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社会热点系列
Need to Know Series

吸烟

Tobacco

Sean Connolly

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Introduction

The public spends a great deal of time, money and energy in its fight against the spread of illegal drugs such as **heroin** and **cocaine**. This is no bad thing, since these drugs – and others like them – cause misery, increased crime and sometimes death. But in this ‘war on drugs’ it is too easy to overlook some perfectly legal drugs that cause as much damage or more. Alcohol is one: tobacco is another.

Misplaced glamour

People have been fascinated by tobacco since it was first brought back to Europe by explorers some five hundred years ago. Even then it was clear that this substance had the power to keep people using it, no matter what the consequences. There were also those who criticized tobacco fiercely, recognizing some of the more obvious health risks associated with it.

Even today many people are **captivated** by the smoke of this plant and smoking is portrayed as glamorous and sexy. People who get caught in its spell find it hard to explain what it is that keeps them smoking – it relaxes some people, it fires others up, still others need it to deal with stress. What these people are experiencing, however, are textbook examples of dependence on a drug. The drug in this case is **nicotine**.

A photograph of a young woman with dark hair, wearing a dark jacket over a patterned top, holding a lit cigarette. She is looking down at the cigarette. In the background, there is a large, colorful mural or poster. One part of the poster has the text "BIGGEST LIAR COL 5 FISH 4 TALES". Another part shows a person's face. The scene is dimly lit, with some light reflecting off the woman's face and the cigarette.

Powerful killer

Well before the **addictive** powers of nicotine were proved medically, a powerful tobacco industry had emerged. By the twentieth century tobacco companies were some of the most powerful and profitable businesses in the world. They realized that once people were hooked, they were customers for life.

Unfortunately, that realization is all too true: the tobacco habit dogs many smokers for life and leads them into an early grave. Millions of people around the world die prematurely each year as a result of smoking. The number rises each year and despite public awareness about the risks, the trend looks set to continue.

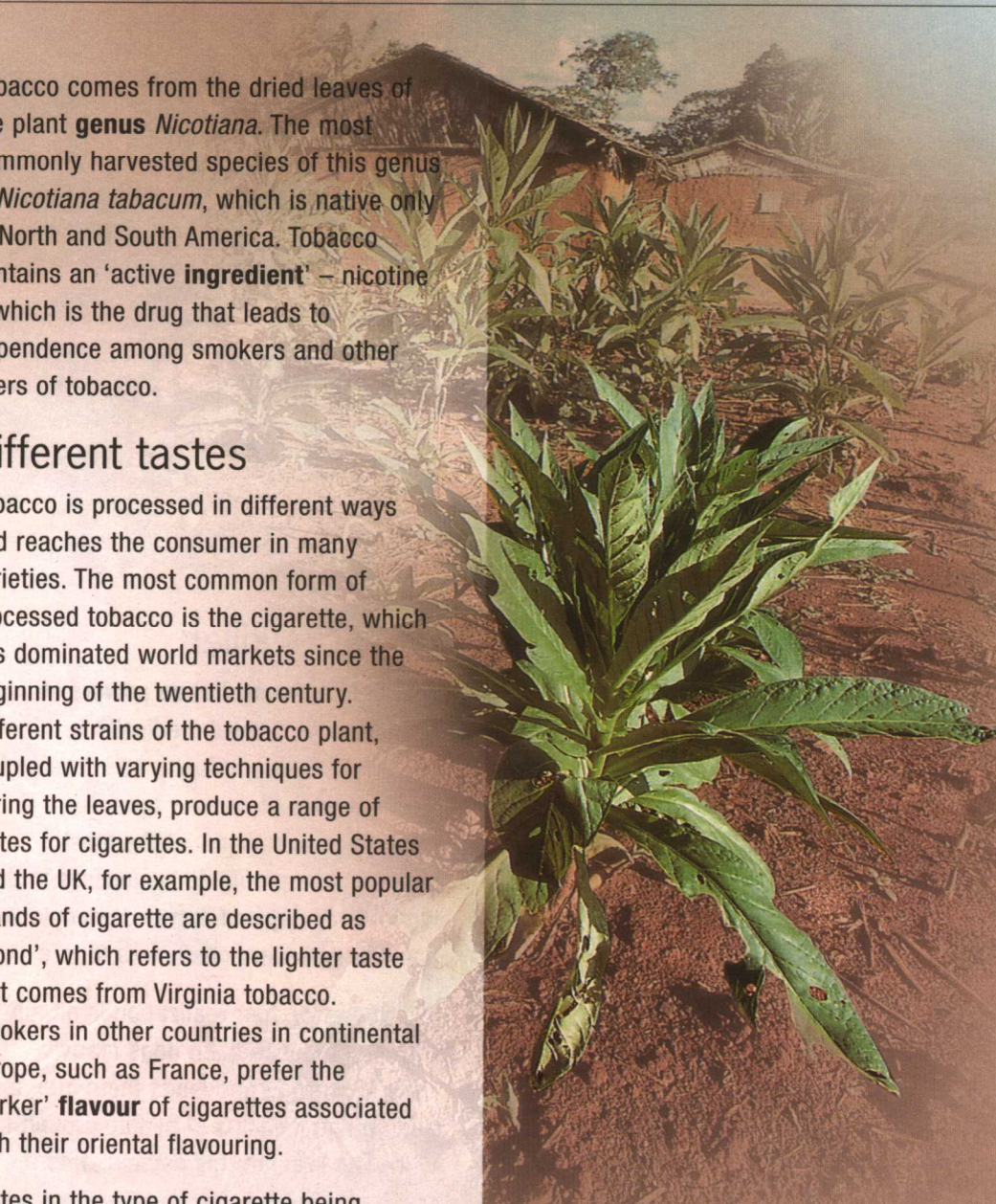
What is tobacco?

