

Tobacco Consumption in the Home: Impact on Social Relationships and Marking Territory

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Abstract

In this paper we move beyond viewing the home as a mere context for consumer decision-making to explore consumption practices and socio-spatial relationships within the home in relation to tobacco consumption. Based on focus groups conducted across ten European countries, our findings suggest that smokers view the home as a safe haven where they are sheltered from the outside regulatory environment. However, tension between smokers and nonsmokers demonstrates that consumption practices within the home may become a process of negotiation, resulting in smokers marking territory in efforts to avoid conflict.

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The home represents the single most expensive purchase that a person is likely to make and as a research setting offers rich possibilities for exploring cultural symbolism and personal meaning (Claiborne and Ozanne 1990). The meaning of home has been a prominent theme within the disciplines of sociology, human geography, architecture, psychology, philosophy and anthropology. However, consumer research on the home is limited and has been studied mainly as a context for consumer decision-making (Bardhi 2006), neglecting the consumption practices that take place within and transform a dwelling unit into a home (Despres 1991). Rose (1999, 248) suggests that physical space needs to be seen as “practised, a matrix of play, dynamic and iterative, its forms and shapes produced through the citational performance of self-other relations”. Thus, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the home, research must focus on the consumption practices and interpersonal relationships that are played out within the home. In this paper, we explore these issues in the context of tobacco consumption.

Nearly one fifth of all deaths in the United States each year are attributed to tobacco, representing almost 440,000 US citizens with 4.8 million smoking related deaths annually worldwide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2002). It is therefore unsurprising to find that a significant portion (6-8%) of annual personal health expenditure in the US is directly related to treating tobacco related diseases, namely, lung cancer, heart disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (Warner 2000). Beyond the personal harm caused by tobacco, the Surgeon General’s report on secondhand smoke in 2006 states that “there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke” (CDC 2006). To address the dangers of secondhand tobacco smoke many states and countries have enacted comprehensive smoke-free laws in public places. Evaluations have shown support for such legislation and high levels of compliance (Fong

et al. 2006, Biener et al. 2007). Recent efforts in tobacco control have moved to restricting smoking in the home within multi-unit dwellings. California is the first state to implement such smoking bans in two cities (Semrad 2007). With continued pressures to legislate in this area it is important to understand the meaning and importance of the home in relation to tobacco consumption. As previous research has predominantly considered smoking in public places and evaluations of smoke-free laws (Fong et al. 2006, Biener et al. 2007), research exploring tobacco consumption in the home is limited. We therefore address this significant and important research gap. In particular, we examine the following research questions: (1) When and where is tobacco consumed in the home? (2) How does tobacco consumption in the home impact on social relations? (3) In what ways do smokers and non-smokers negotiate consumption of tobacco in the home? Answers to these three research questions will allow us to gain a better understanding of how power is regained by the smoker when the home is free from external legislative constraints, yet within the home such power is subject to negotiations and conferment with inevitable compromises in the attempt at harmony with significant others. Our contribution is twofold; first we offer theoretical contributions in relation to negotiated consumption and assigned consumption space in the home. Second, in light of the increasing acknowledgement of the dangers of secondhand smoke we offer public policy makers insight on issues pertaining to the home.

The Home

Meaning of the Home

The home has an increasingly central role in everyday life, with many layers of meaning and a rich social, cultural and historical significance (Moore 2000). Place attachment is a central

theme in relation to the home, used to explain the “positively experienced bonds, sometimes occurring without awareness, that are developed over time from the behavioural, affective, and cognitive ties between individuals and/or groups and their socio-physical environment” (Brown and Perkins 1992, 284). Such interactional processes between people and places contribute to identity definition (Kleine and Baker 2004) and in this way, home becomes an important extension of the self (Belk 1988). As Czikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981, 123) suggest “a home is much more than a shelter; it is a world in which a person can create a material environment that embodies what he or she considers significant. In this sense the home becomes the most powerful sign of the self of the inhabitant who dwells within”. The home as self-definition may involve territorial behavior in terms of the personalization of and communication that a place is “owned” by a person or group (Altman 1975). This may include the way in which consumers incorporate aesthetics into their everyday consumption experiences in the home (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008), emphasizing the link between place and possession attachment (Kleine and Baker 2004).

