

**FEMALE YOUTHS' PERCEPTIONS OF SMOKING IN POPULAR FILM**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, there has been mounting concern about the effect of smoking in film on youth audiences, and a growing body of survey-based research has linked exposure to tobacco imagery in film with youth smoking initiation (Dalton et al., 2003; Sargent et al., 2001). Although these studies have raised awareness about the potential dangers of tobacco imagery in movies, they provide little or no insight into the meanings that adolescents give to these messages. Research exploring how young people make sense of smoking in film is limited (McCool et al., 2003; 2001; WHO, 2003), and none has been conducted in the Canadian context.

Influenced by previous audience research by Wilson & Sparks (1996), and guided by Radway's (1991) conception of audiences as 'interpretive communities,' this study analyzed how groups of female adolescents (smokers and non-smokers) in a Vancouver high school decoded tobacco imagery in film. Focus group interviews with the smokers revealed that: tobacco imagery in film influences youth smoking rituals (i.e., smoking styles, smoking frequency); the cigarette remains an important symbol within youth peer groups and serves specific functions in the lives of smokers; smokers identify with tobacco brands in films; personal experiences with cigarettes are drawn upon when assessing the authenticity of a smoking scene. Interviews with the non-smokers revealed that: the majority had an 'unaware and don't care' attitude towards smoking in film (i.e., they do not notice it and are not bothered by it); stereotypical depictions of smoking in film are generally viewed as a reflection of reality. While aware that tobacco placement in film is a form of product promotion, respondents (both smokers and non-smokers) tended to focus on the cigarette's function as an artistic tool. Overall, both the smokers

and non-smokers were capable of critical readings of a media text, but often did not use these capabilities when viewing tobacco imagery in film. The thesis concludes with a discussion about the ways that the research findings may be used in the design of anti-smoking campaigns.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

We are about to go into production with the motion picture “Run Sheep Run:”, a suspense, thriller, set in Los Angeles...The major characters and supporting people in the script all smoke...If there is any interest from your company, and I’m sure there must be, *the film is better than any commercial that has been run on Television or in any magazine, because the audience is totally unaware of any sponsor involvement* (italics added, from internal R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company (RJR) documents dated August 25, 1972; Source: Smoke Free Movies Web site: <http://www.smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/index.html> )

The above is an excerpt from a letter written by the president of a Hollywood production company and addressed to William Smith, president of the RJR Tobacco Company. This piece of correspondence, along with other internal tobacco industry documents made public through court proceedings, detail a “long and deep relationship” (Mekemson & Glantz, 2002, p. 81) between Hollywood and the tobacco industry. Although paid tobacco brand placement in movies was prohibited by a voluntary ban in 1989, industry records show dealings between the movie and tobacco industry as late as 1992 (documents post mid-1990s are unavailable to the public) (Mekemson & Glantz, 2002). Furthermore, smoking rates in films actually *increased* during the 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Glantz et al., 2004; Stockwell & Glantz, 1997), leading critics to suggest that collusion between Hollywood and Big Tobacco still exists today (Mekemson & Glantz, 2002).

Over the past decade, there has been mounting concern about the effect that viewing smoking in film may have on youth. Researchers suggest that high levels of exposure to smoking in film may influence young people’s tobacco-related beliefs and behaviours (Sargent et al., 2001a). The issue is that youth do not learn about the reality of smoking from movies because smoking imagery rarely shows the negative health

effects of tobacco use (McIntosh et al., 1998). Instead, film portrayals tend to associate the cigarette with wealth, glamour, and many other (often unrealistic) images and meanings that appeal to young people (McIntosh et al., 1998; Hazan et al., 1994). Indeed, a growing body of research demonstrates that viewing cigarette use in film may play a role in smoking initiation amongst adolescents (Distefan et al., 2004; Dalton et al., 2003), leading some analysts to conclude that the influence from films is “as strong as other kinds of social influence, such as smoking by a parent or sibling” (Sargent et al., 2001a, p. 1396).

#### Statement of Purpose

Although the survey-based research mentioned above has raised awareness about the dangers of tobacco imagery in film, it does not provide insight into how youth *interpret* and *understand* these depictions. Nor does it facilitate an understanding of how smoking imagery in film may inform young people’s views of smoking in their everyday lives. The position taken in this project is that we must begin to understand smoking in movies through the eyes of youth if we hope to design strategies to combat the continued inclusion of tobacco imagery in film. As a step towards gaining such an understanding, this project has drawn on theoretical frameworks from the tradition of audience research, and approaches the study problem using a qualitative research technique commonly used in communication studies: audience ethnography. Guided by Radway’s (1991) notion of audiences as ‘interpretive communities,’ this study recognizes the potential range of influences of tobacco placement in films on different youth cultures. As such, this project focuses on the interpretations of two specific groups of adolescents: female smokers and female non-smokers.

### Significance of Study

This project contributes to existing research in the areas of youth, smoking, and audience research on two broad levels. First, it builds upon work concerning youth audiences. With its exploration of the interpretations offered by two groups of female adolescents (smokers and non-smokers), it informs previous audience research demonstrating that not all audiences interpret media messages in a similar manner (Wilson & Sparks, 1996; Jhally & Lewis, 1992; Radway, 1991). Furthermore, by investigating the extent to which these youth are critical of positive tobacco messages, this project also builds upon existing audience theory surrounding young people's ability to be 'active' viewers of mass media (Miles, 2000), as well as substantive research focusing on youth interpretations of smoking in film (McCool et al., 2003; 2001; WHO, 2003). In addition, this research contributes to the area of youth smoking cultures. To date, there is limited research which focuses on the role of cigarettes in Canadian youth cultures, with the exception of work by McCracken (1992) and Connop et al. (1999). Work investigating the meanings of cigarettes in the lives of Canadian *female* youth is limited, as well. Therefore, an exploration of the meaning of cigarettes to young females in Vancouver (that uses audience research/focus group techniques) will go some way toward addressing these shortcomings.

This research is also significant from a practical standpoint. By gaining a better understanding of how young females (both smokers and non-smokers) make sense of tobacco imagery in film, this study may aid in the design of more effective media literacy campaigns specific to this demographic.

### Structure of Thesis

The structure of this thesis is as follows. Chapter two consists of a literature review, which is divided into two parts. In the first half, previous research that applies to audiences and youth will be discussed. It begins with a broad overview of theoretical work in the history of audience research, and narrows in focus to describe work specific to youth audiences. The latter half of the chapter focuses on youth smoking and the media, beginning with a general description of the strategic advertising techniques used by the tobacco industry over the past several decades (to target adolescents and females), and finishing with an outline of existing research in the area of film and youth smoking. Following the literature review is the methods chapter, which provides a rationale for the use of the focus group interviews, and a detailed description of the procedures used in, and the setting for, the focus group interviews with the female adolescents. In the fourth chapter, results from the smoker focus groups and the non-smoker groups are outlined, followed by a short, integrative assessment which compares the differences and similarities between the two groups. In the fifth chapter, the results are then discussed with reference to key theoretical and substantive considerations. The thesis concludes with recommendations for further research and for improvements on the current study, as well as suggestions for possible anti-smoking strategies.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Part 1: Culture, Media Interpretations, and Youth

##### Cultural Studies and Audience Research

This thesis builds from a history of scholarly work linking audience research with cultural studies. The origins of this work are usually traced back to studies and concepts developed by researchers at the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the 1970s. Scholars at the CCCS offered a variety of critical approaches to be used in the analysis, interpretation, and criticism of cultural texts and artefacts in contemporary society (Kellner, 1995). Of particular significance was their acknowledgement of the *potential* for human agency amongst media audiences. Stuart Hall's (1973, c.f., Moores, 1993) seminal paper '*Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*' was at the centre of this interpretation of the audience-media relationship. In this paper, Hall described the communicative process as a whole, with the moment of media production at one end of the spectrum and the moment of audience perception at the other end. Subjects were seen to decode media messages based on their own experiences, instead of passively accepting the intended message encoded by the producer (c.f., Wilson & Sparks, 1996). Although Hall acknowledged a certain amount of human agency on the part of the audience, he credited producers with more power in this process since they have a wide array of resources with which to create ideological messages meant to influence the viewer. Hall dubbed the message created by producers the 'preferred' meaning of the media text. Lewis (1991) further explains the producer-viewer relationship with his observation that:

The program, once produced, was a powerful but ambiguous structure of signs. The producers of the program could use their semiological skill to encourage the viewer to "prefer" certain meanings, but, since decoding is an active process, this "preferring" was a bid for power rather than a guarantee of it... Viewers, or decoders, though active, are not free to interpret this "structured polysemy" as they choose. They are limited both by the message and by their own ideological world. (p. 58)

Hall defined three types of audience interpretations. Interpretations that were directly aligned with the 'preferred' meanings were termed "dominant readings." Readings which generally matched the 'preferred' meaning, with only slight variations, were called "negotiated readings." Readings that completely contradicted the 'preferred' meaning were dubbed "oppositional readings" (c.f., Moores, 1993).

David Morley (1986, c.f., Moores, 1993), another member of the Birmingham group, was the first to test Hall's theoretical model with his empirical project *The 'Nationwide' Audience*. Morley showed video recordings of *Nationwide*, a news show that aired on BBC during the 1970s, to diverse groups of viewers (divided according to social class), and invited the groups to comment on the program. Morley found that the groups of viewers differed in the level to which they agreed with the intended messages of the program, and the extent to which they identified with the genre (c.f., Moores, 1993).

Although Morley's study broadly confirmed Hall's understanding of a 'relatively autonomous' audience, the encoding-decoding model was not without limitations. For example, and as Moores (1993) points out, Morley had difficulty dealing with two levels of interpretation (i.e., ideology and genre) at once, especially when attempting to classify whether the audience agrees, disagrees, or partially agrees with a message. As Moores (1993) explains:

reactions to the programme's presentational style and mode of address have more to do with patterns of taste and cultural disposition than with degrees of distance from a preferred meaning. One is a matter of genre preference, the other is a stance taken in relation to specific ideological propositions. (p. 21)

In addition, Morley found that while members of a certain socioeconomic class have similar interpretive tools to decode a message, there was enough within group variation to make him question the usefulness of using social class to explain why a person interprets a text in a certain manner (c.f., Moores, 1993). In short, Morley recognized the limits of such a "simplistic and reductionist class analysis of television decoding" which ignores other important factors such as age, gender, race, and ethnicity (McGuigan, 1991, p. 133).

Ultimately, Morley felt constrained by certain aspects of Hall's encoding-decoding model, namely its excessive focus on the ideological message in the form of a 'preferred' meaning and its disregard for individual reader tastes (i.e., the relevance/irrelevance of a text to a reader). As a result, Morley called for a reformulation of audience research, one that acknowledges the fact that different cultural groupings are interested in different kinds of material or genres. In order to aid such a reformulation, Morley drew on Pierre Bourdieu's (1984, c.f., Moores, 1993; Thornton, 1995) concept of cultural capital. Cultural capital or cultural competence advances the notion that symbolic wealth and social status may be accumulated in the sphere of culture through upbringing and education so that in effect, cultural hierarchies mirror social ones and people's tastes are an indication of class. In short, Morley believed that Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital "provided a means of rethinking the diverse experiences and knowledge socially situated groups bring to their use of television and the shaping of their programme preferences" (McGuigan, 1992, pp. 134-135). It facilitated the

consideration of *who* likes a certain type of programming and *why*, as well as *how* this programming is valued in the 'cultural economy' of society (Moore, 1993).

### The 'Interpretive Community' Framework

Janice Radway's (1991, first published in 1984) ethnographic account of how women read romance novels addresses some of the shortcomings of *Nationwide* and Hall's encoding-decoding model, albeit unintentionally. Radway adopted the notion of 'interpretive communities' (originated by Fish, 1979) in an attempt to describe the interpretive strategies that readers bring to a certain genre of text. She argued that although texts are polysemic in nature, similar readings are produced by similarly located readers as they "learn a similar set of reading strategies and interpretive codes that they bring to bear upon the texts they encounter" (Radway, 1991, p. 8). Interestingly, the study became less about the patterns of interpretation used by differing 'interpretive communities' and instead focused on how women who are fans of the genre use the *event* of reading the romance. Radway discovered that the romance novel was not merely read by these women, but was used as a "declaration of independence" (p. 7) from their duties as wives and mothers. As a result, the text was embedded in their social lives.

Radway (1991) acknowledged that the use of 'interpretive communities' in her study was problematic in that it did not specify exactly how membership in the romance-reading community was composed. This term had been used previously to account for the ways in which academics with different specializations or backgrounds critique literary texts. In other words, the term had been applied to academic concepts, and not to actual people. Thus, Radway (1991) observes that the notion of 'interpretive

communities' was not sufficiently theorized to deal with the complexities of social groups (such as the women she studied), and as such:

cannot do complete justice to the nature of the connection between social location and the complex process of interpretation. It is inadequate finally to the task of explaining how social determination operates with respect to the larger activity of romance reading. (p. 8)

Despite these possible shortcomings, the 'interpretive community' framework is useful for audience research, as the limitations of Radway's work were not structural, but largely methodological, as "she did not adequately operationalize the concept of social location as a context of meaning construction" (Wilson & Sparks, 1996, p. 402).

#### Youth Interpretations, Cultural Consumption, and Youth Culture

Of particular relevance to this project's focus on youth audiences and media messages is audience research conducted by Wilson & Sparks (1996) which explored how young males' social location (race, in this case) interacts with their interpretations of sneaker commercials and celebrity Black athletes. Wilson & Sparks (1996) were interested not only in the ways that the two racially distinct groups of youth understood these commercials, but also with the meanings of such advertisements (and in turn, Black athletes and athletic apparel) in the everyday lives of these youth. To aid their analysis, they drew upon previous work in the areas of audience research and youth cultures. Radway's (1991) 'interpretive community' framework was central to the project, as they theorized that "this understanding of the 'interpretive community' can be used to examine how youthful audience 'tastes' in media texts and 'interpretations' of these texts relate to their social and cultural context" (Wilson & Sparks, 1996, p. 404). In addition, they looked to youth subcultural theory (with its tradition of celebrating the manner in which young people actively use items from popular culture to negotiate identity and

construct meaning) to explore the role of the commercial messages in Black and non-Black youth cultures. More specifically, they drew upon the work of Hebdige (1979, c.f., Wilson & Sparks, 1996) and Willis (1990). Hebdige studied spectacular British subcultures in the 1970s (e.g., punk) and used the term 'bricolage' to describe the process by which these groups of youth would actively construct meaning by creatively combining unremarkable and often inappropriate items in what he saw as an act of defiance to the dominant order (c.f., Tanner, 1996). Willis (1990) believed that the spectacular subcultures that were originally studied in the 1950s and 60s were in fact spectacular because they found visible identities and styles outside or against the traditional workplace. He contends that the notion of spectacular subcultures is now impossible because in today's society, most human identity is formed outside of the realm of work, as work has less and less inherent value beyond providing a means for livelihood and leisure. Willis (1990) therefore celebrates the way in which *all* youth exercise 'symbolic creativity' in the realm of leisure to produce not only an individual identity, but to also explore where they fit into the greater collective, or society as a whole. In this sense, he views social locations and situations not only as learned, but as something to be "lived and experimented with" (p. 12).

Using these theoretical frameworks to guide their analysis, Wilson & Sparks (1996) found that the Black and non-Black youth represented distinct interpretive communities. The Black youth demonstrated a higher level of cultural identification with the Black athletes than did the non-Black youth (who were largely ambivalent when compared to the Black youth). Moreover, the athletic apparel commercials and the Black athletes seemed to play a larger role in the lives of the Black youth, as they appeared to

be more influenced by these images than their non-Black counterparts. In a related analysis focusing on the issue of the mass media and racial perceptions, Wilson & Sparks (1999) also found that the non-Black participants' perceptions of racial groups (in this case, Blacks) with which they had little direct experience were in some part informed by media portrayals of Black people. However, they caution against making "specific (and overly deterministic) claims about the 'linearity' and directness of this informational process" (p. 618).

Similar to Wilson & Sparks (1996), this thesis draws upon Radway's (1991) 'interpretive community' concept to guide an analysis of the understandings that youth with a shared habit of viewing popular film derive from smoking imagery in movies, and the possible ways in which the social location of the viewers (as smokers and non-smokers and adolescent females) may relate to these interpretations. Embedded within the research is an investigation of how portrayals of smoking in film inform the youths' understandings of the cigarette in the smoking and non-smoking youth cultures. With this theoretical background, relevant substantive research in the area of youth, smoking, and film will now be outlined.

## Part 2: Youth, Smoking, and Media

### Strategic Advertising and the Tobacco Industry

In 1988, the Canadian government passed the *Tobacco Product Control Act*, banning all forms of tobacco advertising, including promotion in retail outlets and billboards (one exception was sponsorship advertising, but it was limited to the use of corporate names) (PSC, no date). Imperial Tobacco Limited (ITL) and R.J. Reynolds-Macdonald Inc. (RJR), which dominated the tobacco market in Canada at the time,

challenged this piece of legislation and a long court battle ensued, culminating in the eventual repeal of the *Act* in 1995. Despite their victory, the court case was damaging to these two tobacco companies (and the tobacco industry, in general) as many of their confidential marketing documents became available for pre-trial review and subsequently entered the public domain (Pollay & Lavack, 1993).

An investigation of these documents revealed that the tobacco companies spent billions of dollars researching strategies for targeting the youth market (Pollay & Lavack, 1993). Research was focused on the youth segment because the tobacco industry has a high level of brand loyalty (i.e., annual brand switching rates of established smokers are less than 10%) and so the company which captures the largest segment of the starter market therefore controls the majority of the market share. Since most smokers start before the age of 18, teens essentially *are* the starter market, making them a desirable target for tobacco companies (Pollay & Lavack, 1993).

The result of industry research was the creation of cigarette advertisements that used images of freedom, independence, and self-reliance to appeal to youths' emerging need for autonomy. Also realized was the value in promoting cigarettes as a 'badge product,' a vehicle to gain acceptance with the peer group. As studies by Fischer (1991) and Pollay et al. (1996) demonstrate, these approaches to advertising tobacco products effectively built awareness and brand image among children and teenagers.

The internal corporate documents also reveal the existence of another market segment which has been researched extensively by the tobacco industry: women (Bianco, 2003; Dewhirst & Sparks, no date). In her book *Smoke screen: Women's smoking and social control* (1996), Lorraine Greaves discusses the history of tobacco advertising to

women, with its beginnings in the 1920s. Prior to this time, smoking by women was regarded as low class and scandalous, but the 1920s were a time of social transformation as women began to demand equal social and civil rights (Bianco, 2003). Reading the social climate of the time, cigarette companies created ads equating female smoking with independence, and promoted cigarettes as 'torches of freedom' (Greaves, 1996). By the end of World War II, the combination of social change and marketing tactics had increased the social acceptability of smoking amongst women, and the smoking rates of females (aged 18-21) increased 6-fold between the years of 1911 and 1939 (Bianco, 2003).

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, tobacco companies continued to target females through new advertising tactics. The cigarette was linked with sexuality and attractiveness (heterosexual) in the 1940s and 1950s, leisure and relaxation in the 1950s - 1970s, and in contemporary times, the cigarette has become associated with a diverse range of meanings, including excitement, freedom, vitality, and sociability (Greaves, 1996).

#### Female Youth, Smoking, and Body Image

One meaning often associated with the cigarette – thinness – may be of particular relevance to this project's focus on female adolescents. In a society saturated with media images of increasingly thin models, many young females have body image issues and concerns about their weight. In British Columbia, for instance, 22% of healthy weight female high school students believe that they are overweight and 52% of female high school students are trying to lose weight (MCS, 2004). The most commonly reported

weight loss technique being used is dieting (49% reported dieting in the past), but purging is also another method (7% reported doing so in 2003) (MCS, 2004).

Although not specific to youth in British Columbia, there is evidence to suggest that some female adolescents may also attempt to control their body weight by smoking. For example, survey research conducted in the United States shows a significant association between smoking status in young females, and the use of unhealthy weight loss strategies and body weight concerns amongst these same youth (Delnevo et al., 2003). Additional survey research found evidence to suggest that female adolescents who reported two or more eating disorder symptoms, who had tried to lose weight during the past year, or who are concerned about their weight were about twice as likely to be smokers as those with fewer weight concerns or who were non-dieters. Moreover, female youth who had attempted to lose weight during the previous year, who reported two or more eating disorder symptoms, or who reported a preoccupation with their weight were about twice as likely to *initiate* smoking as those youth not reporting such concerns or behaviours (French et al., 1994). While this research does not demonstrate causation (i.e., that weight concerns lead to smoking behaviour, or vice versa), it does suggest that body image and weight control issues play a role in the smoking behavior of the young women in the samples.

The fact that some young women may believe that smoking can help them to either lose or control their weight is likely not a coincidence. Tobacco companies have played upon women's fear of being overweight since the 1920s when the slogan "Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet" first linked smoking with thinness. This advertising maneuver resulted in a 312% increase in the sale of Lucky Strike cigarettes in the *first*

*year* of the campaign (Surgeon General's Report, 2001) and was the progenitor of contemporary advertisements which associate smoking and weight control (Greaves, 1996). Research suggests that positioning a brand as an aid in weight control continues to resonate with females: six years after the introduction of Virginia Slims, the number of female teenagers who smoked increased by 110% (Bianco, 2003). Tobacco companies not only make the link between smoking and thinness through traditional advertising such as magazine ads, but have also used sponsorship linked marketing (Bianco, 2003). In Canada, for example, *Matinée Ltd.* sponsored fashion shows as a means of associating their brand with beauty, youth, and thinness (Dewhirst & Sparks, no date).

With the exception of marketing research which shows a correspondence between ads linking smoking with thinness and female market share (O'Keefe & Pollay, 1996), there is a scarcity of research concerning the effect of these advertisements on specific groups of women. One psychology-based project using survey methodology explored the link between societal thinness pressures, media exposure to 'thin norms,' and levels of skepticism with respect to tobacco advertisements linking smoking with thinness. It was found that believing that smoking is an acceptable form of weight control and exposure to thinness depicting magazines were associated with being a smoker, while skepticism about tobacco advertising was associated with being a non-smoker (Zucker et al., 2001). This does not provide insight into how young women interpret or decode images of thin bodies smoking in the media, though, and qualitative research, which often provides a richer, more nuanced understanding of such issues, appears to be absent.

