

CAMPAIGN For TOBACCO-FREE Kids®

TOBACCO INDUSTRY TARGETING OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

The tobacco companies have long understood the importance of women and girls in the overall market for cigarettes and as a source of new customers. They have conducted extensive market research on the attitudes of women and girls to better understand how to target their products and their advertising. By focusing their research on how females view themselves, their aspirations and the social pressures they face, the cigarette companies have developed some of the most aggressive and sophisticated marketing campaigns in history for reaching and influencing women and girls. The consequences of these campaigns are staggering. Smoking among girls and young women increased dramatically in the 1990s. From 1991 to 1999, smoking among high school girls increased from 27 to 34.9 percent.¹ Smoking rates among women over 18 have barely declined over the past 10 years and women are now almost as likely as men to smoke.²

The Early Years

Though the slogans have changed over time, the tobacco industry's targeted marketing of women can be traced back to the 1920s. While women were depicted in cigarette ads as non-smoking admirers of smoking men at first, by 1927 advertisements with women smoking began to appear in women's magazines.³ One of the most famous early cigarette advertising campaigns directed at women was Lucky Strikes' "Reach for Lucky Instead of A Sweet."

Despite the advent of targeted advertising, smoking among women did not really gain social acceptability until World War II. During that era, cigarette companies began to target women more directly, using the fashion, beauty, and sophistication themes that still continue today. The companies also used images of women in the military and the work place. For example, Camel's ad slogan during World War II was "First in the Service" and highlighted successful women in the military. While these new advertising campaigns focused on women's growing role in the American workplace, they still portrayed smoking as a stylish and feminine act. This theme of smoking as a way of achieving independence, while at the same time remaining stylish and attractive (especially to men), became less popular after the war ended, but would later reappear.

The Advent of Women-Specific Brands in the 1970s

Cigarette company advertising continued to target women throughout the 1950s and 1960s, but the companies did not make a full-scale effort to expand the number of their female customers until the late 1960s. Realizing the impact that the women's liberation movement was having on the role of women in America, the tobacco companies began to create specific brands of cigarettes for women.

With the introduction of Virginia Slims by Philip Morris in 1968, women became a major target of the tobacco industry. Cigarette ads for this brand depicted women as independent and successful with catchy tag lines such as the infamous "You've Come A Long Way Baby." Like early ads targeted at women, these marketing efforts continued to portray female smoking as a way to express one's independence, as well as a way to be particularly stylish and sexy.

The Virginia Slims advertising theme has not changed much since its introduction. Philip Morris continued to market Virginia Slims using images of empowered women paired with "You've Come A Long Way Baby" throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The copy on these ads usually focused on how women's lives had changed since the 1920s and 1930s, focusing on the new freedoms allowed to women. In the early 1990s, Philip Morris revamped the image of Virginia Slims with the "It's a Woman Thing" campaign. While these ad campaigns continued to suggest empowerment and attractiveness from smoking, the ad copy focused on how women are different than men. More recently, Virginia Slims launched the lavish "Find Your Voice" ad campaign, which featured strikingly beautiful women from around the world and suggested that independence and allure could be found by smoking. (Philip Morris' chief executive in June 2000 agreed to remove the "Find Your Voice" slogan after being questioned in the landmark Florida smokers trial about whether it might be offensive to smokers with throat cancer.)⁴

With the success of these marketing campaigns, the tobacco companies fully recognized the importance of women and girls as a key to their future success. For example, an internal R.J. Reynolds document stated that "Younger adult female smokers will continue to gain importance among [young adult] smokers due to their stronger incidence trend versus [young adult] male smokers."⁵ Six years after the introduction of Virginia Slims and other brands aimed at the female market, the smoking initiation rate of 12-year-old girls had increased by 110 percent. Increases among teenage girls of other ages were also substantial.⁶

In the 1990s, the tobacco industry started tying their print advertising campaigns to a variety of promotional campaigns. These campaigns reinforced the image of smoking being stylish and sexy by offering free merchandise like clothing and CDs. Studies have shown that there is a direct relationship between the awareness of and involvement with promotional items and smoking initiation by youth.⁷