The significance and centrality of the home as having symbolic meaning has been highlighted by consumer researchers considering the loss of the home (Gross 2007, Hill 1991, Sayre 1994). For example, one of Gross’ (2007) informants at the beginning of the foreclosure process lamented “It’s like if you lost a child or something” while one of Sayre’s (1994) informants who lost her home as the result of fire suggested, “What’s missing is my territory, my space. I am still me, but many of the things that identify my purpose and creativity are not there. My territory had my markings, my routines, my responsibilities, my purpose clearly defined.” This issue of territory is further discussed in the following section.

Personal Space and Dominion within the Home

Claiborne and Ozanne (1990) found that consumers often have a need for personal space within the home, a special space which is their own over which they have dominion and control. Place attachment to the home is stronger when a person is able to regulate his or her privacy which in turn provides a basis for a sense of autonomy, self worth and self identity (Harris, Brown and Werner 1996). While the home is a confined space, the outside is perceived as imposing and demanding different rules of engagement with people, places and things (Mallet 2004). As such, home as privacy represents a freedom from surveillance; a back region where the need to maintain role performance is relaxed and where one can be oneself (Goffman 1971, Saunders and Williams 1988).

This also corresponds to the notion of the home as “safe haven,” a sacred space that has the potential to offer self-transcendence (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989). As McCracken (2005, 32) suggests, the homey space can be “embracing” in terms of a “descending pattern of enclosure” where the occupant is “protected from the outside world by an intricate series of baffles and mediants”. In this way, McCracken (2005) argues that the homey space has the same symbolic and psychological value as a parental embrace, offering protection from both real and imagined dangers. However, some critics argue that this perspective of the home as safe haven is an idealized notion that neglects to recognize the tensions surrounding the use of domestic space that are characteristic of the lived experience of home. Indeed, the home can be seen as a “major political battleground; feminists see it in terms of gender domination and liberals in terms of personal autonomy and a challenge to state power ” (Saunders and Williams 1988, 91).

Socio-spatial relations are central to the construction of home. Drawing on Giddens’ (1984) concept of the locale, Saunders and Williams (1988) suggest that the home is a crucial locale

where forms of social relations and social institutions are composed, accomplished and contextualized. Similarly, Valentine (1999, 57) argues that the negotiation of space requires that we position ourselves “physically, socially, morally, politically and metaphorically in relation to others”. Familial relations are particularly central with McCracken (2005, 38) suggesting that homeyness for many people becomes an “adhesive” that attaches them to family.

The concept of the home is important in the context of tobacco consumption for several reasons; firstly, with few exceptions, the home is an unregulated space and governments and the media have raised concerns about how smoke-free legislation in public places may increase consumption of tobacco in the home through displacement, which might be detrimental for other residents, particularly children. However such harmful displacement has yet to be evidenced (Biener et al. 2007). Secondly, anti-smoking adverts such as the European Union “HELP – for a life without tobacco” campaign have used the potential dangers of smoking in the home as a key campaign message. Further insight into this consumption space may benefit the development of future anti-smoking campaigns in the home context. Finally, given that smoking is an emotive issue generating strong opinions, potential for conflict amongst family or household members may be increased.

Methodology

Findings are based on thirty focus groups conducted across ten European Union member states (three focus groups in each country, see Table 1 for focus group composition). The ten countries were chosen on the basis of geographic spread across Europe, the amount of tobacco control legislation in each country as well as cultural variables and scores. In line with the need for compatible participants in focus groups (Morgan 1998), participants in each country were

allocated to focus groups based on their age (15-17, 18-25 and 26-35), smoking status (heavy smoker, light smoker and non-smoker), and social class (working class, middle class). Focus groups were mixed in terms of gender. The research is part of the 'HELP – for a life without tobacco' European Union anti-smoking campaign and as a result, the age range of participants was guided by the target age group of the campaign.

A leading market research agency (IPSOS) was employed to recruit respondents, co-ordinate data collection and ensure consistency in practices. The agency employs recruiters who live in each of the countries, resulting in access to information-rich respondents. Additionally, working with a professional recruitment firm lowered the no-show rate (Morgan 1998). Each focus group consisted of between 6 and 8 participants and lasted between 2 and 2 ½ hours. National representatives from the European Network for Smoking Prevention were also invited to attend the focus groups as observers to increase the likelihood of practical benefits arising from the research and advance the transformative consumer research agenda.

A topic guide was developed to ensure key research areas were covered whilst also encouraging free discussion and the expression of respondents' ideas in their own terms. The topic guide centered on three areas; general smoking awareness, attitudes and behavior; anti-smoking campaigns and the HELP campaign generally; and pre-testing of specific anti-smoking advertisements. In this paper we draw predominantly on discussions from the first topic area.