Tobacco comes from the dried leaves of the plant **genus** *Nicotiana*. The most commonly harvested species of this genus is *Nicotiana tabacum*, which is native only to North and South America. Tobacco contains an 'active **ingredient**' – nicotine – which is the drug that leads to dependence among smokers and other users of tobacco.

Different tastes

Tobacco is processed in different ways and reaches the consumer in many varieties. The most common form of processed tobacco is the cigarette, which has dominated world markets since the beginning of the twentieth century. Different strains of the tobacco plant, coupled with varying techniques for curing the leaves, produce a range of tastes for cigarettes. In the United States and the UK, for example, the most popular brands of cigarette are described as 'blond', which refers to the lighter taste that comes from Virginia tobacco. Smokers in other countries in continental Europe, such as France, prefer the 'darker' **flavour** of cigarettes associated with their oriental flavouring.

Tastes in the type of cigarette being smoked reflect changing fashions as much as different cultural influences.



Tobacco farming is an important economic activity in many US States.

In the United States and the UK, most cigarettes have filter tips, with the filters being made up largely of stems and sweepings that are otherwise discarded in the manufacturing process. As recently as twenty years ago, though, many American and British smokers bought large quantities of unfiltered cigarettes or loose tobacco, which they would then roll up themselves.

Underlying mystery

Most of the effect of smoking is due to the active ingredient, nicotine. What the smokers get from the nicotine remains unclear, however. People who smoke regularly do so for many different reasons, the most obvious being that they are compelled by a dependence on the nicotine, in the same way that a heavy drinker is dependent on alcohol. The many psychological reactions that smokers **ascribe** to the habit, however, suggest a range of other reasons, perhaps partly linked to this sense of dependence.

Strictly speaking, nicotine is a mild **stimulant**, and its effects would normally be expected to provide a boost in the form of extra energy and alertness. Smokers, however, note a range of other reactions to the drug. Some people would say that smoking calms them down in tense situations. Others find that the activity is stimulating and makes them feel more creative. Yet others simply feel that smoking takes their minds off other problems



What is tobacco?

About 40 years ago, psychologists tried to **unravel** the complex and contradictory mystery about the attraction of smoking. They concluded that smoking provided a type of oral **gratification**. Simply holding the cigarette in the mouth provided comfort. More recently, theories about why people smoke have become more complicated and many scientists believe that there is a **genetic** reason for people smoking.

