

Silver Smoke Screen

Recent media scholarship has dissected everything from movie stars' lighting up to sexual come-ons in ads. Here, we translate the most relevant findings.

Reality Bites Back

As movie stars light up on screen, their biggest fans—theater-sustaining teens—pay close attention. Nonsmoking ninth-graders who saw a version of the 1994 hit *Reality Bites* with the smoking edited out were less likely to admire smokers and to express an intent to smoke than were those who saw the original, smoky version. Researchers Cornelia Pechmann and Chuan-Fong Shih of the University of California, Irvine, attribute their findings to the "Forbidden Fruit" thesis: that cigarettes' taboo status makes on-screen smoking alluring to teens. By contrast, an ad that deglamorized smoking—by focusing on premature aging—decreased the teens' cravings for cigarettes.

—*Journal of Marketing*, July 1999, page 1

Monicaholics Anonymous

We're all well acquainted with newscast standbys such as "Sources say..." and "We have learned..."; this study reminds us just how well. The paper's author, Steven Esposito of Capital University, in Columbus, Ohio, tallied how often CBS, NBC, and ABC evening news broadcasts, along with CNN's *WorldView* show, relied on anonymous sources during their coverage of the Lewinsky scandal. More than 70 percent of Monica stories included at least one unnamed source, and a whopping 45 percent of all sources cited were anonymous. The study also found that unattributed comments originating from the Clinton administration outnumbered those from Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's office 5 to 1.

—*Communications and the Law*,
September 1999, page 1

Popularity Contest

We might not realize it, but Sam Donaldson and his colleagues do help us decide which candidate to back, according to this study of the 1992 and 1996 presidential campaigns. For both elections, coders assigned TV and newspaper stories about campaign events a rating between 0 and 100 based on their favorability to a candidate. The study's author, Daron Shaw of

the University of Texas at Austin, compared this coverage with poll results—and found strong evidence that television and, to a lesser extent, newspapers influence candidate popularity. For the GOP candidate, favorable coverage of Republican events boosted his poll numbers, while positive press for Democratic events reduced his popularity. On average, Shaw found that a 5-point increase in TV coverage favorability (on the 100-point scale) produced a 2.5 percent jump in a candidate's polls.

—*Political Communication*,
April-June 1999, page 183

In 2043, They'll All Be Naked

Sex has always sold, of course, but never this much: Professor Tom Reichert of the University of North Texas and colleagues reported that 17 percent of magazine ads containing at least one man and one woman in 1993 depicted or implied intercourse, up from 1 percent ten years earlier. Cheesecake and beefcake were up, too: 40 percent of female models were classified by researchers as "provocatively" dressed, up from 28 percent in 1983. Some 18 percent of the men were in various states of undress, up from 11 percent.

—*Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, spring 1999, page 7



Hard And Soft Copy

The tabloidization of TV news hasn't yet erased the differences between *60 Minutes* and *Hard Copy*. Celebrities are almost eight times more likely to appear as sources on *Hard Copy* than on its more sober counterpart, according to this study by Indiana University professor Maria Elizabeth Grabe and colleagues. Don Hewitt and his venerable newsmagazine use more sources, air each source longer—an average of 52 seconds, more than three times as long as *Hard Copy*—and devote much more time to on-camera interviews. Then again, *60 Minutes* correspondents hogged the camera almost 15 times longer than *Hard Copy* reporters and were 46 times more likely to interrupt their interview subjects.

—*Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, summer 1999, page 293