With respondent's consent, all focus groups were recorded and transcribed from the native language into English. Transcripts formed the basis of data analysis, which was carried out using the techniques proposed by Spiggle (1994). This involves categorizing data, completed in an inductive manner as categories emerged from the data rather than identified a priori to the research. Abstraction then grouped categories into more general conceptual classes and

comparison allowed the exploration of differences and similarities across incidents within the data and the identification of any patterns. We present our findings in relation to places of tobacco consumption and issues of (dis)empowerment, marking territory in the home and social relations in the home.

Table 1: Focus Group Composition

Region	Country	Tobacco Policy	Age (Years)	Smoking Status	Social Class
West	UK	High	15-17	Non	Working
West	UK	High	18-25	Heavy	Middle
West	UK	High	26-35	Non	Working
West	Sweden	High	15-17	Non	Middle
West	Sweden	High	18-25	Light	Working
West	Sweden	High	26-35	Non	Middle
South	Italy	High	15-17	Light	Working
South	Italy	High	18-25	Non	Middle
South	Italy	High	26-35	Heavy	Working
West	France	Medium	15-17	Non	Working
West	France	Medium	18-25	Non	Middle
West	France	Medium	26-35	Heavy	Working
East	Czech Republic	Medium	15-17	Heavy	Middle
East	Czech Republic	Medium	18-25	Light	Working
East	Czech Republic	Medium	26-35	Non	Middle
East	Hungary	Medium	15-17	Non	Working
East	Hungary	Medium	18-25	Non	Middle
East	Hungary	Medium	26-35	Heavy	Working
West	Germany	Low	15-17	Non	Working
West	Germany	Low	18-25	Heavy	Middle
West	Germany	Low	26-35	Light	Working
North	Netherlands	Low	15-17	Heavy	Middle
North	Netherlands	Low	18-25	Light	Working
North	Netherlands	Low	26-35	Non	Middle
South	Portugal	Low	15-17	Non	Working
South	Portugal	Low	18-25	Heavy	Middle
South	Portugal	Low	26-35	Light	Working
East	Slovenia	Low	15-17	Light	Middle
East	Slovenia	Low	18-25	Heavy	Working
East	Slovenia	Low	26-35	Light	Middle

NOTE.— The classification of the countries as low, medium and high was based on the WHO country profiles; social class was derived from the occupation of the head of the household, local definitions were used to categorise respondents into working and middle class categories.

Analysis and Discussion

Places of Tobacco Consumption and Issues of (Dis)empowerment

Many smokers in the study admitted that they feel uncomfortable and experience embarrassment when smoking in public places.¹ This is partly attributable to their belief that others make negative judgments of their decision to smoke, echoing Goffman's (1963, 18) suggestion that shame can be a central possibility arising from the individual's perception of falling short of "what he really ought to be." For example:

"If you are on the street and you are walking along the street there are just people who just grimace at you because they don't like you smoking." (Italy, 26-35, Heavy Smokers)

"if I sit with somebody who doesn't smoke then I feel strange." (Czech Republic, 18-25, Light Smokers)

For some respondents the negative connotations stem from feelings of exclusion created by regulations that prevent smoking in public places.

"I feel it's a bit shameful, I have to go outside the restaurant and smoke, banned from coming in, that's where you can stand and stink up." (Sweden, 18-25, Light Smokers)

"I feel excluded. More and more, and angrier because over some years they've created a national level policy that the people that smoke are stupid and disturb everyone because they smoke." (Portugal, 18-25, Heavy Smokers)

Due to an ever-tightening policy environment, smokers experience physical separation from others in certain public settings. As a result, findings indicate that, even those living in countries

¹ It must be noted that this is not generalizable to all smokers; indeed findings suggest that some consumers engage in cigarette consumption primarily to gain social acceptance amongst peer groups and as a route to inclusion in certain social situations.

with low levels of tobacco restrictions experience a sense of exclusion. Such exclusion goes hand in hand with disempowerment as smokers are restricted and at times prevented from engaging in a consumption practice that they feel is important.

In comparison, the home is seen as personal space and thus an escape where smokers can enjoy smoking outside the gaze of a perceived “disapproving” general public. For some the home has always been a place where smoking has been present:

“If I hadn’t seen it from my very young age at home I would not smoke, but I do because I have seen it since I remember” (Czech Republic, 15-17, Heavy Smokers).

