

Clever marketing strategies aim to keep women smoking and entice young girls to start. They're selling us an image, and with it dependence and ill health.

Tobacco Advertising
(not just Marlboro)

BY JUDITH HAINES, RN, BFA

In the October 1987 issue of upscale New York-based *Vanity Fair* magazine, photographer Helmut Newton had this to say of his accompanying portrait of actress Debra Winger: "Debra is a very intelligent girl. Look at the quality of her eyes—riveting.... And the cigarette? Well, she's a real smoker. But, also, smoking in women is an erotic act."

This rather frivolous endorsement of the act of smoking, and the black and white photograph showing Debra Winger with a smouldering cigarette jutting from between her lips, must have warmed the cockles of the tobacco industry's heart. And for Philip Morris Inc., the worldwide industry leader, it must have been particularly heartening: the three full-page color cigarette ads appearing in that issue of the magazine all promoted ultra-light brands (largely targeted at women) and all carried the Philip Morris trademark.

These days, the tobacco industry needs all the help it can get to boost its ailing market. And with a sharp decline in the male cigarette market, says British physician Bobbie Jacobson, author of *Beating the Ladykillers: Women and Smoking*, it's banking on women and new converts in the Third World to save the day.¹ And to a degree, we Canadian women are giving it some help: while 30 percent of women aged 15 to 19 smoke, almost half of those in their 20s do.

The reasons girls and young women begin to smoke are complex indeed, so complex, that if you ask women why they started smoking in the first place, they are often at a loss to explain it. Nonetheless, many seem to have some bittersweet memory of the person they thought they could become through smoking. Retracing her own development as a smoker, one woman I spoke to who has since kicked the habit said: "It starts with an image.

Through acting out the image it becomes an association. Then it just becomes a dependence."

A newly-released background paper on women and tobacco, prepared for Health and Welfare Canada's Health Promotion Directorate and the National Working Group on Women and Tobacco, offers some explanations as to why young women reach for cigarettes.² The attraction of smoking as an appetite suppressant, identifying with adult behavior through smoking, and the perception that smoking represents risk taking and emancipation can all contribute to the initiation of smoking in young women. Maternal role models who smoke and pro-smoking friends also contribute to a climate of social acceptability that supports smoking behavior. But more, "the advertising and promotion of tobacco, using themes of sexual attractiveness and freedom, is particularly effective on teenage girls," says the paper's author, Lorraine Greaves. Once hooked, women keep smoking for a variety of reasons, including to feed their physiological dependence, prevent weight gain, relieve stress, or to help support an image.

Selling ill health

Where does this image that so many women have internalized come from? In large part from sophisticated cigarette marketing campaigns. And while advertising alone can't fully shape the smoking behavior of girls and women, our awareness of the considerable health risks attending tobacco use has led us to vigorously question tobacco marketers' false impression of what cigarettes have to offer us. It is an impression cleverly constructed on a foundation of aspirations that women—for better or for worse—hold dear. Aspirations to be independent, in control, successful and appealing. And while the Cinderella-like transforma-

tion to such a world is not within reach, smoking's promise must hold particular appeal to those Canadian women who experience higher smoking rates than others: native women, the poor, the battered and the unemployed.

Some might say that we should thank the tobacco industry for taking women's hopes so seriously. But seriously for whose benefit? Certainly not ours. We know full well that cigarette smoking ups women's chances of acquiring coronary heart disease, chronic bronchitis and emphysema, peripheral vascular disease and lung cancer. Indeed lung cancer, a disease attributable to smoking in approximately 85 percent of cases has in some Canadian provinces already surpassed breast cancer as the leading cause of cancer death in women aged 55 to 74. For smokers using contraceptive pills, the picture is particularly disturbing. The multiplicative effects of smoking and the pill put their users at particular risk for heart attacks, certain kinds of strokes and, it now appears, cervical cancer. And as if that weren't enough, there's a host of smoking-related complications that the pregnant woman and her fetus can experience. Yet in the face of all this, tobacco companies continue to shamelessly promote tobacco—a product that accounts for approximately 35,000 preventable deaths in Canada each year, 13,000 of them women. They sell us a dependence cloaked in glossy images of independence. And they call it choice.

