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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.

LEWIS K. DAHL

Bellport, New York

Commercialization of Scientific Findings

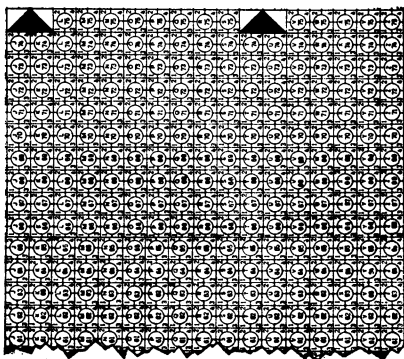
There has been much discussion of late in the public press of the matter of "poisoned cranberries," chickens made dangerous by use of hormone injections, and so on, but I have seen no rational attempt to place these cases in their proper niche as examples of a much larger problem. This is the problem 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

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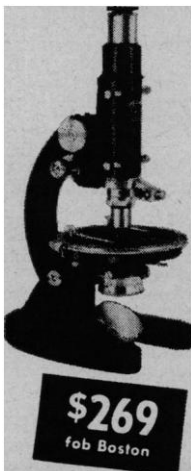
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French chemical industries placed on the market a number of weed killers. An investigation of the over-all value of these substances was undertaken by Roger Gautheret of the Sorbonne, and after intensive field trials he concluded that while they did kill the weeds as desired, their long-term effects on the quality and viability of the crops was such as to make many of them not only valueless but damaging. The industry stood to lose millions which they had poured into the chemical processes and into their agricultural propaganda. A strong effort was made to have Gautheret's report suppressed, but he stood his ground and the objectionable products were withdrawn from the market.

One of the most tragic examples of this sort of thing in the United States is the current campaign to eliminate the fire ant in the South by airplane dusting of wide areas with specific insecticides. The ants are being controlled, but in the process local birds which eat insects, and carnivores which eat the birds, are being destroyed, and a whole chain of untoward biological events has been set going which was not foreseen because insufficient thought and study had been given to the problem in the preliminary stages. The whole question of radioactive fallout is just another example of action without sufficient study.

We cannot and should not halt "progress." But we should do our best to anticipate whether our procedures are likely to produce "progress." We should not leave the evaluation of weed killers or of steroid hormones or of radioactive products to the chemists; the closest kind of collaboration with botanists (students of weeds), with physiologists (students of chickens and their potential consumers), and with doctors (students of potential victims of radioactive poisoning) is needed. Nor should these evaluators be either directly or indirectly dependent on the producers of the chemicals in question. It is all right for Du Pont and Lederle and the Atomic Energy Commission to maintain their own corps of evaluation scientists, but we should maintain adequate corps of independent investigators. The Bureau of Standards has a small role of this sort, and we saw a few years ago what happened when they made their independent evaluations of "battery additives" and "water purifiers." Such studies should be greatly multiplied, given teeth, and given the respect and support of the community.

I would like to see this whole problem much more widely aired than it has been.

PHILIP R. WHITE

Roscoe B. Jackson Memorial
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Meetings

Esperantist Congress

The 44th annual international congress of Esperantists was held in Warsaw, Poland, 1-8 Aug. 1959. In attendance were 3254 members from many parts of the world, representing 43 nations. The invitation to convene in Warsaw, presented by the Polish Parliament to the 43rd such congress in Mainz, Germany, had been accepted as particularly appropriate because 1959 is the centenary of the birth of L. L. Zamenhof, who was born in Poland and who published from Warsaw his pamphlet presenting the international language which became known as Esperanto.

The opening session was officially welcomed by the vice chief minister of Poland. The Polish Government issued two postage stamps commemorating the congress. Among meetings held in connection with the regular sessions of the congress was that of the Internacia Scienca Asocio Esperantista (now more than 50 years old), 46 members being present from 18 countries. At the institute called Somera (summer) Universitato, the following scientific subjects were discussed: the international organization of the struggle against hunger (Paul Neergard, director of Denmark's pathology service); the centenary of spectroanalysis in 1959 (Hugo Sirk, Vienna); possibilities and difficulties for interplanetary travel (B. Popović, Sarajevo); the centennial of evolution (Andreo Grebecki, Warsaw); and practical applications of sex diagnosis in cells (Giorgio Canuto, Turin). These, like all proceedings of the congress itself, were presented in Esperanto without translation.

The invitation from the city of Brussels that the congress meet there in August 1960 was accepted. Invitations for 1961 and 1962 were received from Madrid and from Zurich, respectively. Japan has asked to be host to the 1965 congress.

IVY KELLERMAN REED

La Jolla, California

Forthcoming Events

March

24-25. Geological Soc. of America, Lexington, Ky. (T. G. Roberts, Dept. of Geology, Univ. of Kentucky, Lexington.)

24-26. American Assoc. for the History of Medicine, Charleston, S.C. (J. B. Blake, c/o Smithsonian Institution, Washington 25.)

24-26. Aviation Education, 4th natl. conf., Denver, Colo. (W. Kinkley, Superintendent of Schools, Aurora, Colo.)