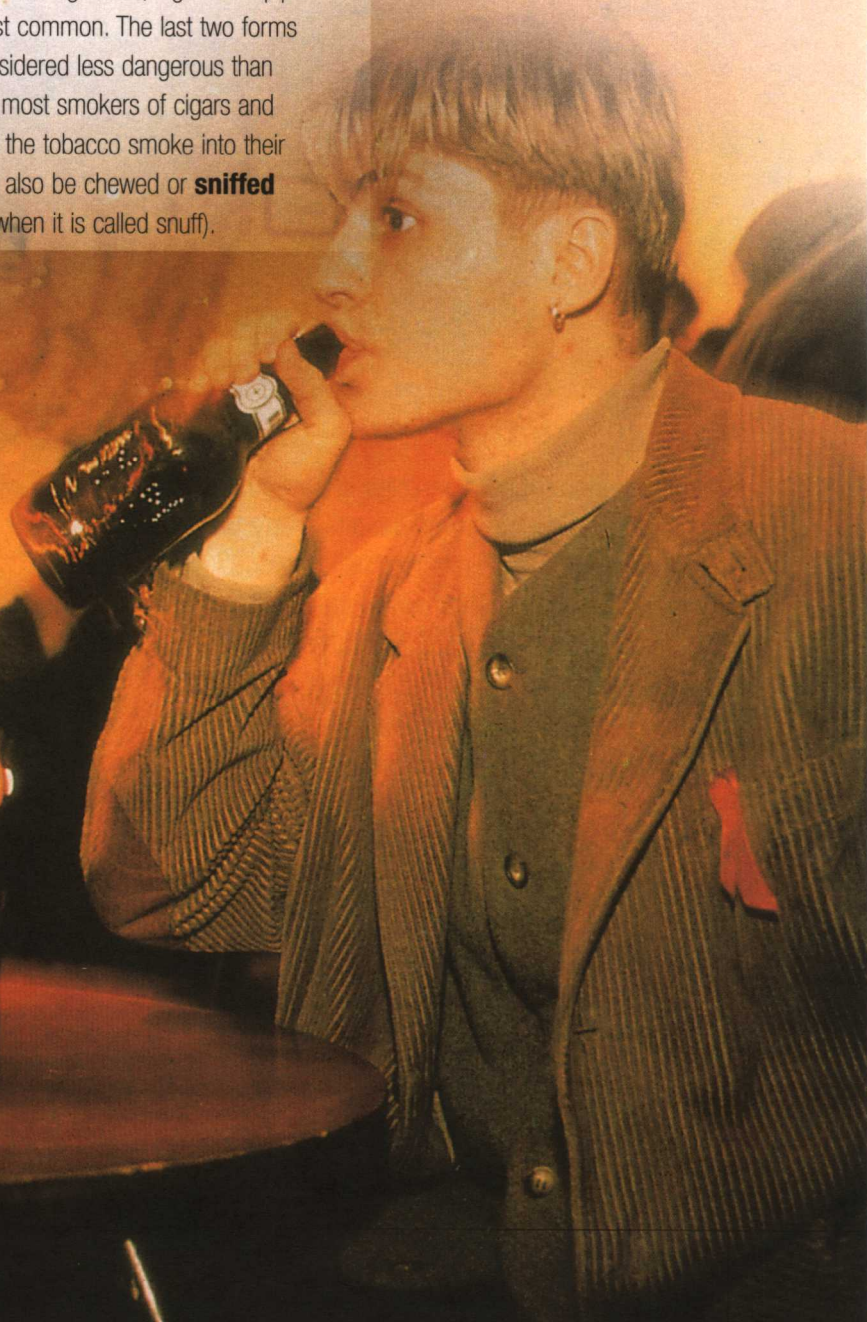
A dangerous habit

There is widespread medical agreement about how dangerous smoking is. The health risks, which are discussed in more detail later in this book, range from heart disease to a wide variety of **respiratory** illnesses such as **emphysema**. Smoking can also lead to a number of cancers, most commonly lung cancer. In addition to triggering these fatal diseases, smoking hastens the ageing process: many smokers develop lined faces long before non-smokers of the same age. Even those who do not smoke themselves can be at risk from the smoke exhaled by those around them. Inhaling smoke in this way is called passive smoking.




A choice of poisons

People can take tobacco in many forms. Smoking, in the form of cigarettes, cigars and pipe tobacco, is the most common. The last two forms are sometimes considered less dangerous than cigarettes because most smokers of cigars and pipes do not inhale the tobacco smoke into their lungs. Tobacco can also be chewed or **sniffed** into the **nostrils** (when it is called snuff).



Part of society

A photograph of a sailboat, the 'SILK CUT', sailing on the ocean. The sail is dark with yellow and white stripes and the words 'SILK CUT' in yellow. The hull is white with 'SILK CUT' in yellow and red. Several people are on the deck. The boat is moving through the water, leaving a wake.

Smoking in general, and cigarettes in particular, are common in most countries despite many laws designed to control their sale and use. Most governments insist on health warnings being printed conspicuously on each cigarette packet as well as appearing prominently on all advertising. Although cigarette advertising is banned on television in many countries, messages about tobacco products still get through. They appear in magazines and – more significantly – as **sponsorship** in various sports.