“In the presence of other people sometimes I can be tolerant and other times I can be very intolerant.... if I am at my home and somebody comes to see me then I wouldn’t be considerate either because it is my home but when I am somewhere else I have to follow rules and it is alright and then I tolerate it” (Germany, 26-35, Light Smokers).

“I also smoke in my room, my own room so that is my private sphere” (Germany, 26-35, Light Smokers).

The home thus becomes a “back region” (Goffman 1971), a place where smokers do not feel vulnerable to undesirable stereotypes. In this way, the home is established as a safe haven where individuals live by their own rules and are free to regulate their activities and practices, in turn creating empowerment and self worth.

“I think when I smoke it just enables me to be by myself, it’s my cigarette and I. I mean it enabled me to just go away and isolate myself, just by myself, you know... It’s not to share, it’s just to be by myself, to isolate myself. Cut myself off from the others” (France, 26-35, Heavy Smokers)

The home is then placed in opposition to the world outside (Mallet 2004). In contrast to the regulated outside environment that imposes constraints on smoking behavior, consumers are afforded more freedom in terms of their behavior “behind closed doors” (Miller 2001). As Miller (2001, 1) suggests, “it is the material culture within our home that appears as both our appropriation of the larger world and often as the representation of the world within our private domain”. Indeed, cigarette consumption becomes a central ingredient to other activities that occur within the privacy of the home. Respondents smoke “after dinner,” “in front of the TV,” “in bed,” “first thing in the morning” and when drinking coffee – “the two go together virtually all the time.” Indeed, some respondents freely admitted that smoking is a “ritual,” “a force of habit” and even an “addiction” that leaves them “hooked” and “dependent.” Given the centrality of cigarette consumption to smokers’ daily lives, it is perhaps unsurprising that for many respondents smoking forms part of a normal ritual in the home where they regain their displaced power. We now move on to consider how this could change when smokers and non-smokers live together.

Social Relations in the Home

Findings suggest that a divergence of attitudes towards smoking can provoke a degree of conflict between smokers and non-smokers as each party competes to have their preferences met, creating a “tricky” and “difficult” relationship. Both smokers and non-smokers discussed the tension that this could create:

“My mate’s girlfriend smokes and while we were still in the flat together he initially let her smoke in the flat. I came back in and I smelled it and I said get her out. That started tension between us because of the smoking” (UK, 26-35, Non-smokers).

“I don’t live with my parents but they still don’t tolerate my smoking. I took up smoking in high school because everybody was smoking but my parents never accepted it and there was constant

quarrelling and fighting and when I lived at home I got used to having to go outside to smoke” (Hungary, 26-35, Heavy Smokers).

“I go home and my partner doesn’t smoke and she is annoyed by the smoke and sometimes after work I go to the pub with my mates and have a few beers and of course we smoke and then it is the line ‘Oh you have been to the pub again’” (Germany, 18-25, Heavy Smokers).

Within the household, conflict has been an elusive concept, particularly within the family context (Commuri and Gentry 2000). However intra-familial and intra-household decisions are more complex than a simple aggregation of individual behaviors (Hall et al. 1995). Rather, within the household, there can be contradictory consumption practices and values that are difficult to reconcile. Such a combination of individual preferences may make conflict probable (Lee and Collins 2000). Within our context, potential for conflict is enhanced because what is essentially a private consumption practice has an impact on other members of the home due to the effects of secondhand tobacco smoke. As such, “where the desire for a purified environment is not shared by all members of a household, the house becomes a place of conflict” (Sibley 1995, 91).

The presence of children within the home adds another dimension to the issue of social relations. Many smokers prefer to avoid smoking in front of young people with one Czech smoker suggesting, *“When young people can see me I feel like I’m spoiling them.”* Many smokers in the study demonstrated awareness that the family context of interpersonal communication has the greatest influence on consumer socialization (Ward 1974) and consequently made efforts to avoid “setting a bad example”.

“I’ve got a baby cousin and I go outside if she’s in my house and so does my mum, we don’t smoke. Before I even touch her I wash my hands” (UK, 18-25, Heavy Smokers).

