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From Smoking to Vaping: Philip Morris' Reliance On Women's Lack Of Self Confidence

Over the past century, the smoking industry has misguided many to believe that consuming tobacco and nicotine products is an empowering practice. However, the false association of smoking with glamor, coolness, self confidence, and with a new way to establish one's identity has distorted what empowerment is and influenced the perception of social norms. Particularly, powerful tobacco advertising companies have found a way to make people want things they neither need nor want by linking mass produced goods to their unconscious desires. One such example in the 1920s, tobacco marketers were able to establish a connection between cigarette smoking and perceived male power misleading women into purchasing cigarettes (Curtis). While older cigarette ads associated smoking with female sophistication, newer ads have modified their strategy to appeal specifically to teens, and have reappropriated the sophisticated and mature connotations of smoking into a product that appeals to younger audiences. In other words, smoking/juuling would likely not have been so prevalent in society had the industry not portrayed the act of smoking in such a positive light.

Tobacco industries have used these marketing methods for decades as they continuously mislead consumers without principle or remorse. While in the 1950s there was already speculation of the negative effects of smoking, due to the lack of technology, resources, and information, there was no hard evidence to prove otherwise. In order to combat these claims, adverts instead played on our emotions and manipulated information so that they could not only

profit from consumer ignorance, but help define popular culture norms. These companies developed irrational or false ideas that they fed to the public for the purpose of personal benefit or in order to increase their sales. For example, women smoking cigarettes as a form of empowerment and self-expression was at best misleading, and at worst an outright lie (Curtis). The notion of self-expression is exemplified in an ad posted in LIFE Magazine from Philip Morris in 1951 (see below).

Figure 1: Philip Morris ad, May 7, 1951, LIFE Magazine

Furthermore, Philip Morris' marketing strategy was planned and implemented in a way to target and manipulate human impulses. Individuals tend to seek the approval of others and desire to be viewed in a positive light by peers, resulting in bending their values or morals believing themselves to be more likable (Curtis). These corporations and people in power found that this was a means to control the masses by catering to their selfish desires. The willful mass

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF!

Don't test one brand alone ... compare them all!

TRY THIS TEST!
Take a PHILIP MORRIS—and any other cigarette. Then, here's all you do:

- 1 Light up other cigarette. Take a puff—don't inhale—and slowly let the smoke come through your nose.
- 2 Now do exactly the same thing with the other cigarette.

NOTICE THAT PHILIP MORRIS IS DEFINITELY LESS IRRITATING. DEFINITELY SMOOTHER!

Unlike others, we never ask you to test our brand alone. We say . . . **compare PHILIP MORRIS . . . match PHILIP MORRIS . . . judge PHILIP MORRIS against any other cigarette!** Then make your own choice! Remember

NO CIGARETTE HANGOVER
means MORE SMOKING PLEASURE!

CALL FOR PHILIP MORRIS

market manipulation allowed corporations to sell things that people didn't need at scale. Consumers are exposed on a daily basis to these manipulative mindsets that lead them to believe that they will be happier if they do what the media advertisers tell them to do. Through diction

such as "you" and "your own choice," advertisers are specifically calling out to their consumers and personalizing their ad. Additionally, the ad appeals to their audience by claiming that their product is the best on the market by asking consumers to "test" it out to prove that theirs is the best. The ad also chooses descriptive words that claim that their product offers greater pleasure than other brands. They use the face of a young, slim, and attractive woman to further enhance the idea that cigarettes must be "good" for you. The woman in the ad is also gazing up, an orientation that symbolizes progress and happiness, as Lakoff and Johnson argued in *Metaphors We Live By* (15-18). The ad uses rich, gold-tone colors as well as stating "your throat can tell," further associating a positive connotation to their product. Compared to today's ads, these marketing strategies might seem obsolete, but the cigarette market has always successfully associated smoking with independence and social desirability; the Philip Morris ad exemplifies this. By studying our social behavior, lifestyles, and aspirations, tobacco companies are able to make smoking not only socially acceptable but also desirable.

In the years leading up to the 1951 ad, many economic and global events had an influence on the advertising industry. For example, the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the ensuing annihilation of half of the US troops present resulted in a war supported by every American man, woman, and child because they had to contribute to the fight. At that time, many companies were hesitant to allow women to work in factories because women were considered to be less competent at skilled manual work than their male counterparts and a potential distraction to men, resulting in reduced productivity (McDonnell, Episode 7 11:30-11:46). Despite the fact that women did enter the workforce, the notion that they were less competent than men was used in many ads as a marketing fodder to promote just the opposite: self confidence and empowerment for women. Since the 1920s, many cigarette companies have not hesitated to jump on the

bandwagon and claim to support women's individual rights. By shifting the focus of new freedoms available to women, Philip Morris was able to shape multiple generations. Furthermore, many young girls during this time were forced to grow up faster. In the forties, "The departure of so many men changed the normal rhythms and patterns of American social life. For teenage girls, those changes often meant growing up very quickly. Teenage girls were more precociously sexual in some ways in the 40s than they'd been in the 30s, in part because their young boyfriends were going off to war and they might never see them again" (McDonnell, Episode 7, 22:43-22:57). This also proves that young teens in addition to women have been targeted by cigarette companies. These social changes coincided with tobacco company marketing tactics towards young teens and women.

