SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EYES:

ADVERTISING AND THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY

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Since the seeds of American cigarettes were first sown in 1884, the tobacco industry has established a resilient root that continues to nestle deeper into the soil of society, making smoking cigarettes an integral and pervasive activity that has been inhaled into the American way of life. Even today, smoking is a defining element in American culture, a rite of passage into adulthood for many adolescents. For more than half a century, the world's tobacco companies were thought to be providing a great public service. In *The Smoke Ring: Tobacco, Money, and Multinational Politics*, Peter Taylor reveals that during World War I, General John J. Pershing cabled Washington DC, asserting the indispensability of tobacco as a daily ration, and during World War II, President Roosevelt made tobacco a protected crop as part of the war effort (5). However, by the mid-twentieth century, smoking began to be correlated with cancer and other debilitating ailments, prompting many to oppose the addictive and ubiquitous habit. Although time has only continued to reveal the damaging effects of smoking, curiously, cigarettes still maintain a steadfast grasp on society. America's fascination with a substance proven to have unfavorable effects can be compared to the country's fixation with beer, another potentially harmful substance that can lead to loss of perception and coordination, sometimes with fatal consequences. In his essay "Beer," Ben Scott illuminates the strategy used by the mega-brewer Anheuser Busch to implant its products deep within American culture. According to Scott, "culture is shaped simultaneously from the inside and from the outside and from the inside. Anheuser Busch's goal is to gain control over the formative processes and direct them to the same ends: profit, exposure and influence" (71). The beer industry's tactical employment of the "external control" of media outlets makes the product ubiquitous and persistently imprints its image into the consumer's mind, and using "internal control" of media messages identifies the product with appealing events and images to form consumer associations between the product and desirable qualities (71) such as popularity, pleasure, maturity, health.

This marketing strategy markedly resembles that of the giant tobacco companies. *A Smoking Gun: How the Tobacco Industry gets Away with Murder,* by Elizabeth Whelan, Executive Director of the American Council on Science and Health, and *Merchants of Death*

by Larry White expose the devious ploys of the tobacco industry and the advertising strategies employed to attract new consumers. Both Richard McGowan's *Business, Politics, and Cigarettes* and Peter Taylor's *The Smoke Ring: Tobacco, Money, and Multinational Politics* explore the surreptitious business and political affairs that transpire within the successful multibillion-dollar industry. The ongoing debate about advertising strategies that use a "smoke screen" of "external control" to secure a product's place in mass media and "internal control" to encourage positive associations with the product focuses primarily on the efficacy of the advertising—does it make a customer buy or use the product? However, the ethics of promoting a harmful and addictive commodity go largely unexamined, and the real question, unasked: Why does the public allow itself to be manipulated by these strategies?

Although beer and cigarettes are potentially harmful and may have fatal consequences, the consumption of these products is far from perceived as a vice. Despite new commercial attempts cautioning against drinking and driving, media warnings of the fatal effects of smoking and even implementations of smoking bans, drinking and smoking still remain accepted in many restaurants and recreations, are glamorized in movie and books, and are especially popular among students. This conundrum can be partly explained by the industries' effective employment of external and internal control (Scott 71) to captivate the attention of the public through the insinuation of beer and cigarettes into every aspect of daily life. This is accomplished with the products' penetration of public space with billboards, commercials, and political contributions. The effectiveness of this strategy can perhaps be validated by the continual popularity and success of beer and cigarettes. "External control" ensures that the product is recurrently seen in advertisements and is pervasive in everyday events so that the product remains ingrained in the consumers' minds while "internal control" develops its appealing social connotations. If a product is ubiquitous but does not have a positive connotation, it will not necessarily be successful; therefore, "internal control" is a way of "associating goods with social meanings that will bestow a positive perceptual differentiation on the product" (Scott 87). Consequently, since cigarettes are known to be harmful, causing emphysema and lung cancer, as well as yellow teeth and bad breath, billions of dollars are expended to promote the dangerous habit of smoking.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of advertising is still debated. J. J. Boddewyn, in his article, "There is No Convincing Evidence for a Relationship Between Advertising and Consumption," and Hugh High, in *Does Advertising Increase Smoking?* challenge the notion that advertising increases consumption, and argue that it solely promotes brand allegiance. While a great majority of critics affirm that advertising promotes smoking, others insist that external and internal control do not significantly influence consumption. Scott himself admits that "a convincing sample of studies has found little indication that attitudes and decision making are affected by commercial [messages]" (87). Professor of Marketing and International Business, J.J. Boddewyn claims that