### Film, Tobacco, and Youth

In 1964, the United States Surgeon General issued the first *Report on Smoking and Health*, awakening the general public to the dangers of tobacco use, and over the ensuing years, smoking in North America became less socially acceptable and cigarette use began to decline (PCS, 2003). Throughout the 1980s and 90s, various countries in the developed world began to pass legislation banning or restricting traditional tobacco advertising (i.e., retail outlets, billboards, magazines), and executives in the tobacco industry began to seek alternative options. Sponsorship linked marketing (whereby a product, brand, or company sponsors an event in an attempt to create an association between the event and the sponsor) was one such method that proved to be extremely effective for building brand recall and creating brand identity amongst youth, and this method increased in use during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Cornwell, 1995; Sparks, 1999; PCS, no date).

Another avenue that was pursued was tobacco placement in popular film, and an examination of tobacco industry documents reveals that the tobacco industry and Hollywood have had a relationship since the 1970s (Mekemson & Glantz, 2002). The tobacco industry did not only view placement in film as a way to advertise a brand, but also a means of increasing the social acceptability of smoking. As one Phillip Morris executive explained in a 1983 draft speech:

Recently, anti-smoking groups have also had some early successes at eroding the social acceptability of smoking. Smoking is being positioned as an unfashionable, as well as unhealthy, custom. We must use every creative means at our disposal to reverse this destructive trend. I do feel heartened at the increasing number of occasions when I go to a movie and see a pack of cigarette in the hands of the leading lady... We must continue to exploit new opportunities to get cigarettes on screen and into the hands of smokers. (Mekomson & Glantz, 2002, p. 83)

Towards the end of the 1980s, the relationship between Hollywood and the tobacco industry came under scrutiny, and in an attempt to prevent the implementation of legislation, the tobacco industry applied a voluntary ban (*Cigarette Advertising and Promotion Code*) on tobacco placement in film. In 1990, this code was revised so that any paid tobacco placement in film was prohibited (tobacco companies could provide cigarette products for free) (Mekemson & Glantz, 2002). Despite this ban, a comparison of pre-ban (1988-1990) and post-ban (1991-1997) films by Sargent et al. (2001b) indicates that the prevalence of tobacco brand appearance did not change in relation to the ban. In fact, there was an increase in actor endorsement of cigarettes (from 1% before the ban to 11% after the ban). Moreover, the brands which appeared most frequently (in 80% of the placements) were also the four most highly advertised brands in the USA (Marlboro, Winston, Lucky Strike, and Camel), which “suggests a concordance between the advertising goals of the tobacco industry and the actions of the film industry” (Sargent et al., 2001b, p. 31).

Although the tobacco companies continue to deny that they arrange for tobacco placement in movies, there is evidence to suggest that smoking rates in film increased throughout the 1990s (after remaining steady from the 1960s to 1980s) (Hazan et al., 1994; Stockwell & Glantz, 1997). By 2002, smoking rates in movies were at levels previously seen in the 1950s when the occurrence of smoking in ‘real life’ was twice as prevalent (Glantz et al., 2004). It may be that in the face of advertising restrictions enforced by the 1998 *Master’s Settlement Agreement* (in the U.S.) and the *Tobacco Act* of 1997 (in Canada), the tobacco industry is once again looking for alternative means of advertising.

Tobacco placement in film becomes a cause for concern in the face of survey-based research which shows a link between smoking by teens' favourite stars in movies and the incidence of smoking among these same teens (Tickle et al., 2001). Furthermore, longitudinal research that focuses on levels of exposure to incidences of smoking in film demonstrates that youth who view the highest levels of smoking in film are almost three times more likely to initiate smoking than those with the least amount of exposure (Dalton et al., 2003).

#### Youth Interpretations of Smoking in Film and Youth Smoking Culture: Existing Research and Future Directions

To date, most of the research concerning smoking imagery in film has focused on the production of the images that target youth, along with several quantitative studies that evaluate the success of these attempts. The only research which analyzes how youth *interpret* these images has been performed in New Zealand (by McCool et al., 2003; 2001) and in India (WHO, 2003). McCool et al. (2003; 2001) performed two separate studies, one with 12 and 13 year olds and one with 16 and 17 year olds. In both of the studies, a grounded theory approach and focus group methodology were adopted to explore how youth (the groups were further divided into males and females) interpret and decode smoking imagery in film. Findings revealed that stereotypical smoking imagery in film may play a central role in reinforcing cultural interpretations of smoking in younger children (McCool et al., 2001), while "pervasive and credible" (p. 1023) depictions of smoking may offer support and reassurance to older teens that smoke or are tolerant of smoking (McCool et al., 2003). Moreover, the older youth were found to base their interpretations of smoking in film on their own experiences with cigarettes (McCool et al., 2003), while the younger participants (who had lower smoking rates than the older

youth) tended to draw upon observations of family members or friends who smoke (McCool et al., 2001). There were a number of similarities between the groups, as well. Both recognized that tobacco placement in film may function as both a form of promotion and an artistic tool, and both resisted the suggestion that smoking imagery in film affected their desire to smoke (McCool et al., 2003; 2001). Significantly, both groups of youth also presented a “predominantly nonchalant response to smoking imagery in film” (McCool et al., 2003, p. 1023). The researchers conclude that:

the persistent inclusion of tobacco in film and its immediate acceptance as ‘normal’ and appropriate is an affirmation of the established position tobacco holds within youth culture, particularly among older teens. Essentially, it is the virtually unconscious acceptance of tobacco imagery that may render it as powerful. (McCool et al., 2003, p. 1031)

A team of researchers working with the World Health Organization (WHO, 2003) conducted eight focus group interviews with males and females aged 16 - 18 in an attempt to determine the impact of smoking in Bollywood films (India’s equivalent to Hollywood films) on the behaviour of Indian youth. A key finding of the study was the importance of film in the lives of the teens, and there appeared to be a strong linkage between behaviour observed in Hindi films and the self-reported behaviour of the youth. For instance, some of the young respondents admitted to being influenced by smoking in film because it was made to appear fashionable. It was also found that some youth attempt to emulate smoking styles depicted in Bollywood films in their everyday lives. Another finding, of particular relevance to this thesis, is that non-smoker and smoker perceptions of smokers did not appear to differ significantly. Both groups associated smoking with being modern, fashionable, cool, rebellious, and powerful. The non-smokers were observed to be a more traditional and reserved group, though.

Research concerning how Canadian youth use the cigarette to negotiate identity in their everyday lives is limited to two ethnographic projects. In McCracken's (1992) ethnographic study of young smokers in Ontario, Canada, he observes that:

teen smoking is driven in large part by the way in which teens see smoking, how they use it in their social lives, and the meaning it takes on (and gives off) day to day. It is only by capturing these cultural aspects of teen smoking that we can hope to complete our understanding of why teens start smoking and keep smoking. (p. 5)

A central assumption of his work is that teens are at a stage in their lives in which they are moving away from the "gravitational pull" of parents in a search for identity. He asserts that smoking is a powerful tool that teens may use to define the self because cigarettes are "charged with some of the most potent and interesting meanings a teenager has at his or her disposal" (p. 7). He concludes that smoking behaviour and beliefs in the teen world are highly formalized and ritualized, that teens use smoking as a means of identity construction, and finally, that cigarettes and smoking give teens access to various cultural meanings and numerous pragmatic functions. A limitation to McCracken's work is that external sources of these meanings (i.e., the mass media) are not discussed.

Research by Connop et al. (1999) also used ethnographic techniques in an attempt to identify the context in which youth begin to smoke, the smoking related behaviours of young people, and the circumstances in which teens currently smoke. Similar to McCracken (1992), they acknowledge that cigarettes are a powerful tool in the identity formation of youth. Unlike McCracken (1992), their research focused specifically on marginalized teens. They conclude that the young people in their study turn to peer groups for support and "use health-risk behaviours as a symbolic gesture of resistance to authority as well as a requisite for group membership" (p. 5).

Qualitative research demonstrates that cigarettes hold special meanings and perform specific functions in the lives of women. In her one-on-one interviews with women in Canada and Australia, Greaves (1996) found that females use smoking to organize social relationships, control their emotions, create an image (i.e., independence, style, thinness), and as a source of support and predictability. The retrospective interviews revealed that the reasons the women had for smoking changed since their initiation (usually as teenagers). As adults, the women were addicted to the physiological effects of smoking, but did not like the social stigma attached to smoking, whereas when they started to smoke, the opposite was true: they disliked the physiological feelings, but enjoyed the psychosocial benefits (i.e., appearing 'cool', older, fitting in). This latter point reinforces the work of McCracken (1992) and Connop et al. (1999).

A study by Dunn & Johnson (2001) is also pertinent to the research in this thesis because it focused on Canadian female non-smokers between the ages of 13 – 17 years. The research used a grounded theory approach to direct the discovery of the strategies used by females to avoid smoking. Seventeen Caucasian teens were asked open-ended questions with the aim of gaining "a complete picture of their experience of being a non-smoker" (p. 290). 'Self-confidence' was identified as the core category that underpinned the process of remaining a non-smoker. This process consisted of the following three phases: making sense of smoking, rejecting smoking, and declaring oneself a non-smoker. The researchers conclude that "there is a process that underlies remaining a nonsmoker" (p. 289) and also express the hope that the relevant strategies used by these adolescents may provide insight into the design of more effective anti-smoking campaigns.

There are several gaps that remain in the body of research on film, youth, and tobacco. For example, and with the exception of the studies by McCool et al. (2003; 2001) and the WHO (2003), research to date is largely survey-based, meaning that there remains a need for research focused on the rich and nuanced interpretations that youth make of tobacco-related media messages and the value assigned to these messages in smoker and non-smoker peer groups. Furthermore, the audience research outlined previously was completed in New Zealand and India, respectively. The fact that these youth likely consume different forms of popular culture than Canadian youth (e.g., New Zealand-made and Bollywood films) indicates a need for similar research in Canada. Even if one assumes that there is a significant overlap in the movie-viewing habits of youth in New Zealand, India, and Canada, it is likely that youth in these distinct national contexts view popular culture through different cultural lenses (McCracken, 1988).

In addition, there is no existing qualitative research focused on possible differences in the interpretation of smoking in popular films by smokers and nonsmokers. Although the research by McCool et al. (2003; 2001) and the WHO (2003) do include both smokers and non-smokers, the interpretive similarities and differences between these groups were not examined in any depth. Questions remain about whether non-smokers are particularly resistant to film messages, or smokers especially receptive to them. Indeed, understanding how smokers *and* nonsmokers use media depictions of smoking in their everyday lives may facilitate the creation of more effective anti-smoking campaigns.

A final note concerns smoking among young females. Despite evidence that for decades the tobacco industry has targeted females by attaching a variety of meanings to

the cigarette through the use of mass media advertising campaigns (Greaves, 1996; O'Keefe & Pollay, 1996), little is known about the meaning of cigarettes in Canadian female youth culture, and even less about their interpretations of smoking in film.

### Research Questions

In this study, I address these gaps through the following research questions: To what extent are female adolescents critical viewers of smoking imagery in film? How do female youth make sense of the various meanings and functions that are attached to the cigarette in movies? To what extent do smoking depictions in movies inform female adolescents' understanding of tobacco use in their everyday lives? Do the interpretations of young females vary between smokers and non-smokers (i.e., do they represent distinct 'interpretive communities')? Are there common interpretive strategies used by non-smokers to help them resist the influence of smoking imagery in film?

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHOD

I have approached the research questions using a qualitative technique commonly employed in communication studies called audience ethnography. Audience ethnography is a relatively new technique in the history of audience research. Early experimental research on the 'effects' of the media (conducted during the 1940s to 1960s) was largely based on the belief that television creates a measurable response in the viewer. Lewis (1991) critiques this 'effects' approach for treating viewers as "empty vessels" (p. 9). He also notes that with its laboratory-like 'stimulus-response' approach (i.e., showing the viewer a program (the stimulus) and then measuring their behavior (the response)), 'effects' research lacked the methodological sophistication to gain an understanding of the complex process of meaning construction by the audience. It was not until the 1980s that methodology in the area of audience research evolved to allow for a more complete exploration of the "ambiguities and enigmas of television viewing" (Lewis, 1991, p. 74). It was during this time that researchers began to use the qualitative technique of audience ethnography in an attempt to gain a more complete understanding of how media messages interact with and play a role in the social worlds of the audience. Audience interviews became a key methodological tool in the audience ethnography, with one common type being the focus group interview.

In this chapter, a rationale for using the focus group interview technique is provided, along with a brief description of a previous audience research study after which the methods used in this project have been modeled. The narrative then turns to the details of this particular project, beginning with an outline of the focus group sampling

method. This is followed by a description of the research setting, the recruitment of participants, and the movies that were shown to the participants. With this background, an outline of the procedure used in the focus group and a rationale for conducting the focus group in this manner will be provided. Details about the analysis of findings and some methodological obstacles will complete this section.

#### Rationale for Focus Group Technique

A focus group is “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (Morgan, 1996, p. 130). As such, the focus group generates more in-depth information than would be obtained by a survey and allows for directed interaction that draws out specific ideas and themes that may not be addressed in casual conversation (Morgan, 1996). Moreover, focus groups encourage the interaction of the participants, creating a ‘group effect’ which allows for the researcher to observe participants as they “both query each other and explain themselves to each other” (Morgan, 1996, p. 139). Such interaction also offers insight on the extent of agreement and disagreement among the subjects, and allows the researcher to clarify differences in opinions (Morgan, 2004). Morgan & Krueger (1993) refer to the focus group interview as a “friendly research method” (p. 18), explaining that with its open and interactive approach, it is an excellent technique for exploring people’s thoughts and behaviours in a respectful and non-condescending manner.

The methodological design of this thesis is based on previous audience research conducted by Wilson & Sparks (1996), a study which, in turn, built upon research by Jhally & Lewis (1992) that used a similar approach. Wilson & Sparks (1996) used focus group interviews to examine how racially distinct groups of youth make sense of sneaker

commercials and celebrity Black athletes. They were interested in both youths' understandings of the commercials and the meanings of the commercials in the everyday lives of youth. In order to explore these issues, they conducted focus group interviews with seven groups of young males (2-8 participants in each group). Three groups consisted of Black youth, while 4 groups were comprised of non-Black youth. The participants were shown several sneaker advertisements depicting Black athletes, and a group discussion followed the viewing segment of the interview. Similar to Wilson & Sparks (1996), the present study uses focus group interviews to explore the understandings that youth with a shared habit of viewing popular film derive from smoking imagery in film, and the possible ways in which the social location of the viewers (as smokers and non-smokers and as adolescent females) may relate to these interpretations.

#### Focus Group Sampling Method

For this project, ten groups of female adolescents (with 3-5 participants in each group) who watch at least two North American popular films per month viewed a selection of three movie clips depicting an actor smoking. Five of the groups consisted of 14 - 16 year old non-smokers (average age of 15.1 years) and the other five groups were comprised of 14 - 19 year old smokers (with an average age of 16.5 years). The youth were of a diverse racial mix and a roughly similar socioeconomic status. I provide a more detailed account of the participants and their background in Appendix A and Appendix B.

The goal of the recruitment strategy was to find groups of youth with an interest in popular film. In this case, having an interest in popular film meant that the participant

normally watches at least two North American-made films per month (on video, DVD, on television, or in the theatre). This was not an issue, as on average, the respondents (both smokers and non-smokers) viewed around two such movies per week. Another aim was to recruit groups of friends. Lewis (1991) recommends the use of friendship groups when conducting group interviews in order to ease the inhibitions of the participants and encourage the natural flow of conversation:

a group of people who know one another well will have an established pattern of conversational rules. A group less familiar with each other will, to some extent, need to have those rules imposed upon them by the interviewer. The more intimate groups are much more likely to let the interviewer sit back and listen during the discussion, while the less familiar groups will usually rely upon the interviewer to organize the conversation. (p. 90)

Although some of the groups appeared to be more cohesive than others (i.e., they were closer friends), all of the participants had a level of familiarity with the other group members and seemed comfortable in their presence. As such, all of the focus groups may be classified as consisting of 'friendship groups.'

During recruitment, potential subjects were asked about their smoking status. Following the protocol used by Dunn & Johnson (2001), a nonsmoker was defined as a female adolescent who has never smoked, who has experimented with less than 20 cigarettes (one package) in her lifetime, and who has not smoked in the past 30 days. Alternatively, a smoker was defined as someone who has smoked more than 20 cigarettes in her lifetime and who has smoked in the past 30 days. The goal, in this instance, was to assess how groups of female smokers and non-smokers (who share a similar interest in popular film) interpret images of smoking in movies.

The *number of focus groups* chosen was based on Morgan's (2004) observation that most projects consist of four to six focus groups (when studying a relatively

homogenous population). He justifies this number by explaining that in relatively standardized focus group interviews, "little new information emerges after the first few groups," as the data becomes "saturated" (p. 276). He then explains that the number of four to six focus groups is conditional upon the ability of the moderator to predict what the participants will say "even before they say it" (Morgan, 2004, p. 276). In other words, the researcher should continue to conduct interviews until common themes emerge within each homogenous population. The present study was considered to have a relatively high level of standardization (i.e., the group discussion was led by a moderator, followed a semi-structured set of discussion guidelines, and was conducted in a controlled, theatre-like environment). Thus, the relatively structured nature of the project and the presence of common themes within each group after five interviews led to my decision to finish data collection at this point.

The *number of participants* in discussion sessions was 3 - 5. Although this number differs from the 'rule of thumb' of 6 - 10 homogenous strangers, Morgan (2004) acknowledges that smaller focus groups allow for an increased level of participant involvement and are easier to manage, both important considerations when conducting research with female adolescents. The number of participants in each group was also determined, to some extent, by the fact that I recruited friendship groups. Because many of the youth typically 'hung out' in groups of 3 - 5, this was the number of participants that comprised each session.

#### The Setting

The school in which the research was conducted is located in British Columbia, a province with the lowest smoking rates in Canada in 2002 (16% in British Columbia vs.

21% for the rest of Canada) for those aged 15 years and older (PSC, 2004). In this province, a number of measures have been put into effect to discourage smoking among the general population. For example, there are smoking bans in many public places and work sites, and cigarette taxes have steadily increased over recent years (MCS, 2004). Of particular relevance to this project is the fact that youth smoking has received a great deal of attention over the past decade in B.C. Numerous anti-smoking campaigns have been directed at adolescents in the last several years and legislation has been put into effect in an attempt to deter young people from smoking. Under the provincial *Tobacco Sales Act* (1996), for instance, it is illegal to sell, distribute, advertise, or promote tobacco products to anyone under the age of 19, and stores found selling to underage youth receive large fines. Reports indicate that compliance is quite high: in 2002, only 9% of stores were selling to underage test shoppers (down from 35% in 1995) (Ministry of Health Services, no date).

It seems that these efforts to deter youth from smoking are paying off, as smoking rates have decreased amongst B.C. teens over the past five years. In 2003, 73% of young British Columbians (aged 13 – 17 years) were non-smokers (up from 55% in 1998), and the smoking rates of youth (aged 13 – 17 years) in Vancouver (the city where the research was conducted) are the lowest in British Columbia (currently at 6% down from 12% in 1998) (MCS, 2004). This information helps to paint a picture of the relationship between young people and tobacco in the province of British Columbia: youth are likely aware of the negative health effects of smoking; the young smoker is the minority; and the cigarette has been positioned as ‘forbidden fruit’ for young people.

The school itself is located in the east side of Vancouver, off of a busy main street. It is immediately surrounded by condominiums and houses, and a number of amenities are also located close by (i.e., restaurants, a 7-11 store). The average income of families living in this area is \$49,615.00 (Statistics Canada, 2001). This particular high school is one of the largest in Vancouver, with approximately 1700 students (grades 8 – 12). It offers a variety of academic, enriched, and career preparation programs, as well as a number of alternative programs (in which the classroom environment is less structured or traditional). Based on observations of the school, the youth attending this school appear to be of a diverse ethnic and racial mix, and a high proportion of them appear to be of Asian or East Indian descent. School policy states that smoking on the school grounds is strictly prohibited, and as a result, the students are forced to leave the school property in order to smoke. Two visible smoking areas exist just off of the school grounds. I provide a more detailed description of these areas in Appendix C, as well as a brief discussion around the issue of school smoking policy and ‘contested terrain’ at the school.

#### Recruitment of Participants

The non-smokers were recruited in one of two ways. Two of the groups were recruited from the hallway or cafeteria, while three of the groups were recruited through teacher contacts. Once an initial introduction was made, I explained the project to the potential participants and handed out the appropriate information sheets and consent forms (Appendix I). A time was then arranged for the interviews to take place.

Many of the smokers were recruited from the school’s designated smoking area on the east side of the school. Once I had met several of the youth in this area, they

introduced me to friends and/or classmates who are also smokers. As with the non-smokers, the smokers were given the appropriate information sheets and consent forms, and a meeting time was arranged.

A commonality amongst the smokers who participated in this research emerged during the recruitment process: most were enrolled in either the Career Preparation Program or the Middle Alternative Program located on the east side of the school. Further discussions with these youth revealed that a high proportion of the students in these programs are smokers. According to one of the students enrolled in the Middle Alternative Program, "the whole class smokes," with the exception of one of the male students. The teacher of the program confirmed that many of the students in the class are indeed smokers. The students in the Career Preparation Program gave a more conservative report, estimating that about half of the youth in their class are smokers (8 out of 16). Additional information about these programs is provided in Appendix D. In Appendix E, I also provide some narratives from the non-smokers and smokers regarding their first experiences with smoking.

It should be noted that the members of one focus group (four youth) were from a larger alternative school (consisting of approximately 60 students) located off the main campus. The students in this program come up to the main campus for some of the elective courses (i.e., woodworking, auto mechanics) and it was in one of these classes that I had the opportunity to recruit these youth for a focus group interview. While carrying out related research, it was discovered that many of the students in this school are smokers: 29 out of 50 are regular smokers and an additional 12 are occasional smokers.

### Selection of Movies

The four movie clips used in the study were from North American-made films. The clips were shown as a way to initiate discussion about tobacco imagery in film. Because participants were asked to comment on issues such as which clip they liked the best and whether they felt the smoking depictions were believable, specific incidences in the clips are referred to throughout the interviews. As a result, a brief description of the clips will be given to provide context to the participant responses that will follow in the results chapter.

