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## CIVIL LIBERTIES, THE CONSTITUTION, AND CIGARS: ANTI-SMOKING CONSPIRACY LOGIC IN *CIGAR AFICIONADO*, 1992-2001

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While the rate of cigarette smoking has steadily declined over the last three decades, the rate of cigar consumption has increased by 66% (Baker, et al. 2000, p. 737; Satcher, 1999).<sup>1</sup> While most cigar smokers are wealthy, well-educated white males (National Cancer Institute, 1998, p. 52; Rigotti et al., 2000, p. 699),<sup>2</sup> adolescents are also picking up the habit. A Robert Wood Johnson Foundation national survey reported that 37% of males and 16% of females between the ages of 14 and 19 have smoked a cigar during the previous year. In fact, the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse indicated that 5.6% of adolescents said that they were regular cigar users (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999), and the number of adolescents who have ever smoked cigars is 39% (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000).

With this growing popularity of cigar smoking in America, public health officials have been earnestly trying to convince the public that this seemingly benign fad carries with it many of the dangers associated with cigarette use. Nonetheless, millions of cigar smokers continue to light up, seemingly impervious to the threats of cancer, emphysema, and death. While a myriad of methods and approaches have been adopted to understand why such prevention efforts have been unsuccessful, a textual analysis of *Cigar Aficionado*—America's leading cigar magazine—provides some overlooked explanations into the role played by one mainstream commercial periodical.

Consequently, it is the purpose of this paper to examine *Cigar Aficionado's* use of a progressive conspiratorial storyline designed to discredit anti-smoking advocates and their messages. We argue that this conspiracy logic calls into question the authenticity and motives of most of the anti-tobacco advocates in America (scientists, politicians, journalists, lawyers, etc.).

This conspiracy storyline, like the pro-smoking arguments previously found by DeSantis (2002) and DeSantis and Morgan (2003), serves to relieve the cognitive dissonance commonly present during at-risk behavior, and, as such, frees *Cigar Aficionado* patrons to think only about the joys of cigar smoking, rather than the health consequences of smoking. Throughout the remainder of this paper, we will discuss 1) conspiracy theories; 2) narrative theory; 3) the rise, effects, and promotion of cigar smoking in America; 4) the four major components of *Cigar Aficionado's* conspiracy; 5) the functions of conspiracy theory in reducing cognitive dissonance; and 6) some implications for health prevention research.

### CONSPIRACY THEORY

Conspiracy theories in America—i.e., an agreement between two or more people to perform an illegal, wrongful, or subversive act—are as old as America itself. Since its colonial beginning, conspiracy theories have circulated in what Astier (1992) has called the “margins of American political life” (p. 169). This is not to imply, however, that America has a monopoly on conspiratorial thinking. One needs only to remember the genocidal consequences of Hitler's “Jewish plot,” or Stalin's obsession with “fascist spies” to realize that the need to blame one group for the evil of another is “rooted in the rich soil of human intolerance” (Astier, 1992, p. 170).

What seems to set American conspiracies apart from their international counterparts, however, is that they rarely pit one ethnic group against another and are never paranoia of a ruler against his [or her] people" (Astier, 1992, p. 171). Instead, American conspiracies cast political and economic leaders as the greatest threats to tarian democracy. It is this cynicism, according to Hofstadter (1965) and Davis (1991), that has created fertile ground for conspiratorial theories to germinate and take throughout America's history.

As America enters into the new millennia, one of the most well funded conspiracy theories to gain national attention accuses the tobacco industry of waging a public relations campaign to inculcate America's youth to their addictive product. The "Truth" campaign, funded by a 1.5 billion dollar tobacco settlement, has constructed a series of public service announcements (PSAs) that indict the tobacco industry of not only selling "toxic" products with increased doses of nicotine, but also of strategically placing cigarettes to children as young as eight years old.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting, however, that some defendants on the other side of this tobacco (pro-smoking forces) have not simply taken the traditionally defensive stance taken by most targets of conspiracies, but have adopted a much more offensive strategy by promoting their own version of a "tobacco conspiracy." Perhaps the most funded and organized of these has been waged by the pro-smoking cigar periodical *Cigar Aficionado*. Since 1992, the magazine has methodically woven a conspiratorial line accusing the medical establishment, the media, and high-ranking politicians of fabricating lies and half-truths to dupe the American public into accepting smoking regulations and relinquishing their civil liberties.

Unlike the often discussed and researched "Truth" campaign, *Cigar Aficionado's* conspiracy campaign has not been examined thoroughly by governmental agencies, the medical establishment, and prevention researchers. In fact, only the periodical's patrons are likely to have heard about this vast, anti-smoking conspiracy. Consequently, only the at-risk tobacco user is informed of this plot, leaving little room for health officials to respond to or rebuke *Cigar Aficionado's* accusations. Consequently, it is the goal of this project to 1) make prevention researchers aware of this well-organized and financed campaign and 2) detail some of the discursive barriers that may be encountered in disputing *Cigar Aficionado's* conspiracy claims.

#### THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Conspiracies, by their very nature, are communicated narratively. They are not constructed by rhetors or authors, or interpreted by audiences, in algorithmic, geographic, or syllogistic form. They are, quite simply, framed as compelling stories of good versus evil. Consequently, this project adopts what Walter R. Fisher (1984, 1985, 1991) has labeled the "Narrative Paradigm" as a theoretical lens to interpret *Cigar Aficionado's* conspiracy stories.

While Fisher may have introduced narrative theory to communication scholars, he did not discover narratives. In fact, Polkinghorne (1988) advances that "the history of narrative begins with the history of mankind [sic]." He writes that "there does not and never has existed, a people without narratives" (p. 14). Ergo, to be human is to tell stories (Fisher 1984, 1985, 1987; Lucaites & Condit 1985; Hymes 1980; Polkinghorne 1988; and Query, Kreps, Arneson, & Caso 2001).

Narratives from this perspective, however, are not fictional yarns whose content or may not have any relationship with real life. By narrative, Fisher (1984) refers

to a theory of symbolic action where stories matter in the lives of the people who interpret them (p. 2). Narratives, therefore, far from being trivial stories, give collective social life meaning. They enable us to understand the actions of others, asserts MacIntyre (1981) "because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of narratives" (p. 197). For Gerbner (1986), there is nothing more essential than narrative use to our species. "Homo sapiens live in the world erected, experienced, and conducted largely through many forms of modes of story telling" (p. 254).

The ubiquitous and primal nature of human story telling, however, should not lead one to conceive of narratives as a primitive mode of communication, used by the undereducated in place of Enlightened rationality. For as linguist-folklorist Dell Hymes reminds us, the use of narrative is not simply the provenance of the poor or undereducated of the world, but a commonly shared and experienced medium that unites all of human kind—rich and poor, educated and undereducated (1980, p. 132).

Consequently, Fisher sees this egalitarian and universal conception of narrative as a welcome challenge to many of the fundamental ideas that have underpinned the study of rhetoric and logic:

The narrative paradigm challenges the notions that human communication—if it is to be considered rhetorical—must be an argumentative form, that reason is to be attributed only to discourse marked by clearly identifiable modes of inference and/or implication, and that the norms for evaluation of rhetorical communication must be rational standards taken essentially from informal or formal logic. (1984, p. 2)

For Fisher, therefore, the narrative paradigm reconceptualizes the content and form of argument, reason, and rationality, making them fundamental to the narrative paradigm (1984, p. 2). Specifically, Fisher asserts that an effective narrative needs to have narrative probability (coherence) and narrative fidelity (faithfulness) in order to be judged as a sound and truthful story. Or to put it another way, narratives have to "constitute a coherent story" and have to "ring true" with other stories audiences "know to be true in their lives" (Fisher 1984, p. 8).