Early exposure

Children become aware of cigarettes at an early age. One 1996 study in Britain showed that three out of four children are aware of cigarettes before they reach the age of five, whether or not their parents smoke.

By the age of eleven, one-third of children had experimented with smoking; the figure rises to two-thirds of all sixteen-year-olds.

Despite the restrictions on tobacco advertising and widespread health campaigns about the dangers of smoking, children regularly take up smoking. Some experts suggest that young people may believe that the health warnings do not apply to them – only to older people.

American studies indicate that the problem of young people smoking is not just serious, but getting worse. In 1991, about 14 per cent of thirteen-year-olds, 20 per cent of fifteen-year-olds and 28 per cent of seventeen-year-olds had smoked within the past month. By 1995 the figures had risen to 19 per cent, 27 per cent and 34 per cent respectively.

Put that in your pipe...

Young people – boys in particular – are especially influenced by sports-related advertising. Formula One motor racing, which has long links with the tobacco industry, is a good example. A 1997 report in the British medical journal *The Lancet* found evidence that boys whose favourite sport was motor racing were twice as likely to become regular smokers as boys who had no interest in the sport.

Some countries, such as the UK, have introduced measures to ban tobacco advertising in sports such as Formula One motor racing.



Is smoking addictive?

The quick answer is 'yes'. In any discussion of addiction, however, medical researchers prefer to use the word dependence to describe the compulsion to use a substance, usually a drug. Dependence, in turn, is usually divided into two categories: physical and psychological. A drug is said to cause physical dependence if the user continually needs to increase the dose to maintain the effects of the drug – a pattern called tolerance – and then suffers **withdrawal symptoms** when it is stopped. Alcohol and heroin are good examples of drugs that cause physical dependence. Tobacco, through its active ingredient nicotine, fits this description. Studies have shown that people rapidly build up a tolerance to the effects of nicotine. First-time smokers experience a range of unpleasant effects, such as dizziness and **nausea**, but these lessen as the person continues to smoke. Sometimes, the unpleasant effects have disappeared within a few days.

Nicotine is a stimulant. Noting this fact, medical researchers gave a group of smokers equal doses of nicotine one hour apart. The heart rates of the group increased each time – one signal of a stimulant at work – but it happened much more after the first dose than after the second. Tolerance was demonstrated even in the short term.