> **advertising does not affect the aggregate demand for cigarettes but only influences market shares among brands within a total market whose size and growth are functions of other variables such as demographics, income, price, current attitudes toward smoking, and anti-smoking regulations. (1256)**

Consequently, many have concluded that consumers are immune to advertising ploys and that advertising strategies do not attract new users, but merely promote loyalty among to established consumers to familiar brands. Elizabeth Whelan quotes Anne Browder of the Tobacco Institute, "Lever Brothers (a soap manufacturer) doesn't advertise its products to convince you to take a bath. Just as the cigarette advertisements are aimed at gaining brand loyalty among smokers, not getting nonsmokers to try a cigarette" (181). Although this statement may raise a few incredulous eyebrows (and Browder's employment in the Tobacco Institute may taint her claims), Boddewyn observes that "even the Surgeon General has acknowledged that there is no scientifically rigorous study available to the public that provides a definitive answer to the question of whether advertising and promotion increase the level of tobacco consumption . . . the extent of influence of advertising and promotion on the level of consumption is unknown and possibly unknowable" (1261).

Nevertheless, many anti-smoking activists believe that advertising is the primary factor that induces people, especially young people, to start smoking, and therefore they support a complete ban on cigarette advertising in the hope that it will eradicate the habit which kills over 3.5 million people each year. However, various studies confirm the fact that "in a number of countries where advertising is not prohibited, consumption among both adults and young people has been declining, while it has been increasing in some countries where advertising is prohibited" (High 39). Moreover, Boddewyn claims that "there is no

ready way of telling if the relationship between aggregate advertising and aggregate consumption involves either consumption causing advertising, or advertising causing consumption . . . In reality, there is also a demand for advertising because people lack sufficient knowledge" (1256). It can be argued that advertising is an essential aspect of business in providing consumers with "sufficient knowledge" and, in fact, "aims to inform people about their general attributes and benefits. As consumer awareness of the product category expands, advertising faces a mature market" (High 20). Therefore, it is evident that many not only believe that there is no correlation between cigarette advertising and consumption but that advertising is an essential and informative aspect of the economy, and despite the general impression that advertising does promote consumption, the other side of the debate should not be overlooked.

Although some strongly affirm that advertising does not influence a product's use, it cannot be denied that industries expend a great deal of money and effort in ensuring their right to advertise. One of the most effective and indispensable means of external control that multi-million dollar corporations employ is political influence. A political associate is a prominent and invaluable ally for any corporation or business. Both the tobacco and beer industries have endeavored to extend their "external control" in politics as part of a marketing strategy (Scott 82). Ben Scott affirms, "Brewers have become involved in the political issues that affect the industry, sending lobbyists to Washington and state capitals. Power drawn from economic networking and political connections enables advertising on an ever-widening scale" (Scott 80). For many, the industry-government relationship may seem amoral and deceitful, but the public is unaware of it because "power transactions between corporations and government rarely take place in the public arena" and "corporations that are politically active deny critics the righteous authority to blow the whistle on improper action by donating to charities and underwriting public programs" (82). The mega-industries use their financial resources to conceal their political schemes in order to extend and secure control over cultural outlets, and are able to promote their products and maintain a steadfast grasp on the market. Tobacco corporations as well as the beer industry extend control into politics and other areas to promote its products. "[C]igarette companies have political allies," Elizabeth Whelan explains, "Believe it or not, two . . . directors of Philip Morris are trustees of medical institutions" (5). To most, it would appear inappropriate to be involved in both the promotion of tobacco products which are destructive to health and a medical institution

