

TOBACCO INDUSTRY DENORMALIZATION

A New Approach to Antismoking Campaigns for Young People

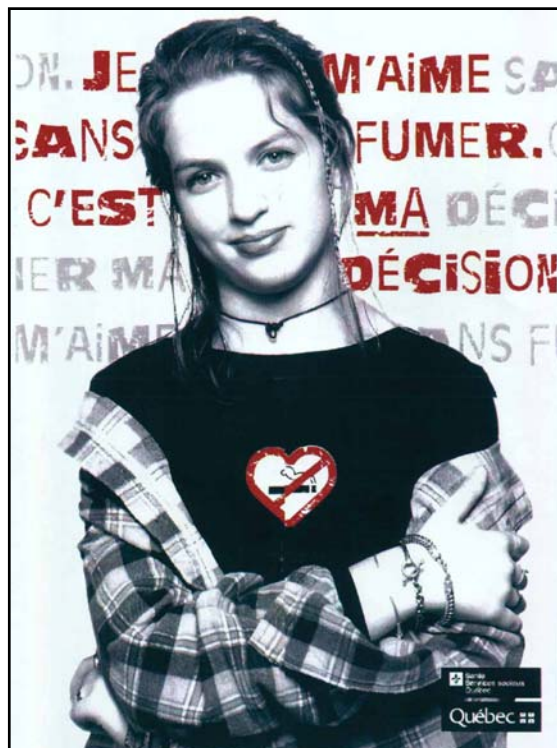
(September 2001)

1) ← Campaigns Aimed at Youth

In order to reduce smoking effectively, there needs to be consistency between the antismoking initiatives in family and school settings and the messages conveyed by society. The fight against tobacco requires a comprehensive approach that is designed particularly to change societal norms. Youth-focused campaigns are a vital part of the overall strategy. Yet the nature of these campaigns greatly influences how effective they will be in discouraging young people from lighting up.

2) ← Traditional Campaigns

Increasingly, experts are questioning the effectiveness of traditional school-based antismoking programs, in particular those that place the responsibility for not smoking on the individual. These campaigns, developed and implemented by the usual authority figures in kids' lives (teachers, parents, the government, health officials), focus on decision making, self-assertion, and the health hazards of smoking.



← PREVENTION CAMPAIGN BY THE QUEBEC GOVERNMENT (1995).

Several studies have shown the ineffectiveness of such campaigns. For example, a Montreal study revealed a striking paradox in a program designed for students aged 9 to 12. Instead of deterring them from smoking, the program actually increased the likelihood for these kids to smoke (three times more for boys and five times more for girls).¹ Another study, conducted by two professors at the Université du Québec à Rimouski, concluded that government campaigns dissuade only young non-smokers²—in other words, kids and teens who are already “responsible.”



↑ "AN INEFFECTIVE ANTI-TOBACCO FIGHT"

↑ "ANTI-TOBACCO PARADOX"

In December 2000, the U.S. National Cancer Institute published a landmark study exposing the ineffectiveness of traditional antismoking campaigns. This study tracked 8,388 students over 15 years in 40 school districts. It found that in the classroom, antismoking programs that focus on social influences have no measurable impact.³



¹ DUFOUR, V. Paradoxe antitabac : Un programme destiné à des jeunes Montréalais a eu l'effet inverse à celui recherché. *Le Devoir*. April 22, 2000 (article quoting Lise Renaud of the Direction de la Santé et des Services sociaux de Montréal-Centre).

² THÉRIAULT, CARL. Une lutte antitabac inefficace. *Le Soleil*. May 27, 2000 (on the study by Arthur Gélinas and Colette Schoonbroot, Étude de pertinence des interventions préventives sur le tabagisme auprès des jeunes en milieu scolaire).