*My Best Friend's Wedding* (romantic-comedy): In this clip, the focus is on the cigarette as a stress release. Julia Roberts is smoking in the hallway of an upscale hotel and she feels guilty and stressed out because she has just deceived her best friend. Although she has behaved badly towards her best friend, she is not portrayed as the villain in the movie, but as a desperate, love-sick woman. While she is in the hallway, a hotel bellhop approaches her and tells her that she is on a non-smoking floor. She offers him a puff of her cigarette. He takes a drag, offers her some sympathetic words of advice, and then leaves her alone to finish her cigarette. This clip also features the brand, Marlboro.

*Center Stage* (teen drama): The smoking depiction in this clip associates smoking with teenage rebellion. A young woman, Eva, is first shown sitting around a table in a pub smoking and drinking beer with her friends as she tells them about a scholarship she has obtained for a prestigious ballet school. Later in the clip, she meets one of her new roommates in the dormitory room they will be sharing with a third (unknown) roommate. In this scene, she pulls out a pack of cigarettes (Marlboros) and begins to smoke just as

the third roommate enters the room. The third roommate becomes upset with Eva for smoking inside and tells her it is not allowed. The final scene in the clip shows Eva in dance class, talking back to the teacher and then finally, dancing. The actor who plays Eva is not a well-known actress (although she has been in some other movies). She also appears to be of African-American descent.

*10 Things I Hate About You* (teen drama): This clip associates smoking with 'coolness' and 'toughness.' It takes place on the side of a high school playing field. All sorts of team practices are occurring, while at the side of the field, Heath Ledger sits on a bench (in a cool pose), smoking a cigarette. A popular, 'preppy' character jogs over from track practice and tries to convince Heath Ledger to take out a girl at their school (Julia Stiles). The preppy character finally offers to pay Ledger to date Stiles, and Ledger agrees.

*Fight Club* (action): Smoking is associated with masculine 'toughness' in this clip. Brad Pitt and Edward Norton are shown sitting in a bar, drinking beer and smoking. Pitt offers Norton a cigarette (from a package that looks to be the brand Rothman) but Norton refuses, saying, "No, I don't smoke." In this scene, Pitt comes across as the cool, tough guy, while Norton is more of an uptight, 'geeky' character. The final scene shows the two actors outside the bar. Pitt asks Norton to punch him and after showing disbelief and hesitation, Norton eventually does so.

The members of the focus groups viewed three of the four clips listed above. Initially, the clips used were *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *Center Stage*, and *10 Things I Hate About You*. After the first five focus group interviews, *10 Things I Hate About You* was replaced by the *Fight Club*. This switch was made because most of the participants

did not seem to identify with Heath Ledger, the lead actor in the film *10 Things I Hate About You*, and as a result, the clip did not generate very much discussion. In contrast, many of the youth expressed the idea that they like Brad Pitt, and the clip from *Fight Club* produced more interest from the groups, and more discussion. This slight procedural change did not appear to be problematic, as the key concepts within the structure of the interview were still addressed in a standardized fashion. Moreover, this change in film served to illustrate the importance of selecting clips which resonate with the youth (an issue that will be addressed in the final chapter).

### Conducting the Focus Group

The duration of the focus group sessions was typically between 45 – 60 minutes. One of the interviews was just under this time (about 35 minutes), while another was longer (about 80 minutes). The length of classes at this school is 85 minutes, with 65 minute classes on Fridays. Because the interviews were carried out during class time, having interviews which ran for 45-60 minutes allowed for sufficient time to fill out the appropriate forms at the beginning of the session and address issues around smoking in film. In addition, there was enough time in most of the interviews to ask the participants some general questions about smoking, such as their experiences with tobacco and the smoking culture at their school.

The focus groups were conducted in a teachers' lounge at the school which was not used on a regular basis. Because I had previously arranged to meet the participants at the specified room, I was always in the room waiting for the respondents prior to the study. When the group members entered the room, I repeated the purpose of the study to them, emphasized that participation was voluntary, and asked them to fill out the passive

consent forms. The respondents were also asked to fill out a biographical information sheet (see Appendix F). This questionnaire was adapted from the one used by Wilson (1995) in his study of youth and sneaker commercials.

A table was located in the middle of the room, and was surrounded by chairs. I had access to a television and VCR which I set up in one corner of the room. When we watched the movies, the participants shifted their chairs so that they could view the clips. Once the film-viewing segment of the interview was finished, the participants shifted their seats so that they were all sitting around the table in a circle. I would then join the group around the table. This circular arrangement provided an informal and open atmosphere in which all of the members were facing each other.

Before beginning the focus group discussions, the group members filled out a movie-viewing questionnaire (Appendix G) for each clip and were encouraged to refer to the sheets throughout the interviews. An audio-cassette recorder was put in the middle of the table and all of the sessions were recorded. I acted as moderator in all of the focus group sessions. Because of the distinct goals of the study, I was relatively involved in directing conversation, but at the same time, tried to allow relevant conversation to flow freely. The questions were based on a semi-structured interview guide (see description below and Appendix H).

Each session was reviewed shortly afterward to allow for evaluation and revision of the interview protocol, and some minor changes were made. For example, for the first few focus groups, the respondents filled out a movie-viewing form for all three of the clips, and I began the interview by asking the respondents about a specific clip, addressing all three clips in turn. Although this method was somewhat effective, I came

to realize that asking them which was their favourite clip provided a better transition into the group discussion. Following this reasoning, I had the youth fill out one movie-viewing form for their favourite clip only. This procedure was much more efficient, as some of the respondents were taking a very long time to fill out the forms. Moreover, by having the adolescents fill out a form for their favourite clip, they seemed to take 'ownership' of that clip and were eager to discuss it. Another procedural change was the previously mentioned switch in movie clips. These slight changes were made to help the flow of the group discussions and did not appear to be problematic methodologically because the sessions were conducted until common themes began to emerge.

#### Content of the Interview Guide (Appendix H)

The interview guide was based on themes identified by McCool et al. (2003) in a study of youths' perceptions of smoking imagery in film. The purpose of the guide used in the present study was to gain insight into the youths' thoughts about such issues as the authenticity of smoking in film, stereotypical images of smoking, saliency of brand placement, and their opinions surrounding the inclusion of smoking in popular film. The youth were also asked general questions about smoking at their school and about some of their personal experiences with cigarettes. The interview guide began with general questions about the film as a way of allowing the participants to express some of their thoughts and opinions in an open, yet somewhat directed manner. The discussion was then narrowed to focus on more specific questions regarding smoking. Please refer to the interview guide for more detail (see Appendix H). Because the interviews were semi-structured, the exact same questions were not asked in all of the interviews, although the same, central themes were addressed. It should also be noted that questions in the

interview guide evolved slightly as I gained more experience conducting the interviews, and found more effective ways of wording questions in order to address the areas of interest.

### Potential Problems with Focus Group Research

Despite being a good method for exploring an audience's interpretations and ideas about a media text, there are some possible shortcomings associated with focus group interviews. More specifically, potential problems may arise from the group dynamics if more outspoken participants control the flow of the discussion, and more withdrawn youth do not contribute. In an attempt to avoid this situation, I encouraged all of the group members to express their opinions about a subject, and often asked each member of the focus group what they thought about central themes or issues. An additional obstacle is that of peer group conformity, as some youth may refrain from sharing their true opinion in order to fit in with the rest of the group (McCool et al., 2001). While it is possible that this occurred in some instances, there was a certain level of within group variation during the discussions which indicates that at least some of the youth felt comfortable expressing their own opinions.

The presence of a group moderator is another potential area of concern (Morgan, 2004). It is possible that by trying to direct the conversation to topics in which I was interested, I disrupted the natural flow of conversation between the youth (the very thing the focus group is meant to capture). In order to avoid this, I tried not to interrupt the natural flow of the group talk, unless I deemed it necessary (i.e., the respondents were moving too far from the topic of focus). In addition, there is the issue of reactivity, in which subjects tell the researcher what they think the researcher wants to hear. In an

attempt to avoid this problem, I noted the context in which the information was collected and considered this during analysis of results (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

Finally, researcher bias has been identified as a potential problem in ethnographic work (Alasuutari, 1999; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The notion of researcher bias implies that “the orientations of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 16). For instance, my social location as a Caucasian female non-smoker potentially affects the way in which I conduct my research. By exercising reflexivity with regards to my research strategy and data collection technique, it is hoped that any potential problems in the production of knowledge was minimized.

#### Analysis of Focus Groups

Following the completion of a focus group interview, notes were made concerning the group dynamics and interactions during the focus group. These data were used to supplement the actual interview data that were transcribed soon after the interviews. The data were reviewed, and emerging themes or concepts were identified throughout the data collection procedure. The emerging data were reviewed with an eye towards the possibility of making changes to the interview guide if the assembled guide did not address the areas of concern, or if themes began to emerge that seemed important to pursue with subsequent groups. Finally, as recommended by Hammersley & Atkinson (1995), a journal was kept in which analytic ideas were noted during the data collection period. Doing so allowed me to begin a preliminary analysis of results and engage in a reflexive monitoring of the research project.

Ethnographic and focus group analysis methodology was used to analyze the transcripts from the focus group interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Knodel, 1993). Upon completing data collection, the transcripts were read, and a classification system for the major themes relevant to the study questions was developed. Several of the major codes identified were based on topics that were outlined in the focus group discussion guide and directly pursued in the interviews (e.g., saliency of tobacco imagery, perceptions of authenticity). In addition, patterns or themes that emerged spontaneously were also assigned a code.

The transcripts were reviewed numerous times and the text that pertained to a certain code was identified (many of the sections of text were assigned more than one code). After the coding process was complete, the textual data were entered into a qualitative data analysis program, *ATLAS/ti*. This program facilitates the organization and management of large amounts of textual data by allowing the researcher to select and code relevant data into analytic categories. In this manner, all of the statements related to a certain category can easily be assembled for analysis once the transcripts are entered into the computer program and coded (Knodel, 1993). Once the data were entered and coded in *ATLAS/ti*, the key categories were then further examined for possible between-category relationships. The extent of within-group agreement on various concepts was also determined at this stage.

#### Potential Problems in Analysis of Focus Group Data

One potential problem with this analytic process is that of coder bias in selecting 'representative' quotes from the transcripts, or in other words, taking quotations out of context in order to prove a point. Often, two coders are used to avoid this problem and

increase the reliability of the results (Knodel, 1993). In this case, coder bias was avoided by requiring the existence of numerous quotations to support a coding decision (i.e., evidence of within group agreement was required) (Knodel, 1993). The reliability of the results was increased by using extensive intra-coding (i.e., the transcripts were reviewed on numerous occasions to ensure that the same areas of text were consistently being coded in a similar manner). In addition, Knodel (1993) explains that “the accuracy of the interpretative analysis is also enhanced if the analysts are intimately involved with the actual data collection (i.e., present at the focus group sessions and possibly even serving as moderators)” (p. 50). The fact that I was the moderator allowed me to consider the context in which comments were made, and aided in the analyses of the data.

#### Ethics

The study received ethics approval from the University of British Columbia Office of Research Services and Administration Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Appendix J).

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS AND ANALYSES**

The results of the research are divided into three sections. The first two sections present the interpretations and perceptions of tobacco imagery in film shared by the smokers (section 1) and non-smokers (section 2). The following topics are covered: the saliency of smoking in film, participant perceptions of the influence of smoking in film on young viewers, respondents' judgments about the inclusion of smoking in film (i.e., on a moral basis), media literacy skills, and perceptions of the authenticity of smoking depictions. In the final portion of the chapter, points of comparison between the interpretations of smokers and non-smokers are briefly discussed.

This presentation of results is reflective of dominant themes which emerged during the audience ethnography. Although I have divided these findings into distinct categories, these are somewhat artificial divisions as the youth responses were frequently relevant to various topics. For instance, although participant perceptions surrounding the authenticity of a smoking scene have been grouped together and reported as one distinct theme, this issue emerged repeatedly throughout the interviews, intertwining with topics such as media literacy skills and judgments of smoking. It should also be noted that the participant responses are not limited to their perceptions of smoking incidents in the clips shown, but sometimes flow into narratives about the role of smoking and the cigarette in their everyday lives. In short, the reader should be aware that although the main themes and ideas presented in this section have been delineated for the sake of clarity, my hope is that the holistic framework of the youths' lives becomes evident from the analysis and discussion.

When presenting the results, participant responses or comments have been classified as "typical," "representative," or "other" (c.f., Wilson & Sparks, 1996). "Typical" responses are defined as those supported by most members of the specified groups (i.e., the non-smokers, the smokers, or both groups). Comments were categorized as "representative" when a few participants in a group responded in a similar manner and there did not appear to be any disagreement among the remaining group members. In these cases, silence was taken to imply tacit approval and the comments of a few participants were assumed to represent the opinions of the group. "Other" responses were defined as those instances in which one or two participants in a group expressed an opinion that did not seem to be indicative of the sentiments of the rest of group. In addition, the terms "majority," "some," and "a few" were also used frequently throughout the presentation of results to quantify how many of the participants appeared to subscribe to a particular idea. "Majority" indicated that almost all of the participants in a group (ie. smokers or non-smokers) were in agreement; "some" meant that about half of the youth felt the same way about an issue; "a few" indicated that one or two expressed a certain opinion. Discussions within a group are presented when there was either a disagreement on an issue or when several respondents participated in the development of an idea.

#### Section 1: Smoker Interpretations

The results of the smoker portion of the study are divided into four areas. The first shares findings regarding the impact of movies on youth smoking rituals. Under this heading, smoker perceptions of how tobacco imagery in film may influence the style in which they smoke, their own smoking initiation, and finally, the amount that they smoke are discussed. The second part concerns youth judgments about the inclusion of smoking

in film and seeing an actor smoke. The third focuses on the issue of media literacy, and as such, describes the youths' understanding of why smoking scenes are included in films, and their awareness of brand placement in film. The final section concerns the adolescents' perceptions of the authenticity of smoking scenes in movies.

### I. Impact of Movies on Youth Smoking Rituals

*"Like, you were cool if you could do rings": Smoking style and imitating Hollywood films*

Conversations with the smokers suggest that within the youth smoking culture at this school, smoking style is very important. For instance, it appears that one can gain status within the hierarchy of the smoking group by being able to perform elaborate smoking styles:

Renae: For a while, it was like the big thing. Like, you were cool if you could do rings. Like, I remember Rachel. Like we thought she was so cool because she could do the rings. And none of us can.

Kelly: She could do double rings and stuff, and like hearts.

Jada: Yeah, like my friend...every time she exhales, she does this thing where she just like shoots it, like in ...two little spurts...whenever she does it, it looks just so cool! And I try it and it just doesn't look the same!

Alternatively, the next quote illustrates that one may be ridiculed if her smoking technique is found to be lacking (i.e., she does not smoke the 'right way'), especially if it is perceived that she is *trying* to look cool:

Daniella: I know a girl...she does it to look cool. And when she smokes, she covers her mouth! Like...her face, like she doesn't want nobody to see.

Karen: Because she doesn't inhale!

Daniella and Karen: She doesn't inhale!

The following comments suggest that not only is it important to smoke the 'right way,' but that being a 'natural' at smoking is viewed positively by some of the group members (i.e., being able to smoke properly with little instruction from others):

Millie: And then they asked me if I wanted to try one, and I was like, "Yeah, okay." And out of all of them, I was like the only one who knew how to smoke a cigarette. And that was my first time trying. It was weird that I knew how to smoke and they didn't.

Renae: Certain people just can't [smoke]. It just doesn't look that great.

Interviewer: So, where did you learn how to smoke?

Jada: That wasn't until grade 8.

Interviewer: Okay, so what happened in grade 8?

Mindy: People teach you different ways of smoking because they think your style is wrong.

Kate: Not for me, but that may have happened to you (laughs).

The fact that Kate teases her friend for being coached on proper smoking style reinforces the idea that one should *just know* how to smoke properly. Indeed, there appears to be little room for error when learning how to smoke. This may be especially problematic for young people who initiate smoking when they begin hanging out with a new crowd of people and feel like they must look like an accomplished smoker right away.

With this in mind, it seems likely that young people might imitate smoking styles they see in movies in order to appear like a seasoned smoker. This line of inquiry was met with a range of answers, from acceptance to denial. When asked if they copied smoking styles in movies when first starting to smoke (in order to learn how to smoke the 'right way'), only a few members revealed that they had:

Sharon: Yeah, when I was just starting smoking I liked to watch people smoke [in movies]. Like, it was a thing for me I did.

Karen: Daniella probably does.

Daniella: I actually have! ...

Karen: Well, yeah, probably, because she's just starting to smoke, right? She's experimenting.

Daniella: Like different hand ways.

Karen: (laughs and shows how Daniella was holding her cigarette in a funny manner)

Daniella: No, not like that, but like, getting it out of your nose, or making circles out of it. You know what I mean. O's and stuff...

Karen: I did that too, when I first started ... Like, you just held it the way- It's just like ...you're going to a sushi restaurant and never going to a sushi restaurant before and

trying out sushi and tempura and this and that, and deciding which one is your favourite. It's like, you know...It's like a style of clothes, too, right? A certain style. It's like, you're going to be doing this for a long time. You might as well find something the most comfortable, right?

Daniella's indignation at being teased about the way she held her cigarette (and the fact that she was teased about it in the first place) demonstrates the importance within the smoking peer culture of being able to smoke the 'right way.' Furthermore, Karen's comparison between smoking and "a style of clothes" suggests that to her, the cigarette is a cultural commodity – an item that is integral to a young smoker's peer-group-related identity. Confirming this view, Karen later observed that "smoking and style and clothing is...all the same thing, it's like a fashion statement...in a way. It explains a lot in a person." Finally, Daniella's attempt to 'save face' by explaining that she was merely imitating the more extravagant smoking styles seen in movies (i.e., "O's and stuff") suggests that within the smoking peer culture it is acceptable to copy artistic smoking styles seen in movies, but it is not 'cool' to model one's normal or 'everyday' smoking style on celebrity smoking (i.e., to have to learn how to smoke by imitating smoking styles in the mass media). Responses from some of the other participants support this idea. For instance when asked if she had ever imitated smoking styles in movies, one respondent explained that she had only done so as a joke:

Tammy: Not purposely...Like, maybe if I'm just joking or being weird.

Members from another group mocked people they know for modeling their smoking styles on movie stars:

Renae: Yeah, I've seen people pretend to be really hot when they smoke. Like the dainty people like Edith.

Kelly: Yeah (laughs).

Renae: Like how she smokes like this (imitates someone smoking a cigarette).

Kelly: Yeah.

Les: Kind of like, show-off, like.

Interestingly, earlier in the interview, one of the members from this group explained that she and her friends might imitate 'classic' styles seen in films:

Renae: Like if they're, if it's like a group of people and like sometimes it's like a girl smoking, they do it in like...– and I'll be with my friends and they'll say the same thing – like, it's a classic way. Like, it looks good when they do it...And so then when you're like standing around you're like "I look like this person!" (laughs)

It is possible that her next comment is made with the aim of demonstrating that even though she may mimic an actor smoking, she still possesses media literacy skills:

Renae: In movies they can try to like, glamourize it. Like, they'll have...either the prettiest girl smoking or like, the outcast and...they work it in. Like, they know what they're doing...They obviously target you.

A few of the youth completely denied copying styles, while a couple explained that they had seen others do so:

Jessie: Yeah, like the smoke rings...the French inhale where it goes out the mouth and like, in the nose and the mouth thing.

Fran: The dragon thing.

Finally, some respondents admitted to copying (or wanting to copy) some of the more flamboyant styles:

Sharon: Well I just like, you know, blowing O's, or like –...sparking a smoke and just being like "La-la-la-la-la" (imitates smoking)...I don't know.

Mindy: But one of those cigarettes that I wanted to try – like, you know when you see, like old Western kind of films, they got like, the long filter, then they got the cigarette at the end? ... Well, it's like a cigarette and it's like a little holder and it's just, you know, they just sit there and they go (imitates smoking) and the cigarette is like, so long. I always wanted to try one of those, like, but I can never find it in order to fit my cigarette in it. So if you guys find one, let me know.

Kate: I found one.

Mindy: Where?

Kate: At this party. There was this girl walking around smoking with it and she goes (imitates smoking). It's just a huge, like plastic piece, right? And you put your smoke on the end...It was cool, but it was like, plastic, and it wasn't meant for smoking, so it started to melt.

In summary, it appears that it is acceptable to imitate over-the-top or flamboyant smoking styles that are seen in movies, and several of the participants readily admitted to doing so. Alternatively, it does not appear to be acceptable to model one's normal smoking style on movie depictions. The few participants who explained that they had looked to smoking imagery in film when learning to smoke were the exception, and other group members made fun of people for doing just this. Instead, it appears that possessing an intrinsic knowledge of how to smoke the 'right way' is privileged amongst the youth interviewed for this project.

*"And every time I saw her take a puff off that smoke, I'm like... 'I'm getting a smoke!'"*  
*Film as a social influence on smoking initiation*

When discussing the various film clips, it became apparent that some of the youth become very involved in a movie's plot, sometimes discussing the movies and characters as though they are real. Some of the participants also revealed that they strongly admire certain actors. This suggests that some movies (and their characters) resonate strongly with young people, and as a result, may act as a source of social influence for the youth when it comes to smoking initiation (along with family members and friends). When posed with the question of whether seeing smoking in film influenced their own smoking uptake, though, all of the participants rejected the idea. Instead, the teens cited the influence of family members and friends on their smoking initiation. Typical responses included:

Sally: Not really because I have a lot of friends that I chill with and like, they smoke... both my parents smoke.

Chey: No, it was more my mom.

Daniella: Mostly friends, I would say.

Karen: Yeah, exactly, friends.

Daniella: More friends than movies. Movie's just a movie.

Karen: Friends they have real stuff.

Daniella: Movies...can't just give it to you, right? Friends...they give it to you...Take a puff, take a puff. Before you know it you have a whole cigarette taking puffs out of that.

Millie: Next thing you know you've got a pack and then a carton and then.

Karen: Exactly.

Kate: For me, my mom and her friends would all sit at a table and smoke and just smoke and make food. And we'd like run around and play. And then we'd...try to get smokes, 'cause it was such a cool thing. And we'd do it with crayons and we'd be like (imitates smoking).

Mindy: I find that a lot of times, though, if your parents smoke, or like if it's in your family to smoke and if you grow up with it, you're most likely going to end up smoking. Maybe not now, but like later on.