Targeting Women with "Low Tar" and "Light" Cigarettes

Realizing that many women were concerned about the long-term health risks of smoking, in the 1970s the tobacco companies began promoting "low tar" or "light" cigarettes to women as a "softer" or even "safer" option. As a 1978 Philip Morris document stated, "Today women make up the majority of low tar smokers. Almost half of all women have switched to low tar."⁸

Almost a decade later, another Philip Morris document offered a more detailed analysis, stating that "because of women's nurturing role in society, they are naturally more involved with low tar cigarettes than men (70% of low tar smokers are female). They do not want to stop smoking, yet they are guilt-ridden with concerns for their families if smoking should badly damage their own health. Thus they compromise by smoking low tar cigarettes. ... This new product can fit this positioning exactly."⁹

An example of this marketing strategy can be seen in the True ad campaign from the 1970s. This campaign, which showed golfers and tennis players as well as young women, read "All the fuss about smoking got me thinking I'd either quit or smoke True. I smoke True. The low tar low nicotine cigarette. Think about it."

The cigarette companies continued to market these products despite being well aware that the actual or implied health claims in their ads were either misleading or entirely false. In fact, studies have shown that the introduction of "lights" did not improve the public health and may have led to an increase in the incidence of disease caused by smoking. That is because the

introduction of lights led many smokers not to quit and smokers of lights compensate by smoking more, inhaling more deeply or blocking ventilation holes.¹⁰

More women than men currently smoke light and ultra-light cigarettes (63 percent of women and 46 percent of men). Women are also more likely than men to switch to light or ultra-light cigarettes.¹¹¹²

Cigarette Company Targeting of Women and Girls Today

The cigarette companies continue to target women using the same themes in their advertising. The image of smoking being tied to independence, stylishness, weight control, sophistication and power continues today in the advertisements running in many popular women's magazines. There are now two main types of cigarettes marketed to women, female brands and dual sex brands. Female brands, like Virginia Slims, Capri and Misty, are marketed directly to women using feminine images. Dual sex brands, like Marlboro and Camel, are marketed to women with independent and fun-loving imagery.

Philip Morris has been especially successful in its efforts to attract women to its "dual sex" brands. For years now, more women, of all age groups, have smoked Marlboro than any other brand.¹³ As an RJR document recognized, "It is clear that the primary competitor for a new [young adult] female smoker is Marlboro."¹⁴ An undated R.J. Reynolds analysis of younger adult female smokers recognized the importance of this group to industry growth and also the potential in 'dual sex' brands like Marlboro and Camel: "Most younger adult females smoke a dual sex brand – not too masculine (e.g. Camel), but not strictly female (Virginia Slims). While specially targeted female brands will undoubtedly play a role in the future market, lifestyle trends suggest that commonalities between younger adult males/females are increasing over time, so that dual sex wants are likely to remain prevalent."¹⁵

Female-specific brands continue to play an important role in the cigarette companies' marketing strategies. Recent female-brand marketing campaigns continue to portray the image that women are empowered by smoking and Virginia Slims continues to be the most popular female specific brand among women.¹⁶

From the Camel ads of the forties, with images of female pilots and copy lines like "They've Got What it Takes!," to the recent Virginia Slims campaign telling women to "Find Your Voice," the tobacco companies have continued to target women and girls with their deadly and addictive product. In the United States, smoking rates among males and females in high school are almost equal (34.7 for males and 34.9 for females), and more than 20 percent of adult women are current smokers.¹⁷

National Center for Tobacco-Free Kids, March 20, 2001

Additional Tobacco Industry Quotes About Targeting Women and Girls

R.J. Reynolds, 1982. "RJR has a corporate gap in the younger adult female smoker market. While this in itself does not represent a market opportunity, penetration of this smoker group does pose a strategic corporate opportunity ... younger adult smokers are strategically important to

RJR's long-term growth ... Specifically, these young adult females agree that smoking is: attractive to the opposite sex, sophisticated/stylish, less intelligent, more aggressive, more mature, less feminine, smoke because friends do, feel more comfortable around others, feel that I'm rebelling."¹⁸

American Tobacco Company (later purchased by Brown and Williamson) 1983. "Only recently has Virginia Slims attempted to update their approach reflecting fun and lifestyle. Given the increasing number of women in the work force, their demanding life-styles and changing values, an opportunity exists to position a female brand in step with today's successful women's lifestyle and values."¹⁹

