Emotions for sale: cigarette advertising and women’s psychosocial needs

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Objective: To explore messages of psychosocial needs satisfaction in cigarette advertising targeting women and implications for tobacco control policy.

Methods: Analysis of internal tobacco industry documents and public advertising collections.

Results: Tobacco industry market research attempted to identify the psychosocial needs of different groups of women, and cigarette advertising campaigns for brands that women smoke explicitly aimed to position cigarettes as capable of satisfying these needs. Such positioning can be accomplished with advertising that downplays or excludes smoking imagery. As women’s needs change with age and over time, advertisements were developed to reflect the needs encountered at different stages in women’s lives. Cigarette brands for younger women stressed female camaraderie, self-confidence, freedom, and independence; cigarette brands for older women addressed needs for pleasure, relaxation, social acceptability, and escape from daily stress.

Conclusions: Psychosocial needs satisfaction can be communicated without reference to cigarettes or smoking. This may explain why partial advertising bans are ineffective and comprehensive bans on all forms of tobacco marketing are effective. Counter-advertising should attempt to expose and undermine the needs satisfaction messages of cigarette advertising campaigns directed at women.

Tobacco companies target women and other special populations with advertising.1–4 When cigarette marketing in the USA specifically targeted women in the 1920s and 1930s, and again in the late 1960s, female smoking increased. Advertising aims to elicit emotional responses from its audiences. As early as 1911 psychology of marketing theorist Walter D Scott said, “[t]he man with the proper imagination is able to conceive of any commodity in such a way that it becomes an object of emotion to him and to those to whom he imparts his picture... the good advertiser... should be a practical psychologist and know the human emotions and sentiments...”.5

Consumers “may feel they are purchasing a self-image”. To sell these images, marketers need to determine consumers’ interpersonal concerns and what images will promote the desired self enhancement. In an early study Koponen showed that purchasing behaviours were correlated with scores on standardised personality inventories. During the 1960s and 1970s, research on consumer lifestyles,5 psychological study of values,9 and market research on psychographics10 were used by business for a better understanding of the motivations of different consumer groups to develop more focused advertising. Using Virginia Slims as a case study, O’Keefe and Pollay found that Philip Morris identified a female market niche, the feminist values of individuals in that niche, and the stimuli to which they respond as they attempt to fill their needs.

Researchers have noted the psychological and emotional needs of female smokers and the advertisements that appeal to such needs. Aesthetic smoking with slimness has been shown to encourage smoking initiation among adolescent girls and young women.12–13 Fashionableness, sex appeal, affluence, independence, and adventure have been identified as themes found in female targeted cigarette advertising.14–17 Advertising for cigarettes smoked by women only (such as Virginia Slims, Eve, Kim, and Satin) gave women a sense of equality, exclusivity,11,15 and liberation.19

Although tobacco advertising targeting women has been documented, less is known about how needs satisfaction messages effectively promote smoking to women. Tobacco industry documents provide a unique opportunity to examine the industry’s process of developing cigarette advertising for women. Between 1980 and 2000, cigarette advertisements designed to appeal to women increasingly paired smoking with the satisfaction of psychosocial needs that industry research identified as salient to women of different ages and life experiences.

METHODS

We searched the Legacy Tobacco Documents Library (http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu), Tobacco Documents Online (http://tobaccodocuments.org), and the documents websites of Philip Morris (http://www.pmdocs.com), Brown and Williamson (http://www.bwdocs.com), RJ Reynolds (http://www.rjrtdocs.com), and Lorillard (http://www.lorillarddocs.com). Initial search terms included women, female, marketing, creative, focus group, qualitative, exploration, segmentation, psychology, promotion, advertising, brand names, and industry acronyms (for example, “YAFS” for young adult female smokers). These searches yielded tens of thousands of documents.

We conducted additional snowball searches on names of individuals and agencies, places, dates, Bates numbers, and campaign slogans. Documents related to research, planning, and evaluation of advertising to women were selected. This analysis is based upon a final collection of 704 documents.