designed to promote health, and it may seem outrageous that such a dual affiliation could be allowed. However, since tobacco companies, like beer companies, exert such tremendous power and possess immense resources, their assets enable them to establish political ties that ensure minimal governmental involvement, allowing them to continue wide-scale advertising and extend their control over market and culture. It must be acknowledged, however, that anti-smoking activists use similar political techniques: most of the researchers who claim that smoking initiation and prevalence are positively related to tobacco advertising "acknowledge funding from the Department of Health, which is unlikely to finance studies aimed at proving that there are no relationships between advertising and smoking" (Boddewyn 1255). As the tobacco industries have associates in medical institutions, researchers who release studies on the harmfulness of smoking have the interests of their financial supporters in mind, which may also impact the integrity of their studies.

Not only has the tobacco industry extended its control into medical institutions, it also uses its resources to influence prominent politicians. As Whelan reveals, "Tobacco companies have been highly successful in manipulating Senators and Congressmen who depend on them for support or who, through some wheeling and dealing and good old-fashioned Congressional horse-trading, can raise support for other issues by compromising themselves on the issue of cigarettes and health (6). In response to the anti-smoking movement, the US government has recently attempted to enforce a more stringent attack on the cigarette industry with laws that attempt to impede back-room deals. However, the cigarette industry still remains a prime force in politics and has a way of concealing its dubious transactions. *Newsday*.com reports documentation that "more than 100 state legislators were given meals, drinks and other considerations in 1996 worth more than the $75 limit by Philip Morris' chief lobbyist in Albany"; although "Philip Morris was fined $75,000 by the state Lobbying Commission and the legislators' cases were referred to the Legislature's ethics commission," the latter does not make public its investigations or punishments (*Newsday*.com). It is evident that, like the mega-brewer Anheuser Busch, the large tobacco companies expend great resources to gain the favor of politicians and ensure that their underhanded transactions remain secret. Although the routine "considerations" to legislators may seem dishonorable but insignificant, it can be argued that the money that the

tobacco industry provides to the government is, in contrast, a very significant sum. Therefore,

> **with the substantial source of revenue the cigarette industry has become for most governments, in their dealings with the cigarette industry, public policy makers must balance between the revenue needs of the state and the health concerns of the anti-smoking forces. (McGowan 114).**

While it may seem outrageous to "balance" the importance of lives and revenue, it cannot be denied that if the government did not accept revenues from the tobacco industry and attempted to eliminate the cigarette business in the hope of saving lives, there would be a tremendous negative affect on the economy. In *Cigarettes*, Tara Parker-Pope argues that

> **[t]he world is hooked on cigarettes. For every smoker who lights up a cigarette, there are countless others who have already taken a long, slow draw from the cigarette economy. Politicians, government workers, store clerks, truckers, farmers, educators, artists and doctors— indeed, virtually everyone inhales its smoke. (21).**

It is undeniable that the cigarette economy is a tremendous business for many, from the farmers who work on the tobacco fields, to those in the industry who profit from the five billion dollars spent on cigarette advertising, to those who are supported by the anti-tobacco movement. Therefore, some may argue that the advertisements, "donations" made by the tobacco industry to politicians, and the industry itself are necessary evils. Nonetheless, it cannot be contested that political influence helps the cigarette industry to ensure its external control, and repeatedly surrounding people with appealing messages about their product makes them socially acceptable. Large donations understandably make government figures less keen to attack their benefactors and prevent their advertising schemes, and as a result, the tobacco companies as well as beer brewers exert considerable effort to create associations with the government and other influential entities such as medical institutions to ensure that they can continually implement the influences that guarantee their success.

Although external control is an effective strategy that enables industries to gain the undivided attention of consumers, when it is used in conjunction with "internal control" of media messages (Scott 71), consumers are significantly more likely to be influenced by their effective marketing schemes. External control ensures that the product is prevalent in all forms of media—billboards, commercials, magazines, and movies. However, it is not

necessarily guaranteed that the customer will have a positive impression of the product solely based on its ubiquity. Therefore, "internal control" is employed to associate products with appealing meanings and events. In *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes*, Thibodeau and Martin explain that "cigarettes have always embodied pleasure. Package designers have long been instructed to sell cigarettes by linking them to happiness, fun, desire, and health" (73). Note, once again, the ironic identification of smoking, a demonstrably unhealthy habit, as a signifier of "health."

