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Letters

Smoking, Masculinity, and Age

It was with considerable interest that I read Seltzer's recent article [*Science* 130, 1706 (18 Dec. 1959)] on "masculinity and smoking," for it coincides with a thesis which I have been expounding privately during the last 6 or 7 years. Since my proposal was arrived at by a somewhat different technique—namely, the arm-chair, inductive method—it justifiably has been accorded little attention—international, national, or even local. Nonetheless, now that the subject has been brought into the public forum by a respectable journal like *Science*, as a supplement to Seltzer's much more scientific judgment I offer my contribution, with the realization that there may still be a few gaps to be filled in before it is incorporated in standard textbooks.

Up to perhaps 30 years ago cigarette smoking was very largely a male prerogative in our society. Subsequently, a noticeable fraction of women began smoking, and this fraction has continued to increase. Therefore, at some time during this latter period the association of masculinity with cigarette smoking became of doubtful validity, and at present I suspect that only feeble-minded adolescent males and the advertising savants of Madison Avenue consider cigarette smoking to be a mark of masculinity. It follows that *not* smoking cigarettes should now become the new evidence of masculinity and, conversely, for a male to begin smoking cigarettes during the present era will be a sign of effeminacy.

The following observations may be pertinent. (i) In the social environment in which I operate (scientific-professional) there is a very significant percentage of males in the 25- to 45-year age category who have never smoked cigarettes, and there are quite a few who have stopped during the last 5 to 10 years for a variety of declared reasons which I shall not attempt to analyze; by contrast, among members of this group it is the rule for the wives to smoke. (ii) During the last 3 or 4 years advertising programs for some cigarettes have leaned heavily on copy that depicts men in symbolically virile, masculine occupations: tattooed truck-drivers, muscular longshoremen, lean cowboys, and the like. No doubt the scientists of Madison Avenue can produce several explanations for such advertising programs, but one wonders why it is necessary to belabor an obvious point, unless the point is no longer obvious. (iii) I am informed that the sale of cigars—still smoked almost exclusively by males in this society—has

been increasing phenomenally in the past few years.

For reasons which readers will appreciate, I have made no detailed attempt to categorize my friends and acquaintances according to degree of masculinity and smoking habits. Some smokers in the 35- to 45-year age group may have been reared in communities where relatively few women smoked so that smoking was still largely a masculine prerogative when they began. There must have been few such areas in the United States since World War II, however, and smokers under the ages of 30 to 35, according to my thesis, would have begun when the taint of effeminacy was clearly present. Conversely, smokers now over 45 are beyond the age at which their masculinity can be questioned on the basis of their smoking habits. Moreover, as perhaps some readers will agree, after this age there is more objective evidence of attrition.

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Commercialization of Scientific Findings

There has been much discussion of late in the public press of the matter of "poisoned cranberries," chickens made dangerous by use of hormone injections, and so on, but I have seen no rational attempt to place these cases in their proper niche as examples of a much larger problem. This is the problem of premature or inadequately prepared commercialization of scientific finding. For every case so reported there must be hundreds which are ignored. And they represent a very dangerous trend.

The cranberries in question were rendered suspect because of the more or less accidental discovery that certain chemical weed killers contain chemicals which, under certain specialized conditions, produce cancer. The possibility that these chemicals, in the concentrations likely to be absorbed by ordinary eaters of cranberries, would actually produce cancer in such consumers is practically nil. The hormone pellets implanted in male chicks to produce physiological caponization similarly contain chemicals which under certain conditions produce cancer in certain animals, yet the chances that persons eating fowl so treated will thereby develop cancer are infinitesimal.

To me the fact of the danger of cancer from these foods is not the important fact. The important fact is that the chemicals in question were made commercially available when no adequate study had been made of their potentialities. A few years ago the