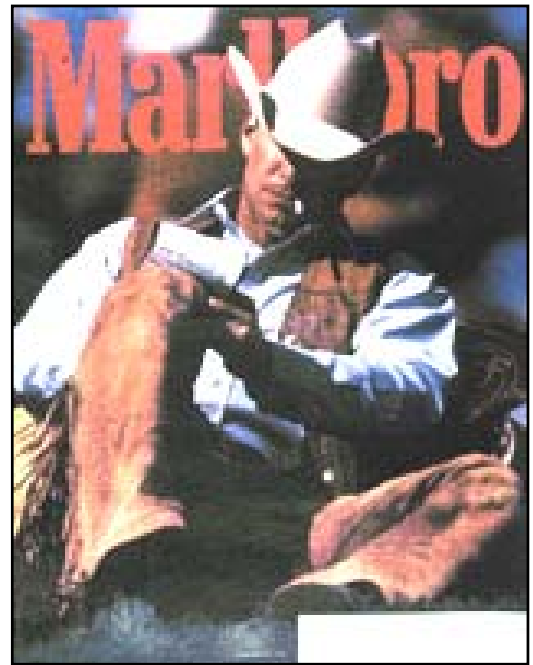
³ NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE. Researchers complete extensive youth smoking prevention study. December 19, 2000 (press release on study done by the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center and published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* on December 20, 2000).

3) ← Observations by Experts

The ineffectiveness of school-based initiatives isn't due to the programs themselves. In fact, taken alone, these programs would probably be beneficial. Yet unlike other health promotion programs, anti-tobacco programs are up against decades of efforts by tobacco multinationals which manipulated social norms to make smoking attractive. Cigarette marketing, which associates smoking with maturity, rebellion, popularity and independence, has a greater impact on young potential smokers than do the messages from traditional antismoking campaigns.⁴

In fact, the tone (paternalist) and source (government, educators) of traditional campaigns end up bolstering the tobacco industry's message to youth: smoke and you will be rebelling against adult authority.

Published scientific studies now recognize that youth-focused antismoking campaigns that center on health hazards or romantic rejection are ineffective strategies for dissuading young people from smoking.⁵



4) ← An Emphasis on Young People

Campaigns that concentrate on youth inevitably put emphasis on the "problem of underage smoking". However, framing the smoking epidemic as a "youth problem" risks reinforcing the social acceptance of adult smoking.⁶

→ Youth prevention campaign by R.J. Reynolds (maker of Camel cigarettes).



⁴ Cigarette ads have more impact than anti-tobacco efforts. *Washington Street Journal*. June 11, 2001 (article quoting research by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania).

⁵ GOLDDMAN, L and S GLANZ. Evaluation of antismoking advertising campaigns. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Vol. 279, No. 10; March 1998.

⁶ SIEGEL M. Mass media antismoking campaigns: a powerful tool for health promotion. *Annals of Internal Medicine*. Vol. 129, No. 2; July 1998.

Creating effective antismoking messages for young people is no easy task. Kids and teenagers are more intelligent than they're given credit for. What's more, they won't listen to adults who lecture them.

When a campaign targets kids too directly, young people feel that "someone"—usually some adult—is preaching to them.⁷ Even when a campaign uses a young spokesperson, kids will see this person as a mouthpiece for adults and another way to manipulate them. Of course, if adults tell kids—directly or indirectly—not to do something, that forbidden fruit suddenly looks very tasty.⁸ All this to say that most antismoking campaigns are doomed to failure simply because they're designed by adults and target kids.⁹

That's why education campaigns structured around adult smoking and social norms on smoking offer the best chance of influencing young people.¹⁰ In California, the most effective campaigns have moved away from the usual youth-focused approach and have appeared to be aimed squarely at adults.¹¹ In other words, *young people listen to what adults say to one another*.

Distinguishing between the *goal* and the *message* is key. While everyone agrees with the goal—that kids shouldn't smoke—telling them this directly isn't necessarily the best way to achieve this goal.

5) ← Authority Figures

Mobilizing the adults who play a significant role in young people's lives (parents, parent groups, school officials, camp counsellors) isn't necessarily a good approach.

Though various adults can help in the fight against youth smoking (by supporting higher cigarette taxes or offering programs to quit smoking), they aren't effective *spokespeople* for antismoking campaigns directed at teens.

There is, however, an exception to this rule: adults *are* effective when denouncing tactics used by the tobacco industry. In fact, denormalizing the tobacco industry changes the dynamic of parent (or teacher) versus rebellious teen by creating a common enemy for young people and adults.¹²

⁷ SILVERMAN, B (vice-president of the Western Internal Media Corporation, the public-relations firm for the public-health department of California). Interview during a Health Canada conference on denormalization, Ottawa, January 1999.

