

Queensland Health Promotion Quarterly

SKINS FOR SMOKES AND THE USE OF CULTURAL CONTENT AND IMAGERY

For just \$5.29 Australians can now purchase "Skins" from local, independent grocers to cover their cigarette packet with the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander flag. We argue that this use of cultural content and copyright¹ imagery on cigarette packets negates health promotion efforts, such as Australia's recent introduction of plain packaging laws and the subsequent dismissal of a legal challenge from the tobacco industry.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people smoke over twice the rate of non-Indigenous Australians (ABS 2010). Health promotion practitioners working to reduce these smoking rates face the challenge of the broader historical and cultural context of smoking behaviour. In response, health promotion efforts have endeavoured to shift, displace and resist the notion that unhealthy behaviours, such as smoking, are inherently part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Some examples of this approach include Queensland Health's Smoke-free Support Program (*Smoking: It could cost us our culture*), the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health's *Deadly Choices* campaign and other initiatives beyond Queensland (for example, Adams et al 2010; Basinski and Parkinson 2001).

Brady (2002) has noted how throughout colonial contact, Europeans have exploited Aboriginal addiction to nicotine and therefore as health practitioners, we are concerned about what may be the continued exploitation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for economic gain. We also note that Skins are available with the Australian flag and are concerned that more broadly, cultural and national pride is being manipulated by these companies. In other words, the sale of products that appropriate cultural content and copyright imagery for the purpose of enhancing the appeal of cigarettes is cause for alarm for us.

As a practice, health promotion endeavours to secure equal opportunity and resources to enable

people to achieve their full potential in life. Thus, we raise this issue for your awareness and welcome your analysis, comments and suggestions for action. We are also working on possible responses with advocacy organisations.

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1. We note that both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags are copyrighted materials and therefore must be reproduced in accordance the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 or with the permission of the artists, respectively Harold Thomas and the Island Coordinating Council.

Photo by Michelle Redman-MacLaren; Cairns.