R.J. Reynolds, 1983. "There is greater agreement as to how and why women began smoking in the first place. Beyond the easily recognized pressure of peers, women come to indicate passage into adulthood and as part of this transitional period, to exhibit anti-authoritarian behavior."²⁰

R.J. Reynolds, 1983. "The 'premise' is described as: "A brand that enhances/complements the young adult female smoker's image by standing for contemporary femininity."²¹

R.J. Reynolds, 1984. "Designed to reinforce its appeal to fashion conscious, younger adult women ... These product and packaging modifications will allow the consumer to make a bolder statement about her lifestyle and still enjoy the low tar benefits of MORE lights 100's."²²

Philip Morris, 1985. "However, this report does provide us with some useful information for Virginia Slims in a sense that a slim image cigarette has to be more of an appeal for the female smokers who are concerned about their weight. Although the survey indicated that only 52% of all female smokers 18-20 years old are concerned about their weight, I believe that this concern will be much higher amongst the over 20 year old female smokers, which is presumably the correct target for Virginia Slims."²³

Philip Morris, 1991. "VSLM Creative Strategy: To convince fashionable, modern, independent and self-confident women aged 20-34 that by smoking VSLM, they are making better/more complete expression of their independence."²⁴

Philip Morris, 1992. " In an effort to gain relevancy among young adult female smokers, Virginia Slims is exploring a new advertising direction. While this new direction has not been specifically defined as of yet, its objective is to make Virginia Slims relevant to young adult female smokers through a proprietary attitude, in the context of female style ... To women smokers, Virginia Slims is the brand that best expresses their style and attitude about being a women today. The Virginia Slims Fashion program should dimensionalize the style and attitude of today's young women smoker ... Event Objectives: generate trial and retrial among target ... provide YAFS with an opportunity to support a popular, relevant charitable cause."²⁵

American Tobacco Company (later purchased by Brown and Williamson) 1993. "There is significant opportunity to segment the female market on the basis of current values, age, lifestyles and preferred length and circumference of products. This assignment should consider a more contemporary and relevant lifestyle approach targeted toward young adult female smokers."²⁶

Philip Morris, 1993. "As a matter of fact, advertisements in magazines is the most efficient way to talk to these female smokers. We also know what values to outline based on what we just saw ... Actually, one of their main terminal values is to look attractive. In other words, a woman cannot be attractive if she is fat. Aerobics (gym) is therefore one of their major activities, when

they do not try to meet the opposite sex in parties, bars or discotheques. This is their conception of having an exciting life for the time being. The feed back effect of such an exciting life and such as independence is that they claim it would be a long time before they settle down with someone. This boiling mixture of dreams, immediate experience of independence and intensive sexual encounters is satisfied in some ways by the brands they smoke."²⁷

Philip Morris, 1993. "As it is often the case, being stylish implies to hold the weight down and to remain physically fit. Not surprisingly, the people to look up to as models are sexy and self assure people and consists at least of socializing with sophisticated friends."²⁸

Brown and Williamson, 1995. "The recent BrandScape research identified key characteristics of Misty smokers. Summed up into two words, the Misty smoker is both "Savvy" and "Sassy"; Savvy - rational, practical, feminine, price conscious. Sassy - active, youthful attitude, confident. This type of information has allowed us to fine-tune Misty's magazine selection, going beyond traditional quantitative data, age, income to include more qualitative insight into who the Misty focus audience is."²⁹

Brown and Williamson, 1995. "Role of Print: Reach - Misty target is a heavy magazine reader ... Image - Vast array of editorial formats (i.e.: service, beauty, fashion, entertainment) provide Misty advertising with numerous 'personalities' increasing relevancy and interest to broad scope of Misty target ... Beauty / Fashion: Allure, Bazaar, Elle, Glamour, Mademoiselle, Mirabella, Vogue. Strong composition of younger portion of Misty target, editorial focus appeals to the sociability of the Misty smoker, ideal format to showcase creative."³⁰

¹ CDC, "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 1999," *MMWR*, 9 June 2000, Vol. 49, No. SS-5.

² U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "Cigarette Smoking Among Adults – United States, 1998," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, 2000, Vol. 49, No. 39.