⁸ SILVERMAN, B (vice-president of the Western Internal Media Corporation, the public-relations firm for the public-health department of California). Interview during a Health Canada conference on denormalization, Ottawa, January 1999.

⁹ ACTION ON SMOKING AND HEALTH (UK). *Danger! PR in the Playground*. 2000.

¹⁰ Reid DJ, McNeill AD, Glynn TJ. Reducing the prevalence of smoking in youth in western countries: an international review. *Tobacco Control*. 1995; 4:266-277.

¹¹ SILVERMAN, B (vice-president of the Western Internal Media Corporation, the public-relations firm for the public-health department of California). Interview during a Health Canada conference on denormalization, Ottawa, January 1999.

¹² FRIEDMAN, M. Teen antismoking strategy focus groups, summary report. *Research Management and Strategic Planning*. November 1996; and KEYE, P. *What We Know, and When Haven't We Known It? Remarks for Health Communications Day*. John Hopkins University; October 1993.

Otherwise, authority figures are the most likely groups to inspire rebellion in teens. Not surprisingly, tobacco companies seek out authority figures to take part in their own “prevention programs.”¹³ (But when it really count, like to promote their products, the industry turn to celebrities that teens admire such as Jacques Villeneuve.)

➔ **The launch of the Operation ID program in the Saguenay in September 2000. This “prevention program” funded by the Canadian tobacco industry brings together the police, mayors, politicians, parent committees and school boards.**



6) ← Solution

Antismoking campaigns should be directed at *young people who are most likely to smoke*. As personality analyses have shown, young smokers tend to be more rebellious people.¹⁴ This fact isn't lost on the tobacco industry: ***“The adolescent seeks to display his new urge for independence with a symbol, and cigarettes are such a symbol since they are associated with adulthood and at the same time adults seek to deny them to the young”***¹⁵ An effective antismoking campaign must target these rebellious teens and *use their urge to rebel to discourage them from smoking*.

The key, then, is to direct teenage rebellion toward the heads of the tobacco industry rather than toward the usual adult authority from the youngster's environment. Smoking must become the *opposite* of an act of rebellion. It should be presented as a sign of weakness, a sign that the smoker has given in to the industry's manipulative and unscrupulous marketing.

7) ← Denormalizing the Tobacco Industry

The tobacco industry is unlike any other. Cigarettes are the only consumer product that kills when used as exactly as directed by the manufacturer. The fact that tobacco is legal is a historical accident. Indeed, such a lethal product could never be launched on today's market. When the medical community finally realized the dangers of smoking, it was too late: millions of smokers were already addicted to nicotine, and the industry had used every political, “scientific,” and promotional means to “normalize” cigarettes.

¹³ ACTION ON SMOKING AND HEALTH (UK). *Danger! PR in the Playground*. 2000.

¹⁴ *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell, 2000, p. 231, quoted in *Danger! PR in the Playground*, Action on Smoking and Health (UK) 2000.

¹⁵ KWECHANSKY MARKETING RESEARCH INC. Project 16; October 18, 1977 (marketing report for Imperial Tobacco Ltd.).

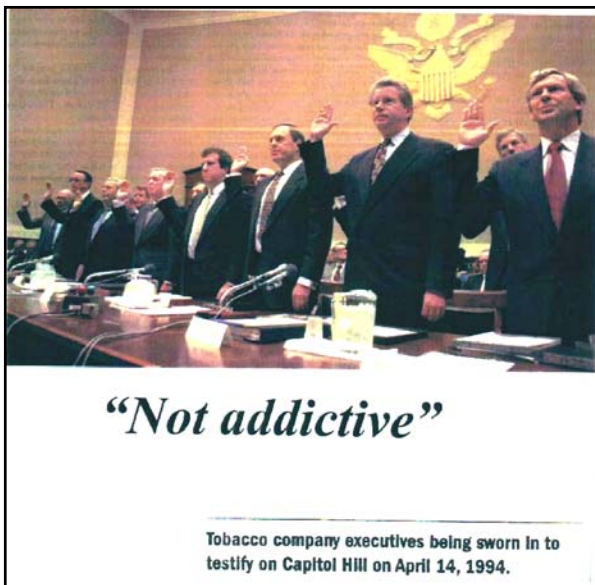
2. It has been stated that CTR is a program to find out "the truth about smoking and health." What is truth to one is false to another. CTR and the Industry have publicly and frequently denied what others find as "truth." Let's face it. We are interested in evidence which we believe denies the allegation that cigaret smoking causes disease. If the CTR program is aimed in this direction, it is in effect trying to prove the negative, that cigaret smoking does not cause disease. Both

