

Selling Tobacco to Women

Introduction

For most of the past 500 years, during which tobacco—the sacred plant of the indigenous peoples of the Americas—has been commercialized, smoking has been primarily associated with men. Public opinion discouraged women from smoking. Women who smoked were assumed to have loose morals and this reduced their chances of marriage at a time when marriage was regarded as the primary objective of women. Apparently, some suggested tobacco could put a moustache on a woman or cause insanity among women. A woman could even be arrested for smoking in public.

All of this changed during the 20th century. First, the development of machine-made cigarettes and new ways of processing tobacco made cigarettes more palatable (and more addictive). Their wide distribution to soldiers in World War I greatly expanded the number of smokers, and tobacco companies spent millions in advertising aimed at exploiting the image of the brave, smoking soldier. It worked – sales to men went through the roof. If advertising could work on men, why not on women?

The tobacco companies hired a psychoanalyst named Dr. Brill to help them change the social attitudes about women and smoking. He suggested freedom and liberation as central themes that would appeal to women. The companies hired celebrities to endorse these themes and to smoke in public. Later they added a focus on beauty (particularly weight control) and sexual appeal. Again the advertising hit the mark – cigarette sales to women increased dramatically.

The following images all come from marketing campaigns designed to increase smoking among women. Similar images are viewable online at www.tobaccofreekids.org/slideshow/deadlyinpink_2009_03/slideshow_full.html. How do each of these images play on social values related to personal identity, gender and self-worth?





Instructional strategies

1. After reviewing the content included in the student handout, ask students to compare and contrast how tobacco was promoted in the past with how it is promoted today. Is there still a difference in how it is promoted to women vs. men? Why or why not?
2. After reviewing the content included in the student handout, facilitate a discussion with the class. You might ask questions like:
 - a. What ideas and feelings do these images evoke? What do they say about women?
 - b. Do you think these images/messages were effective in getting more women to smoke? Why or why not? Would they be as effective today? Why or why not?
 - c. Do you react differently when you see a man or a woman smoking? Does it matter whether you are a man or a woman?

After an initial discussion, break the class into small groups and have each group examine the images in the handout and formulate one or two questions that emerge for them. Then, as a class, discuss as many of these questions as possible. You could read all the questions and have students vote on which ones they want to discuss. You close with the reflective question, *What ideas or values do you hold that marketing companies could exploit to influence your personal behaviours?* Or you might use this in the journal exercise below.

3. Invite students to research the history of women and tobacco and present their findings related to the social, cultural, and personal factors influencing tobacco use among women in the 1900s. Some helpful links include:
 - a. World Health Organization. (2010). *Gender, Women and the Tobacco Epidemic*. Available from: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/44342/1/9789241599511_eng.pdf
 - b. Jenson, P. M. (1994). A History of Women and Smoking. *Canadian Woman Studies* 14:3, 29-32. Available from: <http://cws.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/cws/article/download/9758/8870>
 - c. The History of Women and Smoking. Popsugar (an independent media and marketing company for women). Available at: <http://www.popsugar.com/love/History-Women-Smoking-11456540?page=0,0,0#photo-11456540>
4. After engaging in one or more of the previous exercises, invite students to write a journal entry expressing what they have learned or found interesting. They might craft a BIG question that is still unanswered for them – something they may want to think more about. Or you might suggest they reflect on their own values and ideas – what ideas or values could marketing companies exploit to influence their personal behaviours.

Drug Literacy

Big ideas

- Drugs can be tremendously helpful and also very harmful
- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives
- We can learn how to control our drug use by reflecting on the different ways people have thought about drugs, exploring stories from various cultures and listening to each other

Competencies

- Explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs
- Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs

For a complete look at the drug literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see: www.uvic.ca/research/centres/carbc/assets/docs/iminds/hs-pp-drug-curriculum.pdf

Links to Curriculum

First Peoples' principles of learning

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- Learning is embedded in memory, history and story

Social Studies 10

Big Ideas

- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
- Worldviews lead to different perspectives and ideas about developments in Canadian society



Competencies

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to: ask questions; gather, interpret and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Compare and contrast continuities and changes for different groups during this time period (continuity and change)
- Assess how prevailing conditions and the actions of individuals or groups affect events, decisions, and developments