In the case of *Cigar Aficionado's* conspiracy narrative, we will demonstrate that it is both a "coherent" story, lucidly composed by professional writers, complete with well defined antagonists, protagonists, scenes, actions, and motives, and a story that "rings true," particularly for an American audience with an historic propensity for believing in conspiracies and a cognitive need to conceive of anti-smoking forces as irrational and reactionary.

#### THE RISE, EFFECTS, AND PROMOTION OF CIGAR SMOKING IN AMERICA

The sharp increase in the consumption of cigars, including increases among women, African Americans, and adolescents, has generated considerable alarm among prevention researchers. In response, a number of foundations and public health departments began devoting greater attention to the issue of cigar smoking. These organizations include the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; the Massachusetts, New York, and California Departments of Public Health; the American Cancer Society (ACS); the National Cancer Institute (NCI); the Roswell Park Cancer Institute; and the U.S. Surgeon General. Their efforts culminated in the production of a 247-page monograph issued by the National Cancer Institute that systematically

iewed all available research on cigar smoking. Similarly, the ACS held a summit in 1988 to examine, organize, and summarize the "health risks of cigar smoking."

What NCI and ACS found was not surprising: In spite of popular wisdom that cigars were somehow "safer" than cigarettes, cigar smokers are vulnerable to many of the same cancers as cigarette smokers, largely because carcinogens and nicotine are absorbed through the mucus membranes in the mouth. Cigar smokers face greater exposure to nicotine and tobacco-based carcinogens because cigars are much larger in size than cigarettes, and smoking time is far greater than with cigarettes. It was also found that cigars are just as addictive as cigarettes, even though cigar smoke is not fully inhaled, because concentrations of nicotine in cigars are higher. Furthermore, secondhand smoke generated by cigars is equally toxic as that of cigarettes (Baker, et al., 2000, p. 735).<sup>4</sup> The reports conclude that greater efforts need to be devoted to examining the health consequences of cigar smoking, as well as developing preventive strategies.

There is a remarkable degree of consensus among governmental agencies, health advocates, and cigar companies about one of the possible underlying reasons for the recent increase in the consumption of cigars: the emergence of the "lifestyle magazine," *Cigar Aficionado* (Baker, et al., 2000; NCI, 1999; Shanken, 1995). By the end of its first full year, *Cigar Aficionado* had a readership of over 400,000 per issue, with an accompanying spike in the consumption of premium, hand-rolled, imported cigars, chased from cigar shops,<sup>5</sup> night clubs, cigar bars, golf courses, race tracks, shopping malls, upscale restaurants, luxury hotels, gas stations, grocery stores, sports arenas, and stores, and even at the menswear sections in department stores (*New York Times*, July 30, 1997, p. 12).

The big five cigar companies openly credit the rise of *Cigar Aficionado* with greater responsibility. Virtually all major premium cigar manufacturers, including Culbro, Danmenthal (of the *Hoyo de Monterrey* and *Punch* brand cigars), and the Newman Family (of the *Cuesta-Rey* brand cigars), praise *Cigar Aficionado* for "improving [the] image of cigar smoking" and rejoice in "the significant increase in consumption and retail sales of cigars" (Culbro Corporation, 1996, p. 2; *Cigar Aficionado*, Autumn 1995, p. 128; *Cigar Aficionado*, Spring 1995, p. 89; Consolidated Cigar Holdings, Inc., 1996, p. 3).

Cigar smokers also credit *Cigar Aficionado* for improving the popularity and image of cigar smoking. One reader wrote that his very first issue of *Cigar Aficionado* actually persuaded him to begin smoking cigars. "I believe that I would not have taken up cigar smoking," he asserted, "had it not been for the way your magazine has presented the image of the cigar and the pleasure it provides" (Winter 1993, p. 17). Another reader noted that he had been transformed from a man who thought cigar smoking was "uncool," to a person "looking forward to enjoying [his] first *Romeo y Julieta*" (Winter 1993, p. 25).

One might expect that any organization, even *Cigar Aficionado*, would minimize its professed responsibility for the surge in the consumption of tobacco products. Instead, *Cigar Aficionado* flaunts its role. Editor-in-chief of the magazine, Marvin Shanken, boasts, "History and government statistics tell us that the premium cigar market in America can be categorized into two eras: pre- and post-*Cigar Aficionado* magazine" (*Cigar Aficionado* 1995, p. 15). He also brags:

... Premiums will top 240 million cigars for 1996. The premium cigar market will have more than doubled in a span of three years. . . . What happened? While it sounds self-serving, it's hard to ignore the fact that this change probably can be tied directly to the launch of *Cigar Aficionado* in the autumn of 1992. (Shanken, 1996, p. 97)



FIGURE 1  
CIGAR AFICIONADO COVERS HIGHLIGHTING THE RICH, FAMOUS, AND BEAUTIFUL.

*Cigar Aficionado* makes no secret of its mission to promote the smoking of cigars, which is remarkable since its very existence flaunts voluntary and mandatory codes against the promotion of tobacco that have been in place since 1965. These codes prohibit "models in ads who appear to be under the age of 25, not to associate smoking with glamour, physical fitness, or wealth, and not to place brand-name tobacco products in movies" (NCI, 1998, p. 225). *Cigar Aficionado* promotes cigars as "symbols of a luxuriant and successful lifestyle" (Altman, et al. 1996). Cigars are even glamorized by depicting sports heroes, female super models, pop icons, and movie mega-stars smoking cigars on the covers of the magazine. Michael Jordan, Madonna, Mel Gibson, David Letterman, Jack Nicholson, and Kevin Costner are just a few of the superstars who appeared in *Cigar Aficionado* talking about their love of cigars (see figure 1). Historic, literary, artistic, and political figures such as Fidel Castro, Winston Churchill, Ernest Hemingway, Sigmund Freud, Luciano Pavarotti, Thomas Edison, and John F. Kennedy have also been featured in the magazine. The transformation of cigars from a blue-collar indulgence to a glamorous luxury item has been so successful that a significant number of smokers and non-smokers alike perceive cigar smokers to be wealthy, well-educated, and even, shockingly, athletic (Baker et al., 2000, p. 738).

Finally, and most relevant to this study, *Cigar Aficionado* has been able to attract and maintain its readers' attention through the systematic promotion of an anti-smoking conspiracy theory. In almost every issue, the magazine supplies readers with a description of a vast anti-smoking conspiracy in America, highlighting 1) the names of the conspirators, 2) what the conspirators are doing, 3) the motivations for the conspiracy, and 4) the effects of the conspiracy. Taken in total, these conspiracy messages serve to relieve the cognitive dissonance that arises when individuals engage in at-risk behavior by casting doubt on the credibility of health messages and the messengers, while simultaneously securing life-long patrons and cigar smokers.

While the "promotion" and "glamorization" of cigars are both worthy of study, we believe that it is the creation of a conspiracy theory that poses a greater threat to health

rts. While the promotion and glamorization of cigars may entice a consumer to try or her first cigar, it is the consistent advancement of conspiracy messages, aimed at rediting anti-smoking information and motivation, that keeps patrons lighting up the face of overwhelming scientific evidence that their "hobby" is life-threatening. While the magazine may profess to simply celebrate "the good life," we argue that it serves a more insidious function; specifically, the periodical is responsible for obliterating the counter-attitudinal messages, in the form of a conspiracy theory, that are meant to relieve the cognitive dissonance associated with the consumption of a potentially deadly product.