↑ Excerpt from a Philip Morris document (1970) on the *Council for Tobacco Research*, the public-relations group created by U.S. tobacco companies to persuade the public that the dangers of smoking had never been proven.¹⁶

For the past 60 years, tobacco companies have invested billions to create a social environment that normalizes cigarettes and prevents strong measures to reduce or eliminate smoking. This is why antismoking campaigns cannot be modelled on other public-health campaigns like those promoting vaccination or encouraging protection against sexually transmitted diseases. In the case of these campaigns, there are no multi-billion-dollar industry working to achieve the opposite results.

As successful U.S. campaigns have recently shown, an effective way to fight against teen smoking is to tell them the truth about the tobacco industry. The *American Legacy Foundation* (created under the 1998 agreement between 46 U.S. states and the industry to produce antismoking campaigns) has said that to dissuade young people from smoking, a campaign must be "structured around creating a movement against smoking like the movement against the Vietnam War or . . . apartheid in South Africa."¹⁷

This notion has is described as industry "denormalization" and aims to change widespread perceptions that society has about the industry and its products.



← **HEADS OF TOBACCO COMPANIES SWEARING BEFORE U.S. CONGRESS THAT NICOTINE IS NOT ADDICTIVE (1994).**

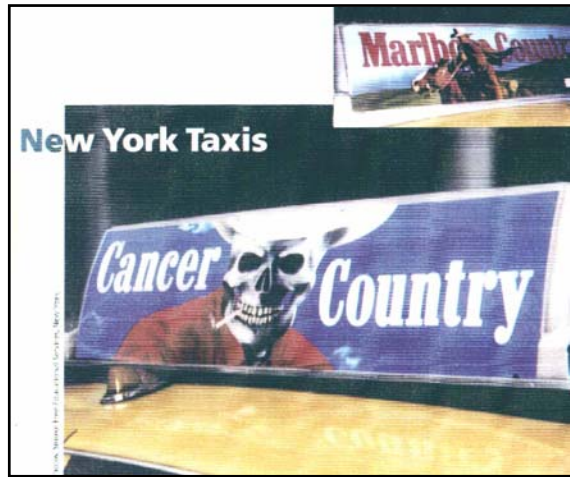
Experience in some U.S. states has revealed that what works best with young people are aggressive campaigns that attack the tobacco industry and challenge the social norms on using and promoting cigarettes.¹⁸ It's telling young people that the tobacco industry wants their money, doesn't care one iota about their health, has hidden and denied the dangers of smoking for 50 years, has studied the psychological profile of 11-, 12- and 13-year-olds to find out what factors motivate them to smoke, and uses sophisticated marketing tactics that make smoking seem a symbol of maturity. In other words, children and teens are told that the industry is manipulating them.¹⁹

¹⁶ GLANZ, S., et al. *The Cigarette Papers*. University of California Press; 1996.

¹⁷ HEALTON, C. (chairman of the American Legacy Foundation) quoted in: Big tobacco burned by cigarette spots. *Washington Post*. August 10, 2001.

¹⁸ SIEGEL M. Mass media antismoking campaigns: a powerful tool for health promotion. *Annals of Internal Medicine*. Vol. 129, No. 2; July 1998.

¹⁹ GOLDDMAN, L. and S. GLANZ. Evaluation of antismoking advertising campaigns. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Vol. 279, No. 10; March 1998.