³ Ernster, Virginia, "Mixed Messages for Women" *New York State Journal of Medicine*, July 1985.

⁴ Fairclough, G, "Philip Morris Removes Slogan From Ads In Second Attempt Responding To Critics," *Wall Street Journal*, 12 June 2000.

⁵ R.J. Reynolds, Younger Adult Female Smokers - New Brand Opportunity, 23 July 1985 (RJR 504103122 - 3124).

⁶ Pierce J.P., Lee L., Gilpin E.A., "Smoking initiation by adolescent girls, 1944 through 1988: An association with targeted advertising," *JAMA*, 1994, Vol. 271, No. 8.

⁷ Pierce, J. et al, "Tobacco Industry Promotion of Cigarettes and Adolescent Smoking," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 1998 February; 279(7): 511-505. [with erratum in *JAMA* 280(5): 422 (August 1998)]. and Altman, DG. et al, "Tobacco Promotion and Susceptibility to Tobacco Use Among Adolescents aged 12 through 17," *American Journal of Public Health*. 1996 Nov; 86(11):1590-1593

⁸ Philip Morris, Virginia Slims introduces the low tar cigarette made just for women , 1978 (PM 1005064182).

⁹ Philip Morris, Project Magic, June 1985. (PM 2501008130).

¹⁰ Stellman, S.D., et al., "Risk of Squamous Cell Carcinoma and Adenocarcinoma of the Lung in Relation to Lifetime Filter Cigarette Smoking," *Cancer* August 1997; 80(3): 382-88.

¹¹ Pillitteri, JL, Shiffman S, Rohay JM, Gitchell JG, Burton SL. Smokers beliefs about light and ultralight cigarettes are more fiction than fact. Poster presented at the Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco's Annual Meeting, March 23, 2001, Seattle, Washington.

¹² Giovino, G. et al., "Attitudes, Knowledge, and Beliefs About Low-yield Cigarettes Among Adolescents and Adults," in *The FTC Cigarette Test Method for Determining Tar, Nicotine, and Carbon Monoxide Yields of U.S. Cigarettes; Report of the NCI Expert Committee*. National Institutes of Health. National Cancer Institute. Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph 7.

¹³ SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 1999 CAI.

¹⁴ R.J. Reynolds, Younger Adult Female Smokers - New Brand Opportunity, 23 July 1985 (RJR 504103122 - 3124).

¹⁵ R.J. Reynolds, Younger Adult Female Smokers, undated (RJR 503049112 -9115).

¹⁶ SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 1999 CAI.

¹⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 1999," *MMWR*, 9 June 2000, Vol. 49, No. SS-5.

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- ¹⁸ R.J. Reynolds, Analysis of 18-24 year old female market, 7 May 1982. (RJR, 502765848).
- ¹⁹ American Tobacco Company, 1983 November 17. (B&W/ATC, ATX040017950-ATX040017951).
- ²⁰ R.J. Reynolds, McCann-Erickson market research dept, Two Focussed Group Sessions to Explore Attitudes Toward Smoking and Cigarette Brands/Advertising, November 1983. (RJR, 501759283-9314).
- ²¹ R.J. Reynolds, Project AA Analysis of Female Smokers, July 19, 1983 (RJR, 501759283-9314)
- ²² R.J. Reynolds, June 14, 1984 (RJR, 500627236-7337)
- ²³ Philip Morris, Virginia Slims Memo, 8 August 1985. (PM 2026305099).
- ²⁴ Philip Morris, VSLM Print Advertising Test, 5 April 1991. (PM 2504059015/9081).
- ²⁵ Philip Morris, Request for Promotional Services, 31 March 1992. (PM 2043524894)
- ²⁶ American Tobacco Company, 1993 November 17. (B&W/ATC, ATX040017950-ATX040017951).
- ²⁷ Philip Morris, Research Report on YAMS/YAFS, 1993 (PM 2040885023)
- ²⁸ Philip Morris, Research Report YAMS/YAFS, 1993 (PM 2040885023)
- ²⁹ Brown and Williamson, B&W Misty Media Plan Recommendation, 3 March 1995. (B&W 432010732).
- ³⁰ Brown and Williamson, B&W Misty Media Plan Recommendation, 3 March 1995. (B&W 432010732).