



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 6 to 9
About the Author:	Adapted from Smoke-Free for Life, from the Nova Scotia Department of Health, Drug Dependency and Tobacco Control Unit.

Truth or Money

Overview

In this lesson, students explore how the influence of advertisers can lead to censorship of information about public health issues. They discuss the types of interest groups that seek to influence public opinion about smoking, as well as the strategies used by each group. Students then discuss the ways in which the tobacco industry has censored magazine messages about the health risks associated with smoking. To give students a chance to experience a smoking-related moral dilemma, they are placed in the role of a journalist whose article has been rejected because it could antagonize the magazine's cigarette advertisers. They must then decide how to respond to the editor.

Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate:

- an awareness of the potential influence of advertisers on magazine content
- an understanding of the role tobacco advertisers may play in censoring information about public health issues in magazines
- an awareness of possible connections between tobacco companies and companies that, on the surface, are not connected to tobacco products

Preparation and Materials

Photocopy the student handouts:

- *Censorship in the Media*
- *Kiss My Ash*
- *The Dilemma*

Procedure

Class Discussion: 15 minutes

- Which interest groups might want to influence public opinion about smoking? (*Write answers on the board. Examples may include: the tobacco industry, government officials, health agencies, concerned citizens, educators, ex-smokers, relatives of cancer patients.*)



- What is the position of each of these groups?
- How can these groups get their messages across?
 - *through education*
 - *through the media, using ads, articles, "subvertisements," "advertorials," or letters to editors*
 - *through statistics or persuasive language that appeals to cherished values such as freedom, individuality, and sophistication*
- Which interest group would be likely to:
 - Call a smoker a "nicotine addict?"
 - Refer to bronchitis, cancer, and emphysema as "alleged health hazards?"
 - Describe nicotine as a "killer drug?"
 - Talk about health advocacy groups as "anti-smoking fanatics?"
- Besides stating their message in words, how else can interest groups influence public opinion? (*Through images in ads, or "spoof ads," or by controlling the media through economic influence.*)

Distribute the handout *Censorship in the Media*. Discuss the notion of censorship, and how it can be politically or economically driven.

- Ask students, "Why is omission of information just as bad as biased information?"

Activity

- Have students complete the assignment described in the handout *The Dilemma* individually, or in small groups.

Extension Activity

Copy and distribute the handout *Kiss My Ash*.

- Discuss journalistic terms: editor-publisher, alternative weekly, contributing editor, regular columnist, advertorial (advertising disguised as an article), masthead, local tidbits roundup, letters to the editor, freelance writer. Or read the article to the class, pausing to discuss these and other terms. Ask students what Kowinski lost by writing his "final column," and what he gained.
- Tell students to put themselves in Kowinski's shoes and write his final column ("Mr. Butts is Back") as well as the letter to the editor-publisher that he refers to. Discuss the effectiveness of Kowinski's article, and the appropriateness of his language (words such as "Tobacco Slime"). Discuss what changes might be made if the article were written for a more conservative audience.

Evaluation

- Completed *The Dilemma* assignment
- "Mr. Butts is Back" column



Censorship in the Media

In some parts of the world, the government controls the media. This means that no one can broadcast or publish anything a government considers immoral or harmful, or that threatens the country's "stability" (which usually means the government's own power base). This is what we usually think of when we hear the word censorship.

Democratic countries, on the other hand, take pride in upholding the principle of freedom of speech. People are free to say and write whatever they wish, with some carefully defined exceptions. But in a market economy, there is another controlling power at work – the power of money. In North America, most mainstream publications depend on two income sources: subscriptions and advertisers. Both influence decisions about content. Readers must find the content relevant, interesting, tasteful, and entertaining, or they will drop their subscriptions. And advertisers will cancel their accounts if they consider the content to undermine or challenge their messages about the products they sell.

Is there a relationship between advertising and content? Consider the following:

- The tobacco industry has enormous advertising power in the U.S.. According to the American Federal Trade Commission, annual advertising and promotions expenditures for the five largest U.S. tobacco companies in 2010 were over \$8 billion.

Source: Federal Trade Commission, *Cigarette Report* for 2010

- The tobacco industry has enormous economic clout. Philip Morris International – whose holdings include forty per cent of Canada's third-largest tobacco company, Rothmans, Benson and Hedges Inc. – is the leading international tobacco company and fourth most profitable international consumer goods company, with \$6.890 billion in net earnings in 2008. Altria Group, the parent company of several tobacco companies, including Philip Morris USA and the U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Company, and Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, earned \$4.930 billion in net earnings in 2008.
- Between 1950 and 1969, *Time*, *U.S. News* and *Newsweek* between them featured 210 articles about cigarettes and tobacco – most of these related to the health dangers of smoking. On January 1, 1971, cigarette advertising was outlawed on U.S. television, and advertising revenue began to flow into the print media. Between 1970 and 1986, *Time*, *U.S. News* and *Newsweek* included only 64 articles about tobacco and cigarettes, and most of these dealt with political or business issues, not health. Not only did these three major national news publications fail to cover the health dangers of smoking, they routinely failed to mention smoking in most articles about cancer and heart disease.

