

Gender and Tobacco: Men and Boys

While the number of girls and women who smoke has risen in recent decades, smoking has always been - and continues to be – more of a male problem.

True, most boys and men don't smoke. But young males represent a particularly rich market for tobacco advertisers, who play on their insecurities about breaking away from childhood, forming their own identities, and becoming "men." Tobacco ads geared to boys try to link smoking with "masculinity." They try to connect smoking with images of success, confidence, coolness, athletic ability, sexual attractiveness, independence, rebellion, adventure, risk-taking and fulfillment.

The tobacco industry has long known that adolescent boys have a strong desire to feel independent. The cigarette brands most successful with boys are those that offer images of independence, freedom from authority, and self-reliance. Think of the Marlboro Man. He is totally independent and free. He is usually alone and interacting with no one. There are no parents, no older brothers, no bosses, no bullies. Indeed, there is no one whose authority must be respected. There is no cop, teacher or principal in Marlboro Country.

Reasons for smoking: boys vs. girls. For the most part, teenage boys and teenage girls smoke for similar reasons. Low self-esteem, lower socioeconomic status, and smoking by parents, siblings and friends can influence a young person's decision to smoke. However, research has shown that adolescent boys are more likely to use smoking as a way to relieve stress or to "get along" in life, whereas adolescent girls appear to smoke more for social reasons.

Girls are also more likely than boys to use smoking as a way of controlling appetite and weight. But recent studies have found that some adolescent males are using tobacco for the same reasons. Researchers have discovered that boys aged 9-14 who think they are overweight are 65 per cent more likely to think about or try smoking than their peers.

Statistically, adult males who smoke are most likely to be:

- Unemployed or have lower incomes
- Less educated

Health hazards to men from smoking

- Smoking is the number one cause of premature death in men.
- Smoking-related diseases shared with women include: emphysema, chronic bronchitis, heart disease, stroke, cancers of the mouth and bladder.
- Men who smoke are more likely to suffer from impotence and diminished sexual functions

Men in Poorer Countries

Today, most males in the U.S. have come to see the truth about smoking: it is an expensive, unattractive, and destructive addiction. As a result, smoking rates are declining. So the tobacco industry has been seeking to push its products in poorer

regions of the world. Increasingly, smoking is becoming a habit of poor, less educated males. In some poorer nations, smoking among men is as high as 80%. In many of these countries where educational and health systems are poor, boys and men are largely unaware of the devastating effects of smoking and are vulnerable to manipulative ads of the tobacco industry that imply smoking leads to happiness, power, sex appeal, and success. What do you think of this strategy of the tobacco industry?