Acknowledging that numerous research projects have shown that family members and friends are a strong source of influence on young people's smoking initiation, it still seems likely that smoking in film may be a powerful, albeit subtle, contributor. Consider the following discussion amongst the young females about earliest movie (and smoking) memories:

Les: Mmmm. I can't remember the name of it. It had all these girls in it, like Christina Ricci, and.

Renae: Oh, oh!

Les: Kirsten Dunst.

Kelly: *Now and Then*?

Les: Yeah, *Now and Then*.

Interviewer: *Now and Then*.

Renae: Yeah, I think that was my first movie, too, to see it....

Les: And I like Christina Ricci and I was like "Oh, she smokes. Oh" (says it like she is intrigued by the idea). I'm like, thinking about it...I watched it a lot. Like, I was obsessed with that movie...

Renae: It's so weird, because like, I was, too. And a couple of my friends were, too. It was the favourite movie, like everybody knows about it. It's so funny.

Interviewer: So, what did you think about them smoking in it? If anything?...

Les: I just thought, like, they were.

Renae: They looked too young.

Les:...But they looked, they were like my age, like, at that time, so I was just like "hmmm." Like, I don't know. I didn't know what to think...I still think of like, bad girls or something.

Interviewer: Right. So do you think, for you, did it...maybe influence you, or like make you think that smoking was a little bit cool, or what did you...

Les: It made me kind of think that maybe I want to try it. But then, I just, I was little, so I was just like "No, I'll never do it...It's bad for you. It'll kill you, so I'm never going to do it"...Then I just saw her [Christina Ricci] and I'm just like "Hmmm. If she can do it, then maybe."

This participant (Les) had stated earlier in the interview that she did not think that her smoking uptake was influenced by seeing an actor smoke. It was not until she was asked to recollect her earliest smoking memories that she was able to recall the scene from the movie and then acknowledge the possibility that it made her think about trying. Thus, a more nuanced analysis of the results suggests that for this youth, seeing Christina Ricci (one of her favourite actors at the time) smoking in *Now and Then* may have influenced her attitudes or beliefs around smoking, and possibly contributed to her smoking initiation.

Another participant's recollection of her earliest smoking/movie memory suggests that even though the smoking depiction may not have influenced her to *start* smoking, it almost certainly encouraged her to continue smoking at a time when she was just experimenting with cigarettes:

Karen: Oh, there was this one movie. I don't know what it was called, but it was like, one of those England-type movies on Channel 39, on Showcase Review...and there was this one girl from England, and they lived in England, and she ... went to a private school. And she ... was black, and she ... was really good and then she met this guy and she really, really, really liked him. And then before you know it, out of the blue, she's smoking! ...She's wearing make-up and she's in her house and she's smoking. Her mom's an alcoholic. She's just like ... "Do the F-in dishes yourself, mom!" And like she's just harsh, like, changed...And every time I saw her take a puff off that smoke, I'm like - and this is just when I started smoking, too - I'm like, "I'm getting a smoke!". Like it just seemed - even though I wasn't totally addicted, I just thought: "Ahh, that makes me want to go for a smoke."

Later in the interview, the same respondent acknowledges that when she began to smoke, she wanted to act out and rebel. The parallels between her early smoking behaviour and the movie character described above are striking:

Karen: When I was, when I started smoking, I was going through a lot. A lot. A lot of shit with my family... And I just like, I wanted to get out. And I wanted to hang with the baddest person in the world. And do the baddest stuff...Now I regret it all. I totally regret it all. I wish I was stronger. But I wasn't. I was very weak, so.

In spite of the fact that she had already started smoking when she viewed the clip, the way in which the young girl was using cigarettes in the film (as a way to act out) may have reinforced the participant's inclination (at the time) to do the "baddest stuff."

One of the groups commented on the possibility that smoking in film might influence young people to start to smoke:

Les: If it's a favourite actor...

Kelly: Yeah, that's true.

Les: and they see them smoking, then probably.

Renae: And if they like...the character, or whatever, and they kind of relate to the character, then it makes it more like, "Oh, well, I can just be like her in that movie. Oh, I look just like her, like, or him." Right? So, it does kind of influence, but you don't like to say it. Like, you don't like to actually think you're doing it because that person is doing it? But it does kind of, like in a little subtle way.

Embedded in the last comment are two insights into why young people might deny that movies influence their smoking uptake. The first is that the influence is so 'subtle,' that they are not aware of it themselves. This is quite likely, as smoking scenes are usually put into movies in such a manner that they appear natural and normal. The second is that young people (and people, in general) do not like to admit that they may be influenced by the mass media, as the respondent suggests in saying that "you don't like to actually think you're doing it because that person is doing it."

*"I just remember in the movie, Casino, I always, always wanted a smoke": Smoking in film and cigarette cravings*

When asked if they notice tobacco imagery in film, the majority of the smokers revealed that not only do they find it to be a salient feature of movies, but that they crave a cigarette when they see an actor smoke. The following comments are representative of the smokers:

Karen: When I'm watching movies, I don't pay attention to the negativity of it. It makes me crave one. Like, every time I see someone smoking in the movie, or smoking on the street, it makes me want to go out and get one...I pretty much have to stop the movie if I don't have a pack of smokes around me...Like, I'm a chain smoker in-a movie. Like, I gotta smoke. Because you always see people smoking, right?

Les: When I see it, I think that...I just want to have a drag. "Oh my, God. I want a smoke."

Sharon: Yeah, every time I see one, I want to have one.

Liz: When you see a person smoking, you're like, "Ahh, but I want a smoke."

Members in one of the groups were not as enthusiastic about this idea and responded with "kind of" and "not really" when asked if seeing an actor smoke in a movie causes them to crave a cigarette. They were the exception, as the majority of the smokers seemed eager to share that they have cravings when they see smoking in films. This admission was often made spontaneously by the participants (i.e., I did not have to question them about this aspect) and as such, came as a surprise since, in other circumstances, these young people were unwilling to admit to being influenced by the media (as was seen in the previous sections). It may be that in the hierarchy of the smoking culture, this admission is acceptable (and even desirable) as it elevates one to the status of an established smoker who gets 'full-blown' cravings. It is also possible that within the peer group, it is acceptable to be influenced by the media in this way, because

the urge to smoke when one sees tobacco imagery in films is a physical craving or addiction that is beyond one's control.

## II. Judgments of Celebrity Smoking (by Smokers)

### *Spontaneous judgments: Conspicuous by their absence*

None of the participants in the smoker focus groups volunteered comments suggesting that they view smoking in film negatively. Also absent were any spontaneous suggestions that smoking in films is wrong on a moral basis (i.e., because it will influence young people to start smoking). This absence of judgment is not surprising considering that many of these smokers do not appear to believe that smoking in film played a role in their own smoking uptake.

*"Well, it doesn't, like influence me. It just...looks weird": Thoughts on seeing a 'cool' actor smoke*

When the participants were asked 'What do you think when you see a 'cool' actor smoke in a film?' many of the participants simply refrained from commenting. A few expressed disapproval at seeing an actor smoke in a movie:

Mindy: I find it to be a turn off, because they're just, they're so cute that they don't need to smoke.

Another makes a reference to a specific actor:

Jessie: Like, Vin Diesel. Like, he's hot. He has a nice body. But you see him smoke and it's just a turn off.

With regards to seeing an actor smoke in 'real life,' one of the students observed:

Karen: Like you see them. You see this glamour, this and that, and you think "Perfect! Perfect! Fashion! Money!" The next thing you know, you see them pulling out a smoke, you're like "Oh."

It is quite possible that these smokers do not find smoking to be as alluring as they once did, since they are now more aware of the realities of smoking. For instance, Mindy

indicated earlier in the interview that she has tried to quit smoking, while some of the others expressed a desire to quit sometime in the future (i.e., after high school or “eventually”). Another possible explanation is that these participants simply wish to appear media literate and therefore, explain that they view an actor who smokes in film in a negative light.

Only a few respondents explained that they find it appealing when an attractive actor smokes in a film, as the following discussion about Brad Pitt in *Fight Club* indicates:

Renae: It's horrible to say, but for him, it like —.

Les: It adds to it.

Renae: Maybe it was just the character, but it's just like.

Les: Yeah, it adds to like, his style...

Renae: It is kind of appealing. Like, I think even if I wasn't a smoker, that wouldn't deter me from thinking he's attractive with it? Like it just kind of...added to it, right?

The participant's comment that “it's horrible to say” (i.e., admit that actors look cool smoking) suggests that the overall ambivalence to this question on the part of the smokers may be related to the fact that others agree that smoking in film is attractive, but do not wish to admit to this. When these same youth (who made the above comments about Brad Pitt) were asked about seeing a favourite female actor smoking in a movie, one of the participants viewed this in a more negative light, while the other still felt it looks attractive:

Les: Well, it doesn't, like influence me. It just...looks weird...It doesn't suit them. You're like “They're not smokers. Like, what are they doing?”...

Renae: For certain people like I find that it looks really classy when they do it. Like I don't know if it's like the way they position everything...But like, it seems pretty classy sometimes.

Interestingly, Les was the participant whose earliest smoking memory was that of Christina Ricci smoking in *Now and Then*. In this way, her retrospective thoughts about

seeing a favourite actor smoke contradict her present opinion of a female actor smoking. The issue of celebrity smoking and the influence that it may have on young people is clearly a complex one that requires further attention.

### III. Media Literacy, Film, and Smoking

*“So people can relate to it and also because they get funding”: Smokers’ perceptions of the film industry and tobacco placement in movies*

When posed with the question: ‘Why does a director put smoking in film?’ the smokers explained that it serves as both an artistic tool (to develop a character) and a promotional tool (to advertise brands). It should be noted that although the answers given are representative of the smokers (i.e., they all agreed), some of the youth may not have come up with both of these reasons on their own. This is an important consideration, because it hints to the possibility that not all of the participants were aware that smoking in film may be a form of promotion until another group member mentioned it.

Representative comments are as follows:

Millie: To advertise the brands and stuff like that.

Karen: Or to tell more about the character.

Daniella: Give more description of someone, right?

Karen: Exactly, more of a style for them.

Sharon: Because ... it’s a stereotype.

Jada: And probably it’s advertising, too.

Liz: To make it look realistic, obviously.

Tammy: Just for the character, maybe.

What these comments seem to indicate is that the respondents possess some knowledge about the movie-making process and the fact that money may change hands between tobacco companies and the movie industry in order to have brand placements in

film. This awareness, in turn, informs findings shared in the first section regarding the youths' perceptions of the influence of tobacco imagery on their smoking initiation. It is quite possible that the young people who resisted the idea that smoking in film influences their smoking practices did so because they are aware that the tobacco industry is trying to target them in films and they do not want to appear vulnerable to such tactics.

It is equally plausible, though, that the smokers' recognition that tobacco imagery in film is a way to advance character development and make a scene more believable might make these participants less likely to question smoking in film. These ambiguous findings provide a useful departure point for future work in this area.

*"It's so cool when you see like, a package of du Maurier": Brand identity and young Canadians*

The smokers are very aware of brand placement in film, with Marlboro and du Maurier being the brands mentioned most frequently by the teens. Marlboro appeared in a few of the clips shown to the youth, and is a brand often featured in popular film over the years ([www.smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu](http://www.smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu)), whereas du Maurier is a brand common in Canada (not featured in the clips shown). The respondents did not merely notice the brands, but also made note of the fact that Marlboros are American cigarettes whereas du Maurier is Canadian (it is worth noting that although du Maurier is known as a Canadian brand, it is owned by Imperial Tobacco, which is a subsidiary of British American Tobacco). For one youth, the distinction between American and Canadian brand placements in films seemed to be elevated to the level of a power struggle between Canada and the United States:

Mindy: I find it odd, though. A lot of them only have American brands. Like, well, what about the Canadian brands? Or, you know –

Sharon: But they're American films.

Kate: Yeah.

Mindy: But still! ...I think all brands should be associated with everything.

The following quote reinforces the idea that in the eyes of some, du Maurier has a Canadian identity and that seeing this brand in a movie appeals to some young Canadians:

Karen: You can totally tell if a movie's like Canadian or American. ... It's so cool when you see like a package of du Maurier. A guy pulls out a pack and you're like "Oh my God, it's Canadian! It's a Canadian movie! He's smoking Canadian cigarettes." It's totally cool, man.

In contrast, other participants explained that they watch for American brands. For these participants, the fact that it is an American brand and therefore "scarce over here" adds to its appeal:

Renae: If they're American movies I look for the Marlboro.

Les: Yeah. That's my favourite smoke...

Renae: 'Cause it's...the brand that is so scarce over here, like, I never see it. So when you see it in movies you're like "Oh, they have Marlboro."

Renae then explains that for her, the brands that she sees in movies take on new significance as she associates them with people that she knows:

Renae: I also look because like I know people who smoke different brands. Like Nicky with her like, with menthol (laughs) or something. Because like it makes her breath like minty after so she doesn't talk to her parents and smell like smoke. And I'm like "How does that work?" But anyways, like, I just notice it, you know. Like, if people smoke different brands you kind of notice like what smokes the actor's smoking.

Renae's anecdote illustrates how a brand may also come to take on the personality of the person who smokes them, although in her case, the people are not famous, but are her friends. A logical question, therefore, is whether seeing an actor smoke a particular brand will influence a young person to try that specific brand (as it takes on the personality of an actor). Although there was no evidence of such actor

influence in the present study, members from one group did express interest in trying a brand featured in a movie:

Liz: They're these cool brown smokes! They're like in brown papers and they're really long. I want to try them. They look so cool. And they're in *Final Destination II*...

Fran: The brand is More.

Jessie: Yeah, and...it's like brown, and then at the ending, at the filter, there's a white lining to it, right?

The participants' enthusiasm when discussing the brands stands in contrast to their reticence when discussing the fact that smoking in movies is a form of advertising. In fact, when the subject of specific brands in film was discussed, there was no acknowledgement by the participants that they were being targeted by the tobacco industry through placement in movies. This suggests that although they do possess media literacy skills, many do not apply these skills in a critical manner, possibly because they become so engrossed in the plot of a film. Only one participant made note of brand placement in films on her own accord:

Renae: You could also tell like, just how the movie was made, that he [Brad Pitt] pulled it, he pulled like the full pack out on purpose...Like he was juggling that, like, the American move, I guess, on purpose just to show the brand name...You could tell that the company was in on it, or else they would have just, he would have just had it in his pocket and pulled it out. He wouldn't have taken the whole thing and juggled it.

#### IV. Authenticity of Smoking Imagery in Film

*"Because when you're stressed, the first thing you go for...is your smokes": Personal experiences with cigarettes and assessing the authenticity of smoking in films*

When assessing the believability of a smoking scene, the smokers often drew on their personal experiences with smoking. As a result, the discussions about the believability of a clip segued into discussions of 'real life' smoking, as the participants compared the smoking depiction in the movie to their own life. The following represent typical responses:

Renae: She knew that she wasn't allowed to smoke in there, but she didn't care because she was like upset or whatever...Because when you are stressed, the first thing you go for, if you're a smoker, is your smokes...

Les: This morning.

Renae: Yeah, like after a bad test.

Mandy: If you're in a bad mood, then you need a smoke.

Kelly: You know what I noticed? ...how after he offered the smokes and Edward Norton said "No", then...he never blew the smoke in his face...I do that with Terry...she has asthma.

Kelly: Because you can't really smoke inside, especially like schools and stuff.

Liz: Yeah, because you smoke in a bar when you drink and then you smoke when you're in a room... So, yeah, it's realistic.

Liz: It's true, though. If you're handed a smoke, a smoker, you'll take the smoke.

Renae: Well, in *Fight Club*, they were like drinking and smoking and I do that. They go hand in hand...like, even if you don't light it yourself, if you're around people, it almost always gets passed.

Karen: Oh, yeah, for sure [it was realistic]. Like anytime like a negative incident or situation happens, you want to go outside and like have a smoke, like "ahhhh." Like,...I was having a bad day, and I was like, "[Teacher], I really need to go for a smoke right now." Like, I just can't stand this, like I gotta go and get my mind off things, kind of thing.

Because these smokers have direct experience with cigarettes, they seem to be able to critique the authenticity of the clips with confidence. This knowledge allows them to reject portrayals of smoking that do not accurately reflect reality (or at least *their* perceptions of the reality of smoking). At the same time, though, viewing depictions of smoking that resonate with their own personal experiences (i.e., using smoking as a stress release, when drinking) may simply serve to justify their own smoking behaviour.

*"Anybody can be a smoker, you just have to puff on it": Rejecting the 'stereotypical' smoker*

The interviewed smokers recognized that certain types of characters are often associated with smoking in films (i.e., the stereotypical smoker), and saw these

stereotypical depictions of smoking to be 'authentic.' Some representative responses include:

Jada: Um, for guys, it would be like, the rugged.

Jessie: Rich, spoiled kid.

Liz: Stuck up people. Yeah, they have the money. Why not?

Kelly: And sometimes richer people, because I guess they can afford it, or something (laughs).

Mandy: Well, in *Centre Stage* I thought it was like, the outcast, like the one girl.

A few of the participants felt that smoking does not suit innocent or studious-looking people:

Tammy: Um, I think that a type of smoker would be like that guy, like, you know, the guy that's kind of known like, to be more of like, the rebel or you know, more of a hard guy as opposed to like the people in school that like, just do their work and are ...bookworms.

Kelly: The innocent people. The innocent people don't look like they smoke...Like, you (the researcher) don't look like a smoker.

While the smokers did not seem to question the authenticity of stereotypical depictions of smoking, at the same time, there seemed to be some flexibility around what types of characters can smoke. A few participants made note of this fact:

Renae: Yeah, [smoking] works for like, Brad Pitt's character, because he's like the bad boy and then Edward Norton was the good one and he didn't smoke...Because they could have easily made his [Ed Norton's] character smoke, because it would have worked, right?

Sharon: Like I mean, anybody can smoke...So I don't think that you look a certain way and that's why you, that's why you smoke.

Kate: Anybody can be a smoker, you just have to puff on it.

A specific discussion in one focus group provides insight as to why these youth may be open to the idea that 'anybody' can smoke. When discussing the clip, *10 Things*

*I Hate About You*, the group members begin by acknowledging that the clip is realistic because smoking suits Heath Ledger's tough guy character. One of the participants then qualifies the statement:

Jada: He's a smoker.

Kate: Yeah, he's a smoker...Fully.

Mindy: It fits his personality, like.

Sharon: Look at the role he played in the movie...

Interviewer: So you ...think that smoking goes with certain types of characters better.

Mindy: Yeah.

Jada: Yeah, but sometimes you would be surprised. Like I'd never think Edith.

This last line is of interest, because Edith is a member of the focus group. Earlier discussions revealed that she is the 'innocent' one in the group and the other members were all shocked when they discovered that she is a smoker. Therefore, this reluctance to stereotype smokers and instead believe that "anybody can smoke" may arise from the fact that the youth have several friends who smoke. Once again, the youth appear to draw upon their own experiences with smoking and as such, do not view 'smokers' as some undifferentiated mass, but instead, as individuals with unique personalities. This might help explain why these youth would not question seeing a variety of characters smoke in a movie.

*"Smoking makes you not hungry": Active bodies, smoking, and health*

The clip from *Center Stage* (which depicts a very slim ballet dancer smoking) was used to initiate conversation around the topic of smoking, health, and body image (as well as the possible influence of the mass media in this context). Initially, the participants were asked their opinion about the authenticity of the smoking depiction, and as stated previously, it appears that the youth drew upon their personal experiences with

smoking to assess the believability of the clip. A few commented on the fact that a person normally would not smoke inside the school:

Jada: Obviously you can't smoke in there...the first thing you do would not be - in a new school - is light up a cigarette. You would go outside, right?

When asked specifically what they thought when they saw the dancer smoking in the clip, a few critiqued the clip based on the fact that an individual who is performing a physically demanding activity such as ballet should not be smoking:

Les: Yeah, I thought that was weird. Because when you're a dancer, like, most dancers don't smoke - ...It didn't make sense.

Tammy: Um, I think she's kind of stupid. Like, anybody knows you're not supposed to be smoking in like ... doing something like that - like an activity like ballet and especially inside the building where you're taking the class...It's a contradiction.

Others did not see the contradiction between being physical activity and smoking:

Karen: Well, you know some like athletes they smoke and stuff, right?

Millie: Yeah, me. I used to smoke and go and play soccer. And I could run. But now I can't run.

The link between smoking and weight control was a salient feature for one of the participants, as she sometimes smokes to control her hunger:

Interviewer: What about the fact that she's a dancer who smokes?

Jessie: That affects her.

Interviewer: How?

Jessie: Because it dulls your hunger.

Liz: Smoking makes you - yeah, smoking makes you not hungry and you're a dancer, you know, so you don't eat all that much.

Jessie: That's true, though. When you're hungry and you have a smoke, you're fuller.

Interviewer: Yeah? Do you know people...that do that? Like maybe smoke instead of -

Jessie: I do...Once in a while...

Liz: No, but it's - No, but it works. It makes you feel - it takes your mind off the hunger. You don't think about it anymore and you don't feel like [eating].

With the exception of the two participants who made the above observations, the other respondents did not comment on a possible link between smoking and weight

control when they viewed this clip. When asked specifically about smoking and weight control, the participants appeared to be aware of the association between the two, but the majority explained that watching the clip of the dancer smoking did not make them think that she was smoking to control her weight. As one youth explained: "I never thought of that."

When the issue of smoking in movies and weight control was brought up with one of the groups, a participant indicated that seeing an attractive female actor smoke in a film might encourage her to smoke as a means of weight control:

Karen: Sometimes I think: "I'm not going to eat all day. I'm just going to smoke all day." And that way it'll keep me busy. When I see like a pretty girl on TV and I see her smoking or ... I see she's kind of like hard, hard core, like bad in a way. And she's really pretty and everything and she smokes, then I think "I'm not going to eat anything today. I'm just going to smoke."

Aside from the comments concerning smoking and weight control, very few of the smokers commented on the fact that smoking is an unhealthy habit, and most of these comments were made in passing. Comments included:

Sally: You like harsh get wrinkles and like, cancer and lung cancer and all that stuff.

Jada: And when you get older and you've been smoking, you see the difference in the like (circles her finger around her mouth, indicating wrinkles)...

Mindy: She has wrinkles.

Mindy: When I went to my uncle's, I left my cigarettes on the balcony because we don't smoke inside because my uncle's sick.

