

Fashionable Pink Camels

I can say with confidence that anyone reading this has spent considerable time standing in line at the grocery store waiting to pay. What is it that most of us do while waiting? We thumb through the glossy magazines and tabloids, of course. Perhaps the latest issue of some publication that we cannot justify subscribing to catches our eye and tempts us to toss it into the cart. Whether our interests are piqued by headlines touting the very latest “Brangelina” news, how to lose 25 pounds in three weeks, or declarations regarding the latest must-have fashion accessory, many of us cannot resist reading the content. I wonder what would happen if our interest in professional literature could be so easily and addictively piqued? But I digress.

Recently, a report in the *Los Angeles Times* (Noveck, 2007) about cigarette advertising caught my eye, and on one particular trip to the store, I purposefully went looking for a copy of *Vogue*. It seemed the venerable fashion bible had been assailed by negative reader mail for having accepted advertising from Camel cigarettes. The article also mentioned other splashy fashion and beauty magazines and, as it turned out, my eyes fell first to the latest copy of *Harper's Bazaar*. The cover boasted head shots of none other than Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie (and their respective pooches) bedecked in designer frocks and pricey jewels, looking tan and lovely. With a quick flip, I found it—the offending ad had large pink curley-qed borders, a floral motif replaced the pyramid and palm trees, the camels were small and fuchsia-colored, the box of Camels was a trendy black, and the cigarettes were touted as being “light and luscious.” The ad was clearly designed to meld into the displays of expensive shoes and outfits and the advertising for jewelry that looked as though it had been lifted from the Smithsonian Institution—couture, Jimmy Choo’s, crystals, and throw in some Camels. Who would not want that lifestyle?

The protected role of tobacco in our American culture and economy is troubling to most of us, but it becomes particularly

upsetting when we see campaigns targeted at women and, inevitably, young girls. Of course, the tobacco companies deny that they are targeting adolescents, but we know all too well that girls are exposed to and experiencing what used to be adult-type activities at younger and younger ages. Young women in high school, many dreaming of launching modeling and performing careers, and those

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in college facing the pressures of becoming adults all are receiving double messages: Smoking causes heart disease—but everybody does it; smoking causes cancer—but it can keep your appetite under control; smoking is unhealthy to those around you who do not smoke—but you and your guy can look so cool when you light up; smoking blackens your lungs—but this brand is completely natural; smoking can harm an unborn fetus—but this cigarette is toffee flavored; smoking is powerfully addictive—but you can quit anytime; smoking is bad for you—but you are not the boss of me!

Progress has indeed been made on many fronts in tobacco control. State and federal excise taxes have increased the price of cigarettes to prohibitive levels in some areas and among the young in particular. Huge monetary judgments levied against the tobacco companies go to fund no-smoking campaigns and health care. Despite the availability of print advertising, restrictions have been placed on where advertising can be placed and where and how cigarettes can

be sold. Nevertheless, two facts out of many strike me as particularly telling. First, despite the huge financial damages assessed to the tobacco companies by the Master Settlement Agreement, the companies continue to remain healthy (the irony of that adjective is not lost on me). They pour billions of dollars each year into advertising their products and supporting price reductions, and none of them seems in any imminent danger of going under. Second, deaths from lung cancer in women have not yet peaked even if they are showing signs that they are beginning to plateau (American Cancer Society, 2007). Advertising efforts in women’s magazines will not help to speed a decline. Placement of such ads in publications that are likely to attract large numbers of women who look at all of the ads for “stuff” to be hipper, prettier, younger, fresher, and more attractive is blatantly wrong, but that’s “just business.” Customers of these magazines have to voice their opinions.

We all read these magazines (you know you do!). I propose we look at the advertisements a little more carefully whether we subscribe to these publications, purchase them every now and then, or just thumb through them to ward off the irritation of standing in line at the grocery store. When you come across these ads for tobacco products, take a minute when you get home to write to the magazine’s editor to express your concerns. You will find that contact information in the front of the publication. Then, when the death toll in women begins to drop, maybe we can take some of the credit. At the very least, the world of fashion might be a safer place for our young people.

References

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