### METHOD

This study adopts a rhetorical approach to analyze the content of *Cigar Aficionado*, its first issue in the autumn of 1992 to the first issue of the 2001 calendar year—a total of 42 magazines with approximately 8,000 pages of text. The authors searched all issues for conspiracy arguments throughout all features of the magazine, including letters to the editor, editor's statements, celebrity interviews, cover stories, profiles of individuals, cartoons, and the like. *Conspiracy arguments* were defined as any statement asserted that two or more people were in collusion with each other to perform an illegal, wrongful, or subversive anti-smoking action. To ensure that we were reliably identifying all instances of conspiracy theory arguments, we selected three issues at random (Autumn 1994, Spring, 1995, and August, 1997) and coded each issue independently. Of the 28 instances generated by both coders for all three issues, 26 were identified by both coders, with just two instances missed by one of the coders. There is essentially only one coding category in this study (conspiracy) and therefore there is no total number of text units to compare to the number of conspiracy claims; the best reliability statistic is a simple percentage of coder agreement: 92.9%. Where all conspiracy claims were identified and copied, they were coded into narrative components. By *narrative components*, we are referring to the basic literary building blocks of any story—the who, what, where, when, and why. The use of this coding scheme produced a clearer, more cogent understanding of the theory that was initially fragmented and incrementally constructed. Specifically, *Cigar Aficionado's* conspiracy theory was amassed over the course of 11 years and developed into hundreds of pages of text, ranging from editorials and features to letters to the editor and interviews. Furthermore, the conspiracy was not solely constructed by the magazine's owner and editor, Marvin Shanken. Others made significant contributions, including patrons (whose letters were reprinted), featured celebrities (Gay Talese, George McGovern, James Wood, P.J. O'Rourke, Rush Limbaugh, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.), staff journalists (e.g., Gordon Mott, Michael Frank, Shandana Kiani), and guest writers (e.g., Diana McLellan, David Savona, Michael Kaplan, Dr. Robert Weiss). In the analysis section that follows, we will detail 1) *who* the conspirators are, 2) what *actions* have been taken by the conspirators, 3) what the conspirators' *intentions* are, and 4) what *effects* the conspiracy has had on America.

### CIGAR AFICIONADO'S CONSPIRACY THEORY IN FOUR PARTS

#### Actors in the Conspiracy

The crucial ingredient needed for any conspiracy is, of course, a conspirator. Hofstadter (1965) argues that historically the conspirator has been described as the

"perfect model of malice, a kind of amoral superman: sinister, ubiquitous, powerful, cruel, sensual, luxury-loving" (pp. 31–32). He is a man, moreover, of influence in a society. "He controls the press; . . . he has unlimited funds; . . . he is gaining a stranglehold on the educational system" (Hofstadter 1965, p. 32).

*Cigar Aficionado's* conspirators, however, differ from this traditional definition in three significant ways. First, instead of finding a single male masterminding a vast anti-smoking conspiracy, Shanken "discovered" many independent cells working in isolation from one another. The only common denominator discussed by the periodical linking these cells was a shared ideology of Puritanism and intolerance. Second, instead of finding a "cruel, sensual, luxury-loving" villain, *Cigar Aficionado* uncovered a cabal of "intolerant crusaders" and "religious zealots" driven by a misguided, but sincere, sense of conservative morality. They are described, in fact, as being antithetically opposed to all things pleasurable, sensual, and luxurious. Finally, while the large majority of suspected conspirators in *Cigar Aficionado* are males, Shanken and his readers have also indicted females—ironically, a very progressive step in conspiratorial thinking.

Of the more than 30 different conspiratorial cells specifically identified by *Cigar Aficionado*, however, none were more prevalent than large national agencies responsible for public health. Shanken's periodical accused no less than the American Cancer Society (May 1997, p. 19), the Surgeon General (May 1997, p. 19), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Winter 1994, p. 19; August 1997, p. 21), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (September 1997, p. 23; April 2000, p. 214), National Cancer Institute (Spring 1993, p. 5; July 1998, p. 21; April 2000, p. 214), the Environmental Protection Agency (Spring 1993, p. 5; Autumn 1994, p. 16; November 1998, p. 100; May 1999, pp. 206–207), and the Food and Drug Administration (Winter 1993, p. 49) of conspiring to 1) taint scientific data to support their own political ends; 2) pass unjust laws; 3) hide their true agenda from the American public; 4) usurp America's civil liberties, and 5) mislead the media.

Along with America's prominent health agencies, *Cigar Aficionado* also uncovered a myriad of other conspiratorial cells working to strip the public of its "constitutional" right to smoke. Some of these seemingly incongruent groups include the Media, e.g., CNN, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, ABC (July 1998, p. 26; January 1999, p. 29; April 2000, p. 214); the states of New York (October 1999, p. 19), Massachusetts (October 1999, p. 19), and California (August 2000, p. 218); the cities of New York (Spring 1995, p. 15), Nashville (November, 1998, p. 27), San Francisco (Spring 1995, p. 15), Los Angeles (Spring 1995, p. 15), and Miami (October 1999, p. 19); the countries of New Zealand and England (October 1999, p. 19); the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (March 1989, p. 29); the Congress (Autumn 1994, p. 13); the U.S. State Department (Summer 1994, p. 27); U.S. Customs Department (Autumn 1994, p. 84; March 1989, p. 29; December 1997, p. 140) (see figure 2); the Cog Hill Country Club (August 1997, p. 29); insurance companies (Autumn 1995, p. 336; Winter 1996, p. 46); and feminists (Autumn 1995, p. 37; May 1997, p. 144).

More common than indicting specific organizations, institutions, or localities, however, was *Cigar Aficionado's* propensity for using nebulous *devil terms* to identify the conspirators.<sup>6</sup> As Weaver (1953) has written, devil terms are emotionally charged words, rooted in a culture's collective experience, that engender a visceral reaction of fear and hatred in an audience, e.g., "communism," "fascism," and "Nazism" (pp. 222–224). These terms are exceptionally suited for conspiracy discourse where 1) an "ultimate villain" is needed, 2) identifying an exact enemy is difficult, and/or 3)



FIGURE 2  
UNITED STATES CUSTOMS OFFICIALS CONFISCATING CUBAN CIGARS FROM "HARDWORKING, TAX-PAYING" AMERICANS (AUTUMN 1994, PP. 84-86; DECEMBER 1997, P. 141).

Recognizing a specific individual is slanderously problematic. Furthermore, by the very nature of the conspiracy genre, assert Goodnight and Poulakos, the enemy must be received as stealth and aloof. The conspirators must be seen as not only hiding their "master plan" from the public, but also as cloaking their true identity (1981, p. 316). Consequently, *Cigar Aficionado's* recurring use of devil terms allowed it to create a super-human miscreant without becoming vulnerable to counter-attacks, rebuttals, or suits from the accused.

Some of the nameless conspirators found in the pages of *Cigar Aficionado* included thought police (October 1999, p. 19), pleasure police (Autumn 1996, p. 19), health police (May 1999, p. 206), fascists (August 2000, p. 222), self-righteous health fascists (Winter 1994, p. 27), self-appointed moralists (April 2000, p. 13), the authoritarian state (Winter 1995, p. 123), the moral right (Winter 1994, p. 24), conservatives (January 1999, p. 29), anti-smoking zealots (Winter 1993, p. 206; Winter 1994, p. 27; Winter 1996, p. 29; November 1998, p. 31; October 1999, 19; April 2000, p. 13), crusaders (Autumn 1994, p. 15; Autumn 1995, p. 19; November 1998, p. 99), the destroyers of individual freedom (Summer 1993, p. 23), relentless legislators (January 1999, p. 29), politically correct society (Winter 1993, p. 22), Orwellians (Autumn 1993, p. 164), remists (April 2000, p. 13), fanatics (Spring 1994, p. 13; October 1997, p. 23; October 1999, p. 19), cultural crusaders (April 2000, p. 13), rabid anti-smoking Nazi ring (1995, p. 21), Puritans (p. 41), storm troopers of virtue (Winter 1995, p. 73), zis (Winter 1994, p. 27), health fanatics (Winter 1993, p. 9; Spring 1995, p. 15), health and lifestyle fanatics (Spring 1995, p. 15), New Puritans (Winter 1994, p. 19), and McCarthyites (Autumn, 1994, p. 251; August 2000, p. 222).