Mindy: She probably spends like thousands of dollars on her teeth so they're white and she uses those Goodnights [teeth whiteners].

These comments were the exception, though. In general, it appears that many of the smokers are aware of the health issues, and may be bothered by them, but prefer to ignore them. For instance, on two separate occasions, a participant initially refused to

take part in the focus group because she thought they were going to have to watch movies that showed the negative health effects of smoking. Once these youth understood that they would be watching a Hollywood movie, they agreed to participate.

## Section 2: Non-Smoker Interpretations

The results of the non-smoker portion of the focus groups are analyzed in three sections. The first focuses on the youths' judgments around smoking, both as it relates to film and as they view it in their peer group. The second part focuses on media literacy and concerns the level of the non-smokers' movie-making knowledge (i.e., why tobacco imagery may be included in a film). The final portion outlines the females' assessments of the believability of smoking scenes in movies.

### I. Judgments of Smoking Imagery in Film

*"You don't really think anything of it": The majority of the non-smokers have an 'unaware and don't care' attitude towards smoking in film*

For the majority of the non-smokers, tobacco imagery in film appears to be an accepted part of the movie-going experience that neither distracts them from the plot of a film, nor detracts from the appeal of a movie. Moreover, many (but not all) of the youth do not mind seeing smoking in films, despite the fact that they are very much aware of the negative health implications of smoking and find it to be distasteful in 'real life.' For these youth, cigarettes appear somewhat innocuous when those smoking them are glamorous movie-stars, and the smell of the cigarette smoke is confined to the movie set. The following are typical responses regarding the saliency of tobacco imagery in film:

Ada: Like I won't make a mental note... I'll just see it and it will just pass.

Ellen: You don't really think anything of it.

Hetty: I don't really notice it because you see smoking around you all of the time. You turn on the TV and the people around you smoke on the streets....it's just, just there.

Maggie: No, it's not a turn off.

Ada: I figure it's the character. I don't really think about.

Annie: For me, I don't like really focus on that, you know? ...I'm probably thinking about something else!

Ada: You're not looking at the cigarette!

Ally: I don't really think much of it. I'm just, like focusing on him [Brad Pitt].

Ellen: It's different in movies than in real life...When you can smell it in real life...I don't like the smell of it at all.

Cory: I don't really notice it. If they're not around me.

Sonny: the odds of you meeting Johnny Depp... is very slim. And ... so who cares if he smokes, right? ... I mean, I'm sure that if you actually knew him and you were like kissing him or like holding his hands and his hands were like nasty and smoky and everything you'd be like "Stop it."

The fact that the typical non-smoker response to tobacco imagery in film was an 'unaware and don't care' attitude is an important one, as it suggests that smoking in films is not something the youth tend to notice, let alone think about in a critical manner.

The ambivalence towards smoking in films that was typical of the non-smokers was not unanimous, though. A few of the young people (who made several media savvy comments throughout the interviews) appeared to find smoking in film to be more salient (and disagreeable) than the majority of the youth:

Sonny: When I see people smoking in movies, I wonder how they do it. Do they actually make them smoke actual cigarettes? And I don't know. It's kind of gross. Like seeing the smoke come out their nose. Yuck.

Sonny: I normally do [notice smoking in films] because most of the time during when they're smoking, they make a point to show what kind of cigarette they are smoking.

Mabel: it makes me feel kind of sick to my stomach sometimes? Like if you see like more than three people and they're all standing around "Yeah, hah" (imitates smoking). You know, then I would start to feel kind of sick because I can just smell it my mind and I'm like (makes a face). Right? ...So I notice it a lot, and I'm just like, I kind of don't really watch around that time. I'll be like "Oh, mmm, mmm" (makes like she is looking around, avoiding watching)... Yeah, and I'll start talking to somebody because I don't want to watch them smoke 'cause I think it just looks stupid anyway. I'm like "What are you doing? Right?"...So it's pretty noticeable to me.

*"It's a personal choice": Non-smoking youth and views on celebrity smoking*

For some of the youth, the 'don't care' attitude towards smoking in film appears to stem from the belief that it is one's 'personal choice' to smoke in a film. This was a representative opinion in two of the focus groups:

Cory: It's their own personal choice. You know it is in the movies but I'm not going to go sit and single parts out.

Hetty: Actually, I don't really mind because I know in real life they don't really smoke ...Cause sometimes, most of the time, just the scene they have to do, require them to actually smoke? And smoking doesn't really bother me, because I don't smoke, so, yeah...It's a personal choice.

Hannah: It's kind of ... [Johnny Depp's] choice, I guess, and that's not going to affect me, because I'm not a follower.

This hesitation to pass judgment on others for smoking because "it's a personal choice" is not surprising in light of the fact that many young people are at a stage in their lives in which they are attempting to assert their independence and make their own decisions (McCool et al., 2001; McCracken, 1992). Just as they do not like being told what to do, they likely do not want to appear intolerant of the choices of others. This mentality seems to overlap to 'real life' smokers, as well. Although the typical attitude towards smoking (and peer smoking) was that it is "stupid" and "disgusting," when the smoking of family members and friends were discussed, the youth were typically not judgmental. A discussion between teens in one of the groups captures this hesitation to judge:

Ada: With close friends, like, everyone – the first time anyone sees them smoking they're like "What, you smoke?... What are you doing?" And they're just like "Ah, shut up!"

Annie: Yeah, but then...you think to yourself, "Oh, they probably get this from everybody else, too, so maybe I shouldn't say anything." You know? ...Because they're your friend and like.

Sonny: It's their choice, right?

Annie: If they smoke, then whatever.

One participant made a comment regarding Julia Roberts smoking in *My Best Friend's Wedding* that closely parallels the above dialogue about seeing a close friend smoke for the first time:

Mabel: And that was the first time I've ever seen her smoke, so it was kind of shocking but. I don't know. Somehow when you see that you kind of picture them doing it...off camera and stuff and so you kind of wonder like "Are they just, like acting or is it like, for real?" So I don't know. It seems pretty realistic to me at that point and then it just, kind of - I don't know, I was just ... her choice and everything, but.

She later talks about seeing Brad Pitt smoking in *Fight Club*:

Mabel: So it's not ... like, "Oh, he smokes. I hate him"...So, it just, sort of at the moment you're like, disappointed, but then you're just like, I still like them because in this movie he's so great and stuff, and then you keep that love for them.

In this instance, an adolescent (who is extremely opposed to smoking) withheld judgment of her favourite actors for smoking in film, just as many of the youth appear to withhold judgment of family members and friends. It is interesting that, in this case, a favourite movie star takes on a status similar to a close friend or possibly a family member when it comes to judgments about smoking.

A few participants in one of the focus groups did not appear to be as open to the idea that it is someone's personal choice to smoke, and did seem to view an actor in a negative light for smoking. One explained that she finds it "kind of annoying" when she sees Johnny Depp (one of her favourite actors) smoke in a film because he's "really cool and different." Another member of this focus group explained that she would change her

opinion of an actor for smoking in a film (she was somewhat melodramatic throughout the interview):

Lana: Oh, my God. I love her [Britney Murphy].

Hannah: She smokes.

Lana: What? I hate her now.

This change in opinion of the actor was not representative of the other group members, although they did go on to discuss Murphy's role in *8 Mile*, explaining that she "just looks trashy" when she smokes in the film, and not at all "sophisticated." The age of the participants may have been a factor in these more critical judgments, as the members of this focus group were the youngest of the participants (they are all grade 9 students while the others were either grade 10 or 11). It is possible that the two participants who appear to judge actors for smoking are not as concerned with freedom of choice as some of the older participants.

*"I would never start smoking because Julia Roberts or Brad Pitt started": Peer culture and media literacy*

Many of the participants who withheld judgment of an actor for smoking in a film believed that seeing such an actor smoke might influence some people to smoke. Instead of looking at the actor in a negative manner, the youth seemed more inclined to pass judgment on an individual that would be influenced by such an image. The following are typical thoughts concerning the issue of whether smoking in film might influence a viewer to start smoking:

Sonny: I would never start smoking because Julia Roberts or Brad Pitt started and I like, I'm in love with them or like idolize them? ...I'm always surprised at how many people would...Because like, they see somebody do it and so they want to do it...but it wouldn't make me start smoking.

Ally: If they like, like the character and they like, want to be like them.

Marianne: If they're really, like, naïve people who think that that's what's going to make them happy.

Mabel: And then you think about all those crazy, like wannabe fans. They're like "(gasps) she smokes. Maybe I should smoke, too. You know, just to be just like Julia" ... And I just feel so sorry for them because they're so stupid. So I mean, like, when you get like an actor or actress or whatever, like, smoking in movies and it kind of like, affects some of the fans. Not me. But, you know, some of the crazy ones out there, so (laughing).

Cory: I mean, it depends on the person, really. I mean, if I see my favourite actor smoke in a - I'll kind of look down on him or her a little more, because it's a disgusting habit, right? ... But I'm not going to go out and do it...I mean, I have my own mind and if I don't want to do it, I'm not going to.

These statements suggest two things. First, the use of the words "crazy," "naïve," and "stupid" indicates that these young people have a negative view of anyone who would begin to smoke because they see their favourite actor smoking in a film. The fact that these participants feel that it is the responsibility of the viewer to resist being influenced by smoking in film (as opposed to blaming the actor for setting a bad example) reinforces the idea that young people focus more on individual responsibility and less on the responsibility of corporate or societal institutions. They clearly feel that youth should have 'a mind of their own' and should be secure enough in their identity that they are not tempted to model their behaviour after a movie star. Second, it appears that in the youth peer culture, it is not 'cool' to admit that one falls prey to the influences of the mass media, as several of the participants were quick to point out that they would never be influenced to start smoking by images in the media.

Members of one group believed that seeing actors smoke in movies might affect "younger people more," especially if they "really, really adored" the actor in the film, an idea was echoed by teens in a few of the other groups, as well:

Sonny: I think the young ones, too.

Ada: ...more likely that's going to happen.

Marianne: If they...see them as a role model, then yeah, sure. But ...it really depends on the person.

## II. Media Literacy, Film, and Smoking

*"I think it's advertising" / "It adds to the character": Non-smokers' views of the film industry and tobacco in film*

When asked why a director would put smoking in a film, the majority of the youth were aware that the placement of smoking in film serves as a form of advertising.

The following comments are representative of the non-smokers:

Cherie: Yeah, do they get more money if they show the brand?

Hetty: ... and don't they get like, money if they use a brand?...

Mabel: Oh. That's right. Marlboro was in all those clips.

Mary: Or maybe the company just pays the movie to like, put it in so that they can see the brand. And they're like, "Oh, I want that."

Barbara: I think it's advertising... Yeah, they smoke. And people say, "Oh, yeah, smoking is cool" and stuff like that.

It is interesting to note that the majority of the participants did not identify smoking in movies as a form of advertising until they were specifically asked about it. This does not necessarily mean that these youth lack media literacy skills. In fact, several made comments throughout the interviews that demonstrate that they are very media literate (e.g., commenting on the fact that the actors who smoke do not have yellow teeth). Still, and in keeping with the 'unaware and don't care' attitude described previously, it appears that these participants had not given the issue of tobacco placement in movies very much thought until they were specifically asked why a director might include smoking in film.

When asked about brands, about half of the non-smokers explained that they notice placements in film. Their ensuing discussion about the actual brand placements indicates that they perceive it to be a form of advertising:

Sonny: Yeah, I do.

Maggie: Oh, I definitely do...

Sonny: Mostly, mostly like, Marlboro, or whatever.

Maggie: Not - I don't notice it as in like, oh like, um, "I want to go out and buy that"...I notice it like, "Oh, what a stupid way to [advertise]."

Ada: Yeah.

Sonny: Yeah, yeah.

Maggie: Like, that's so obvious.

Sonny: That's so fake.

Annie: And sometimes, all I remember is like, the name of the cigarette and like, I leave the theatre and like "What movie were we just watching?" Like...you know, advertisement, you know, it's so blunt...

Ada: Yeah, they're going to get however much money from wherever company, like... did you guys see *Josie and the Pussycats*?

Sonny: Yeah, oh man!

Ada: That whole thing was an ad.

Ellen: Only sometimes because they'll purposely like, turn around the box and like...

Marianne: They do it more with alcohol than they do with cigarettes.

Ally: I don't notice them...

Ellen: Unless they have big signs in the background, right? ...But usually I don't [notice brands].

Other participants notice brands that a family member smokes:

Hetty: Only the ones that my dad uses. I'll be like, "Hey, my dad uses that!"

Mabel: Yeah, I recognized them because my brother smokes Marlboro.

Marlboro was the brand most often identified by the participants. Only one youth named Player's. Interestingly, a few of the participants identified the package by both the name and the colours on the box, suggesting that the brands are identifiable by their colours:

Lana: Yeah, usually the red one, with the white. Marlboro.

Sasha: I think it's like, Player's or something?...The blue one.

The ability of a few of the non-smokers to identify a brand by the colours alone is good news for tobacco companies, who are (by law) banned from associating their brand name with an event. They can (and have been known to) start up a company that ostensibly has no connection with a cigarette brand, but give the company a similar name and the same brand colours/identity of their brand (PCS, 2003).

The non-smokers also recognized tobacco imagery in film as an artistic device used to develop a character. Unlike the participant comments about tobacco as a form of advertising, the idea that smoking is a tool for adding realism to a movie was prominent throughout the interviews (not just when asked "Why does a director put smoking in film?"). Typical responses include:

Maggie: It's an easy way for you to make a character in a movie. It's really easy.

Marianne: Well, obviously that's why they put it in movies. 'Cause some characters, it just gives them more - Like, it helps them with their character.

Ally: It's sophisticated.

Hilary: I don't like smoking or - and I don't do it, but ... I think it rolls in with her character.

Lana: To make it more realistic.

Ellen: It does build a character...Like, you wouldn't expect some people to smoke...And then it just makes them more bad.

Mabel: Yeah, to give a feel to it. Because sometimes, like, some kind of Mafia scene, with all the smoke curling around and stuff, it looks all like, mystical, right? And all like (makes funny sound) "I'm taking your money, Johnny. And I'll kill ya, too!" You know? ... It has like a, it has a feel to it, you know what I mean? (laughing)

Cory: To make the character more realistic. To be more down to earth, because like, everybody now smokes.

Only one participant felt that the cigarette was not useful in developing a character:

Lana: Well, they could have done without it...I didn't think he really needed, like if he didn't it would still, like, mean the same thing. I guess he was doing it to be kind of all like hardcore and big and stuff, but ...I don't think it really helped him be like that.

The fact that the majority of the youth view smoking in film as an artistic device is likely another reason why many of the non-smokers do not seem to mind smoking in film. They view it as a legitimate technique for helping to develop a character and in turn, make the movie more realistic.

### III. Glam or Sham? Authenticity of Smoking Imagery in Movies

#### *"It looked pretty real": Stereotypical depictions and assessments of authenticity*

In the previous section, it was demonstrated that the non-smokers view the cigarette as a tool that can be used to develop a character. As a result, they recognize that the cigarette carries with it a variety of meanings (such as toughness and rebelliousness), and that having a character smoke gives the character access to these meanings (helps to build an identity). When asked to elaborate on the types of characters that usually smoke in films, the participants had little trouble identifying what they view as stereotypical smokers. The following were typical answers:

Sonny: The stereotypical person, like, the tough, muscley, leather jacket.

Maggie: The private school girl.

Annie: Yeah, that rebellious.

Sonny: Or, like, the outcast person.

Mabel: Usually, like the bad guy. Sometimes. If you watch the older movies and like, you know, the evil cowboy dude's all like, on his horse and he's smoking and he says "Let's go get 'em, boys." You know?...And then you see the good guy all like, healthy and ... "Let's go kick his ass."

Cory: It's stereotypical.

Hetty: ...like, the Mafia, the gansters that smoke. Like you wouldn't expect like, the school teacher to smoke...

Cory: Or the good cops or.

Hetty: Yeah, or anybody who's wearing uniform. You don't expect them to smoke.

Annie: The female, it's like the rebellious bad girl, you know.

Sonny: Or she's like, really having a rough time, like "Oh no, I have a fashion show in like an hour and I have no clothes." Stressed out. That's the word.

Some other thoughts on characters that are stereotypical smokers were:

Lana: Older country people.

Sasha: The stereotypical popular group?

Lana: Like really, really blonde girls.

It should be noted that a few of the participants questioned the idea that only certain types of characters can smoke:

Sonny: But in movies, I think you can portray anyone as being able to smoke, like, you know, have like a group of friends smoking outside ... and it just fits because that's where they have their conversations, where they meet.

Cathy: I don't think [smoking suits a certain type of character]. It's just ... if they want to or not. Because, you know, a man in a suit can smoke.

These two comments were the exception, though, as the majority of the youth seemed to feel comfortable with the idea that certain types of characters smoke in a film.

Not only were stereotypical smokers easily identified, but many of the non-smokers drew upon these stereotypical meanings associated with smoking when assessing the believability of a clip. In most cases, these stereotypical depictions were thought to be realistic or authentic, as illustrated by the following observations:

Maggie: Well, he's [Brad Pitt] got the beer...he's the tough guy in it.

Annie: Yeah, the rugged.

Sonny: The untucked shirt.

Maggie: He's manipulative.

Hetty: He's in a bar and he's drinking with all his, with his buddy, so you would kind of expect the guy to smoke.

Ada: I think all the way through she was kind of rebellious, like even after that, right? It's like "you're wearing the wrong clothes. Your hair's in your face."

Maggie: Yeah. She's the rebel of the dance class and everyone's perfect and then she's not and she's the smoking one.

Sonny: Yeah, and she's also like the one, like, drinking beer at a bar, at a pub or whatever.

Maggie: Yeah.

Ada: Yeah, beforehand.

Maggie: Yeah, and she's got her like harsh like, accent.

Mary: Yeah, because she has like, that bad attitude type of person, so yeah [it's realistic].

Barbara: She looked kind of cocky.

Hannah: I think it rolls in with her character.

The stereotypes regarding smoking also extended beyond personality-types to include the way in which a cigarette is used. The connection between smoking and stress was particularly salient for the youth. The fact that stereotypes also apply to the manner in which a cigarette may be used is an important one, as it indicates that young people may not question the believability of a scene if a 'good' character pulls out a cigarette to relieve stress. In this way, the cigarette is able to signify not only personality types, but emotions, too. Because anyone can experience stress, all sorts of characters can be made to smoke, even if they do not fit into the category of the stereotypical smoker. For instance, when they were asked to comment on the specific movie clips, few of the participants questioned seeing the stressed out Julia Roberts lighting up (even though she is not likely to be perceived as a stereotypical smoker):

Maggie: Yeah, it was realistic. You could definitely tell that she was upset...and that she was smoking because she was upset.

Hetty: It looked pretty real.

Cory: And I mean like, people do smoke when they're like, anxious and nervous.

Barbara: Mmm, sometimes when people are stressed they usually smoke, like with smokers.

A few of the non-smokers attempted to question the authenticity of the smoking scene in *My Best Friend's Wedding*, but had difficulty pinpointing exactly what was unrealistic about the smoking depiction:

Marianne: I don't know. It wasn't as realistic as the other ones, but...I don't know. He just sat down and started smoking with her.

Mabel: Um, I don't know. And that was the first time I've ever seen her smoke, so it was kind of shocking...it seems pretty realistic to me at that point and then it just kind of – I don't know.

It is possible that these participants had difficulty assessing the believability of the clips because they lack direct experience with smoking, and so were not able to draw upon personal experiences. In fact, the only clip that several of the participants were able to critique with confidence allowed them to draw on their knowledge about health issues and smoking. More specifically, participants from three of the five focus groups critiqued the clip from *Center Stage* because they found cigarette smoking to be incompatible for an activity requiring the discipline and physical training of ballet:

Hetty: She's a dancer. She should know that she's kind of like an athlete, so she should not do, smoke or drugs or anything like that. She probably knows...

Mabel: Yeah, I don't – usually when you think about athletes and stuff you would expect them not to be smoking or drinking or like anything else, but when you like kind of see in a movie, it kind of takes the dancer or whatever out of them.

Ellen: I don't think - ballet dancers wouldn't smoke.

Sonny: Dancers, like ballet dancers...normally you wouldn't think of a ballet dancer...she's being unhealthy, right?

It is not surprising that some of the youth were able to critique the clip based on their health knowledge. Throughout the interviews, comments were made about the fact that smoking is "gross" and many of the non-smokers cited health concerns as a main

reason for not smoking, suggesting that they are well aware of the negative health implications of smoking:

Mary: It looks sick...smoke goes in and back out and next thing you know, you're like dead.

Sonny: It's gross. Like the yellow teeth, the nasty smell, like the money, the health problems.

Maggie: I care too much about my health.

Lana: Why wouldn't you just like, stab yourself or something? It would be easier  
Hannah: Yeah, smoking is like suicide.

Lana: It kills you. It makes you very unhealthy. It's stinky.

Hetty: You might get cancer later on.

Cory: I value my health too much.

Mabel: I know, I'm way too active to smoke. I move around so much. I run up and down stairs, running around (makes screaming sound). So I mean, I don't want to be like, "(cough, cough) Wait up, guys!" You know? I don't want to be like that.

Only a few of the youth made note of the more subtle health-related incongruencies that they see in films (i.e., smoking yellows the teeth, causes wrinkles), despite the fact that they are aware of these facts, as the above comments indicate. For instance, one of the participants (who made several media-savvy comments throughout the interviews) noted that when she sees a glamorous female actress smoke "it totally doesn't fit...because white teeth, perfect teeth, like perfect...complexion."

This comment was not representative of the rest of the group, though, and her friend countered with:

Maggie: But...I can think of tons of movies where they have done that and where it adds to it... to the character. It makes them look more like dominating.

To this second youth, the meanings associated with the cigarette appear to be more salient than the knowledge that smoking may cause yellowed teeth.

### Section 3: Integrative Assessment

One of the aims of this research is to determine the extent to which the groups of smokers and non-smokers that took part in this project represent distinct interpretive communities. In other words, does a shared social location (in this case, smoking status and gender) determine how youth interpret tobacco imagery in film? Several key differences in the manner in which the smokers and non-smokers make sense of tobacco imagery in film suggest that this is the case. At the same time, there were also a few similarities. I have summarized the ways that the groups dealt with different topics below.