We matched advertising images with the campaigns described in industry documents using print advertising and promotional items from the University of California, San Francisco Professor Virginia Ernster’s tobacco advertising collection and various online sources, including the Pollay collection (http://roswell.tobaccodocuments.org/pollay/dirdet.cfm), the Tobacco Advertising Gallery of Tobacco-Free Kids (http://tobaccofreekids.org/adgallery), and other digital

We selected campaigns based upon a stated intent to target women in marketing plans, the apparent targeting of women using women dominated images in advertisements, or brand sales reports indicating a high percentage of female consumers. Although not every campaign discussed here exclusively or explicitly targets women, these criteria allowed us to analyse both female and unisex brands that claim a large proportion of women in the market. The brands and campaigns discussed were selected to present a sample of campaigns designed for different age groups, different psychographic segmentation schemes, and by different tobacco companies.

RESULTS
Tobacco marketers have noted that messages focusing on physical product characteristics are weak on personal relevance.29 Marketers rely on clusters of values and lifestyle preferences to develop brand images that would be psychologically, emotionally, and socially relevant to potential brand users.21 Table 1 summarises some of the needs of female target markets identified by industry research and the advertising designed to address those needs. We present several examples of campaigns for brands that target specific psychographic segments of the female market, emphasising campaigns that intended to suggest the satisfaction of psychosocial needs.

‘‘Spoil yourself’’: positioning satin for mature, feminine women
Lorillard began test marketing Satin on 14 June 198244 to compete in the growing market of educated working women who smoked slim cigarettes45; the campaign received very positive responses.44 Satin was positioned “to communicate to working women as well as housewives who desire some time for themselves; time to relax and spoil themselves in some manner and to further foster the moment is to smoke Satin cigarettes”.44 The women targeted were mature, highly feminine women who experienced many daily demands on their time and energy46 and who shared a need for private, self indulgent, escapism.22 According to a 1981 Russell Marketing Research report to Lorillard, for test market respondents in cities across the USA, the Satin proposition most strongly appealed to “The sensuous nature of a woman… The desire to ‘‘pamper yourself’’. The desire to relax with a cigarette… The generally suppressed dream of relaxing in luxury”.46 The research firm tested Satin for its ability to “relate to several major areas of a woman’s motivation” and to “make her susceptible to appeals based on those drives which hold the most meaning for her – whether conscious or subconscious”47 (emphasis in original). Lorillard hired MCA Advertising, Inc to develop advertisements that would involve women in a fantasy of “escape from life’s problems with a little well-deserved, self-indulgence”, and found that such a fantasy “seems to really be striking a nerve”22 with focus groups, especially with older women.20

In 1981 focus group testing of prototype advertisements, one image called the “‘Couch’ Ad had the best overall acceptance and involvement. It was self-indulgent, luxurious and sensuous, and went well with Satin… The group identified easily with it—‘can fantasize with it’”.23 This rendering depicted a solitary woman lounging on a couch, reading a magazine, and smoking a cigarette.48 Figure 1 shows the 1983 ad that evolved from these early tests. The headline, “Spoil Yourself With Satin”, was accepted by the participants “without any hesitation and several spoke of ‘deserving’ time for themselves… ‘she is totally relaxed, taking a break—dinner is done, kids are asleep—this is her time’”22 (emphasis in original).

The 1982 Satin marketing strategy was “to convince the target that only Satin can pamper and gratify her special feminine needs and moods when it comes to smoking

<table>
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Figure 1 In this 1983 Satin “‘Couch’” advertisement, the caption reads, “Go ahead. You deserve this Satin moment. So enjoy the smooth, silky taste of new Satin with the luxurious Satin tip”. With the Satin brand and advertising campaigns, Lorillard attempted to capture a sensuous image of highly feminine—not feminist—women. This campaign was designed to communicate a self indulgent, relaxing, escapist fantasy for mature, busy women, whether employed or not, who felt pressured by many demands on their time.
Cigarette advertising and women's psychosocial needs

Joyce S. Maxwell

The author of the 1985 presentation to Maxwell recommended that cigarette campaigns contain messages that the smoker needed to hear about herself/himself as a smoker in a non-smoking world. The campaign should:

Tell me I am not personally offensive or unlovable because I smoke.