Joe Tye, "The STAT Speaker's Guide and Slide Collection"
(Stop Teenage Addiction to Tobacco, 1991)

We rely on the media for our health information, but the information that we get is tremendously distorted and censored, on behalf of the advertisers...Many studies have shown that magazines don't bite the hands that feed them.

Jean Kilbourne in the video *Pack of Lies*
Foundation for Media Education



- “Although popular women's magazines state that they have a commitment to general health coverage, they fail to cover the number one cause of cancer death in women – lung cancer – according to a new study by the American Council on Science and Health.” Women's magazines continue to publish cigarette ads, but rarely include information on the negative health effects of smoking. Of the 2,414 health-related articles published, only 24 articles – less than 1 per cent – addressed the health effects of tobacco. Moreover, the image of female smokers as independent, attractive and lean was portrayed overwhelmingly in the advertisements.

“Science Group Finds that Popular Women's Magazines Continue to Ignore the Risks of Smoking”
Press Release, July 2001, American Council on Science and Health

- In November 1983, *Newsweek* ran a 16-page special health supplement written by the American Medical Association. Although the original AMA manuscript included information on tobacco addiction, *Newsweek* resisted any mention of cigarettes. That issue of *Newsweek* had 12 full-page cigarette ads.

Andrew Tobias, “Kids Say Don't Smoke”
(New York: Workman Publishing, 1991)

- When he was head of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, David Kessler campaigned unsuccessfully to have nicotine classified as a drug. Sifting through tobacco company documents that had been collected by FDA investigators, he discovered evidence of an organized campaign by Big Tobacco to influence public opinion through the media. One Philip Morris in-house document suggested buying *The Atlantic Monthly*, along with several other media outlets, in order to “influence the public policy agenda and the information flow to the populace.”
- In August 1998 *Mother Jones* magazine unearthed a document from Philip Morris that revealed the company's strategy aimed at more tobacco-friendly news coverage. The 1985 memo, written by former Philip Morris chief executive Hamish Maxwell, planned to shape public opinion in the company's favour by using its “considerable clout with the media.” Maxwell wrote: “A number of media proprietors that I have spoken to are sympathetic to our position – Rupert Murdoch [who was on the Philip Morris board at that time] and Malcolm Forbes are two good examples. The media like the money they make from our advertisements and they are an ally that we can and should exploit.” An appendix to the memo, written by another Philip Morris employee, stated that “Murdoch's papers rarely publish any anti-smoking articles these days.”
- *Adbusters* (Winter 1994) cited a study which found that magazines were afraid to publish paid anti-smoking ads because they feared losing lucrative cigarette advertising. The study – which was initiated in part to find out why magazines rarely write about the dangers of smoking – was carried out by University of Washington professor Steven Bishofsky. In the survey, ninety-three per cent of the sampled magazines that print tobacco ads reported that they were concerned with how tobacco companies might react if an anti-smoking statement appeared in a magazine in which they advertised. At the same time, more than half of all other magazines said they were concerned about what the tobacco parent companies might do. For instance, one family-oriented magazine said that losing advertising revenue from other companies “might be of concern if somebody like Philip Morris, which owns Kraft and General Foods, got cranky about it.”



I think now that lung cancer is a disease that gets reported fairly regularly, or the set of diseases. But for a very long time, papers that used to seize upon every disease – muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, huge articles, pictures of the pitiful victims – never had the same thing about victims of tobacco.

Ben Bagdikian
1999 interview for the PBS series “Frontline”

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Kiss My Ash

by William Severini Kowinsky

I could barely speak.

I was having lunch with the young editor-publisher of the *In Pittsburgh* alternative weekly in the summer of '89. As a contributing editor and a regular columnist, I had always written about anything I wanted, exactly as I wanted, and smoking was one of my recurring subjects, though by no means the dominant one. But I knew immediately I couldn't change his mind. He was already committed.

"We can't run any more stories on smoking," he said with a slight sigh. "They made that pretty clear before I took the ads."

The *In Pittsburgh* weekly was taking ads from both Philip Morris, creators of the Marlboro man, and RJR Nabisco, the makers of Salem cigarettes. It was Salem that demanded a ban on smoking stories, and the company's ads were the most extensive and lucrative. Their campaign was called "Salem SoundWaves," consisting of ads, advertorials and public relations events, all aimed at young fans of the newest rock music.