#### Between Group Differences

***Saliency:*** The two groups appeared to differ with respect to the extent to which they notice smoking imagery in film. The smokers seemed to be aware of smoking in film on a physical level, as many explained that they develop an urge to smoke when they see smoking in movies. The non-smokers, on the other hand, were largely unaware of tobacco imagery in film, as it blends into the background of the movie.

***Perceptions of authenticity:*** The smokers seemed to draw upon personal experiences with smoking in order to assess the authenticity of the clips. Stereotypical portrayals of smoking were recognized as authentic, but did not seem essential for assessing the believability of a clip. Moreover, some of the smokers rejected the idea that smoking can only suit certain types of people and instead, were amenable to the idea that ‘anybody’ can smoke. In contrast, stereotypical portrayals of smoking seemed to resonate with the non-smokers. Aside from being able to draw upon their knowledge of the health consequences of smoking, these youth appeared to be unable to assess whether a

depiction of smoking in film is authentic based on first hand experience. Stereotypical portrayals of smoking were often perceived as authentic. The idea that 'anyone' can smoke was less prominent within the non-smoker focus groups.

**Judgments:** The issue of smoker and non-smoker judgments of smoking in film requires a more nuanced analysis. The majority of the non-smokers were not judgmental of smoking in film. Many viewed it as a legitimate technique for developing a character, and the idea that smoking is one's 'personal choice' was also prominent. There were also within-group differences, though, as a few of the non-smokers explained that they are disappointed when they see a favourite actor smoke in a movie (but did not tend to change their opinion of the actor). Although most of the non-smokers did not judge actors negatively for smoking in a film, they were very judgmental of anyone who would be influenced to smoke because they saw an actor smoke in a film. Similar to the non-smokers, the smokers seemed to have a relaxed attitude towards smoking in film, although some expressed the idea that an actor looks unattractive when he smokes in a film. The two groups differed, though, with respect to the manner in which the criticisms were made. The non-smokers' criticism of actors for smoking in films was spontaneous, whereas the smokers' were solicited (i.e., the smokers would likely not have commented negatively if they were not specifically asked about this).

**Perceptions of influence:** The two groups also differed in their perceptions of the influence of smoking in films on smoking initiation amongst young people. The non-smokers expressed the belief that seeing smoking in film could play a role in influencing a person's smoking uptake. In contrast, the smokers did not see this to be the case, explaining that their smoking initiation was not caused by viewing smoking in film.

**Health issues:** Although both groups seem to be aware of the negative health consequences of smoking, issues around health and smoking arose more frequently within the non-smoker focus groups. It should be noted that many of these comments were made when discussing why the youth choose not to smoke. For the most part, though, the non-smokers were more apt to make spontaneous comments about the negative health effects of smoking than were the smokers.

#### Between Group Similarities

**Impression/Image Management:** In the youth culture, it appears that it is important to appear media literate. It was already mentioned that the smokers deny that their smoking uptake was influenced by tobacco imagery in film, and in a similar manner, the non-smokers expressed the sentiment they are impervious to such forms of advertising. The importance of appearing media literate (and managing one's image) suggests that the smokers would likely not admit to being influenced by tobacco imagery in film (even if they were).

**Media literacy skills:** Both the smokers and non-smokers seem to have a similar degree of knowledge about movie-making. More specifically, both are aware that smoking in film may serve two functions: as a form of advertising and as an artistic device to make a movie more believable.

**Importance of Celebrities:** Both the smokers and non-smokers become very 'wrapped' up in movies. They seem to lose themselves in the plot, often talking about characters or incidents as if they really occurred. Considering the extent to which young people become engrossed in film, one must question whether under normal viewing

circumstances, the youth would view smoking in movies with any sort of critical awareness.

### Summary

This chapter describes the extent to which groups of female smokers and non-smokers notice smoking in film, their judgments surrounding the inclusion of smoking in film, their thoughts on why smoking imagery is included in film, and finally, their interpretations of the authenticity of smoking in movies. The smokers and non-smokers appeared to differ in their interpretations in several ways. The smokers were aware of smoking in film, tended to base their interpretations on their personal experiences with cigarettes, and did not believe that their smoking initiation was influenced by seeing smoking in film. In contrast, many of the non-smokers did not notice smoking in movies, stereotypical depictions of smoking seemed to resonate with this group, and many of the non-smokers seemed to believe that young people could be influenced to smoke by viewing smoking in films. These differences in interpretation are likely related to the groups' differing levels of experience with cigarettes (i.e., their smoking status). At the same time, the smokers and non-smokers also displayed some similarities with respect to their understanding of smoking in film. For instance, members in both of the groups expressed the idea that smoking is included in movies as both a form of advertising and an artistic tool. Moreover, it appeared that it was important for the youth (both smokers and non-smokers) to appear above the influence of the mass media (i.e., give the impression that they would not be influenced to smoke by seeing an actor smoke in a movie). In the following chapter, I relate these findings to research that I discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2).

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

As anticipated, the findings from the focus group interviews build upon existing research in the areas of youth smoking and film, audience theory, and youth smoking cultures. In this chapter, the findings are compared to this previous research and have been grouped into five broad areas. The first concerns the ways in which viewing smoking in film appears to impact youth smoking rituals. Embedded within this is a discussion of how tobacco imagery in film may influence youth smoking styles, initiation, and frequency. The subsequent section focuses on the non-smokers, and the extent to which this group are both critical of tobacco imagery in film (i.e., find it to be problematic) and able to critique/deconstruct such imagery. The theme of the third section is tobacco brand placement in film, and more specifically, the level of participant awareness of, and identification with, brands in film (both smokers and non-smokers). In the fourth section, findings from this project are discussed in relation to existing audience theory. Both the 'interpretive community' concept and the 'active-passive' viewer debate are addressed, as well as the question of whether the non-smokers appeared to use specific strategies to resist tobacco imagery in film. The final section discusses how this project has informed existing work in the area of youth cultures and smoking.

#### Youth Smoking Rituals

Findings from this study suggest that tobacco imagery in film may influence youth smoking rituals in three ways. The first area of influence concerns the *imitation of celebrity smoking styles depicted in movies*. Existing qualitative research demonstrates that in the youth smoking culture, smoking style is important (McCracken, 1992) and

moreover, that movies are a source from which to learn these styles (WHO, 2003). In India, for example, young people (16-17 years) not only admitted to copying the smoking styles of characters in Bollywood films, but were also candid in their explanations for why they copy this behaviour: to fit in and be part of the 'cool' group (WHO, 2003).

Findings from the current study reinforce the idea that smoking styles are important within the youth smoking culture. Conversations within the groups of smokers revealed the importance of smoking the 'right way,' and also of possessing an innate knowledge of how to smoke properly, without having to be taught by one's peers. There also seemed to exist a hierarchy within the smoking culture at this school, with the more experienced smokers judging (and sometimes ridiculing) the style of less experienced smokers.

The importance of smoking technique within the peer smoking culture at this school suggests that smokers may imitate the smoking styles of stars in popular film, as was found to be the case with the teens in India (WHO, 2003). There is evidence to suggest that such behaviour may occur, as a few of the female smokers explained that when they first started to smoke, they looked to movie depictions of smoking for guidance. These admissions were the exception, though, as there appeared to be an overall attitude that it is not 'cool' to have to learn how to smoke from an actor in a movie, and several participants denied that they ever copied smoking styles in film. It may be that other participants did look to smoking in film to learn styles, but would not admit to it given the importance of having an inherent knowledge of correct smoking technique.

Interestingly, this condemnation of imitating smoking styles in film did not seem to apply to copying elaborate or flamboyant styles in a joking manner, and several participants readily admitted to doing so. The apparent acceptability of copying such stylized depictions may be connected to the fact that the youth perceive themselves to be active in this process, taking or appropriating the meanings attached to these smoking portrayals (i.e., excessive coolness, sophistication) and using them for their own amusement and the amusement of their peers.

The second area of influence is the impact of smoking in film on the *smoking initiation* of youth. Several research projects have been conducted which suggest that the influence of smoking in films is as strong as other sources of social influence (i.e., family members, peer groups) in contributing to a young person's smoking initiation. For instance, longitudinal survey research demonstrates that after controlling for other risk factors, young people with the highest levels of exposure to smoking in movies are significantly more likely to initiate smoking than those with the least amount of exposure (Dalton et al., 2003). Another longitudinal project shows a causal relationship between female youth with a favourite star who smokes in films and subsequent smoking initiation by these same youth (Distefan et al., 2004).

In contrast to the quantitative evidence described above, the smokers in the present study did not appear to believe that smoking imagery in film influenced their smoking initiation. This perception was not exclusive to these Canadian youth. Both the younger and older participants in qualitative studies conducted in New Zealand (McCool et al., 2003; 2001) also presented an image of resiliency towards the effects of tobacco promotion in film.

This discrepancy between the quantitative and qualitative findings may be linked to the fact that many of the Canadian participants, like the New Zealand youth (McCool et al., 2003; 2001), appear to be aware that smoking in movies is a device that may be used to advertise a brand. As McCool et al. (2001) point out, possessing such a critical awareness of why tobacco is placed in a film likely precludes any admission to being affected by such promotional tactics. Moreover, the apparent need of the young people in the present study to appear media literate and above the influence of the media suggests that they would not admit to being influenced by smoking in film, even if they were.

When this issue was approached in a more indirect manner (i.e., asking about early memories of movies with smoking), a different picture emerged, as the recollections of a few of the youth suggest that seeing smoking in film positively influenced their beliefs and attitudes around cigarette use, perhaps making them more receptive to the idea of smoking. For instance, the association of 'rebellion' with the act of smoking appeared to resonate with one of the respondents, and may have encouraged her smoking when she was just beginning to experiment with cigarettes. Another participant recalled that seeing a favourite actor smoke in a film made her consider smoking at a time in her life when she was very much opposed to the habit. In this instance, it was the participant's identification with a specific (favourite) celebrity that appeared to lead to a more positive attitude towards smoking. Although she did not begin to smoke at that time, this example illustrates the *potential* of movie (and celebrity) smoking to influence young people's attitudes and beliefs around smoking in a positive manner.

Finally, it appears that smoking imagery in film may influence the *smoking frequency* of established smokers, as many of the youth in this group reported that viewing smoking in movies gives them the physical urge to smoke a cigarette. This is a unique contribution to the literature on youth smoking and popular film, as the previous studies conducted in New Zealand (McCool et al., 2003; 2001) and India (WHO, 2003) did not report a similar finding. The absence of such evidence in the New Zealand research (McCool et al., 2003; 2001) may be related to the fact that the participants did not actually view smoking scenes in movies, and as a result, did not have the visual cue of someone smoking to trigger their urge to smoke. Although the teens in the India study (WHO, 2003) did view smoking scenes in Bollywood films, differences in their perception on the need to smoke when viewing such depictions may be a reflection of the medium used (Bollywood versus Hollywood films), cultural differences between the groups of youth in the respective countries, or even the youths' level of addiction to cigarettes.

The fact that many of the female respondents (in the Canada study) reported this urge to smoke when viewing tobacco use in films informs existing quantitative research. Content analyses of films have demonstrated that the incidence of smoking in movies is unrealistically high (Escamilla et al., 2000; Hazan et al., 1994; Stockwell & Glantz, 1997). Moreover, smoking rates in films increased throughout the 1990s, and by the year 2002, smoking rates were at the same level as films made during the 1950s when actual smoking rates in North America were nearly twice as prevalent (Stockwell & Glantz, 1997; Glantz et al., 2004). Researchers have suggested that unrealistically high rates of cigarette use in film normalize smoking, and may lead youth audiences to overestimate

the prevalence of smoking in 'real life' (Hazan et al., 1994; Stockwell & Glantz, 1997; Glantz et al., 2004). Although this may indeed be the case, the fact that tobacco imagery in film appeared to influence the smoking frequency of the female smokers by appealing to their physical addiction suggests another possible motive for having a high incidence of smoking in films: to sell more cigarettes to individuals already addicted. For instance, the smokers in this study reported viewing an average of two movies per week (on TV, DVD, VHS, or in theatre). If even one of these movies has a high incidence of smoking and influences a young person to smoke an extra cigarette, it translates into an extra cigarette a week, 4 a month, and almost 50 (or two and a half packs) in a year for one person. This increase in smoking may occur regardless of whether the movie glamourizes smoking or not, and is an important avenue to consider, as it can lead to considerable monetary gains for tobacco companies.

Smoking in film may also influence the smoking frequency of established smokers in a way that is more subtle than the first. Similar to the older youth in the New Zealand project (who also had experience with smoking) (McCool et al., 2003), the smokers in the present study viewed tobacco imagery in film with an appreciation for images which resonated with their own personal smoking experiences. Moreover, they appeared to draw upon their experiences with smoking when assessing the believability of a smoking portrayal, and were able to discuss the believability of the clips with confidence. Although this is a potentially positive development with regards to the media literacy of young smokers (as it appears that they have the ability to critically assess the realism of smoking in film), it is also possible that viewing such depictions simply serves to *reinforce* the ways that they themselves may use cigarettes: to relieve

stress, in social situations, to control weight, to rebel against authority. In this way, smoking imagery in film may justify and encourage their own smoking behaviour, and serve as a source of comfort to them.

### Non-smokers' Critical Awareness of Tobacco Imagery in Film

In Hollywood movies, the cigarette is a versatile tool that carries with it a variety of meanings, many of them less than realistic. For instance, content analyses of Hollywood films have revealed that the cigarette is often glamorized: characters that smoke are of a higher socioeconomic status than is accurate, and are portrayed as being more romantic or sexually active than non-smokers (Stockwell & Glantz, 1997; McIntosh et al., 1998). In addition, popular films rarely show the negative health consequences associated with smoking (Dalton et al., 2002; McIntosh et al., 1998). While the majority of smokers in movies are adults engaging in other risk behaviours (i.e., drinking, illegal activities), smoking is also modeled as a socially acceptable behaviour used by characters to relieve stress, when thinking, or in social situations (Dalton et al., 2002). In this way, the cigarette in Hollywood films is associated with a diverse range of meanings that may appeal to youth (i.e., rebellion, glamour, toughness, sexiness), while also being shrouded in a layer of social acceptability.

Of particular relevance to this project is the fact that depictions of smoking in film often attach positive meanings to women's smoking. Qualitative content analysis of the social context of cigarette use in films over a 5 year period (in the mid-1990s) demonstrates that tobacco depictions in movies reinforce sexual stereotypes associated with the cigarette (Escamilla et al., 2000). Women were typically portrayed as using smoking to control their emotions, demonstrate sexual power, increase their physical

desirability, control their weight, and as a source of comfort. In contrast, males were shown to use smoking to demonstrate power, prestige and authority, signify their role as a protector, and reinforce their masculinity (Escamilla et al., 2000).

It is with these meanings in mind that I turn to a discussion of the non-smokers' critical awareness of tobacco imagery in film. In this context, the term 'critical awareness' describes the extent to which youth audiences not only *notice* tobacco imagery in film but also *think* about this imagery in a critical manner. The majority of the non-smokers in this study assumed an 'unaware and don't care' stance towards smoking in movies. For most of the youth, smoking appeared to blend into the background of a movie, as they focused more on the characters or the plot of the film. In addition, evidence suggests that the absence of actual cigarette smoke makes smoking in film less offensive to some youth, and therefore, less noticeable. Although many of the non-smokers found smoking to be a distasteful habit, the majority were not critical of actors for smoking in films, and the idea that smoking is one's 'personal choice' was put forth by several of the respondents. Overall, the non-smokers seemed to view smoking in film as an accepted part of the movie-going experience and an artistic tool for developing a character.

These findings support qualitative research carried out in New Zealand with 12-13 year olds (McCool et al., 2001). Similar to the non-smokers in this study, the New Zealand youth expressed "nonchalant and relaxed attitudes" (McCool et al., 2001, p. 1585) towards smoking in film. They perceived smoking to be an unhealthy, yet inherent part of life, and viewed smoking in film as a legitimate means of conveying information about the character or plot of a movie. Akin to the non-smokers in the present study, the

idea that smoking is one's 'personal choice' was common with the New Zealand adolescents (McCool et al., 2001).

One difference between the groups did exist, though. In the New Zealand study, the idea of 'freedom of choice' around smoking extended to their own peer group, leading the New Zealand researchers to suggest that in the youth peer culture, it is not 'cool' to judge the personal decisions of others (McCool et al., 2001). Although most of the non-smokers in the Canada study were not particularly judgmental of smoking in films, or of the smoking of close friends and family members, several of the participants were more judgmental about peer group smoking. This dissimilarity between the two groups may be a reflection of a methodological difference between the two studies. In the New Zealand research, the participants in the focus groups were of mixed smoking status, and as a result, the non-smokers in the group may have been reluctant to pass judgment on the issue of peer smoking in front of peers who are smokers.

Overall, though, the non-smokers in the present study and the New Zealand respondents aged 12-13 years (McCool et al., 2001) appeared to have similar perceptions of smoking in film, and these similarities may be related to the fact that the adolescents in the New Zealand study had smoking rates that were comparatively lower than those of older youth (age 16-17 years) that participated in a related study (McCool et al., 2003). As a result, it is likely that many of the younger New Zealand adolescents had limited direct experience with smoking, similar to the non-smokers in the present study.

The lack of critical awareness displayed by the majority of the non-smokers in the present study (and characterized by their 'unaware and don't care' attitude) also appeared to extend to their assessments of the authenticity of smoking scenes in films. Instead of

questioning the various (and often inaccurate) meanings attached to tobacco imagery, stereotypical depictions of smoking were perceived to be an accurate reflection of reality by many of the participants. This finding builds upon previous research in the area of youth audiences. Wilson and Sparks (1999) found that non-Black male youth who had little direct experience with 'real life' Blacks either found portrayals of Black athletes on television to be realistic, or indicated that they were unsure of the realism because of their inexperience with Black people. Thus, Wilson and Sparks (1999) suggested that the media may have played at least a part in "informing" (p. 618) the non-Black youth about Blacks. In a similar manner, the female non-smokers' apparent acceptance of portrayals of smoking in film as realistic, and their lack of skills to critique the reality of such depictions, suggest that youth with little direct experience with smoking may, to some extent, be informed about smoking by tobacco imagery in movies. This idea supports previous work by McCool et al. (2001) which found that stereotypical depictions of smoking in film "may play a critical role in reinforcing cultural interpretations of tobacco use, such as its role as a means of stress relief, development of self-image and as a marker of adult independence" (p. 1577) for younger children.

Drawing once again on the work of Wilson & Sparks (1999), it is important to caution against making claims about "the 'linearity' and directness of this informational process" (p. 618). That is to say, one should not assume that all youth with a lack of experience with smoking will automatically accept movie depictions of smoking to be true. The possibility that this may occur is a cause for concern, though, as such messages may then play a role in informing young people's attitudes and beliefs about smoking.

### Perceptions of Brand Placement in Film

A third area of contribution concerns young people's perceptions of brand placement in film. Most of the previous research concerning brand placement in film has been in the form of content analyses of films (Glantz et al., 2004; Sargent et al., 2001b) or an investigation of internal tobacco industry documents (Mekemson & Glantz, 2002), and as such, has not focused on young people's interpretations of the appearance of brands in movies. This prior work is relevant to the present discussion, though, as it suggests that brand placement in film is an intentional form of promotion by the tobacco industry. The most striking evidence is that obtained from corporate documents which outline business transactions between Hollywood and the tobacco industry (Mekemson & Glantz, 2002). Additionally, content analyses of the frequency and type of brand appearances in film indicate that the incidence of tobacco brand placement increased during the late 1980s, and continued throughout the 1990s, despite a voluntary ban on brand placement in films by the tobacco industry in 1989 (Glantz et al., 2004; Sargent et al., 2001). In fact, actor endorsement of brands in films increased from 1% in pre-ban films to 11% in post-ban films (Sargent et al., 2001) despite tobacco industry claims that film is not being used as an advertising venue.

Previous research concerning young people's perceptions of brand placement in film is limited to one study conducted in India (WHO, 2003). The adolescents interviewed were not aware of brand placement in films, and instead, believed that it is the brand an actor smokes off-screen that would likely have a larger impact on youth (WHO, 2003). In contrast, the smokers in the present study reported brand placement in film to be a salient feature in a movie, while the brands an actor smokes off-screen did

not receive any mention. This difference between the perceptions of youth in India and Canada may be due to the media viewed: the research in India focused on Bollywood films, while the present research used Hollywood movies. The dissimilarity in perceptions of brand placement may also be a reflection of cultural differences among the youth audiences.

While the majority of the female smokers in the Canada project seemed to be aware that smoking may be included in film as a form of advertising, this topic did not arise during discussion of the brands. Instead, the teens were more intent on discussing the attributes and shortcomings of the brands featured in films (especially Marlboros, one of the most common brand placements). This lack of critical awareness on the part of the smokers, coupled with their attentiveness towards the brand shown in the movies, suggest that tobacco brand placement in film may be an effective form of advertising. Further evidence from the focus groups built on this idea, as several of the smokers discussed past brand placements that they have observed in movies in a positive manner. For example, one participant expressed an interest in trying a long stylized cigarette featured in the film *Final Destination II* (the brand was identified as More by another group member), and another brand mentioned for its appeal in films was du Maurier. It appears that some of the participants strongly identify with the Canadian brand personality associated with du Maurier cigarettes and become excited when they see this Canadian brand in films.

Although not specific to brand placement in film, prior research has demonstrated that the tobacco industry may effectively increase youth awareness of a brand through lifestyle advertising, and more specifically, event sponsorship (Sparks, 1999). Research

conducted in New Zealand with 14 year-old adolescents demonstrates that by associating a cigarette brand with a sporting or cultural event, tobacco companies can achieve significant brand recall among youth. Moreover, it was found that the tobacco brands most recalled by the adolescents were those which sponsored events that had a high appeal for the youth in the study, suggesting that through event sponsorship, cigarette companies can build an identity for their brand and target certain segments of the market according to their lifestyle interests. The results of the research by Sparks (1999) are relevant to the present study, because in a sense, the endorsement of a tobacco brand in a film is akin to tobacco endorsement by a sporting or cultural event. Both can make smoking appear glamorous and exciting, and may increase the appeal of a brand in the eyes of youth, as well as youths' awareness of a brand. Indeed, conversations with the smoker focus groups suggest that tobacco placement in film may function in both of these ways.