Tell me I am not a social outcast because I smoke.

Tell me smoking is not the most crucial choice in my life.

Tell me I am not different from everyone else just because I smoke. (emphasis in original).

The B&H “For People Who Like to Smoke” campaign was designed to send smokers this message. The author of the report quoted above stated, “Benson & Hedges taps into a deep reservoir of affection, because smokers, and particularly compensators, badly need to be told that smoking is a common part of everyday life.” “Compensators” in this document refers to PM’s “Imprisoned Smokers/Compensators” segment. PM’s 1988 B&H creative strategy was to “utilize real smoking and nonsmoking people in spontaneous natural situations which reinforce the social acceptability of the Brand and the people who choose it... Smokers should never be perceived as lonely, isolated, ‘stressed-out’ or ostracized.” All images comprising this campaign included non-smoking and smoking models in engaging, familiar, comfortable social interactions.

Focus group participants responded positively to these communications. Trinette Francis Qualitative Research reported results of 1988 focus groups of 18–44 year old smokers in New York and found the executions most successful in communicating social acceptability, normalcy, and inclusiveness in a comfortable setting were those which:

- depict people interacting sympathetically or enjoying their privacy and time for themselves
- relate to people in situations which indicate a depth of emotional understanding
- where the smoker/non-smoker dichotomy is relegated to the background. 25

The tagline “For people who like to smoke” implied to the respondents a sense of sharing: we’re allies as smokers,” “it

Figure 2 With the 1986 Benson & Hedges “For People Who Like to Smoke” campaign “Living Room Girls” execution, PM attempted to combat the declining social acceptability of smoking through brand image. “For People Who Like to Smoke” depicted casual, jovial scenes of upper middle class people enjoying meaningful time with friends and family, where conflict between smokers and non-smokers was entirely absent.
takes the stigma out of smoking". The ad most preferred by female participants, "Living Room Girls", appears in fig 2. Overall, "[s]mokers tended to feel good about the situations depicted in the ‘For People Who Like to Smoke’ campaign because of their personal experiences of not being able to smoke in many places. The ads, in a way, told them it’s o.k., people do smoke and enjoy it".28

Despite its success in addressing a psychosocial need, the campaign did not succeed in making long term market share or profit gains for B&H. In fact, throughout the campaign’s lifecycle from 1986 to 1990, the brand experienced a steady decline in share.29 In the real world the social unacceptability of smoking remained; the fantasy of problem-free smoking depicted by the campaign was not enough to overcome reality.

"She’s Gone to Capri": offering a fantasy escape to older women

As Graham noted,66 working class women were likely to perceive smoking as a psychological break from the many daily demands they faced. Similarly for middle and upper class women, Brown and Williamson (B&W) launched a campaign in the 1990s, “She’s Gone to Capri”, that tapped the need of busy women to indulge in an escapist fantasy.

In 1980, B&W attempted to develop a low tar cigarette for women who were 25–45 years old, white collar, middle or upper middle class, and relatively well educated.22 Capri was among several brands proposed, with a suggested brand personality designed to present:

...a moment of escape. The trip to a lovely foreign land where there are no phone calls, no kids, no demands... This is relaxation. It’s a special experience; of that we can be sure. It’s not Newport. It’s not Miami Beach. It’s exotic...romantic...exquisite...like nothing back home.68

The eventual users of Capri were about a decade older than the originally intended target, as psychographics overrode demographic targeting as the focus of the Capri advertising strategy.69

After eight years of evolving campaigns that too closely resembled 1980s Virginia Slims advertisements,70 a consulting firm B&W hired in the 1990s, Tatham Euro RSCG, renewed Capri’s positioning as an “Escape from the Ordinary”.71 As the campaign proposal described:

[The Capri campaign invites women to make this escape through a combination of exotic, romantic visuals in a serene atmosphere; and confident women with a lyrical tone and manner... [The Capri woman’s] emotional state can best be described as comfortable and quietly joyous—a moment of serenity, a moment of ‘escape’.72

"The feelings associated with this escape", noted Stewart Young, group research director for Tatham Euro in a 1996 letter to B&W’s Sharon Smith, “are ‘carefree’, ‘peaceful’, ‘relaxed’ and ‘quiet’. The ideal is often being alone, with one’s own thoughts or feelings (alone but not lonely)".73

By 1997, the marketing research firm Perception Research Services, Inc. concluded that "[t]he current campaign for the Capri brand of cigarettes appears to easily transition/evolve toward the exclusion of models/people in the advertising. In many ways, it appears to strengthen the aspirational feel of the campaign, and make it more personally relevant/compelling".74 B&W, concerned with possible future restrictions on tobacco advertising,75 pre-emptively developed a creative strategy where “the absence of a model rendered the setting more personal and more desirable”, especially when "models were removed from current ads and replaced with feminine props (hat, scarf, etc.)".76 Figure 3 demonstrates this change; the first image is an ad that ran in 1997 with the female model, and the second is the same scene in 1999 with the model removed. Joe Schurtz, vice president of Perception Research, summarised 1998 focus group testing, noting the absence of a model “allows each individual to place themselves in the setting and ‘I can make it what I want to’”.77

B&W’s creative execution guidelines specified requirements for the late 1990s “She’s Gone to Capri” images. First, the “location should not be in a crowded, loud or boisterous area but neither should it appear lonely or remote, but more simply put, a personal or private place”.78 Second, in the absence of models, “props should deliver the message that the CAPRI smoker has just momentarily stepped away. She is nearby”.79 Additionally, the camera’s distance from the scene “should be close in enough for the viewer to realize that the area is the personal space of a lady while at the same time enough background should be visible as to deliver the Mediterranean locale”.80 Further, “the photograph is done with a technique that is pointillistic. The visual is not full bleed in order to appear like an old photography”.81 Schurtz explained how this technique might contribute to the escape: "The photographic style of softer/muted borders effectively reinforces images of elegance, mysterious and unique. This dream-like/escape feel can serve as the cornerstone for establishing the aspirational imagery of the brand."82

The “She’s Gone to Capri” campaign became a transden- tial fantasy of escape from the ordinary not in only the mundane sense of everyday hassles, but in a more holistic sense involving place, time, and emotion. The cigarette was subtly paired with this eminently pleasurable emotional state.83 Capri was more successful than Satin; after a 0.41% share of market at its low in 1989,84 Capri increased to 0.63% in 1996.85 As of 2004, B&W lists Capri as one of its 12 “leading domestic brands”,86 even though it has not surpassed Virginia Slims’s 2.4% market share.87

Young women’s needs: Marlboro and Virginia Slims in the 1990s

As manufacturer of two brands popular among women, PM tapped different female market segments with Marlboro and Virginia Slims. In a 1994 report, PM described four
psychographic segments of the young adult (age 18–24 years) female market. The brands for young women discussed here target two of PM's segments: “Mavericks” for young female Marlboro users, and “Uptown Girls” for young Virginia Slims users. “Mavericks” were non-feminine women who gravitate toward exciting lifestyles and value independence; “Uptown Girls” were success oriented and status conscious partiers and shoppers.21 25

Though young female users of both of these brands highly value the peer groups to which they belong,7 7 the differences between these two groups may be seen in the strategies PM appears to have employed in designing the Marlboro advertisements of the 1990s and the concurrent Virginia Slims “It's a Woman Thing” campaign. For Marlboro, being an average person appears to be how young women gain a sense of belonging through their brand, whereas for Virginia Slims, stereotypic expression of gender differences appears to communicate youthful belonging.