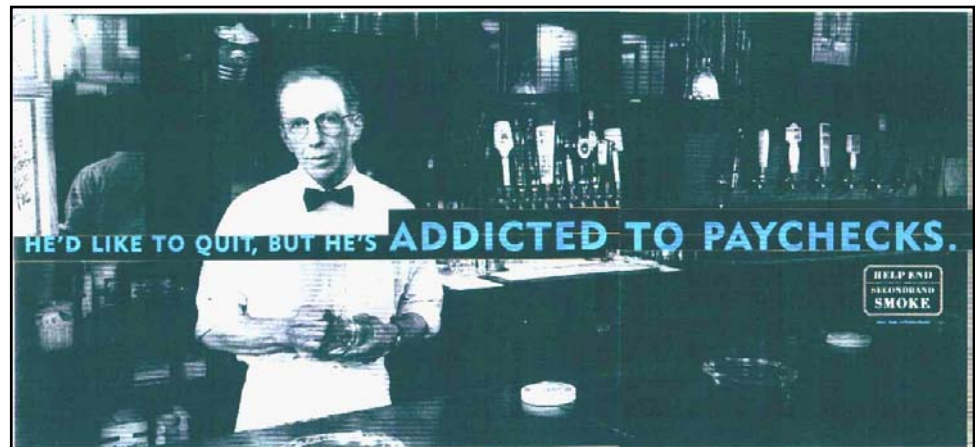


One example of industry denormalization is to show is to provide a critical look at cigarette marketing and reveal what smokers are *really* buying: cancer, emphysema, death. Images commonly associated with cigarette brands can be cleverly used to condemn the industry.

← **COUNTER-AD CAMPAIGN ON NEW YORK TAXIS.**

8) ♣ **Second-hand smoke**

Other than industry manipulation, the issue of second hand smoke is another effective theme to discourage young people from smoking.²⁰ Most young people care deeply about their friends. They do not wish to harm or to annoy them. Messages such as « *If you smoke you harm your friends* » give young people a very good reason not to smoke or to tell their smoker friends “*You know, your actions are hurting me*”.²¹

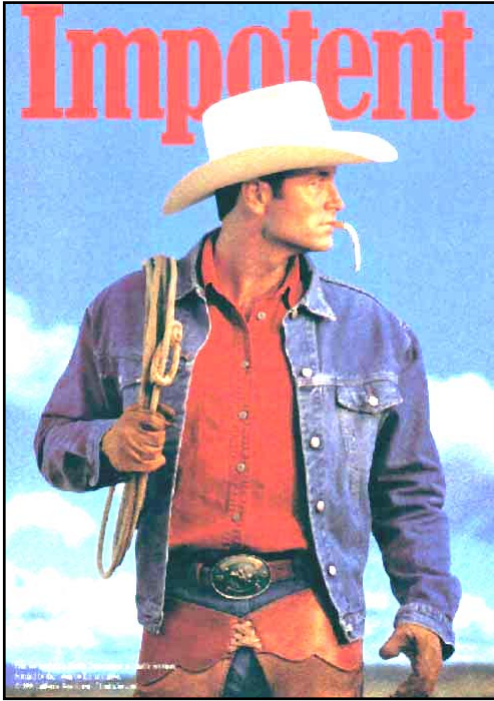


↑ **MASSACHUSETTS HEALTH DEPARTMENT CAMPAIGNS**

²⁰ GOLDDMAN, L. et S. GLANZ. « Evaluation of Antismoking Advertising Campaigns », *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 279, n° 10 (mars 1998).

²¹ SILVERMAN, B., [vice-président de Western Internal Media Corporation, firme de relations publiques du département de santé publique de la Californie] Entrevue lors d'une conférence de Santé Canada sur la dénormalisation, Ottawa, janvier 1999

9) ← Effectiveness



Experience in Florida, Massachusetts and California has shown denormalization to be a successful way to influence young people from smoking. For example, in Florida, smoking rates fell 54% among students in junior high and 24% among students in high school within only a two-year period.

