

Addiction and the Humanities, Volume 1(6) - The Lure of a Life Less Ordinary: “Lifestyle” Magazines and the Attraction of Risky Behaviors

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Gambling, golf, fine cigars and aged liquor traditionally have been luxuries enjoyed by the very privileged, and consequently, have been associated with a life less ordinary. Before one has a chance to notice the contents of either *Cigar Aficionado* or *Player*, the thick glossy pages and beautiful production tacitly introduce the exclusive lifestyle illustrated by the magazine. Each of these magazines focuses content on distinct pleasures: the articles and product advertisements reflect and illustrate these themes. Essentially, these magazines provide readers with examples of how to create a particular personal image and way of life, based on an activity of choice. This week, *Addiction and the Humanities* will explore two magazines, *Cigar Aficionado* and *Player*, which promote a lifestyle centered on a particular substance or activity that, under the right circumstances, has the potential to catalyze addiction.



Most of the articles in these magazines focus on cigars and gambling—just as readers demand. This includes, for example, a list ranking and rating the best cigars of the year, a feature on a particularly successful gambler, a travel diary by a man visiting Cuba to describe the cigar scene, and tips on how to play to win in

the casinos (including suggestions for craps, blackjack, tournament poker, slots and sports betting). The writing style highlights certain elements of risk and daring, perhaps parallel to the risks involved in smoking and gambling. In the diary of the trip to Cuba, for example, the author creates fake names for his travel companions to protect them, “because someone with the U.S. Treasury Department will probably read [it]” (Suckling, 2005, p. 148). Similarly, *Player* regularly features a series of articles illustrating ways to indulge in each of the seven deadly sins. In the January/February 2005 issue, for example, the ‘lust’ category is filled by an article about the cross-country holiday tour by the Victoria Secret Angels, a group of five models who regularly grace the pages of the Victoria Secret catalogues, complete with photos of them posing in front of the Bellagio Hotel fountain (Player, 2005, pp. 26-27). Thus, these articles provide the reader with the opportunity to vicariously experience the adrenaline rush that accompanies these activities and experiences.

Articles also combine aspects of gambling, smoking, and luxury into the storyline so that these activities seem linked to an opulent lifestyle. The January/February 2005 issue of *Player*, for example, features an article about bad boy Howard Stern’s move to satellite radio, which the author claims is “[b]y all accounts, ... a huge gamble” (Emery, 2005, p. 64). The Stern article uses gambling metaphors to tell the story of a rebellious guy’s-guy.

The articles that do not specifically address smoking or gambling provide readers with suggestions for how to create a lifestyle fit for cigar-smokers or high-stakes gamblers. The magazines feature page-long descriptions of the most exquisite chocolate and spirits, the best TVs, the swankest cars, and the right accessories. Accessories might range from jewelry made by top designers for the ladies, to a Limited Edition James Bond 007 Series lighter, pen and cufflink set made from gun metal presented in the shape of a Walter PPK pistol (S.T. Dupont) (Moretti, 2005, p. 39) for the men.

Creating an integrated lifestyle image is not limited only to articles; advertisements serve as creative reinforcements. Again, the magazine editors are very selective in choosing the products promoted in their magazine. For example, only three car companies are featured in the advertisements included in the February 2005 issue of *Cigar Aficionado*: Jaguar, Range Rover, and Hummer. Also included in this issue is an article featuring the evolution of the Mini-Cooper, a recent acquisition by BMW, and a page-long feature on the ‘05 model of the

Porsche 911 Carrera. Other advertisements feature the brands recognized to produce the best liquors and spirits, lighters, watches, exclusive resorts and restaurants, and cigars and casinos—naturally. Through this combination of ads and articles, both magazines live up to their self-proclaimed epithets: “The Gambling Lifestyle Magazine” (*Player*) and “The Good Life Magazine for Men” (*Cigar Aficionado*). When pieced together, these elements create a detailed guide to creating the lifestyle of the ultimate high-roller or cigar connoisseur.

The magazines appear to accomplish their stated purpose. A few details, however, remain unaddressed. The magazines revel in some aspects of the risks involved with these “lifestyle” activities (e.g., the fake names used for the diary of the trip to Cuba). Though many people are able to enjoy gambling without serious negative consequences, there is also risk: some gamblers are plagued by gambling-related problems and the adverse financial penalties that can result from excessive gambling. Sometimes intemperate gambling or smoking will result in events that hurt family and friends. Similarly, while it is less likely to develop an addiction to cigars than cigarettes, smoking cigars significantly raises a person’s risk for developing a variety of cancers (ASHES 1(1)).

Lifestyle magazines that glamorize cigars and gambling gloss over almost all of the possible negative consequences these activities might cause while exaggerating the potential benefits. *Player*, for example, features a small blurb titled “Gambling is Good for You” (*Player*, 2005 p. 13), which encourages gambling. Rani Desai, the Yale University researcher interviewed for this article, is quoted as saying “Folks who engage in activity stay healthier longer. It’s not that gambling makes you healthy, it’s that gamblers are healthier.” Lifestyle magazines have framed idealistic images of these activities and then projected them on a large, international scale. We can only wonder whether these publications, created primarily as and for entertainment, have the power to encourage the development of addiction by shaping a cultural view of acceptable risk taking. If so, do these publications also have a responsibility to limit addiction by sharing the darker side of the very activities they promote?

What do you think? Comments can be addressed to Siri Odegaard.

References

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