In promoting cigarettes to women, advertisers capitalize not only on women's aspirations for themselves (as in Virginia Slims' successful ode to emancipation, "You've come a long way, baby"), but on society's aspirations for women. That women should aspire to be thin and attractive is a message that most of us find hard to escape—whether turning on the TV

set, driving by a billboard or flipping through women's magazines that claim to have our best interests at heart. It is a message we carry around with us, and it complicates the picture of who we really are and should be. "A woman is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself," says the British social critic John Berger. "From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman."³ Advertisers certainly know this, and use it to their advantage.

One way they do it is by playing a sort of word association game with us. Even a brief perusal of cigarette ads found in women's magazines reveals the regular use of words like slender, long, ultra light, slims, ultra long, lean and thins. This strategy, says Dr. Andrew Pipe, chairman of Physicians for a Smoke Free Canada, allows advertisers to send out the slim message to young women who are constantly and very consciously aware of their weight and body image. "There's just no question that one of the conscious strategies of the tobacco industry is to sell tobacco as a form of weight control for women," says Pipe. "And there's no question that women have bought that argument, or bought that product in response to those kinds of messages."

If tobacco companies are selling their killer product as a form of weight control for women, they are not above selling it as a mere fashion accessory. In the October 12, 1987 issue of *Advertising Age*, an international marketing publication, an item titled "PM fashion smokes glow in Switzerland" begins: "Zurich—Philip Morris Cos. has launched a new cigarette as a fashion accessory here and plans to bring it to the rest of Europe."⁴ Called "Star", the item says, it has been successfully tested in the Zurich area and is scheduled to enter Austria, France, Italy and West Germany in 1988, with other European countries following. Francis Sulzer, creator of the brand's concept, is quoted as saying: "The idea we had was to position Star as a fashion accessory, much like jewelry or

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a scarf." As such, its package will change five times a year. "When people take their spring clothes out of the closet, we change the package to give them a springlike pack of cigarettes," Mr. Sulzer says. The winter collection, embellished by art deco design, features the theme of old movies. Star, the item tells readers, targets young, upscale smokers.

Lest you think that women are the only ones targeted by the tobacco industry, another recent *Advertising Age* item, this time from New York, announces that Lorillard, the U.S.A.'s fourth-largest cigarette marketer, is test-marketing a new brand of cigarettes called Harley-Davidson.⁵ The theme of the campaign? "Harley-Davidson cigarettes. Take a new road." According to Lorillard, the objective of the marketing campaign is "to capitalize on Harley-Davidson's preexisting image to generate interest and appeal to the male segment of the cigarette market." The company plans to support its new brand with point-of-

Abrégé

Les femmes : cibles d'une industrie du tabac sous pression. Les hommes représentant un marché en déclin pour les cigarettes, l'industrie du tabac se tourne vers les femmes pour remédier à ce problème. Leurs stratégies astucieuses de commercialisation nous vendent une image qui entraîne accoutumance et problèmes de santé.

purchase displays, buy-one-get-one free deals, premium and T-shirt offers, and a sampling program.

Clearly, the tobacco industry is ready to try just about anything to keep people smoking. A fashion accessory for every season you say? Delightful. I'll take fall. Cigarette? Sure, I always wanted to ride on the back of a Harley. Surely no intelligent human being would fall for this sort of stuff, right? We'd never see Star fashion accessories on the pages of *Flare* or *Chatelaine*...

Women's magazines

In recent years, Canadian women's magazines have drawn fire from anti-smoking forces for turning somewhat of a blind eye to the serious health consequences of the tobacco products their pages advertise. While they'll gladly tell us all about safe sex, depression, compulsive eating, and the harmful effects of overexposure to the sun's rays, all valid concerns, they're reluctant to really speak out about the one health issue women are dying to be informed about. That's not to say we don't see occasional articles telling women how to stop smoking and stay slim or how to butt out a bad habit. But given the tremendous faith readers place in these publications to keep them informed about health issues, says Andrew Pipe, they should be doing a lot more.

Why don't they? The argument goes something like this: women's magazines, depending on tobacco advertising revenue as they do, feel reluctant to bite the hand that feeds them by publishing the truth about tobacco. Does advertising really buy silence from the editorial side of women's magazines? Or is it just that items on lung cancer aren't particularly sexy to juxtapose with alluring fashion spreads and food features?