Perhaps what is most telling about these recurring terms is not what they divulge about the conspirators, but what they reveal about *Cigar Aficionado's* political and social philosophy. As Foss, Foss, and Trapp (1991) assert, the choice of devil terms, "reveals ideas held by the members of the culture" and "reflect[s] their particular vision of world" (p. 74). *Cigar Aficionado's* language choices reflects a worldview where

American's civil liberties (i.e., the right to pursue one's own version of happiness without restriction) are the most sacred, and threatened, of all inalienable rights. It is also a world where the greatest danger to our liberties comes from people wanting to impose their moral order on the nation. These moralists take various forms, from religious zealots to political conservatives, but are ideologically united in their intolerance for individual choice and, of course, tobacco use.

#### *The Actions of the Conspirators*

The "destructive" actions of *Cigar Aficionado's* conspirators are as varied and deviant as the conspirators themselves. These actions are made even more insidious through *Cigar Aficionado's* descriptions of their vast influence in law, government, policymaking, insurance, health care, and media. This belief in such ubiquitous leverage, according to Hofstadter (1965), is typical in most conspiratorial narratives (p. 32). For conspirators to be a true threat, they must have the power and connections to do true harm. Within these vital institutions, however, *Cigar Aficionado* highlighted four recurring conspiratorial behaviors—banning smoking in public, passing anti-smoking legislation, manipulating scientific findings, and fabricating news reports.

First and foremost, the conspirators are credited with banning cigar smoking throughout America. In nearly every issue, *Cigar Aficionado* urgently highlighted the "new prohibition" on cigars being implemented across the United States. In the spring of 1995, for example, readers heard of "New York and Los Angeles, which are making it virtually impossible to smoke in public places" by "using the secondhand-smoke issue as a bludgeon to push through the agenda of the health fanatics" (p. 15). In the May issue of 1999, patrons were told that, "At last count, more than 700 city, state and national laws restricting the enjoyment of cigars in public places have been passed" by "anti-cigar fanatics" (pp. 206-207). Furthermore, in November of 1998, readers heard how the "Nashville Metro City Council rejected the bill that would allow" cigar smoking at sporting events. These "anti-smoking zealots," according to the article, strategically excluded any testimony or evidence that could have been used against them and their oppressive decision (p. 31).

On other occasions, *Cigar Aficionado* rhetorically framed the act of banning as a conspiratorial harbinger of a "full scale attack on America's civil liberties." The magazine consistently warned patrons that cigars are simply the first of their rights to be banned by the "health fascists." Next they will come for your "coffee, meat, and eggs" (Winter 1994, p. 27). In 1994, Shanken warned that this "wholesale rape of our constitutional rights by our government" and the "systematic attack . . . by the moral right" on smoking (Autumn, 1994, p. 18), will eventually lead to the banning of "laying out in the sun, eating hamburgers and French fries or drinking coffee" (Winter 1994, p. 19). In the winter of 1996, this list was expanded to include "butter, sour cream, salt, fattening desserts, caffeine, wine or sherry, and imported foods" (p. 29). In prophetic form, Shanken implores his readers to heed his warnings, or they will be "sipping herbal tea while waiting for the next coffee or cigar contraband shipment to arrive at your neighborhood drug dealer's house" (Winter 1994, p. 27).

Conspirators, however, are also accused of attacking cigar smokers through their vast legal and legislative connections. In an April 2000 editorial, for instance, readers heard of unidentified "groups" who are organizing against them, "often using government funds to finance their blatantly ideological activities." "Through lawsuits, propaganda and intimidation," Shanken continued, "these groups want to impose Prohibition-like laws in twenty-first-century America" (p. 13). In similar form, staff writer

sell Baker frames America's new anti-smoking laws as nothing less than an all-out "war" on the American way of life. "The true crusader," he writes with hyperbolic rhetoric, "doesn't stop at burning the village, killing the women and children and driving off with the cattle if that's what it takes to purify the world" (Autumn 1994, p. 5).

On other occasions, *Cigar Aficionado* spotlighted specific legislative conspirators actively working against American freedoms. In January of 1999, for instance, readers were told of anti-smoking Senate Bill 2625, introduced by Richard Durbin, D-Illinois, which was strategically "filled with distortions and misinformation" to ensure its passage and to systematically oppress cigar smokers. Some of the bill's more outrageous "distortions," according to *Cigar Aficionado*, included such absurd claims as, "regular cigar smoking causes cancer" and "heavy cigar smokers and those who inhale deeply are at an increased risk of coronary heart disease and can develop chronic lung disease" (p. 21).<sup>7</sup>

As readers are reminded, however, most of these anti-smoking laws and policies would not be passed without the collusion of the scientific community. For it is scientists, supported with tax money awarded to them by anti-smoking legislators, that are these "political zealots" with the ammunition for their assault on freedom. The "distortions" on the Surgeon General's Report on Smoking, for example, were accused of "altering" and "bolstering" their findings when their initial pro-smoking conclusions came too "politically unpalatable" for the antismoking fascists in Washington. Subsequently, the "new falsified report" now finds cigar smoking mysteriously "linked to oral cancers" (May 1997, p. 19). Similarly, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) is accused of lying in its well-orchestrated campaign targeting teenage-cigar smokers.

According to a 1997 editorial by Shanken, the CDC "buried" pro-smoking findings, "made no serious attempt to qualify their result," did not "verify" how cigars are being used by teenagers, and manipulated the media for their own political ends (September 1997, p. 23). After the National Cancer Institute released its watershed condemnation on the dangers of cigar smoking, *Cigar Aficionado* leveled many of the same charges against its researchers and administrators. Shanken claimed that their 100-page monograph was strategically manipulated by 1) downplaying the pro-smoking findings of "occasional cigar use," 2) incorporating European smoking studies, and 3) claiming that most cigar smokers inhale. "I wish everyone in America," Shanken concludes, "understood how this anti-cigar campaign is being manipulated" (July 1998, p. 11). The most severe attack, however, was aimed at the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) 1993 report on secondhand smoke. This report, according to *Cigar Aficionado*, is "clear politics, not science" (Spring 1993, p. 5). Along with criticizing the EPA's report for being ideologically motivated and scientifically irresponsible, *Cigar Aficionado* also castigated the EPA for "not including the NCI study on passive smoking"—the same NCI later accused of being a member of the anti-smoking cabal (Spring 1993, p. 5).<sup>8</sup>

Finally, Shanken and his staff indict the American media as co-conspirators in the "war" on cigars (see figure 3). For the conspiracy to be most effective, they asserted, the media's legislators (who are passing laws banning cigar smoking) and the scientific community (who are distorting their findings) need favorable press to rally support for their ideological ends. *Cigar Aficionado* finds more than enough evidence to cast doubt on the media's motives and objectivity. In 1996, for example, Shanken tells readers that the *New York Times* health columnist, Jane Brody, consistently uses "outdated information, and repeats verbatim the standard rhetoric of the anti-tobacco zealots" (Au-

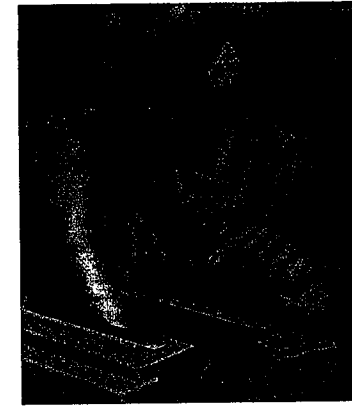


FIGURE 3  
CARICATURE OF A CONSPIRATORIAL JOURNALIST WITH A "SMOKING" TYPEWRITER.

Autumn, p. 19). A year later, *Cigar Aficionado* informed readers of the vicious anti-smoking agenda supported by ABC's *World News Tonight*, *USA Today*, *Time Magazine*, and *U.S. News and World Report*. These four media giants, Shanken notes, have been on "a holier-than-thou rampage," . . . "ready to paint cigar smoking as the worst thing to happen since the nuclear accident at Chernobyl" (May 1997, p. 19). By 2000, this conspiratorial net was cast so widely, that virtually every significant media outlet in the nation was questioned for their impartiality and intent. In April of that year, for example, writer Jacob Sullum accused the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Washington Post*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, and the *Sacramento Bee* of either being strategically fed misinformation by anti-smoking scientists (e.g., former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, CDC's Michael Eriksen, NCI's Jack Henningfield and Donald Shopland), or of malicious exaggeration and sensationalism (Month 2000 p. 214).

