

"Is Female Smoking  
Female Machismo?"

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Despite all the evidence against it, people continue to smoke, and to smoke more. It seems the largest increase in smoking, at least in the United States, is among women, particularly younger women. One wonders how long it will be before we see an increase in smoking-related diseases in this group. The tobacco industry lobbyists want to convince us that general pollution of the atmosphere is the main cause of respiratory disease. If they're right, we ought not to see any increased lung cancer among the younger generation of women as they grow older.

I think this rise in smoking among young women may be related somehow to the woman's liberation movement, or its ideology. In this, I'm not discounting the considerable impact of advertising obviously directed at the 'liberated' woman. There's nothing subtle about it. It all but says outright, with gorgeous photographs of magnificent models with emphatic sexuality, "If you want to be a woman like me, SMOKE!" or "If you

want to get it on with a man like me, SMOKE!"

No doubt many young women succumb to the advertisements, and start puffing their way to an earlier grave. And no doubt, I believe, just as many others may find in smoking a way of expressing their drive toward equality with men. This would all be just silly or amusing, if smoking were not the expensive, harmful, and messy habit it is. For, according to liberationist ideology, smoking among men is an expression of *machismo*, that unnecessary and flamboyant show of masculinity that women's liberation deplores and even vilifies in men.

Smoking cigarettes ought logically to be something banned by the liberation movement. Cigarettes were, in a sense, 'invented' for women in the first place. Cigarettes kept them in their proper subordinate position by providing something for women to smoke that wasn't a *man's* pipe or *man's* cigar. Before the turn of the century no truly macho man would have been

caught dead with a cigarette. It was sissy. On that score alone, one would think the modern woman would avoid cigarettes as symbols of former bondage.

Since the turn of the century, as cigars became more expensive, and pipe-smoking too time-consuming and too mannered, cigarettes have become the staple diet of the smoking male. Too many young men still make smoking their first outward proof of being male, the first part of the gradually elaborated display of machismo. So, on that score too, the modern woman ought logically to refuse cigarettes. Against all logic of health and liberation, exactly the opposite has happened.

One can't argue that men's smoking is, in a lot of cases, an expression of machismo. I recall an article from our *ISI® Press Digest* in which a Britisher denounced his fictional compatriot, James Bond, for that hero's uninterrupted smoking and drinking,<sup>1</sup> as well as for his all too obvious lack of contraceptive concern once 007 and his lady of the moment left the cigarettes and martinis on the coffee table.

In the 1920s and 30s, smoking in the movies was an important part of romance. Wafting clouds of beautifully cinematographed smoke contributed to the atmosphere. And all the attendant business of smok-

ing gave the lovers something to do with their hands during the minimally suggestive dialog that led up to the inevitable preclimactic fade-out. For years, after "Now, Voyager" showed Paul Henreid with two cigarettes in his mouth, lighting one for himself and one for Bette Davis, teenagers all over the country--around the world probably--incorporated the routine in their exploratory philandering. And there must be few men smokers still alive who didn't once or twice when they were young and on the make at least *try* to hand a girl a lighted cigarette with exactly the overpowering masculinity that only Humphrey Bogart ever really managed. Nowadays, of course, movie lovers have so much freedom of expression that they don't need or don't have time to smoke.

So, it's triply ironic that younger women should be taking up cigarettes to equalize the sexes. Cigarettes are symbols of their former subjugation, symbols of exaggerated masculinity, and they were once, at least, an indispensable prop in the stage business of sex and seduction. Life is full of contradictions. Maybe someone like Margaret Mead can explain female machismo--even to the extent of suicidal imitation of the worst in men. I can't.

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1. The smoker in fiction [Editorial comment in] *The Lancet* 2(7829):603-4, 1973.