purpose or purposes of the company advertising the condom:

_____ To increase the reader’s awareness of the product

_____ To make the person feel more positively about the condom brand

_____ To alter the person’s attitude about the condom

_____ To reaffirm the person’s attitude about the condom

_____ To encourage the person to buy this brand of condom

* It’s suggested that ads be compared to see how they are the same and how they differ.²