The tobacco industry itself recognizes the effectiveness of these campaigns. In an internal document by the U.S. tobacco giant R.J. Reynolds, the company complains about a Californian campaign spotlighting the industry's manipulation: ***"The California campaign, and those like it, represents a very real threat Impact on self-esteem, social acceptance and smoking utility will ultimately influence [our] business."***²²

10) ← Involving Young People

Involving young people in an antismoking campaign can be effective provided they're fully and genuinely involved. It's not enough for the spokespeople to be teenagers or for a campaign developed by an ad agency to be approved by youth focus groups. (The best antismoking ads in California were initially given a thumbs-down by youth focus groups.²³ This doesn't mean the ads are ineffective.) The involvement of young people must be serious and extensive and include an in-depth education of the tobacco industry's history and marketing practices.

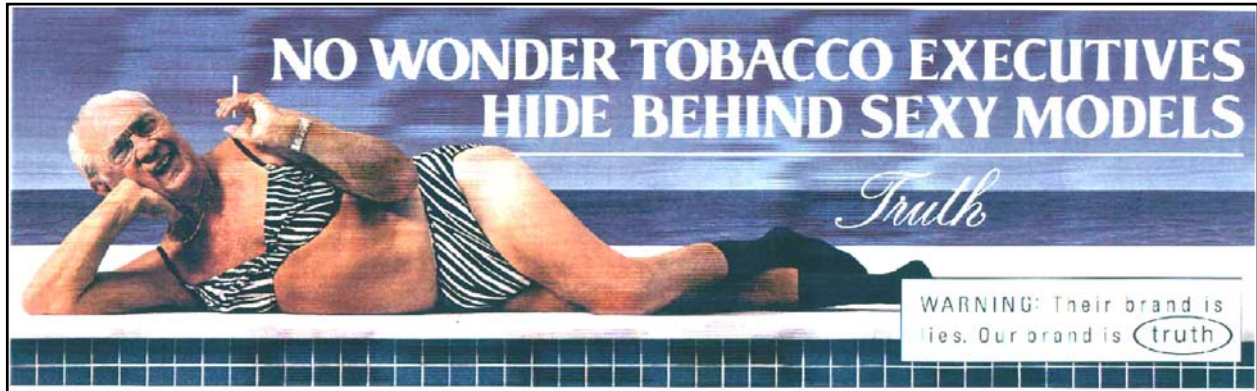
The best example of this approach is the American SWAT teams (Students Working Against Tobacco). This project has involved teens actively in the creation of antismoking campaigns. One such campaign, *"Truth"*, is behind the dramatic drops in smoking among young people in Florida. The key to this campaign's success is not so much that young people created the ads and sometimes served as spokespersons, but rather that they chose to *denounce the tobacco industry*. The Truth campaign stands apart because of its bold, provocative style and its fearlessness in holding the industry accountable.²⁴

²² RJ Reynolds, document submitted in the case *Mangini vs. Reynolds Tobacco Co.*, Civil No. 939359.

²³ SILVERMAN, B. (vice-president of the Western Internal Media Corporation, the public-relations firm for the public-health department of California). Interview during a Health Canada conference on denormalization, Ottawa, January 1999.

²⁴ ACTION ON SMOKING AND HEALTH (UK). *Danger! PR in the Playground*. 2000.

↓ **TRUTH, AN ANTISMOKING CAMPAIGN IN FLORIDA CREATED BY YOUNG PEOPLE.**



11) Industry Denormalization in the Classroom

Classroom projects to denormalize the industry could include:

- A counter-advertising contest targeting Canadian cigarette brands.
- A session of watching a series of American anti-tobacco ads followed by a discussion to analyze and criticize these campaigns (British Columbia has designed such a program, including four versions for four grades, called "Critic's Choice")
- Research and analysis of the tobacco industry's confidential documents (available on many Web sites) on such issues as its youth-focused marketing, its manipulation of nicotine levels to increase smokers' addiction, its involvement in cigarette smuggling, its scientific corruption, its creation of a scientific controversy on second-hand smoke, and its public-relations efforts to create an image of a responsible corporate citizen.
- Analysis of the tobacco industry's "prevention programs" like Operation ID School Zone and Wise Decisions.
- Political actions urging effective smoking reduction measures from school or government (non-smoking schoolyard, higher taxes, greater resources to fight smoking, promotional restrictions, smoking bans in restaurants, etc.).
- Inviting anti-smoking activists to speak about the tobacco industry's tactics, particularly those used to recruit young people.