#### *The Motives of the Conspirators*

Once the conspirators and their actions have been identified in *Cigar Aficionado's* conspiracy narrative, the obvious question left unanswered is *why* so many have taken such outrageous measures to rip the cigars out of the hands of law-abiding, tax-paying Americans. As is the case with most traditional explanations of conspiracies, *Cigar Aficionado* uncovered greed or profit as one of the primary motives for many of their conspirators (Goodnight & Poulakos 1981, p. 312). In November of 1998, for example, P. J. O'Rourke tells readers that the reason the government has targeted cigar smokers is not because it cares about the health and safety of its citizenry, but because it is "looking for some place that they can raise revenue without taking a real beating in the polls" (p. 215). Money was also cited as a primary motivation for public-health agencies (e.g., NCI, EPA, CDC, Food & Drug Administration [FDA], etc.). "Don't be deceived into thinking," Shanken writes, "that these groups are motivated by some higher calling, by an altruism that seeks only to ensure the public's safety." The truth, readers are told, is that they must "raise money to keep their organizations alive and

their jobs intact" (April 2000, p. 13). In July of 1998, politicians and the news media were also indicted for "always cloaking" their motivation "in the safe, self-righteous and politically correct statement, 'for our children,'" while the "real impetus behind these attacks is greed" (p. 26). Finally, the insurance industry was familiarly charged with unfettered avariciousness at the cost of truth and civil liberties. One unidentified insurance agent in the autumn of 1995, for example, testified to *Cigar Aficionado* that his industry does not care about the truth behind health issues related to cigar smokers, but that "it's basically an opportunity to raise premiums" (p. 334). A year later, readers again heard how the insurance industry is raising premiums on cigar smokers because they "are upper-income, healthy individuals," not because they stand an increased risk of illness or death. The author sarcastically observes, "How convenient and profitable" such a "health" decision is for their bottom line (Winter 1996, p. 46).

The most recurring single "motive," however, had nothing to do with taxes, insurance premiums, or profit. On more than 20 occasions, readers heard that the primary motive of the anti-cigar conspirators was a belief in a Puritanical morality—a belief that humans should shun all things pleasurable, exotic, and entertaining. Also, "Americans could not control their own base urges, asserts *Cigar Aficionado*, then these neo-Puritans will use all means necessary, including participating in a conspiracy, to protect the soul of the nation. Readers repetitively heard, for example, that these self-appointed moralists" are "trying to control your life and mind" and are keeping us from "doing something that might be pleasurable" (April 2000, p. 13). Rush Limbaugh, in the same issue, further told readers that these Puritanical fanatics believe it is a "crime to have fun, and they target anyone who seems to have too much of it" (Winter 1994, p. 19). Repeatedly, readers heard how these "moralists" want "happiness destroyed" (Winter 1992, p. 12), find the "pursuit of happiness offensive" (Winter 1996, p. 29), and feel that "enjoyment of any kind . . . should be banned" (August 1997, p. 29). As cardiologist Dr. James Weiss told *Cigar Aficionado's* 250,000 readers, these rigid Puritans are motivated, not by medicine or public health, but by a perverse sense of morality. What these "zealots who object really mean," he concludes, "is that the sight and smell" of cigar smoke "offends them morally" (Winter 1993, p. 206).<sup>9</sup>

Not all motivations, however, were as clearly defined as greed or Puritanism. Most of the motives attributed to the conspirators were far more nebulous and convoluted. On over 15 occasions, for instance, *Cigar Aficionado* told of mysterious "hidden agendas" and secret "ideologies" driving America's new anti-cigar plague. In November of 1998, for example, readers were told that the EPA report was a "perfect example of a political agenda stepping on science" (p. 99) and of findings that were motivated by a biased ideology" (p. 27). In the spring of 1993, Shanken accused the time report of being "politicized and manipulated to support a fanatical antismoking agenda" (p. 5). Relying on this same strategy, *Cigar Aficionado* accused Representative Waxman of supporting "his ideological agenda" (Autumn 1994, p. 13), New York and Los Angeles politicians of pushing through their "agenda" (Spring 1995, p. 15), and unidentified "advocacy groups" of "manipulating scientific data" to "meet their agendas" (April 2000, p. 13). The nature of these agendas and ideologies are not clearly defined; in fact, *Cigar Aficionado* is deliberately ambiguous on this point.

From a practical perspective, such loose and ambiguous conspiratorial motives allow *Cigar Aficionado* to indict a wide variety of villains under simple, malleable charges, while avoiding a more detailed and precise explanation that could either distort the storyline, distract readers, or be proven wrong. This task of simplifying becomes even more crucial, given that the periodical is published, on average, only 5

times a year, and that the storyline has evolved over the span of 11 years. For the average reader who has missed a few issues, or who has forgotten the content of issues long past, such simple motives ("greed," "Puritanism," or "hidden agendas") allow for an easy connection from story to story, issue to issue, and year to year.

### *The Effects*

When discussing the effects that the conspiracy is having on the lives of cigar smokers, *Cigar Aficionado* intermittently detailed specific outcomes. They informed readers, for instance, that the conspirators 1) banned smoking in New York City restaurants; 2) created a hostile living environment for cigar smokers in California; 3) filed law suits in New Jersey, Mississippi, Oregon, Massachusetts, and Florida; 4) taxed tobacco products; 5) raised insurance premiums; and 6) censored *Cigar Aficionado* in New Zealand.

Far more often, however, *Cigar Aficionado* adopted a "transcendent" strategy, elevating particular effects (banning, laws, taxes) into the higher and more ambiguous realm of the general (freedom, liberty, justice). Ware and Linkugel (1973) assert that the transcendent strategy "joins some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship with some larger context within which the audience does not presently view that attribute" (p. 274). In *Cigar Aficionado's* case, this "larger context" consistently touched on notions of patriotism, freedom, and the American way. Anti-smokers were not only charged with being irritating, for example, they were also cited for their "crusade to deny you your individual rights, to limit your choices about how you lead your life" (April 2000, p. 13).

One of the more common transcendent strategies in *Cigar Aficionado* incorporated patriotic icons, such as the Flag, the Statue of Liberty, Declaration of Independence, and the Liberty Bell, to emblematically elevate the discussion above the mere cigar. No American artifact, however, received more space or attention than the Constitution of the United States, a document that symbolically represents the very virtues *Cigar Aficionado* professes to defend, e.g., freedom of choice, liberty, and protection from totalitarianism. The issue of smoking, asserted Shanken, is no longer about my "personal feelings," but the "wholesale rape of our Constitutional rights" (Autumn 1994, p. 18). Three months later, he reminds his readers that the "anti-smoking zealots" are out to get you, "freedom and the Constitution be damned" (Winter 1994, p. 27). By March of 1998, *Cigar Aficionado* rhetorically framed any efforts to ban smoking as a violation of human "rights under God, as promised by the Constitution of the greatest country on this God's earth" (p. 29). More than any other individual or institution, however, it was the "United States Government" who "exceeded their Constitutional prerogative" (Spring 1995, p. 15), by "imposing limits on personal choice" (Winter 1994, p. 19) and attempting "to deprive cigar smokers of their Constitutional rights" (August 1997, p. 21).

