

N.Y. Post Editorial Backs League Ads

*The following editorial appeared in the **New York Post** on Saturday, April 30, 1994. It is reprinted with permission.*

The Truth About Condoms

A new AIDS-prevention campaign has drawn the ire of the Gay Men's Health Crisis, which seems to want to maintain a virtual stranglehold on the dissemination of AIDS-related information.

This development isn't surprising- the 2,500 public-service ads that will soon be appearing in the city's subways, courtesy of the Catholic League, are a far cry from GMHC's dubious "Young! Hot! Safe!" campaign.

The Catholic League ad warns of a "dirty little secret" – that "Condoms don't save lives. But restraint does."

For all the insistence that abstinence is integral to their AIDS-prevention efforts, GMHC and its allies pay nothing but lip service to the notion. Suggestions to the contrary are disingenuous.

Indeed, GMHC and other AIDS – awareness groups have distributed graphic explanatory materials about gay sexual practices – some manifestly targeted at young folks – in the guise of health-oriented information.

At times, these organizations appear interested in seizing the moment to increase awareness of gay lifestyles. How else to explain an ad featuring an embracing pair of teen-age girls? Except by way of tortured logic, lesbians are not an especially vulnerable class vis-a-vis AIDS. The girls in the ad are wearing rubber gloves meant for use in a particular lesbian sexual practice.

The Catholic League ads speak to the failure rate of condoms; and condoms, of course, are not foolproof. Indeed, the GMHC crowd has itself begun referring to condom use as “safer” – rather than “safe” – sex.

GMHC’s rage at the Catholic League campaign – while not unexpected – seems altogether unjustifiable. Certainly, condoms are safer than totally unprotected sex. Far safer. But they are not safer than sexual restraint. At the very least, it seems to us, there’s room for this dual message.

The GMHC has long been an extraordinary organization – it arose to fill a need at a desperate moment and its achievements should not be slighted. But recent GMHC forays in the AIDS-education realm seem misguided.

William Andrew, a member of the Board of Education’s AIDS advisory council, who’s especially concerned with ads aimed at black and Latino youth, argues that GMHC “is promoting sex acts that can be suicidally dangerous by misrepresenting them as perfectly harmless.”

To be sure, the Catholic League, like GMHC, also has an agenda. By warning that condoms are not a foolproof means of preventing sexually transmitted diseases, it promotes the church’s doctrine against premarital and homosexual sex.

Common sense, however, suggests that there’s room – at the very least – for this message, as well as the GMHC’s.