Marlboro

Despite its overtly masculine image, Marlboro claims a larger percentage of young female smokers of any brand.14 78 According to a Leo Burnett Agency presentation to PM in 1991, young female smokers described themselves as “dependable”, “caring”, “friendly”, “fun”, “easy to talk to”, and “popular”, and they most wanted to “belong to a reference group” and “fit in with peers”.77 In a 1993 PM research presentation, young women saw Marlboro Lights as a brand for the casual, outgoing average person who gets along with anyone.35

New Marlboro images appeared in the 1990s that featured cowboys working, smiling, and laughing together. Figure 4 illustrates the change in ad imagery that may reflect PM’s attention to young women’s values. The left image features the solitary Marlboro cowboy, stony faced, against a harsh, sun bleached backdrop of sand and scrub brush. The right features many cowboys laughing together in the soft, warm light of sunset. The “imagery of open spaces and individual freedom” that Marketing Perceptions, Inc, a market research agency hired by PM, found appealing to female Marlboro smokers remained in the 1990s ads. PM may also have followed the recommendation of Bruce Eckman, Inc to make the Marlboro Man “more accessible and less removed (e.g., a smile, a touch, a tip of the hat)”.44

Virginia Slims

Young female Virginia Slims users in the 1990s perceived their brand’s image to be “more pretentious, more image conscious, more self-absorbed, and older” than that of Marlboro Lights.77 This image contrasted with the values Leo Burnett identified as most important to young adult women smokers: fitting in and being popular but unpretentious.77 When prompted to discuss the women’s rights movement that had long been the theme of Virginia Slims advertising, young participants in 1991 focus groups explained that, “as beneficiaries of that Movement, maybe it wasn’t all for the better… Men don’t know how they’re ‘supposed’ to treat women. And women don’t know when and if it’s okay to act feminine, or appreciate a ‘nicety’”.77 In additional focus groups, a participant stated, “I don’t think it [women’s movement] should go that far. It looks like we’re going to an androgyne society”.44 It was necessary for PM to remake the Virginia Slims brand image to be more relevant to the 1990s generation of young women.41

Stereotypical gender differences and a return to the traditional war of the sexes may act as a means of carving out the exclusive in-group to which women belong. Respondents in Marketing Perceptions’ research said, “Women build really close friendships. Men don’t seem to ever be as close… Guys go out to lunch to eat. Women go to chat.”44 Similar statements are featured in Leo Burnett’s...
subsequent “It’s a Woman Thing” Virginia Slims campaign launched in 1996. The campaign attempted to make “statements about today’s women that are universally understood.” Virginia Slims brand’s identity elaborated by Leo Burnett stated, “Virginia Slims… helps instill confidence in women by creating a ‘sense of belonging’ through relevant insights.” Figure 5 is an example of the shift from the feminist “You’ve Come a Long Way, Baby” campaign of the 1970s to the gender stereotypic “It’s a Woman Thing” campaign of the 1990s.

**DISCUSSION**

We extend the current state of knowledge of women’s cigarette advertising by revealing the industry’s intentions of identifying and advertising to the psychosocial needs of different subgroups of women. Beyond simply cueing an ideal of thinness or independence, communicating satisfaction of psychosocial needs of different segments of women according to their age and motivations adds an important layer of complexity and subtlety to advertising. Cigarette advertising by revealing the industry’s intentions of targeting female smokers’ needs with imagery that does not overtly focus on, and in some cases excludes altogether, the act of smoking.

**Implications for tobacco control policy**

Our results have implications for two tobacco control policies: complete advertising bans, and targeted counter-advertising.