The most brazen use of transcendence, however, appeared in the form of historic analogies. By connecting a significant past event with the relatively unimportant act of smoking, *Cigar Aficionado* was able to "borrow" the emotion and symbolism from the former and transfer it to the latter. In the winter of 1994, for instance, smokers were informed that they were not just being taxed but were living through another American "witch hunt" (p. 27). They were told that their "Orwellian isolation" would result in being put into a "modern version of the leper colony" (Autumn 1993, p. 164). They were also reminded that their "founding fathers," who had faced similar oppression



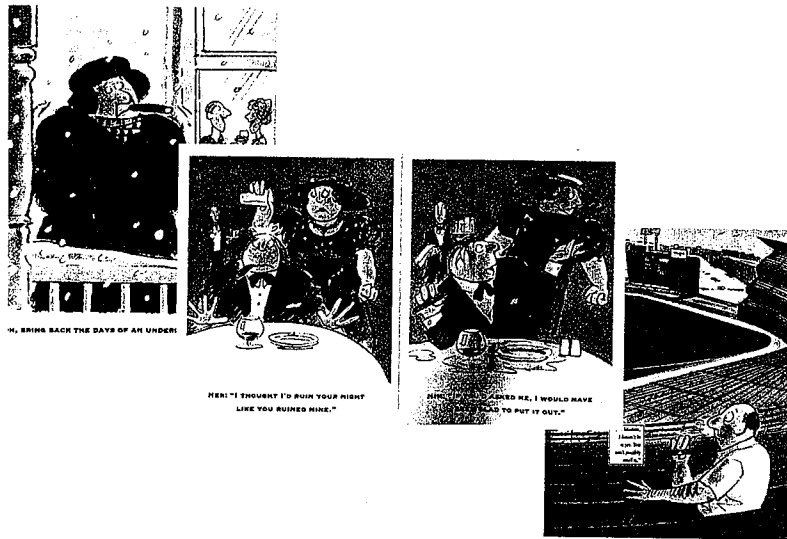


FIGURE 4  
POLITICAL CARTOONS ILLUSTRATING THE MYRIAD FORMS OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL OPPRESSION ENDURED BY CIGAR SMOKERS (AUTUMN 1992, PP. 72-76).

in the English, would be outraged by the “zealots” who are “stealing away” our liberty” and the “freedom to choose how we live our lives” (April 2000, p. 13).

*Cigar Aficionado* also analogized political and social movements with cigar smokers. In autumn of 1995, a letter writer told Shanken’s conservative readers that the gay rights movement that started in the 1970s and cigar smokers of today “have a lot in common”—one wants the government out of their “bedrooms,” the other out of their “smoking rooms” (p. 23). In the summer of 1994, patrons read of how civil rights activist H. L. Mencken dedicated his life to battle “segregation” and “lynching,” so that in part, all Americans could be free to “order Pilsner” or “smoke a cigar wherever and whenever we please” (p. 120). Mencken’s struggle, however, is not over. For in today’s political climate, Shanken tells readers, cigar smokers, like the civil rights activists of the 1960s, are continually “victimized” by “diners throwing water on them,” or “passersby shouting profanities” (Spring 1994, p. 13); they are “harangued” or “kicked.” “A man could get killed these days lighting a cigar,” one reader claimed (Winter 1993, p. 49) (see figure 4). Consequently, readers are invited, like L. Mencken and Dr. King before them, “to fight for their rights” (November 1998, p. 31). For as Shanken reassured his readers in the summer of 1993, “We shall overcome” (p. 18).

This use of historic analogies, however, reached an unprecedented level of pervasiveness in 1994, when *Cigar Aficionado* drew parallels between tobacco prohibition and the Holocaust. During that summer, for instance, readers were told that they were the new heroes, making their “Last Stand” against antismoking savages, just as Custer had once fought the “enraged Native Americans” (Summer 1994, p. 75). Even more remark-

ably, readers in the winter of 1994 were informed that they, like the Jews who were killed in the Nazi concentration camps, are linked in profound and historic ways:

A quote by Marin Niemoeller (1892–1984) says it all: “In Germany they came first for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t Communist. They came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Jew. They came for the trade unionists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist. They came for the Catholics, and I didn’t speak up because I was a Protestant. They came for me, and by then no one was left to speak up.” (Winter 1994, p. 27)

So “when the knock comes on your door,” Shanken writes, “don’t say we didn’t warn you” (October 1999, p. 19).

While *Cigar Aficionado*’s transcendent strategy may be hyperbolic, if not insulting to some, its rhetorical strategy is clear. If Shanken and his writers are able to elevate their plight into a higher plain of individual rights, freedom, and the archetypal battle between good and evil, they will have moved a simple debate over the use of tobacco to a stratum where tobacco use is tied to political oppression. With this accomplished, readers are much more disposed to care about the conspiracy rather than the dubious health consequences of smoking cigars.

#### THE DISSONANCE-REDUCING FUNCTION OF ANTI-CIGAR CONSPIRACY THEORIES

The vast and intricate anti-smoking conspiracy described in the pages of *Cigar Aficionado* might raise the eyebrows of many who do not smoke cigars or who do not have a vested interest in believing in such a seemingly far-fetched narrative. If sales are any indication of resonance, however, there are hundreds of thousands of loyal *Cigar Aficionado* patrons who find Shanken’s narrative compelling. Health-prevention researchers must ask themselves, therefore, what purpose does this conspiracy serve for readers and what is to be gained by believing in its claims? One possible answer to both of these questions lies in the understanding of the basic cognitive processes faced by all people whose actions are in conflict with their knowledge or attitudes. This conflict is termed cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957, 1972) is one of the best-supported theories in the social sciences. Over 1000 studies to date have supported the premises and hypotheses generated by the theory (Shultz & Lepper, 2000). Briefly, cognitive dissonance theory states that when behaviors are at odds with our attitudes or cognitions, we will experience discomfort. The degree of that discomfort depends on the importance of the behavior (e.g., how much one enjoys smoking) in relationship to the importance of the attitude or value that is being violated by our actions (e.g., how much one values a long and healthy life). Furthermore, “dissonance effects are most likely to occur when the individual feels personal responsibility for a counterattitudinal behavior with foreseeable aversive consequences under conditions of low external justification” (Simon, Greenberg & Brehm, 1995, p. 248). In other words, because cigar smokers cannot escape the common knowledge of the dangers of cigar smoking, and because cigar smoking is widely seen (especially by cigar smokers themselves) as a rationally chosen leisure-time activity and not an addiction outside their control, cigar smokers will find cognitive dissonance inescapable. Not surprisingly the dissonance experienced by smokers has been well documented for more than 40 years (Eiser, 1978; Gibbons & Eggleston, 1997; Halpern, 1994; McMaster & Lee, 1991; Tagliacozzo, 1981). Even Festinger himself favored smokers as the perfect example of a group of people subject to dissonance (Festinger, 1957).



But what happens when smokers are imbued with dissonance? Are they destined to remain cognitively imbalanced for life? According to Festinger (1957), McMaster & Lee (1991), and Tagliacozzo (1981), when faced with cognitive dissonance, smokers are driven to reduce their discomfort by taking one of four paths. They will either 1) change their behavior (e.g., quit smoking), 2) rethink their underlying attitude or value (e.g., change their minds about the hazards of tobacco use), 3) add new cognitions (e.g., seek out pro-smoking arguments that refute anti-smoking claims), or 4) reduce the importance of their dissonance by derogating or trivializing the disruptive source and message (e.g., frame the anti-smoking medical establishment, Congress, and the press as conspirators).

Given that for most smokers, "kicking the habit" is either difficult (because of addiction to nicotine<sup>10</sup>) or undesirable (because cigar smoking has symbolic value, e.g., wealth, success, and power), changing behavior (path 1) to reduce dissonance is an unlikely option. It is also difficult for the average cigar smoker to ignore or rebuke the scientific findings on the negative consequences of smoking (path 2 and 3). Therefore, the derogation of anti-smoking information (path 4) is the most probable and effective means of reducing smoking dissonance. This is exactly what *Cigar Aficionado's* conspiracy theory does for its loyal cigar-smoking patrons.