Brand placement of cigarettes in film was less noticeable for non-smokers, likely due in part to their unfamiliarity with the various brand names. A few of the non-smokers explained that they only notice brands that a family member smokes, while others stated that they recognize the main brands, such as Marlboro and Player's. This finding supports the previously mentioned research by Sparks (1999) in which youths' level of smoking experience was found to correlate with their brand recall. Interestingly, some of the non-smokers in the present study identified the brands Marlboro and Player's by their colours (red and blue, respectively), which suggests that even if specific brand names are not shown in film, having a pack with the brand's colours serves the same purpose. This finding is of importance because the ability of youth to identify a brand by

its distinctive colours and packaging means that tobacco companies – who are not allowed (by law) to advertise their brand name – can still gain value from advertising their brand colours, and in fact, several are doing just this. For example, Imperial Tobacco is developing the du Maurier brand image by sponsoring club and music events under the name Definiti. Definiti events feature du Maurier's distinctive red colour, as well as scantily clad females (hired from modeling agencies) selling du Maurier products (PCS, 2003).

### Audiences, Youth, and the 'Interpretive Community'

The findings from this project also build upon the audience research and theory developed by Janice Radway (1991, first published in 1984). In her classic ethnographic study of female romance readers, Radway (1991) theorized that the women's common social location (white, middle class housewives) would provide them with similar interpretive strategies that they would bring to their reading of a text. These women were seen as constituting a distinct 'interpretive community' based on their common interpretations of the romance novel, and more importantly, their *use of* these novels as an escape from the mundanity of their day to day lives.

Following Radway's (1991) understanding of the 'interpretive community' concept, I theorized that smokers and non-smokers would likely interpret, and especially use, media texts about smoking in somewhat different ways because of their distinct social locations (i.e., related to their experience with smoking). At the same time, it was also assumed that there would be some shared interpretations because of their common locations as female youth in the same Vancouver school. Evidence suggests that this is the case. The two groups appeared to differ in several respects, including the extent to

which they notice smoking in film, their assessments of the authenticity of smoking scenes, and their perceptions of the influence of smoking in film on youth smoking initiation. The media text also appeared to play a role in the everyday lives of some of the female smokers, as several reported that tobacco imagery in film may influence their smoking style and smoking frequency. There was obviously no such evidence of impact on smoking rituals amongst the non-smokers.

A notable similarity between the two groups was that the majority did not appear to think critically about tobacco imagery in film, but instead accepted it as a normal part of a movie used to develop a character or make a scene more realistic. Other similarities included (ironically) an awareness that smoking in film may be a form of advertising, and a desire to give the impression that one is impervious to the influence of such advertising.

It should also be noted that within each group (i.e., smokers or non-smokers), interpretations and assessments were not always uniform. Instead, some within-group variation did exist, such as the level of media literacy skills of the youth and the extent to which they were judgmental of smoking depictions in film. These differences may have arisen because this study's definition of social location is somewhat broad. Other factors such as age and race may interact with smoking status to create differences in interpretation. In fact, even smoking status is a nebulous concept, as one can be in various stages of her smoking career (from a social smoker to an established smoker to one hoping to quit). In this sense, the conceptual struggles encountered in this study were akin to those described by Radway (1991), who had a similar difficulty defining social location (i.e., determining exactly how membership in the romance reading community was constituted).

In broad terms, this work also addresses a general question at the root of audience research: is the audience passive or active? Previous research focused on youth audiences has both celebrated young people's ability to actively use the mass media to their own advantage, and denigrated youth audiences as passive dupes. Miles (2000) comments on these opposing viewpoints and offers a position somewhere in the middle:

the debate is polarized when in fact the truth probably lies somewhere in between. In other words, it should not be assumed that children, or young people for that matter, are active critical consumers of the media. The degree of such activity depends upon the critical resources available to them as regards educational and family influences. On the other hand, however, if the images being portrayed by the mass media operate within a consumerist discourse then that discourse will inevitably play some role in young people's lives precisely because it appears to be so omnipresent. (p. 77)

The findings in this study seem to support Miles's (2000) notion that young people have the potential to be critical viewers, but do not always use their literacy skills in their media-saturated worlds. The youth demonstrated that they have the *potential* to actively view tobacco imagery in film. The smokers, in particular, drew upon their personal experiences with the cigarette and were able to judge the authenticity of smoking depictions with confidence. Although many of the non-smokers lack direct experience with cigarette use (and therefore do not possess the same 'critical resources' on which to base their interpretations of smoking in film), a few used their knowledge around the negative health aspects of smoking and questioned the authenticity of scenes that linked smoking with the seemingly healthy activity of dancing. A couple of the respondents (both smokers and non-smokers) also commented on the more subtle discrepancies related to the effects of smoking on appearance (i.e., the actors' white teeth and lack of wrinkles). Moreover, both the smokers and non-smokers appeared to be aware of the fact that tobacco placement in films may serve as a form of advertising.

This critical awareness of the promotional tactics of tobacco companies suggests that the youth do possess a certain amount of savvy about the pervasiveness of advertising in the media environment.

While acknowledging that the youth possess media literacy skills and have the potential to be 'active viewers' (with regards to smoking in film), one must question the extent to which they actually constitute an active audience under normal viewing circumstances. Discussions with the participants about movies reveal that they become very engrossed in the plot of a film. The majority of the non-smokers explained that they do not tend to notice smoking in movies, and although smoking in film appeared to be more salient to the smokers, the fact that they seem to notice it because it makes them crave a cigarette suggests that they are not thinking about smoking in an overly critical manner, either. Even the youths' awareness that smoking in film may be a form of tobacco promotion comes into question under closer scrutiny. The idea that smoking in film is an artistic tool for developing a character was present throughout the interviews (especially amongst the non-smokers), while the fact that film smoking is a form of promotion was only mentioned when the youth were specifically asked why a director puts smoking in film. Moreover, when the smokers engaged in focus group discussions about specific brands, conspicuous by its absence was any mention of the fact that these brands were a type of promotion, suggesting that the youth do not actually use their media literacy skills to think critically about this matter. In short, the relaxed attitude of many of the youth towards smoking in film suggests that they do not likely use their critical assessment skills when viewing smoking in movies and therefore, accept portrayals of smoking in film at face value.

One of the aims of this project was to build upon previous research conducted in Canada on non-smoker's experiences with smoking. Dunn & Johnson (2001) conducted interviews with non-smoking females (aged 13-17) in order to investigate the strategies used by these youth to avoid smoking, in the hopes that this knowledge would aid in the design of better anti-smoking campaigns. The researchers identified 'self-confidence' as the key category that underpinned the process of remaining a non-smoker and further identified three phases in this process: making sense of smoking, rejecting smoking, and declaring oneself a non-smoker. Following the same line of reasoning as Dunn & Johnson (2001), this project was conducted with the idea that young female non-smokers may use specific interpretive strategies to deconstruct depictions of smoking in film, thus making them more resistant to such imagery. This did not appear to be the case, though, as evidenced by the largely 'unaware and don't care' attitude towards smoking in film assumed by the non-smokers, and their apparent acceptance of stereotypical depictions of smoking in film as a reflection of reality.

The fact that the majority of the non-smokers are not critical viewers of smoking in film, yet have not fallen prey to such imagery (i.e., started to smoke) suggests that smoking initiation is a complex issue that cannot be attributed solely to a person's acceptance of smoking in film as a reflection of reality. While exposure to smoking imagery in film may play a role in youth smoking initiation, as demonstrated by several quantitative research projects (Dalton et al., 2003; Sargent et al., 2001), the obvious complexity of the issue of youth smoking reinforces the importance of qualitative research which facilitates a more in-depth exploration of the issue, one which considers

the personal experiences and life histories of youth, as well as their interpretations of other messages about tobacco in their media environment.

### Youth Cultures and Smoking

Finally, the findings from this project build upon theories of youth cultures and smoking. Previous ethnographic work performed in Canada indicates that for young people, the cigarette may be used as a tool to exercise symbolic creativity in their everyday lives, as well as a way to resist authority (or the mainstream culture). For instance, McCracken (1992) found that smoking is used by teens in the construction of identity in much the same way as clothing, posters, and music. He asserts that cigarettes give youth access to various cultural meanings around such things as gender, age, nationality, and sexuality, while also serving a number of functions such as mood manipulation, nourishment of self esteem, claims to toughness, building social connections, to name but a few. He also identifies the importance of smoking rituals in the teen smoking culture, noting that:

virtually everything is scripted and formalized. It must be practiced and perfected. How you hold your cigarette, how you light a cigarette, how you inhale and exhale smoke, all of these are specified by the code...anyone who fails to smoke according to the rules of the ritual is mocked and even shunned. (p. 10)

In their ethnography of marginalized youth, Connop et al. (1999) also found that the cigarette is a useful tool for young people, especially those who are disenchanted with 'mainstream societal values.' They observe that for these youth, smoking is an aid in identity formation as they use the cigarette as a means of becoming part of a peer group, as well as a means of resisting the mainstream culture. As they explain, smoking behaviour "serves the dual function of enabling youth to gain peer acceptance whilst rejecting adult direction which they consider to be oppressive" (p. 37).

Further research suggests that the cigarette may also hold meanings specific to females. Greaves (1996) conducted one-on-one interviews with women in Canada and Australia with the aim of gaining an understanding of how women smokers make sense of their smoking, as well as the meanings it has in their lives. The women reported using smoking to organize social relationships, create an image (i.e., independence, style, thinness), and control their emotions. The issue of emotional dependency also arose, with the women explaining that smoking is used as a source of support and predictability. The meanings that the women attached to smoking changed over time, though, as Greaves (1996) reports that many started smoking (as teens) for the “psychosocial benefits” (p. 78), whereas as adults, they smoke for the physiological benefits.

Evidence from the present study confirms the notion that the cigarette, and by extension, the act of smoking, can be empowering for young females. Building upon the work of McCracken (1992), conversations with the participants of the smoker focus groups reveal the importance of smoking style within the smoking peer culture. Being a “good” smoker appears to be privileged amongst the females, while improper smoking style is ridiculed. In this way, it appears that expertise in smoking style may be used to gain social status within this peer group.

There is also evidence that some of the young smokers use the cigarette in a way that was described by the women in the work of Lorraine Greaves (1996): to control emotions. When asked to assess the believability of certain clips from the films that they viewed, several of the adolescents readily identified with Julia Robert’s use of smoking to relieve her stress, even giving specific examples of times when they have used

smoking as a coping technique while at school. There is also limited evidence that some of the youth may use smoking to control their body weight.

The irony of youth smoking, though, is that while young people may be empowered by smoking at school or within their peer group (i.e., on a micro level), they are most definitely constrained when one moves beyond this realm and considers the bigger picture or macro level: that they are targeted by tobacco companies and in many cases, addicted to a deadly substance. When one considers this 'bigger picture,' the celebration of the symbolic creativity of youth put forth in the youth subculture literature seems less applicable to the issue of smoking.

#### Summary

Overall, smoking in film appeared to play a more central role in the lives of the female smokers than the non-smokers. Not only were the smokers aware of cigarette use in movies, but such depictions impacted the smoking rituals of some of the participants (i.e., smoking frequency, smoking style). In addition, the smokers were able to base their interpretations of smoking in film on their own personal experiences with cigarettes. As a result, they often identified with the ways or situations in which tobacco was used in the clips (e.g., to relieve stress, while drinking). In this way, movie smoking may normalize cigarette use, and therefore encourage the smoking behaviour of some youth. In contrast, smoking in movies did not appear to play a prominent role in the lives of the non-smokers. With their lack of direct experience with smoking, tobacco use in film often seemed to slip 'under the radar' of this group. In general, the majority of the participants in both groups seemed to accept smoking in film without question, which supports previous findings from research conducted in New Zealand (McCool et al.,

2003; 2001). This unconscious acceptance suggests that the persistent inclusion of tobacco imagery in movies may position smoking as a 'normal' and even useful (if not glamorous) habit in the eyes of some adolescents.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Young people must negotiate their way through various media messages about smoking in their environment, some of them positive, and some negative. This thesis addressed concerns that glamorized images of smoking in film influence youth smoking behaviour. It examined how audiences with different social locations understand smoking in film, and the ways that these interpretations might inform their opinions about smoking in their everyday lives. In this final chapter, I outline some of the key findings, identify several limitations of the project, and make suggestions for future research.

#### Theoretical and Methodological Implications, Limitations, and Directions

##### Theoretical Implications

The focus group results suggest that groups of young females who differ significantly in smoking status constitute distinct 'interpretive communities' as they draw upon different interpretive strategies and competencies when viewing smoking imagery in movies. In this way, the results demonstrate that individuals' cultural perspectives may influence their understandings of media messages about smoking. At the same time, this project has furthered theoretical work concerning the extent to which youth audiences are 'active viewers.' In this case, it was found that although young people are capable of thinking critically about media texts, they often do not use these capacities when viewing tobacco imagery in film. Finally, by exploring some of the meanings that the participants attach to smoking in their everyday lives, it was revealed that cigarettes

remain an important symbol within peer groups and may serve certain functions in the lives of smokers.

### Methodological Implications

The qualitative technique of audience ethnography facilitated an in-depth exploration of how youth understand smoking in film. Providing visual cues of smoking in film was an effective tool for initiating conversations around such imagery, and also served the purpose of creating enthusiasm on the part of the participants, as they seemed to enjoy watching the movie segments and then discussing them. Recruiting groups of friends was also effective, as the participants appeared to be comfortable with each other, and in most cases, the discussion flowed well. Instances of within group disagreement on certain issues suggest that the youth felt comfortable enough in their surroundings to state their own opinions and feelings.

### Limitations and Future Directions

Over the course of this research project, potential improvements for this study were identified and additional areas of relevant research that could build upon this work were noted. Based on these, I have outlined a number of recommendations for future audience research:

a) While the use of the 'interpretive community' framework in this project is a useful step towards gaining a better understanding of how young women understand smoking in film based on their smoking status, the concept of social location needs to be explored in more depth, and expanded beyond the issue of perceptions of smoking in film. That is to say, researchers need to take into consideration the life histories and life circumstances of young people to get a more complete understanding of why they smoke. Although it is

useful to have an understanding of how young women make sense of smoking imagery in film, we need to understand how these messages about smoking in movies may interact with other aspects of their lives. In other words, why do the smokers want to smoke? What purpose does smoking serve for them? Such an exploration would entail expanding the ethnographic portion of future work, which would facilitate a richer understanding of the role of smoking in the lives of youth. One useful approach may be to look more closely at young people in alternative school programs, as results from this project demonstrate that this is a group in which smoking rates are disproportionately high. This possible link between smoking status and enrollment in an alternative program (although not investigated in full during the present project) appears to support previous ethnographic work conducted by Connop et al. (1999).

b) In this study, I attempted to explore the issue of smoking and weight control with the female participants, but failed to address some important aspects of this topic. Although it was found that the majority of the participants were aware of the association between smoking and weight control, the source of this belief was not explored in any great detail (i.e., did the adolescents learn about this connection through family? media messages?). Despite evidence to suggest that a few of the participants use smoking to control their weight, the extent to which seeing an actor smoke in movies might encourage this behaviour was not made clear in this study. Future research might address these shortcomings by: 1) asking the participants the source of their beliefs about smoking and weight control and 2) showing focus group members a movie clip in which an actor specifically uses smoking as a form of weight control, and then exploring audience perceptions of such a portrayal.

c) Another area that warrants further investigation is whether unrealistically high incidences of smoking in film may lead to an overestimation of the incidence of 'real-life' smoking. This is an important consideration because there is evidence that young people who overestimate the occurrence of a risk behavior in real-life are more susceptible to initiating that behaviour because they perceive it to be socially acceptable (Perkins & Wechsler, 1996). Although the participants in this study were not asked specifically about the incidence of smoking in 'real-life,' several expressed the idea that 'everybody' smokes and that having smoking in film is merely a true reflection of reality. A recommendation for future audience research would be to explore young people's perceptions of the *amount* of smoking in film (not just the meanings attached to smoking in film, as was the primary focus of this project), and its relation to their perceptions of smoking in 'real life.'

d) The interpretations of smoking in Hollywood films by global audiences represent another area that may be of interest. Differences between the interpretations of smoking in film by youth in this study and the youth in the research conducted in India (WHO, 2003) suggest that cultural (and geographical) differences may lead to different interpretations of smoking in film. In this sense, it may be that the 'interpretative community' concept can be broadened beyond the Canadian context (and smokers versus non-smokers), to map out how the same media is understood by youth audiences from different countries. This is an important consideration, as Greaves (1996) observes that women's smoking patterns in developing countries may be affected by some of the same Westernized media messages in advertising and film as the "cultural and geographical diffusion of women's smoking progresses" (p. 29).

Several recommendations that pertain more to the methodological aspects of the study are as follows:

- a) It is possible that the clips viewed by the youth may have shaped some of the conversations around smoking. Because the clips showed cigarettes being used in certain situations (e.g., to rebel, to relieve stress), it may be that the discussions around tobacco imagery were limited to the contexts of cigarette use portrayed in the scenes. In other words, the participants may have limited their answers to the specific tobacco portrayals in the clips, and not considered other ways in which tobacco is used within film. Future projects in this area could include clips that show a variety of smoking depictions specific to females (e.g., using smoking to control weight or to display sexual power).
- b) An additional methodological limitation of the study concerns the definition of 'taste culture.' In Radway's (1991) ethnography, she focused specifically on the genre of the romance novel based on the understanding that the women shared an interest in romance books. Wilson & Sparks (1996) had youth view a specific genre of advertisements (about basketball sneakers) based on the assumption that the young males in the study were all basketball fans. In the present study, interest in popular film was treated as a 'taste culture.' In retrospect, this definition may be too vague, as within the realm of popular film, there are many different genres. Moreover, when researching youth interpretations of smoking in film, it may be that the selection of actors that resonate with the youth is more important than the genre of the clip shown. Indeed, in this project it was found that clips that the youth were not interested in (or featuring actors they did not like) were not as effective at generating conversation. A suggestion for future audience research carried out in the area of smoking and film would be to find out about the

movie-viewing habits and favourite actors of youth *prior* to the interviews, and try to provide clips that feature at least some of the movies or actors that the youth are interested in.

### Practical Implications and Future Directions

Throughout this project, substantive findings concerning the media literacy of the participants were identified. Based on these, I have outlined some recommendations for possible anti-smoking strategies that may resonate with the youth.

a) It appears that youth in both groups are capable of critical readings of a media text, but do not use these capacities when viewing tobacco imagery in film. Instead, many of the youth appeared to have a relaxed attitude towards smoking in film and accepted movie depictions at face value. A campaign possibility would be one that teaches young people how to deconstruct false imagery about tobacco use in film (in a humorous manner). Such a message could use a double of a popular celebrity who smokes in film (e.g., Brad Pitt or Julia Roberts) and depict a 'day in a life' of this actor. It could show the actor becoming short of breath climbing the stairs, visiting the dentist to have her teeth whitened, and a film technician editing out the wrinkles surrounding the actor's mouth.

b) Findings also suggest that within the youth culture, it is important to appear media literate and above the influence of the mass media, as many of the youth (both smokers and non-smokers) denied that they would be influenced to start smoking by images of smoking in film. The importance of appearing above the influence of the mass media was especially prominent amongst the non-smokers, who spoke derisively about anyone who would be influenced to smoke because they see a favourite actor smoke in a film.

The youths' obviously negative opinion of anyone who might be influenced to smoke by the mass media stands in direct contrast to their relatively non-judgmental attitude towards smoking in film. This importance of appearing above the influence of the mass media suggests that anti-smoking initiatives that educate youth about tobacco industry attempts to target them through popular film may be particularly effective. Although such messages exist on anti-smoking websites directed at youth (e.g., the province of British Columbia's site: [www.tobaccofacts.org](http://www.tobaccofacts.org)), it is possible that many young people are not exposed to such websites. As a result, it may be more effective to spread this message through commercials on the radio or television, or through information sessions at schools.

Another approach is to get young people involved in spreading the message that youth have been targeted by the tobacco industry through cigarette placement in film. Reality Check is a youth-driven movement based in New York which does just this. It began as a group of about 150 youth who attended a statewide youth summit (in June 2000) which focused on the way in which young people are targeted by the tobacco industry. These youth created Reality Check and began to educate other young people about the tobacco industry. The group has grown to include youth from other American states, and over 10,000 young people have attended Reality Check events. More information is provided on the Reality Check Website:

<http://www.realitycheckny.org/RCNY/siteMapSet/realitycheck/rcnyFlash.cfm>. The success and enthusiasm of these teens from New York suggest that it may be worthwhile to try such a youth-centered approach in Vancouver.