Two surveys conducted by the American Council on Science and Health provide some insight into the issue.⁶ The results of the Council's 1982 survey showed clearly that of 18 American magazines surveyed, the best coverage of smoking and health issues was presented in those that didn't accept cigarette advertising. A follow-up study in 1986 assessed reporting of smoking as a health hazard in a select

group of 20 magazines; the readership of 14 of these was primarily women.

The magazine that fared worst in its coverage of smoking? *Cosmopolitan*, followed by such publications as *Ms.*, *Mademoiselle*, *Glamour* and *Self*, all of which were accepting cigarette advertising at the time of the survey. In contrast, *Reader's Digest*, which has had a long-time policy of rejecting cigarette advertising, provided the best all around coverage of the hazards of smoking. *Good Housekeeping*, *Prevention*, *Saturday Evening Post* and *Vogue* also provided what was considered excellent coverage, and of these publications only *Vogue* accepted tobacco ads.

Given *Vogue's* advertising policy, why did it provide some of the best coverage on smoking? Because, said *Vogue* editor Grace Mirabella, she and her editorial staff were concerned about the issue of smoking and health and had a tendency to report on it whenever possible. When asked about possible pressure from cigarette advertisers, Mirabella claimed that she was completely insulated from the advertising side of the magazine. Interpreting this information, Lawrence White and Elizabeth Whelan, authors of the survey results, said: "The freedom of *Vogue's* editor to ignore the magazine's advertising needs is a privilege granted only to the most successful and well established magazines." Also, a footnote informs readers that Mirabella is married to a lung surgeon.

What's the picture with Canadian women's magazines? Clearly we could do with some research in this area. All the magazines that I phoned—*Chatelaine*, *Châtelaine*, *Homemaker's*, *Madame*, *Canadian Living*, *Coup de Pouce*, *Flare*, *Clin d'œil*, and *Allice*—accept cigarette advertising, something you can easily figure out yourself if you spend any amount of time at your local newsstand. *Chatelaine*, with an average total paid circulation of 1,071,779, is the largest circulation women's magazine in the country. According to Richard Page, associate advertising director at the magazine, "the advertising department doesn't try to influence the editorial department, especially where health issues are concerned." However, if a tobacco-related story is scheduled to

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run in the same issue of the magazine as a tobacco ad, he says, the cigarette manufacturer is notified and offered the option of pulling out, a standard magazine practice no matter what the product or who the advertiser.

Though not by definition a women's magazine, the Canadian version of *Reader's Digest* (average paid circulation 1,334,892) attracts a hefty readership—approximately half of it female. In its 40-year history, it has never accepted a cigarette ad, and that's a matter of policy, says Germain Faubert, the *Digest's* Eastern Sales Manager. It's a policy that the Wallace family, founders of the magazine, were committed to and one that Faubert feels is fair for both advertisers and readers. He estimates that without this policy, *Reader's Digest* and its French counterpart *Sélection* could pick up about \$.5 million annually in cigarette advertising. Oddly, however, the magazine does accept pipe tobacco ads, infrequent as they are.

Where to from here?

Realistically, we can't expect to find all the health information we want or need in magazines—women's or otherwise. But as women we should be aware of the messages they're selling us—both through editorial copy and advertising—and of important issues that are given scant attention at the expense of our best interests. And regarding women's health, there are few issues more compelling than that of the growing ranks of women lung cancer victims. It is an issue that concerns us all, whether we're smokers or

not. And we must together explore how we ended up like this and work together to find a way out. For there is a way out, and the thousands of Canadian women who have kicked the smoking habit have shown us that. Smokers don't need guilt trips to dog them into quitting. They need to know that quitting smoking is darned hard work, and that we'll be there to support them in their efforts.

There are other ways of helping smokers and those too young to have yet been hit by the tobacco industry's marketing machine, and that is by advocating and supporting good public health policy. Indeed we have such an opportunity staring us in the face. Bill C-51, a government bill that will ban tobacco advertising, has just had second reading in the House of Commons and is at the committee stage; Bill C-204, a private member's bill that both aims to regulate smoking in the federal workplace and on common carriers, and have tobacco and tobacco products recognized as hazardous products, is at a similar stage in the legislative process. Both bills face strong opposition from a pressured tobacco industry, an industry that is lobbying to save its life. Conservative estimates say it has poured \$4 million into defeating Bill C-51 alone, and it has organized an extensive letter writing campaign to support its stance. In all of this will strong public opinion supporting these bills get lost? Not if we speak out clearly and articulately, and urge others to do the same. □

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