The advertising strategies of the beer and tobacco industries differ in one important respect, however: while beer advertising is directed primarily at men, tobacco advertising has increasingly been characterized by campaigns directed specifically toward women. Initially, smoking was regarded as a male habit. Although the tobacco companies utilize different ploys to induce women to take up smoking, many of their advertisements have been designed to appeal to the male population, using the internal control of media messages to associate their products with activities and qualities that appeal to men. This approach is exemplified by the beer companies that enlist the cultural attraction of sports to affect the value and social meaning of their product (Scott 87). Since most men enjoy sports, industries such as beer and cigarettes link their products with these masculine activities and American traditions. "Beer is advertised with sports, as sports, and during sporting events" Scott explains. "Through time and repetition, beer is perceived with the positive feeling of sports so that Americans grow to associate the two, combining the appeal of both" (87). Repetition of the association makes Americans unconsciously relate two inherently different activities, so that beer and sports ultimately become inseparable, which makes beer socially acceptable and causes Americans to forget its deleterious effects. The tobacco companies also use men's love of sports in their cigarette advertisements in order to establish the social acceptance of its inherently harmful products. In Larry White's *Merchants of Death*, the author remarks that:

> **[u]sing sports to promote products is extremely effective in selling to young men, including teenagers . . . United States Tobacco has consistently increased its snuff sales by hiring football players, race car drivers, and soccer stars . . . Cigarette billboards are clearly visible in stadiums across the country. (125)**

It is ironic that football players, race-car drivers, and soccer stars who typically exemplify physical stamina and peak health are hired to promote products which cause adverse effects

on the body. However, many fail to realize the paradox because the associations have been so ingrained in Americans' minds. The use of the cultural appeal of sports to promote the sale and acceptance of cigarettes overtly parallels the strategy of the beer corporations. The tobacco industries advertise their products in connection with sports so that the product will evoke the same positive emotions of fun and excitement that sports generate. In *The Smoke Ring*, Peter Taylor claims that "[s]ponsorship [of sports] enables the companies to associate cigarettes with health, glamorous and life-enhancing activities . . . it gives them access to prestigious and powerful people and institutions involved in sports" (99). Although it is generally accepted that sports sponsorship promotes cigarette consumption, critic Hugh High disagrees, claiming that "it cannot be argued that tobacco companies sponsor events or license non-tobacco products for the purpose of promoting increased consumption of tobacco in general . . . at most it can be argued that tobacco company promotions are attempts to promote its own brand" (89). However, despite the fact that High claims that sponsorship may only promote brand allegiance, it is evident that the association with sports is a crucial form of advertising for cigarette companies, whether it promotes general consumption of specific brand loyalty.

Cigarette companies have also traditionally appealed to a masculine sense of dominance and independence. In *Smokescreen*, Hilt asserts that "people don't start smoking to satisfy a not-yet-realized craving for nicotine. Rather men appear to start to smoke for purely psychological reasons—to emulate a valued image, to experiment, to defy, to be daring, to have something to do with his hands, and the like" (73). Tobacco industries realize this inherent desire in men and thus present their products to represent "adventure, rebellion, and strength." The familiar Marlboro cowboy represents masculinity, strength, independence and skill. One well-known advertisement showed the cowboy preparing to lasso a steer, a task that requires great skill, strength, knowledge, and swiftness—all characteristics that most men aspire to possess. The enticing caption "Come to Marlboro Country" implies that this "getaway" land can be reached by smoking cigarettes. As Larry White explains, "Marlboro Country was a friendly place to young people . . . it resurrected a way of life that wasn't complicated" (124). However, the most attractive feature of Philip Morris' Marlboros is most likely the image of the cowboy himself.