The focal point of the 1951 Philip Morris above is a young, beautiful empowered woman. The way the woman looks up hopefully, happily and with the caption associating self-belief with smoking further associating empowerment and independence with the act of smoking. The ad declares that Philip Morris is the best brand there is and that "you" can test that out yourself. The main sign in this ad is the young woman, but the values are transferred to the act of smoking and to the headline "believe in yourself." The ad relies on the ambiguity of the "you," who is both the ideal reader of the ad, and the woman portrayed. The specific distinction between the signified (meaning) and the signifier (what we see represented) is crucial when conveying a message because it highlights the conventional relationship between meanings and signifiers (Rose 113). In this case, the conventional morality of individuality and empowerment (believing in oneself, in one's capacities) has been altered to fit the needs of tobacco corporations. Another aspect worth noting in this ad is the way it appeals to reason by stating that they are "the best" and by providing steps by which you can test that they are, in fact, the best. Philip Morris also utilizes

the tactic of encouraging consumers to experience or interact with the product themselves. Again, the woman looks as if she is gazing into the hopeful future where women are finally perceived as social equals. Lastly, the use of phrasing such as “make your own choice” personalizes the product for the audience.



Figure 2: Juul ad, 2015, VICE Magazine

Over 60 years later, smoking and tobacco companies continue to employ similar tactics for the purpose of corporate benefit at the expense of the health and wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of individuals. Due to the drastic decline of tobacco cigarettes during the turn of the twenty-first century, Juul began to take off. Smoking conventional cigarettes became more stigmatized as more research was made public proving the negative effects of long term tobacco use. Particularly, “lung cancer went from rarity to more commonplace – by the early 1950s it became the most common cancer diagnosed in American men” (Mendes). The deleterious effects of smoking were becoming increasingly more apparent, even if stifled by the tobacco industry, while more and more Americans were being socialized on the normalcy of smoking. Combating

tobacco use, Juul was created as a tobacco alternative and once again, many fell victim to the propaganda of corporate profiteering. In most Western areas, the presence of large-scale conscientiousness in society has proven to be a deterrent against smoking cigarettes except where it is prevalent and not stigmatized (Lee). Where advertising companies have historically proven to be successful at normalizing tobacco cigarettes, they are leveraging the same tactics in normalizing e-cigarettes and consumers are again falling for the same tricks. Just as cigarettes manipulated a specific demographic, Juul has done the same, however, the focus has now been shifted to younger audiences, not just women. Most notably, through the use of bright colored ads with young teens smiling boldly at the audience as the face of the product further encourages adolescent use. The act of smoking is an adult recreation, children regularly admire and emulate the actions of adults as they attempt to be more adult-like. Similarly, the array of flavors that are advertised are typically associated with kids (ie. candy flavoring, fruity flavors, or bubble gum flavoring), while smoking is customarily associated with adulthood. In the same way tobacco marketing linked cigarette smoking with empowerment for women, Juul has found a way to link vaping with maturity and independence for teens.

In 2015, Philip Morris purchased a portion of Altria (the main production company of Juul products) in order to change attitudes about smoking. Here they promote the impression of this change, and the positive implication of progress we have in our society (newer must be better). The advertising industry has perpetuated the notion that change and novelty must be always towards something better. Juul companies have also made an effort to target younger audiences through the use of bright, vibrant colors as well as placing a young girl as the face of the ad. The 2015 Juul's ad employs logos by promoting product "evolution," specifically the use of the small hashtag in the top right corner (#smokingevolved), as well as the product change,

away from a cigarette made of paper, filter and tobacco leaves, and towards a sophisticated device for nicotine consumption. Despite these apparent changes, the truth is that nothing has changed: the consumer is still inhaling a nicotine-filled smoke-like substance, nicotine is still addictive, the products are still unhealthy, and the brand is still making money just like they had made money from tobacco-based cigarettes. Another aspect that has not changed between the two ads under consideration, is that both women are facing in the same direction, both are looking up, and holding the cigarette/juul in similar ways, if only with opposite hands. The characterization of high confidence is consistent between the two ads as both women's body language emanates optimism, specifically through their posture—head held high, slightly relaxed, and an attitude that they run the world. The orientation in both ads is fixated on the social marketing concept and the product concept, meaning that advertisers studied the wants, needs, and interests of a target audience so that they can deliver the desired satisfaction that these demographics seek. By placing the orientation of the ad on the women specifically, adverts have associated confidence and empowerment with smoking.

The transition into the twenty-first century further reflected the rapid decline of smoking in America and e-cigarettes became increasingly popular particularly among teenagers. E-cigarette use from 2017 to 2018 increased by 78% and “the fun flavors make e-cigarettes more appealing to young smokers” (Bendix). The marketing methods employed by Juul target younger audiences. For example, Juul ads typically display attractive young models socializing and flirtatiously sharing the flash-drive shaped device, showing behavior like dancing to club-like music and clothing styles more characteristic of teens than mature adults. Their explicit targeting of teens is shown through their promotions alongside ads that make Juul pods seem like “sweet treats” and made “juuling” (the popularized device has become genericized and used as a verb)

seem like casual fun (Chaykowski). Young teens desire to appear more adult-like and this has made them the perfect demographic for manipulative targeting. The irony present here is that while the fruity flavors attract a younger audience pallet, smoking/vaping is associated with adult activity. While these elements appear to be in direct contrast with one another, both elements are successfully effective in attracting young consumers.

Overall, the advertising industry often distorts associations and audience perceptions to make their product more appealing. This includes false perceptions of what it takes to appear mature, independent, and empowered in selling nicotine-based products. To this end, consumers have been misled to believe that smoking tobacco and nicotine products are a trendy practice that can affect smokers' confidence, especially women's. As smoking of tobacco-cigarettes became stigmatized and the negative health effects of consuming these products became public, the advertising companies have thus "evolved" to maintain sales. However, the false association of cigarettes or juuls with glamor, coolness, and a new way to establish one's identity has not only maintained the distorted perception of adulthood, maturity, and self confidence, but also come at the detriment of the health of hundreds of thousands. Ultimately, the nicotine industry has used the same tactics in luring young women to increase their sales, leading to an epidemic of misinformation and subsequent youth vaping.

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