**Advertising bans**

The advertising strategies discussed here present a particular challenge to tobacco control. Cigarette advertising can communicate a subtle message of psychosocial needs satisfaction, often purposefully disconnected from the characteristics of the cigarette or the act of smoking. Further, our analysis of the Capri campaign suggests that advertising may be able to communicate needs satisfaction more intimately by presenting images that exclude models. This form of advertising to women circumvents voluntary advertising restrictions that explicitly prohibit use of female models or people holding cigarettes, such as those used in the past in Japan. Total bans on all forms of cigarette advertising and promotion have enjoyed some success. For example, smoking rates in Australia, where all tobacco advertising is strictly banned, dropped from 22% in 1998 to 19.5% three years later, and the proportion of never smokers increased in that time period. Around the world, the tobacco industry works to weaken or delay comprehensive advertising bans and to develop new marketing strategies that circumvent them. The advertising principles outlined in this paper are not adequately addressed by current advertising restrictions in the USA. Given that advertising images are capable of delivering the desired psychological communication without the inclusion of cigarettes, smoking imagery, or even models, these campaigns rob advertising bans of potency.

Our results explain how tobacco advertising targeting women is constructed to circumvent advertising bans and may provide a framework for analysing advertising targeting other populations. Evidence suggests that comprehensive advertising bans are more effective than partial bans. A comprehensive ban on all forms of advertising and promotions would better address the advertising principles demonstrated in this study.

**Counter-advertising**

Counter-advertising that denormalises smoking and the tobacco industry, such as the Truth campaign and California’s tobacco control media campaigns, have been effective, especially when well funded, long running, and accompanied by other tobacco control measures. Our results suggest that counter-advertising can be designed to undermine the message that smoking a brand of cigarettes provides needs satisfaction. For example, a message of escape from life’s hassles may be countered with a message that addiction further complicates an already hassle ridden life. “Adbusting” attacks directly refute advertising messages and often call the viewer to question implicit brand associations.

Counter-advertising can also provide an alternative means to fulfil a psychosocial need. Counter-advertising can be assessed by its ability to provide alternatives to pro-smoking associations formed by tobacco advertising that resonate with the psychosocial needs of each target audience. The teen focused “Truth” campaign, comprised of advertisements featuring youths confronting the tobacco industry, is a campaign that effectively addresses a psychosocial need: in
What this paper adds

Previous studies have documented that the tobacco industry targets women with advertising, but less is known about what specific psychosocial communications in advertisements effectively promote smoking among women.

Our research provides evidence from the advertisers themselves that targeting the psychosocial needs of women of different ages is the overt intent of cigarette advertisers. Using previously secret tobacco industry documents, we demonstrate how the tobacco industry identifies women’s psychosocial needs and constructs advertising images planned explicitly to suggest satisfaction of those needs. This evidence helps to explain why partial bans on cigarette advertising are ineffective; it also suggests that targeted counter-advertising should address women’s psychosocial needs.

Counter-advertising may also call attention to an offensive industry strategy. Not all industry efforts to target the psychosocial needs of women were successful—for example, Lorillard failed to consolidate a clear and universally appealing image of the Satin Woman for their older female target audience. It is useful to ask if, indeed, older women do frequently wish to indulge in escapist fantasies, or if they may be offended by the industry’s suggestion that they are not willing or able to cope with the pressures of their daily lives. The gender stereotyping on which such cigarette advertisements rely may be insulting to many women. These sentiments can be used to frame counter-advertising or advocacy campaigns, as when public outcry over RJ Reynolds’ “Dakota” campaign targeting low income women was followed by a quick withdrawal of all Dakota promotional efforts.

Conclusion

Cigarette advertising messages have moved away from more easily refuted ideas about the supposed benefits of smoking and toward more subtle and emotionally engaging messages about the satisfaction of needs that are unrelated to smoking. This form of advertising is both difficult for audiences to analyze in a rational manner and impossible to control with partial advertising bans. Ad bans should be comprehensive and should include all forms of advertising and promotion. Counter-advertising campaigns should expose the process of associating cigarettes with desirable psychological states and return the negative affect surrounding smoking to its proper place: on the industry’s predatory marketing practices and the profits it gains from encouraging the consumption of a deadly product.

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www.tobaccocontrol.com
The Lighter Side

The Health Minister of Quebec announces plans to improve the Canadian province’s Tobacco Act, eliminating all smoking from restaurants, bars, and other places inadequately covered by the existing law. © Pascal 2005.