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Women and cigarettes, the causes for consumption

08.02.2008
A study carried out at the Department of Anthropology of the University of Granada has examined, both at a quantitative and a qualitative level, the reasons for the increase in the use of cigarettes among women experienced in Spanish society during the last 50 years.

One of the main conclusions of this study is that the use of cigarettes has become very important for women in order to face up to stress and anxiety, control appetite and body weight, and facilitate interaction in social relations.

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the use of cigarettes has attained new and specific meanings in women’s daily life. Therefore, smoking has a series of relative advantages for women, organized into several dimensions: emotional, corporal, social, symbolic and as an expression of power and strength.

A normal act
Both surveys and indicators show how the number of women smokers is increasingly high. However, “a qualitative dimension has been observed in this phenomenon, so that the adoption of the use of cigarettes among women can not be properly understood without it”, according to the author of this research. During the last 50 years the symbolic and cultural elements that shape the social depiction of the practice of smoking and the image of women smokers have changed. Jiménez Rodrigo states that the use of cigarettes is no longer considered to be a privilege enjoyed by men, and condemned by society when a woman did so, but now it is a normal and acceptable act, and fits in well with the common conception of femininity.

Jiménez Rodrigo explains that women started to use tobacco with a specific product - the industrially produced cigarette made from Virginia tobacco. Unlike pipes, cigars and dark tobacco, this product is believed to be compatible with femininity at pharmacological and social levels. Tobacco companies have played a decisive role in this process.

Compatible with the requirements of femininity
“Smoking has become compatible with the social demands imposed upon women. Cigarettes are used by women in order to relax, to avoid gaining weight, and to appear attractive, mature and feminine. It even helps them to pick up men”, emphasizes the author.

In spite of this, stress and anxiety are strongly linked to the use of cigarettes among women. They have to face potentially stressful situations every day as a result of working days with no breaks, family and work role conflicts, unstable and discriminatory situations, or violence and social isolation. Jiménez Rodrigo states that “on a whole, smoking is one of their safety valves to face up to stress. In addition, it is considered to act as a unique relaxant because of its effects, its availability and its accessibility”.

Apart from this, smoking in order to achieve weight control has become increasingly popular among women, particularly among young women. The use of cigarettes to regulate appetite is related to the promotion of thinness as the ideal female form in Western industrialised nations. Jiménez Rodrigo stresses that the

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present in both their daily lives and other different contexts in which they are participating en masse, particularly education, work and leisure. Moreover, it plays an important social role as it facilitates social relations by increasing their self-confidence and the number of chances to establish social relations and to integrate into a certain group.

Another significant reason has to do with sexual attraction and seduction, although these reasons are more important during adolescence and youth. Smoking is an easy way of coming into contact with men and showing them an attractive "image". Therefore, cigarettes are used as means of drawing male attention to female sexuality, which fits in with the cultural parameters that emphasize the value of love and sexual achievement as the main elements of female success.

Some of the results of this research were presented at the Ninth Spanish Conference on Sociology and have been published in the Liberaddictus journal.

Antonio Marín Ruiz | Quelle: alphagalileo

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