The idea that people will derogate the motives or character of the source of dissonance-producing information as a route to reduce cognitive dissonance has been successfully tested. For example, when study participants are confronted with factual information that is inconsistent with their political beliefs, they will derogate the source of the information, rather than change political affiliations or to give credence to the information. Even when forced to write counterattitudinal political essays, participants migrate people who hold the beliefs about which they have written, rather than alter their own beliefs (Cooper & Mackie, 1983). In the case of *Cigar Aficionado's* 10-year conspiracy campaign, Shanken and his staff of writers questioned the motives, methods, and morals of anyone who dared frame cigar smoking as an at-risk activity. With the ethos of these critics jeopardized, *Cigar Aficionado's* patrons are freed to dismiss the validity of their anti-smoking assertions, and, consequently, relieve their dissonance.

Smokers can also trivialize the source of their dissonance by thinking about other, more important values, whether they are aspects of the self or about more abstractly held personal values (Simon, Greenberg, & Brehm, 1995). J. Cooper (1999) elaborates on this unusual strategy:

The person who smokes despite his or her knowledge of the dangers of smoking experiences an attack on his or her self-integrity. The smokers' dilemma can be resolved by recalling or focusing on other aspects of the self that are highly regarded. "I may smoke," this person may reason, "but I am the heck of a parent, athlete, and lover!" By calling upon other valued aspects of the self, the smoker can reduce dissonance without having to change anything about his or her behavior. (p. 5)

*Cigar Aficionado* trivializes its patrons' dissonance by calling their attention to more important global values, especially patriotism. Readers are told that their "freedom" to smoke cigars is guaranteed by the Constitution; further, it is implied that in the act of smoking, they become political activists who are fighting to preserve the freedoms of Americans. "[M]aking important issues salient," therefore, "shifts people from reducing dissonance via attitude [or behavior] change . . . to reducing dissonance via trivialization" (Simon, Greenberg, & Brehm, 1995, p. 256). After all, what is a little harmless cigar smoke when the consequential issues of freedom and liberty are in jeopardy.

Festinger (1957) found this type of "unconscious ingenuity" in the effort to reduce cognitive dissonance fascinating (p. 135). He was particularly interested in determining how to dissuade individuals from trivializing their at-risk behavior. Because individuals do their best to avoid dissonance-producing information under most circumstances, even to the extent that they create social environments that support their attitudes and behaviors, reaching smokers with prevention messages is a serious challenge. Festinger (1957) recommended presenting dissonance-producing information (such as anti-smoking messages) in contexts where people actually expect to receive messages in support of their current behavior. We are highly skeptical, however, that Marvin Shanken will be receptive to the placement of anti-smoking PSAs within the pages of *Cigar Aficionado*.

## DISCUSSION

Marvin Shanken's probable unwillingness to participate in any campaigns aimed at refuting his conspiratorial assertions is not the only barrier faced by prevention agencies. There are also at least three other significant barriers facing prevention researchers. First, conspiracy logic, by the nature of its structure and content, is more complete and impenetrable than other narrative forms. It is created, Hofstadter (1965) argues, by starting with "defensible assumptions and the careful accumulation of facts, or at least of what appear to be facts" (p. 36). Next, these "assumptions" and "facts," along with an ample helping of unsubstantiated assertions, half truths, and paranoid delusions, are pieced together, forming a complex, but coherent, conspiracy in which all actors, actions, and motives fit together in near perfect symmetry, forming what Young, Launer, & Austin (1990) have called a "self-sealing" argument. No questions left unanswered, no logical sequences severed, and no plot unclear. In short, *Cigar Aficionado's* story provides a worldview that is "complete, capable of answering—by subsuming—all uncomfortable questions." (p. 106). In fact, Hofstadter argues, "the paranoid mentality is far more coherent than the real world, since it leaves no room for mistakes, failures, or ambiguities." "It is nothing," he concludes, "if not coherent" (1965 p. 36). Consequently, prevention researchers will be hard pressed to propose an alternative reality for readers that has as much narrative coherence and internal logic as does *Cigar Aficionado's* comprehensive conspiracy.

Second, we argue that *Cigar Aficionado's* readers will be an unusually difficult audience to dissuade, due to both social and cognitive influences. *Socially*, these individuals are products of a culture with a propensity for distrusting the powerful and believing in conspiracies. As Hofstadter (1965), Young, Launer, & Austin (1990), and Goodnight & Poulakos (1981) have all argued, Americans are taught to be suspicious of elites and their penchant to conspire, exploit, manipulate, and deceive. *Cognitively*, *Cigar Aficionado's* readers have a vested interest in believing that an anti-smoking conspiracy exists. As long as they are able to view the health industry (and their partners in deceit) as insincere and corrupt, they will be able to discount all anti-smoking assertions and continue their at-risk behavior with little or no dissonance. Taken together, Shanken's patrons become exceptionally resilient to persuasive attempts that assure them that powerful agencies, politicians, and the media would never conspire to deceive them about their politically unpopular hobby.

Finally, built into the conspiracy genre is a self-protecting mechanism that thwarts traditional approaches to argumentation, e.g., the use of respected sources and credible evidence. Typically, the more credible the *source* of a message is, the greater likelihood

persuasion. However, as Goodnight and Poulakos have written, "since the drama of conspiracy largely unfolds in successively greater betrayals, apparent credibility ultimately serves only as a cloak of respectability deceiving the uninitiated" (1981, p. 306). weaker ethos, therefore, simply serve as evidence to how vast and influential the conspiracy really is. Similarly, the quantity and quality of *evidence* also plays a significant role in traditional persuasive processes. Within the conspiracy narrative, however, large amounts of "more widely accepted evidence becomes a sign of the conspirators' power" (Goodnight & Poulakos 1981, p. 307). It is ultimately dismissed as some sort of red herring consciously designed by the conspirators to confuse the wary and the gullible" (Young, Launer, & Austin, 1990, p. 103). As a result, conventional persuasive strategies, far from disproving the existence of a conspiracy, would boomerang, actually supplying the paranoid with even more evidence of a conspiracy.

### CONCLUSION

It has been this paper's charge to uncover *Cigar Aficionado's* conspiracy theory and the role it has played in rebuking anti-smoking health claims. Specifically, from its first issue in 1992 through its first issue in 2001, *Cigar Aficionado* crafted a progressive conspiracy that highlighted the antagonists' identity, actions, motives, and effects. In doing so, the magazine not only cast doubt on the legitimacy of the health community's researchers and findings but also aided in the reduction of cognitive dissonance for their at-risk patrons. Consequently, readers are enabled to light up with less anxiety over the act of smoking and have a reduced compulsion to abstain from tobacco use. In the rhetorically constructed world found in the pages of *Cigar Aficionado*, the true danger faced by cigar smokers is not tobacco, but a ubiquitous conspiracy targeting the recreational use of cigars and the truth about its benign effects.

When our findings are considered alongside the previous research on the construction and use of pro-smoking messages by DeSantis (2002) and DeSantis & Morgan (2003), a richer understanding of messages generated for, and by, smokers to reduce dissonance develops. In the case of DeSantis' ethnographic study, we see how men at local cigar shop collectively construct joint rationalizations in the form of pro-smoking counter arguments that frame cigar smoking as a harmless, if not beneficial, hobby (2002). In DeSantis & Morgan's work, we are shown that the same six pro-smoking arguments that were generated by the cigar-shop patrons were also applied to readers of *Cigar Aficionado* (2003). With the inclusion of this work, previous researchers have at least a starting point for understanding the content of most of the counter-attitudinal assertions from the cigar community. Specifically, these works have identified recurring messages that frame 1) the medical establishment as a corrupt institution that is more interested in money and power than truth; 2) politicians as part of a larger conspiracy aimed at usurping civil liberties; 3) cigar smoking as both psychologically and physiologically beneficial; 4) life's other dangers, e.g., eating fatty foods, walking across the street, driving in a car, as more dangerous to one's health than cigar smoking; 5) cigars as safe alternatives to cigarettes; and 6) smoking in moderation as an acceptable alternative to smoking abstinence. When these recurring counterarguments are considered in concert, a highly complex fabric emerges that serves as a protective shield for cigar smokers from most dissonance-causing messages, whether they are delivered by friends, family, or public service announcements.