> **The cowboy is an almost universal symbol of admired masculinity . . . Marlboro was no longer just a cigarette, but a lifestyle, a smoke for the rugged**

> **individualist who longed for simpler times and the chance to escape to the wide-open spaces of Marlboro Country . . . Their own research found that the cowboy appealed to younger male smokers, who were looking for ways to show their independence. (Pope 91)**

Therefore, it is evident that with enough exposure to images of sports and rugged-looking males, boys and men will inevitably correlate the vitality and pleasure of the cultural events and associations with cigarettes. As a result, the harmful effects of smoking are forgotten and the tobacco industry's products are assimilated into society.

Not only do the tobacco companies promote sales with images directed to the interests and fantasies of men, more recently, they have begun to employ internal control in an appeal to women, which challenges the assertion that advertising is directed to current and not new users. Smoking was originally regarded as a male habit, and a stigma was placed upon women who adopted it. However, in the 1920's, cigarette industries began to look for ways to appeal to the elusive half of the population that had not yet assumed the smoking habit. In the "Flapper Era," cigarette advertisers observed that women were increasingly interested in tossing aside the cultural restrictions that had hampered them, and wanted a slim figure to wear the new revealing dresses. As a result, Pope explains, the Lucky Strikes brand hired Amelia Earhart to promote its cigarettes with the appealing statement, "For a Slender Figure—Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet" (82). At that time, Amelia Earhart was famous for her flight across the Atlantic, and the cigarette company hoped that hiring her would lead customers to believe that smoking Lucky Strikes would give them the independence and adventurousness of the aviator. Moreover, the advertisement presented the aviator's daring image together with the claim that the Lucky brand of cigarettes promoted a slim figure. Although this was an effective advertising approach, the habit was still relatively taboo for most females.

However, with the advent of the women's liberation in the early 1970's, cigarette advertisers saw that women needed to find a symbol of freedom and immediately responded by associating their products with equality and independence. As Ian Tyrrell affirms in *Deadly Enemies,* cigarette advertising succeeded "because it astutely targeted patterns of behaviour and beliefs within the community" (138). As a result of the triumphant Virginia Slims campaign, smoking became perceived as an assertion of autonomy for women. In *Cigarettes*, Pope quotes Dr. Brill's assertion that "some women regard cigarettes as symbols

of freedom . . . More women now do the same work as men do . . . Cigarettes, which are equated with men, become torches of freedom" (85). In *Merchants of Death*, Larry White adds that

> [w]hen women's liberation began to change women's perceptions in the early 1970's, Philip Morris was right in there with a new brand called Virginia Slims. The brand's slogan, "You've come a long way, baby," said it all. This ad campaign brilliantly associated smoking with exciting careers, sexual freedom, and all the improvements in women's lives promised by the women's liberation movement. (127)

This was the image that women of the seventies sought and wanted to emulate, and Virginia Slims succeeded by establishing a connection between smoking and the traits that women of the time admired, using lean, seemingly-independent models to imply that if women smoked Virginia Slims, they would become both independent and "slim." However, although this form of advertising is generally believed to be effective, dissenters would argue that simple awareness of an image "hardly implies that the viewer will consume the product advertised, which would mean that advertisers have an automatic sales machine" (High 72). High maintains that "there is absolutely no evidence that imagery has led anyone to start smoking [but] that family and friends are the major influences on smoking by the young" (72). Nevertheless, despite the skeptics, advertising must have some degree of influence on consumers since the industry continues to invest billions of dollars to market their products.

Two of the most widely advertised products in American culture today are beer and cigarettes, both of which are addictive and damaging. Despite the potential hazards of these products, they are nonetheless deeply rooted in American society and generally have a positive and appealing image. The beer and tobacco industries have employed effective and identical marketing strategies, nestling their products in the American imagination behind a smoke-screen of power and positive associations that conceal their destructive effects. It is incontestable that the tobacco and beer industries both utilize external and internal control to secure a place for their products in mass media and create associations that engender a socially acceptable identity for their products; the difference in these campaigns is the gendered appeal of tobacco advertising. While some may disagree about the effectiveness of the advertising, or whether it is aimed at brand selection rather than the creation of a new

market, the morality of the advertising strategies goes largely unchallenged. It is hoped that this examination of tobacco advertising will serve to lift the smoke-screen of deception from the eyes of consumers, and to initiate a more productive debate.

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