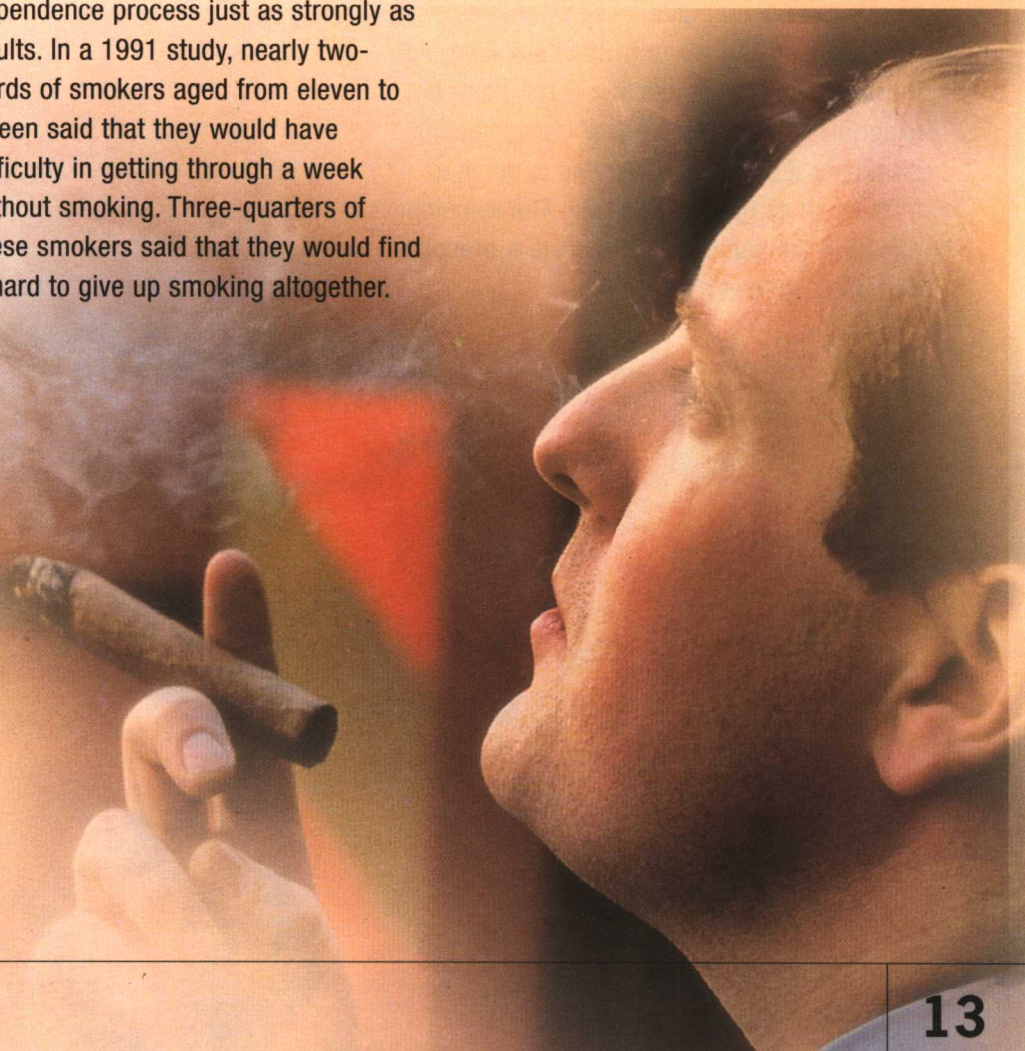
Send for reinforcements

Smoking, or nicotine intake, also scores highly on the psychological dependence scale. The dependence builds alongside the production of certain chemicals in the brain. Nicotine triggers the release of **dopamine**, a chemical in the brain that is associated with feelings of pleasure. Nevertheless, recent research has shown that in the long term nicotine actually **suppresses** the ability of the brain to experience pleasure. Because of this, smokers need greater amounts of nicotine to achieve the same level of pleasure.

Psychologists use the term reinforcer to describe something that drives an individual to seek more. Nicotine acts as a reinforcer in the way it motivates people to smoke more. The same effect is noticeable in laboratory rats, which will press a bar in order to obtain a supply of nicotine.

Young people can be affected by the dependence process just as strongly as adults. In a 1991 study, nearly two-thirds of smokers aged from eleven to fifteen said that they would have difficulty in getting through a week without smoking. Three-quarters of these smokers said that they would find it hard to give up smoking altogether.

Often seen as less harmful than cigarette smoking, regular cigar smoking can also lead to serious illnesses.



Is smoking addictive?

Coming off

Withdrawal symptoms play a large part in keeping people hooked on a drug. Nicotine withdrawal is unpleasant and many would-be quitters fall at this first hurdle. Symptoms include an intense craving for cigarettes (the craving is actually for nicotine), **irritability**, anxiety, poor concentration, restlessness, decreased heart rate and weight gain. Some people have argued that these symptoms really relate to stopping the activity of smoking, not the withdrawal from nicotine itself. However, experiments have shown that the symptoms disappear if people get nicotine in another form (such as gum or patches). The symptoms remain if the same people receive a **placebo** that does not contain nicotine.

“I want to hurt something.”

(Anonymous smoker experiencing nicotine withdrawal, quoted in *Buzzed*)



“Over the past decade there has been increasing recognition that underlying smoking behaviour and its remarkable intractability to change is addiction to the drug nicotine. Nicotine has been shown to have effects on the brain’s dopamine systems similar to those of heroin and cocaine.”

(The UK Government’s Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health, 1998)

Nicotine patches worn on the skin help some smokers to kick the tobacco habit.



Life with smoking

By the time most people have become regular smokers, the reasons that drove them to start – thinking it is sexy or cool, or perhaps a way of losing weight – are largely forgotten. Other more negative factors begin to emerge in the short term. These include the depressing realization that the smoking habit is expensive, the awareness that smoking can affect the way they look and the decreased resistance to certain illnesses. Over the longer term, smokers need to face the prospect of more serious, possibly life-threatening diseases linked with smoking. It is at that stage that the 'way of life' can become a 'way of death'.

All in appearance

Tobacco can affect a person's appearance by altering the skin, the body shape and weight. These changes are not in themselves life-threatening but they can, nevertheless, increase the risk of more serious **ailments**. What is more, they have a noticeable ageing effect on the body.