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## Appendix A: Participant Background Table (Smokers and Non-Smokers)

Smokers	Age	Years Lived in Canada	Self-Identified Race	Average Family Income	Parental Smoking Status		5 Closest Friends' Smoking Status		
					Mother	Father	Smoker	Non	Ex
1	17	17	White/Brown	\$ 54,469	Smoker	Non	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	18	18	Caucasian	47,190	Non	Non	3	1	1
3	18	18	Caucasian	43,527	Smoker	Smoker	5	-	-
4	17	17	Caucasian	60,698	Non	n/a	4	1	-
5	17	17	Asian	41,106	Non	Smoker	4	1	-
6	16	16	Chilean/Hawaiian	n/a	Smoker	Non	3	2	-
7	15	15	Caucasian	n/a	Smoker	Non	4	1	-
8	15	15	Hindu	49,615	Non	Smoker	5	-	-
9	14	14	Caucasian	n/a	Ex	Ex	5	-	-
10	14	7	Filipino	47,190	Non	Non	5	-	-
11	15	9	Filipino/Chinese	43,527	Non	Non	3	1	1
12	15	15	Vietnamese/Chinese	43,527	Non	Smoker	n/a	n/a	n/a
13	19	16	Filipino	49,615	Non	n/a	4	-	1
14	16	16	Spanish/Native	49,277	Smoker	Smoker	n/a	n/a	n/a
15	18	18	Caucasian/Native	49,615	Smoker	n/a	3	1	1
16	18	18	Caucasian/Native	n/a	Smoker	n/a	5	-	-
17	17	17	Black	47,916	Non	Non	n/a	n/a	n/a
18	17	17	Native/Caucasian	47,190	Non	Non	3	2	-
19	17	17	Caucasian	47,190	Non	Non	4	1	-
20	18	18	Caucasian	56,902	Ex	n/a	2	1	2
Average	16.5			\$48,527					
Non-Smokers	Age	Years Lived in Canada	Self-Identified Race	Average Family Income	Parental Smoking Status		5 Closest Friends' Smoking Status		
					Mother	Father	Smoker	Non	Ex
1	15	15	Vietnamese	\$ 49,277	Non	n/a	-	5	-
2	15	15	Chinese	49,615	Non	Smoker	-	5	-
3	15	15	Chinese	49,615	Non	Non	1	4	-
4	16	15	Asian	54,764	Non	Smoker	2	3	-
5	16	16	Caucasian	49,277	Non	Non	1	4	-
6	16	16	Caucasian	47,916	Non	Non	-	5	-
7	16	16	Caucasian	47,190	Non	Non	1	4	-
8	14	14	Caucasian	43,527	Non	Non	1	4	-
9	15	11	Russian (Caucasian)	49,615	Non	Smoker	1	4	-
10	15	11	Bulgarian (Caucasian)	49,615	Non	Non	-	4	1
11	14	14	Caucasian	56,902	Non	Non	1	4	-
12	14	14	Caucasian	43,527	Non	Non	-	5	-
13	14	14	Vietnamese	43,527	Non	Smoker	-	5	-
14	14	13	Cambodian	43,527	n/a	Smoker	-	5	-
15	16	16	Caucasian/Native	49,615	Non	Non	-	5	-
16	15	15	Caucasian	49,615	Non	Non	-	5	-
17	16	13	Chinese	49,615	Non	Smoker	1	3	1
Average	15.1			\$ 48,570					

\*Darkened borders separate focus groups

### Appendix B: Smoking Habits Table (Smokers)

Smokers	Current Age	Age of Initiation	Number of Cigarettes Smoked/Day	Favourite Brand
1	17	14	n/a	du Maurier
2	18	13	10-20	du Maurier
3	18	12	14-16	du Maurier
4	17	12	15	Player's Light Kingsize
5	17	14	1-3	Mild Seven
6	16	12	15	JPS Quantum
7	15	13	15	Player's Filter
8	15	15	15	du Maurier
9	14	13	10	JPS
10	14	12	n/a	du Maurier
11	15	15	2	du Maurier
12	15	15	5	du Maurier Light
13	19	14	7	Craven A Menthol/du Maurier Regular
14	16	15	4	Player's, Menthol
15	18	14	12	Benson & Hedges Black
16	18	12	10	Player's
17	17	15	6	Marlboro
18	17	15	5-7	JPS Quantum
19	17	15	1 or 2	du Maurier
20	18	14	4	du Maurier

\*Participant numbers in the Smoking Habits Table correspond with those for the smokers in the Participant Background Table (Appendix A)

\* Darkened borders separate focus groups

## **Appendix C: School Smoking Areas and ‘Contested Terrain’**

### **The West Side of the School: The “Grad” Side**

One of the main smoking areas is located on a street which runs along the west-side of the school. The students that frequent this area smoke on the sidewalk (at the bottom of a set of stairs leading up to the school), and when it rains, some of the youth smoke underneath the overhang of a condominium unit across the street. Both males and females smoke in this area, and most of the students appear to be of Asian descent. No more than a dozen students were observed at this location at any one time, and not all of the youth that spend time in this area are smokers. Discussions with some of the focus group participants revealed that this is the ‘grad side,’ or the place where the older students smoke.

I visited this location about six times, but drove by on numerous occasions as it is located on the same street as the school parking lot. A few times, I was able to engage in conversation with a couple of the male students in this area. The conversations were short, though, as they were happy to answer a few of my questions, but were not interested in carrying on a prolonged discussion. For the most part, the students in this area were not particularly friendly towards me and attempts to recruit female smokers from this area for the focus group interviews were unsuccessful.

### **The East Side of the School: “Down at the Bottom of the Laneway Thing”**

This smoking area is located just off of the street which borders the east-side of the school. There is a paved road or laneway that leads up to the school and it is at the bottom of this laneway where the smokers are supposed to gather (although they are sometimes seen smoking half-way up the lane). Based on the dozen or so occasions that

this location was visited, there appeared to be about 8-10 female students who 'hang out' in this area on a regular basis. Only about 6 students were observed at any one time and no males were ever seen smoking in this location. The absence of males in this area does not seem to be a result of their presence being unwelcome, though. On one occasion, a group of female teens were observed watching the street for a certain male driving by in his car, as it seems that one of the smokers was interested in him. In another instance, I was having a conversation with a few of the smokers when a male walked up the laneway. I was quickly abandoned as the participants walked away to talk to the approaching youth.

Overall, the teens that spend time in this area were friendly and willing to speak to me. As a result, this is the location from which most of the smokers were recruited for the audience ethnography portion of the project. After making initial contact with a few of the youth, they introduced me to friends and classmates who are also smokers. It was discovered that the majority of the students who smoke in this area are members of one of two alternative programs located on the east side of the school: the Career Preparation Program or the Middle Alternative Program. The majority of them were in grades 10 through 12 (only one grade 9 student was observed in this location).

#### In Front of the School by the Bus Stop: "The Younger Kids"

Another smoking area that was identified by some of the students is located in front of the school, by the bus stop. The existence of this smoking area was first revealed to me by members of one of the non-smoker focus groups as a place where "the younger kids" go to smoke. This smoking area was visited several times, with no sign of any smokers. Finally, on one occasion, two females were seen standing by the bus stop.

When asked if smokers ever 'hung out' in that area, one of the girls revealed that she had just finished smoking a cigarette. A meeting was set up to interview the smoker (a grade 10 student) and some of her friends, but they did not appear at the appointed time. No students were observed smoking at this location at any other time, and a smoking area frequented by younger students (grades 8 and 9) was never identified. Thus, the 'visible' smokers at this school seem to be in grades 10-12.

#### School Rules and 'Contested Terrain': "This School Tries to Say That's Their Property"

As mentioned previously, school policy states that smoking on the school grounds is strictly prohibited. The students (both smokers and non-smokers) seem to be aware of this rule and it is common knowledge amongst the smokers that any students seen smoking on the school property will be assigned 'garbage duty' for a week. If the student does not perform this punishment, he or she faces suspension. None of the smokers spoken to could recall someone being suspended from school for smoking, although one of the non-smokers knew "a couple of people" who were suspended for doing so.

According to the students, the rules are not enforced consistently, as some staff members are more lenient than others. One non-smoker explained:

Marianne: I've been standing with friends that have been smoking...And some teachers will come and be like "Okay, like you have to step off the property". But other teachers, like people have told me that they're like "Okay, go to the office. You're not allowed to smoke"...it depends on the teacher...If they're more an easy-going person then —.

Some of the smokers appeared to understand and respect the policy prohibiting smoking on school grounds, whereas others were openly defiant of the rules. For example, conversations with a few of the smokers revealed that there are several areas

around the school which are 'contested terrain' with regards to the rules around smoking.

One of these is the previously mentioned smoking area in front of the school. A

participant in one of the smoker focus groups explained:

Millie: Like, you know like in front of the school where the bus stop is?...Okay, that does not belong to the school... that is the public's...Where if they feel like smoking or walking there, they can. Our school, this school tries to say that that's their property...If you want to smoke, you've got to cross the street, the lights, and go on the other side to smoke. It's like, "No, that's not yours. It's the governments."

Members of another of the smoker focus groups were also able to comment on this area, revealing that the rules surrounding this smoking area were changed because people were not going all the way out to the street to smoke, but instead were standing right next to the front doors of the school. Indeed, on one occasion, I observed two male students standing by the front door and one was smoking a cigarette. When I approached, he tried to hide the cigarette from view. Once they understood that I was not a teacher or administrator at the school, they relaxed, finished the cigarette, and went inside.

Apparently, this area is not the only one over which controversy has arisen. The same students who were upset about not being permitted to smoke in front of the school expressed anger at not being allowed to smoke at the top of the laneway (which is just up from the east side smoking pit and clearly on school property):

Millie:... where you saw us at first. At that little tree right there at the top. [Middle Alternative Program] used to own that part, so like we were allowed to smoke there...But now that we've got this new asshole colonel principal –

Karen: He's such a prick.

Millie: and this other, this other chick that's a total... – we don't get it anymore.

I also observed these students defying the school smoking policy while we walked across the school grounds (after a focus group interview). They were quite bold

in this instance, walking past the large windows of the school cafeteria and past a female adult who was walking in the opposite direction. I was walking with the students because their teacher had requested that I walk them back to their class after the interview to ensure that they did not 'skip' the rest of the class. Other female students were also observed smoking at the top of one of the east side stairwells leading into the school. Upon further inquiry, it was revealed that students often smoke by the stairwell when it is raining outside, and the collection of cigarette butts in this location indicate that this is likely the case.

Based on evidence gathered from observation of the school grounds and conversations with the youth at this school, it appears that a struggle exists between the administration and some of the smokers. The administration attempts to control where the students smoke, while some of the students feel they are entitled to smoke in certain restricted areas. Officially, the administration has more power in this struggle, but by continuing to smoke in restricted areas and 'getting away with it,' the smokers may win a small victory over the administration and also gain access to the 'rebel' image.

## **Appendix D: Background on Alternative Programs**

The Career Preparation Program has two classes of about 15 students each. The students in the program spend one day gaining work experience in career preparation classes, and the next day in mainstream classes. They alternate between the two.

The Middle Alternative Program has approximately 15 students and is a stay-in-school program for students who have poor attendance in the mainstream programs. The students spend most of their time in the Middle Alternative Program classroom, but do attend some of the mainstream classes. The program combines personal counseling, group activities, and individualized learning with the aim of reconnecting the students to the school environment. Conversations with the teachers of the program confirmed that classroom attendance is often poor, and during the time in which the research was conducted, two of the smokers (age 15 years) that participated in one of the first focus group interviews subsequently dropped out of school.

Alternative High School is an alternative school located off of the main school campus (for grade 11 and 12 students). There are about 60 students registered in this school, and class sizes are quite small (about 10 students per class). This program is for students who require additional support to complete academic work. The students must undergo an interview procedure to be accepted to the program and there are strict expectations laid out for the students at the onset. They are required to accept structure (including strict late and attendance policies) and are expected to work hard. The primary goal of the program is to provide an alternative setting for the students to complete grades 11 and 12.

## **Appendix E: First Smoking Experiences**

### Smokers: Narratives about Starting

Many of the participant narratives around first smoking experiences were rather meager and provide little insight into their motives for smoking. Whether this indicates a lack of self-awareness, or a reticence brought on by my presence is unclear. Despite this lack of detail, the youths' stories indicate that many were at a transitional stage in their lives (i.e., just entering high school) and that they were hanging out with friends when they tried:

Kate: ...But then I started smoking in grade 8 when I was like, 13...It was just like, the smoke pit, and like, people smoked.

Tammy: Oh, God. I was in grade 7, I think.

Interviewer: grade 7? Okay, where were you? Who were you with?

Tammy: Just a couple of like, my young friends. I don't know. Just walking around in the alley (laughing).

Interviewer: When did you first start smoking? You said you were like, 13.

Anne-Marie: High school.

Interviewer: High school. So where were you when you first started? Can you remember the first time?

Anne-Marie: Smoke pit.

Chey: I was at a Youth Centre.

Interviewer: At a Youth Centre?... And then someone had some cigarettes and said "Hey, let's try."

Chey: Yeah. All of them were smoking.

Sally: Well, I was in a group home at the time.

Interviewer: Okay. How old were you?

Sally: I was like, just like, 15.

Interviewer: 15? Okay. And you were just with some other kids and –.

Sally: Yeah, 'cause practically everyone in the group home smokes, right?

Two of the smokers explicitly stated that for them, smoking was a means of gaining access to a group (particularly an older group), or of meeting people:

Millie: I started because I wanted to get in with the older crew, like, all the smokers in the smoke pit.

Karen: And you meet so many people. By smoking. Like, oh my gosh. It's like you going to university. You meet like, a lot of new people, right? ...That's like smoking.

A few of the participants were able to offer more detailed descriptions about their first smoking experiences, and from these descriptions, it becomes clear that smoking allowed them to 'hang out' with a new person. The following narrative offers insight into the awkwardness associated with first-time smoking experiences and the importance of learning how to smoke correctly. It also reveals something of the process of becoming a smoker:

Karen: We were friends in humanities class and she smoked, right? And I would always smell her. Like, she would always come back smelling like smoke. And then I'm like, I'm like, she's like, "Do you smoke?". And I lied to her and told her I did (laughs). She's like "Come out for a smoke with me, then" and I'm like "Okay". I came out and she's, she's, she was looking at me and I was smoking, I was smoking so funny (laughing). I couldn't even smoke. I had my hand like open like that (holds her fingers apart). I'm like (laughs). Then she's like, "Okay". She's like "Do you, do you really smoke?". I'm like, "No". And she's like "Okay, so you want me to teach you how to smoke?". I'm like "Okay". So then she taught me and then, and then, I could inhale it and then about two weeks to about a month after taking a couple of puffs and learning and learning and learning and learning, I was like, I bought a pack, right? Because I knew how to smoke them, right? And I thought I was really cool with a pack of smokes. And then I smoked it, and then I went on to another pack. And I bought another pack from there and then... I was 13, I remember.

Another smoker describes a similar situation in which she smokes with someone she is just beginning to be friends with:

Renae: And she's just come back from camping and she was like smoking the whole way through camping and, I don't know. I was beginning to be her friend again and she was like: "Wanna go for a smoke?". And I was like "Oh, okay". Because I'd tried it before but I can't remember when. And so I tried it then and I didn't, it didn't really agree with me. I was like "I feel kind of sick" (laughing)...I think I threw up. After I went back to class, I think I went and threw up (laughing). If I remember correctly.

### Non-Smokers: Narratives about Saying 'No'

Many of the non-smokers in the project had been faced with the decision of whether or not to smoke. Most of them explained that the offer to smoke occurred when they were hanging out with friends (usually in grade 8 – the first year of high school). The comments of a few of the youth indicate that they no longer spend time with these people. For example:

Cory: Just, a group of friends. We were pretty close, but now we don't talk anymore (laughs).

Ellen: Friends, before.

Most explained that when offered a cigarette, they did not even have to think about whether or not to try it, suggesting that they had already assumed the identity of a non-smoker:

Ellen: ... It wasn't a big deal because I didn't want to...It wasn't like, "Uhhh..." It was like "No, I don't want it"...It doesn't appeal to me.

Ally: I just knew that I didn't want to try it... I didn't want to get involved with that...So I didn't even think about it.

Mary: People have asked me, but I've just rejected them...I'm like "Nah, I have to go somewhere else with my other friends and stuff"...I thought about like the diseases and stuff you get when you actually smoke and it scares me.

Hannah: I just said "No" and walked away...nothing good is going to come out of it.

Mabel: I was like, "No, I'm not going to do it" and stuff. Like, "I'll sit with you when you do it, but I'm not going to do it with you". You know?

Sasha: People just know I don't [smoke].

The most prominent theme to emerge from the discussions with the non-smokers about their encounters with smoking is that they were very confident in their decision to say 'No.' When asked if they felt uncomfortable saying 'No' at the time of the offer to smoke, the youth explained that it was not a problem for them:

Annie: No, it was actually just kind of like: "No, I don't smoke."

Sonny: Not at all.

Ada: It's not like that people are trying to pressure you into doing it, it's like, "no, no."

Maggie: I've never been peer pressured with that, like —.

Sonny: If somebody asks you, and if they'd be like "Are you sure? Like, seriously, have one", I'd be like "Ew, that's disgusting"...Or walk away. And ...if it was a friend who offered it to me, and kept pushing me, I'd be like, "No, what's your problem?" Like, I don't think a friend would ever do that.

Mabel: She was like, "Do you want one?". And I was like "No" and she's like "Good, I'll kick your ass if you do!" I'm like "Okay."

Cory: They were pretty cool with it.

A few of the participants had tried smoking in the past (usually in social situations such as parties) but they consider themselves non-smokers:

Annie: But like, at the back of my mind, like whenever I'm in that scene, you know, I'm thinking to myself ... "That's gross."

Marianne: It's something I don't want to do.

## Appendix F: Biographical Information Sheet

**Instructions:** The following questions are intended to provide some background information about you. Answer all the questions as accurately as you can. If it is unclear what is being asked, please ask for help from the group leader.

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Age: \_\_\_\_ (years)
4. How long have you lived in Canada? \_\_\_\_ (years)  
If you were not born in Canada, how old were you when you first moved to Canada? \_\_\_\_ (years)
5. What is your ethnic background?
6. How many North American made movies did you watch in the past month? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How many foreign films did you watch in the past month? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Rank order the five types of movies that are your favourite. For example, if action films are your favourite type of movie, you would rank Action films "1." Rank only the top five.

Comedy \_\_\_\_  
Romance \_\_\_\_  
Action \_\_\_\_  
Thriller \_\_\_\_  
War \_\_\_\_

Western \_\_\_\_  
Spy \_\_\_\_  
Science Fiction \_\_\_\_  
Drama \_\_\_\_  
Documentary \_\_\_\_  
Other \_\_\_\_

If you indicated "other," identify the type of movie: \_\_\_\_\_

9. List the three most recent movies you have viewed:
  - a)
  - b)
  - c)
10. Who are your 3 favourite actors?
  - a)
  - b)
  - c)

11. What is you parent's education level? (Check in each column as appropriate)

	Mother	Father
Some high school	_____	_____
Finished high school	_____	_____
Some college	_____	_____
College diploma	_____	_____
Some university	_____	_____
University degree	_____	_____
Other (please specify) _____		

12. Please identify your parents' occupation. This includes part-time work.

Mother: \_\_\_\_\_

Father: \_\_\_\_\_

13. Do your parents smoke? (circle one)

Mother: Yes/No

Father: Yes/No

14. If yes, what is their favourite brand?

Mother: \_\_\_\_\_

Father: \_\_\_\_\_

15. If you smoke, what is your favourite brand? \_\_\_\_\_

16. Think of your 5 closest friends...How many are:

Smokers: \_\_\_\_\_

Non-smokers: \_\_\_\_\_

Ex-smokers: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix G: Movie Viewing Questionnaire**

Please respond to the following questions after viewing the movie clip.

1. Have you seen this movie before? Yes/No (circle one)

If yes, approximately how long ago?

2. As you watched the clip (just now) what was the most attention getting feature that you noticed?

a.

3. Identify other prominent features that you recall (not more than two).

b.

c.

4. Do you like this actor? Yes/No (circle one)

5. Briefly tell the story of this movie clip. What is going on in the clip?

6. What did you like most about this clip?

7. What did you like the least?

## **Appendix H: Interview Guide**

### **General Questions:**

1. Which clip did you like the best? Why?
2. Do you like the actor? Could they have cast someone better for the role?
3. What were the most noticeable features in the scenes? Did you notice the depictions of smoking?
4. How realistic was the portrayal of smoking? Do you think the actor smokes in 'real life'?
5. Have you ever used a cigarette in the way that it was used in any of the clips? Or seen someone else use a cigarette in such a way? (ie. 'cool' pose, rebellion, stress release)
6. Do you find that in movies, a certain type of character smokes or that smoking occurs in a certain situation?
7. What do you think when you see a 'cool' actor (or an actor you admire/like) smoke in a movie? Do you think there should be smoking in movies?
8. Why do you think the movie director has a character smoke in a film?
9. Did you notice what brand the actor was smoking? Do you tend to notice cigarette brands in movies?
10. Recall the first movie you saw with smoking in it.
11. Who smokes at your school? Where do they smoke? Are there rules around smoking at your school?
12. What activities do you do in your spare time?

### **Smoker Specific Questions:**

13. Have you ever imitated smoking styles you have seen in movies?
14. Tell me about the first time you smoked.
15. Did you ever imitate smoking in movies before you smoked? (i.e., when you were young?)
16. Why did you start smoking? Did seeing smoking in movies influence your decision to start?

17. Do you ever smoke in place of doing/saying something else?
18. How do you feel about smoking now? Have you ever quit? Do you plan to quit?  
Can you imagine yourself as a non-smoker?

**Non-smoker Specific Questions:**

19. Have you ever imitated smoking styles that you've seen in movies? Or seen anyone else imitate styles?
20. Did you ever imitate smoking styles when you were young?
21. Do you think that smoking in movies may influence people to smoke?
22. Have you ever been asked if you wanted to smoke? Did you try? (If yes, what led you to this decision/ why didn't you continue? If no, what led you to say no/ what did you say?

## **Appendix I: Consent and Information Package**

### **Confidential Survey of Teenage Attitudes Towards Tobacco Messages and Smoking**

#### **FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION SHEET**

**Researchers:**

Dr. Robert Sparks  
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Dr. Brian Wilson  
School of Human Kinetics  
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**What is the focus group study for?**

The study asks you for your opinions about smoking, tobacco promotion, and smoking in popular film. It is intended to help us better understand teen smoking from the point of view of teenagers themselves.

**What do the participants do?**

You will meet with a research assistant from UBC and a couple of your friends to; 1) watch some movie clips and 2) discuss your opinions about smoking, tobacco promotion, and smoking in film.

**Who participates in the focus groups?**

The group sessions are restricted to High School students in grades 8-12. You and the other participants must be friends or good acquaintances who are comfortable talking about this topic together. Group size will be restricted to six people.

**When is it?**

Your session will be scheduled after school or in a spare block during school, and will take about one hour.

**Who is running it?**

The study is being run by Dr. Robert Sparks and Dr. Brian Wilson at the School of Human Kinetics, University of British Columbia, and is funded by a Canadian Tobacco Control Research Initiative Grant. Shannon Jette is a UBC graduate student who will be conducting the focus group interviews.

**What about *privacy*?**

All information resulting from the focus group will be kept strictly confidential. The session will be audiotaped (and possibly videotaped), and transcribed, and the tapes, transcripts and questionnaires will be kept private. *Consent Forms* (attached) will be kept separately in a sealed envelope and locked file. According to University of British Columbia regulations, the audiotapes, transcripts, questionnaires, and *Consent Forms* will be stored for five years,

**A Confidential Study of Teenage Attitudes Towards  
Tobacco Messages and Smoking: Focus Group**

**CONSENT FORM**

In order to participate in a focus group, you will already have taken home a *Letter* for your parent(s) or legal guardian to read. Today you will be given an *Information Sheet* to read, and you need to sign this form.

We encourage you to discuss the study with your parent(s) or legal guardian and to obtain their permission to participate in the study.

**Student's Consent**

I have read the attached *Information Sheet* and understand the nature of the study as described in the *Information Sheet*,

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on class standing,

I hereby agree to the above stated conditions, and consent to participate in this study.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_