While *Cigar Aficionado* professes to simply celebrate the "good life," we have demonstrated that it serves a more insidious function. Subsequently, we are compelled

to address two concluding issues. First, after reviewing the laws restricting the promotion and sales of tobacco products and the content of *Cigar Aficionado*, we are struck by how successful Shanken has been at masquerading his periodical as nothing more than a benign "lifestyle" magazine. From our perspective, any periodical that publishes hundreds of advertisements for tobacco companies; glamorizes the act of cigar smoking by associating it with famous people, beautiful places, and elite activities; and consistently produces pro-smoking messages aimed at thwarting health efforts is, in fact, a magazine that encourages the "dangerous life." While we do not advocate more censorship of the press, we do suggest that the restrictions that are already in place to prevent the glamorization and promotion of tobacco products be more earnestly enforced.

Second, we believe that as long as the health community continues to ignore *Cigar Aficionado's* role in supplying cigar smokers with anti-smoking rebuttals, any attempt at creating cigar prevention messages will fail. Throughout the 10 years of the magazine's existence, Shanken and his magazine have spent considerable time and space constructing complex pro-smoking conspiracy messages that directly respond to the shifting medical and political climate of the last decade. For instance, when the Surgeon General, the NCI, the ACS, and the EPA each released reports to the public, *Cigar Aficionado* quickly responded by highlighting the conspiratorial forces at work on the projects and the ways these cells distorted "reality" for their own political, moral, or financial ends. In contrast, no health agency has ever responded to any of the conspiratorial claims made by *Cigar Aficionado* (even though a single issue of the magazine, with its circulation of more than 400,000, is read by more Americans than all of the aforementioned reports, combined). Furthermore, unlike tobacco studies, whose findings are written to objectively report their conclusions to other researchers, *Cigar Aficionado's* counterattacks are written to persuasively alter the beliefs of cigar smokers. Thus, while the medical establishment is supplying *information* to non-smokers, *Cigar Aficionado* is supplying *misinformation* to smokers. We are forced to pessimistically conclude, therefore, that until prevention agencies begin to 1) take *Cigar Aficionado* more seriously, 2) view the magazine as a diligent pro-smoking force, and 3) become more strategic and dynamic in their message construction, cigar smokers will continue to light up, dissonance free.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>While cigar consumption has decreased slightly since 1998, the number of cigar smokers is still significantly higher than the pre-1964 figure. Within the industry, however, many report that this decrease in smoking primarily comes from the infrequent experimental user, not from the regular cigar smoker. Thus, the number of the "cigar curious" may have decreased, but the true at-risk cigar smoker has not abandoned his or her "hobby."

<sup>2</sup>In recent years, the fastest growing segment of the cigar market has been the premium cigar category (loosely defined, these are cigars that cost more than \$3.00 a piece, are hand rolled, are imported, and cannot be purchased at your local gas station), where sales have increased by 154% since 1993. Prior to the 1990s, this segment of cigars was responsible for less than 7% of all the cigars sold in America (NCI, 1998, p. 52).

<sup>3</sup>In one ad, for instance, two young people walk into a tobacco company's corporate headquarters and ask their marketing executives to take a lie detector test to help them "tell the truth" about the tobacco industry's hidden plot. The two young crusaders are quickly escorted out of the building by security guards. The ad ends with the campaign's logo, "Truth." Augmenting the thousands of TV spots that will be aired over the next five years is an Internet site, community-based activities, and other anti-smoking programs designed to tell the conspiratorial truth about the tobacco industry. At [www.thetruth.com](http://www.thetruth.com), for example, the campaign's web site "contrasts the industry's past statements about the health effects of smoking with what the site operators say the industry knew" (*Chicago Sun-Times*, February 13, 2000).

<sup>4</sup>The following is a more detailed account of the most significant conclusions to emerge from both reports: 1) The risks of cancer to the oral cavity and esophagus are similar among cigarette and cigar smokers. . . . Regular cigar smoking has also been linked to lung, larynx, and probably cancer of the pancreas (NCI, 1998, p. 155). 2)

On average, cigar smokers are less likely to inhale cigar smoke than are cigarette smokers to inhale cigarette smoke, and this reduced inhalation of tobacco smoke probably explains the lower risks of coronary heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and lung cancer seen among cigar smokers compared to cigarette smokers (NCI, 1998, p. 155; Baker, et al. 2000, p. 735). 3) There is substantial variability in the pH of the tobacco smoke produced by cigars, but most cigars produce smoke that is more alkaline than cigarette smoke. This alkaline pH facilitates nicotine absorption across the oral mucosa and may explain why cigar smokers are less likely to inhale than cigarette smokers (NCI, 1998, p. 191). 4) Cigar smoke contains the same toxic and carcinogenic compounds identified in cigarette smoke (NCI, 1998, p. 97, Baker, et al. 2000, p. 735). 5) Measurements of the CO concentrations at a cigar party in a hall and at a cigar banquet in a restaurant showed carbon monoxide levels comparable to those observed on a crowded California freeway (NCI, 1998, p. 177). 6) Smoking cigars instead of cigarettes does not reduce risk of nicotine addiction (Baker, et al. 2000, p. 735). 7) Compared with a single cigarette (0.55g) smoked to 70% of its mass, a large cigar smoked 70% emits about 20 times the carbon monoxide, 5 times the respirable particles, and twice as much of polycyclic aromatic (Baker, et al. 2000, p. 735).

<sup>5</sup>The number of retail specialty tobacco outlets has increased from 2,358 in 1992 to 4,948 in 1996 (NCI, 1998, p. 197).

<sup>6</sup>Interestingly, *Cigar Aficionado* rarely specified individual conspirators. Those that were singled out, however, included John 'Sue the Bastards' Bانشaf (Winter 1993, p. 77) and Michael Pertschuk from Action on Smoking and Health (Autumn 1994, p. 13), actor Rob Reiner (August 2000, p. 218), the FDA's David Kessler (Autumn 1994, p. 13), Congressman Henry Waxman (Autumn 1994, p. 13), and Congressman Richard Durbin (January 1999, p. 21).

<sup>7</sup>Durbin, however, was not the only conspirator named. In the autumn of 1994, Shanken identified other "key players" in America's anti-smoking conspiracy, including "David Kessler at the Food and Drug Administration and Michael Pertschuk at Action on Smoking and Health." It was David Waxman, Congressman from California, however, that was branded as the "worst offender" of civil liberties. Waxman, according to Shanken, is "willing to ignore the science or selectively use poor science that supports his ideological agenda to severely limit personal freedom" (p. 13).

<sup>8</sup>In November of 1998, readers were again reminded of how the EPA authors "approached the study with a predetermined result in mind, and that they manipulated the research and analysis to arrive at the conclusion" (November 1998, p. 27). Similarly, in an article entitled, "Underhand About Secondhand, writer, Jason Sheftell accusations of the EPA of "cherry-picking" results, "excluding those studies that were unfavorable to its premise," altering data from chapter to chapter, and shifting statistical confidence" (November 1998, p. 100).

<sup>9</sup>*Cigar Aficionado* also discussed other nebulous motivations for the conspiracy. In the winters of both 1993 and 1995, for example, readers were simply told that it was the pressure of "political correctness" that forced politicians and researchers into acquiescing to the anti-smoking fascists (p. 22 & p. 24). In May of 1997, readers heard how anti-smoking "feminists" involved with policy making in Washington (no specific names or organizations were given) transferred their hatred of men to the cigar—the icon of masculinity. Banning smoking for them, we are told, is a way in which women clandestinely punish men while still appearing concerned for the public's health (p. 144).

<sup>10</sup>See Baker, et al. (2000) for a review on the medical literature on the absorption of nicotine by cigar smokers.

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