One night, while pondering what to do, I went to hear a band I knew at a club I frequented and had even sung at myself, doing Buddy Holly for their Halloween event "Night of the Singing Dead." As I entered, a smiling young woman in a green and white cheerleading outfit handed me a card to fill out -a chance for a prize, she said -and a small pack of Salem cigarettes. I looked around and saw Salem banners, Salem balloons, more young women and men in clean Salem green and white outfits and more Salem cigarettes at every table.

After the band's first set, a prominent local DJ pulled a few cards and gave away the prizes -Salem sweatshirts and other logo merchandise. I retreated to the bar. "Isn't this awful," I said to someone I knew. "Why" he said. "This is a national company sponsoring a local band. That's pretty impressive, isn't it?"

Hearing of my dismay a few days later, *In Pittsburgh's* art director came to me with her misgivings. The literal centrepiece of Salem's campaign was a two-page spread in the center of the paper once a month, an apparent potpourri of music news and reviews, including a concert calendar. It was signed, "From the editors of *In Pittsburgh*." But in fact, she said, they had to call Salem to clear everything that appeared. Salem made them take out the names of groups that didn't support smoking and eliminate from the calendar the clubs that refused to hold the kind of promotional party I had unwittingly attended.

By this time, I was planning the column I wanted to write, and the story was beginning to surround me: a systematic campaign targeting young people, implicating the whole local youth cultural apparatus. Plus an advertiser controlling content and banning an entire category of information throughout the paper.

Motivated by shock and anger, and also the fear common to whistle blowers that if I didn't separate myself immediately, my integrity would be destroyed, I wrote what I knew would be my final column.

"Mr. Butts is back," the column began, referring to the Doonesbury cartoon character. I quoted someone at an art opening saying, "I didn't understand what Mr. Butts was about before, but I do know now."

I concluded, "It's time for people and publications to stand up to the Tobacco Slime and say they won't take it any more."



In a letter to the editor-publisher, I focused on the compromise of journalistic principles. I went to the *In Pittsburgh* office where people greeted me with smiles, where I was welcome and valued, and turned in the column and the letter that would mean I would never enter those offices again, and would seldom see anyone who worked there.

I tried to enlist the support of a few staff members, and waited for others to call me. No one did. The column wasn't printed, my name disappeared from the masthead. I sent copies of the column with a letter to Pittsburgh's two daily papers. One did a short item in a local tidbits roundup, the other printed most of the letter in its "Letters to the Editor" column. Both papers included *In Pittsburgh's* official position that there was nothing significantly new enough in my column to warrant the risk of losing tobacco advertising by running it. Not a single Pittsburgh journalist offered me any personal or professional support.

I miss my column and I miss the faith I lost in journalism and in people. Emotionally, I had bitten off more than I could chew. I lost that circle of friends - all the *In Pittsburgh* people, the rock and club people whose personal relationships were one with their business entanglements. Needless to say, I wasn't invited to play Buddy Holly at that club on future Halloweens. But I am far from being the most damaged victim of the Tobacco Slime.

The Tobacco Slime remain relentless and insidiously active, and extremely powerful. The integrity of what you read or see means nothing to them. The health of the young counts even less.

William Severini Kowinski is a freelance writer and "veteran of the battle for our mental environment." He is the author of The Malling of America. This article appeared in the Winter 1994 issue of Adbusters Quarterly, a Vancouver-based magazine published by [The Media Foundation](#), a "non-profit society dedicated to cleaning up the toxic areas of our physical and mental environment". Reprinted with permission.

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The Dilemma

Congratulations! The article you wrote has just been accepted by a mainstream women's magazine. It will be used as a cover story: "Cut Your Cancer Risk by 50 Per Cent." This is your first big break and will be an important step in establishing your career as a journalist. There's just one catch. In her letter of acceptance, the editor of the magazine asked you to delete any mention of smoking. Instead you should focus on other lifestyle changes: diet, using sunscreen, exercise, and so on. She said that the magazine's cigarette advertisers (there will be three full-page cigarette ads in the same issue) could "take offense to an anti-smoking message."

You worked hard on this article, and you know that lung cancer has now overtaken breast cancer as the leading cause of cancer death among women, and that 85 to 90 per cent of all lung cancer is caused by smoking. You feel strongly that women are being deceived by cigarette ads into thinking that smoking is stylish, sexy, and a way to control weight. You know that many women fear breast cancer, but that they need to be alerted to the fact that lung cancer is at least as dangerous a killer, and is largely preventable. Your own aunt, whom you respected as a strong-minded, caring woman, died of lung cancer when her children were still in their early teens. You saw the anguish your cousins went through as they watched their mother being consumed by cancer.

What can you do? What should you do?

- List your options and describe the consequences for each (what you win and what you lose).
- Choose a course of action.
- Write a letter to the magazine editor responding to her letter of acceptance.

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