“It’s also a pretty bad role model for kids to smoking in the future... I do, yes I think about that a lot.... I don’t smoke in front of my boyfriends younger sister who is 10/12 or something because she knows I smoke but I won’t smoke in front of her because she gets that image” (Sweden, 18-25, Light Smokers)

This reinforces the indirect and emotional power of children to shape consumption practices in the home and encourages smokers to regulate their smoking behavior if young people are present. However, for some smokers, the grip of their addiction is too strong to resist. As one of our Portuguese informants commented, *“I know that I am prejudicing my son. I shouldn’t smoke at home, but I can’t stop.”* Again, this highlights the addictive nature of tobacco that leads some smokers to possess a negative self-view and reduce self esteem. Therefore although smoking in the home can afford an escape from the regulated ‘outside’ thus releasing feelings of empowerment, the presence of significant others can result in a loss of power in the home and feelings of discomfort. We now move on to consider how this tension is negotiated.

Marking Territory in the Home

In some of the focus groups with non-smokers the issue of smoking in the home provoked strong emotional responses. In the Netherlands focus group of 26-35 year old non-smokers, several respondents agreed that *“in my house there’s absolutely no smoking. If someone comes, then they go out, but not in my house.”* Two main reasons emerged for this reaction to smoking. First, in relation to decor, respondents wanted to avoid *“nicotine yellow on the walls”* and second, those who had children didn’t want any cigarette smoke in the environment where children are present. Other non-smoking focus groups shared these strong opinions:

“My dad, he smokes but he is only allowed to smoke in the basement and also outside but not in the house” (Germany, 15-17, Non-smokers).

“In my family, my mum used to be a strong smoker. We literally chase her out of the house, even if it’s minus 20 degrees, she has to be outside. My father said that he won’t tolerate smoking inside the house” (Hungary, 18-25, Non-smokers).

In response to this tension, the issue of marking territory comes to the forefront when smokers and non-smokers share the same living space. The result is the division of space within the home with certain spaces deemed more acceptable for tobacco consumption than others:

“I lived with a non smoker for a while and we marked our territory. I was allowed to smoke in the kitchen, at the window. Never in the bedroom, not in the dining room or on the balcony” (France, 26-35, Heavy Smokers).

Within the home the negotiation of “acceptable” behavior then becomes central as consumers need to be aware of not only their own but also other people’s norms and values. Findings suggest that this is also true for other shared spaces such as cars

“I smoke in the car, it is my car and I can do it but when somebody is with me who doesn’t smoke then I open a window” (Germany, 26–35, Light Smokers).

Marking territory can be viewed as a way of “regulating” social interactions for as Altman (1975, 140) suggests, “With everyone having “places,” there is no need to continually negotiate who belongs where or who has rights to what, so that day-to-day life smoothes out by virtue of territorial assignments or ownership”. In many cases, this “smoothing out” is aided by smokers adopting territories where the smell of tobacco smoke can be easily dispersed or masked, such as “near the chimney” or “at the window.” Or as another smoker suggested:

“I light up a candle so I can put out the candle and there’s no smell. And I sit on the floor and throw the cigarette to the fire. My husband doesn’t smoke so he keeps pestering me. So I don’t feel okay sitting on our sofa and smoking” (Portugal, 26-35, Light Smokers).

Some smokers adhered to the viewpoint that smoking could damage the ambience, recognizing that *“in the house it’s much better to feel the smell of cleanness than to get into a house that smells like a cigarette”*. Here we witness a contradiction in the relationship between smokers and their homes. Despite the desire to smoke, smokers can be aware that cigarette odors can damage the atmosphere in their homes. The challenge then becomes for smokers to create their own private space where they can smoke without disturbing the wider ambience of the home and without complaints from others. Territories are marked for such consumption in areas where the effects of tobacco smoke are minimal thus restoring a safe haven for their “sacred” ritual. So although the home may be free from formal regulations preventing smoking, it can be subject to more informal yet strict regulations that are initiated and negotiated among household members.

Conclusions

Research interest on spatiality of consumption tends to relate to visible and spectacular sites of consumption such as flagship stores (Peñaloza 1998) and festival shopping malls (Maclaran and Brown 2005), neglecting more private and mundane consumption spaces. In the paper we raise the profile of the home as an important consumption site. We advance current theory that tends to examine the home as a context for consumer decision-making by exploring consumption practices and consumer interpersonal relationships in the home. We suggest first, the home offers an empowering space for consumption practices, second, consumers strive to maintain the home as a sacred space and third, contradictory consumption values incite the negotiation of space and consumer relations within the home.

Our analysis reveals that the home offers a space where consumers have power and dominion, a space where they are separated and sheltered from the outside world and a space where they

have greater agency in their consumption practices. The home becomes an escape, a refuge where consumers are freed from the anxieties and intrusions associated with public scrutiny. It becomes a place for the expression of self-identity and a site of stability in comparison to the ever-changing and restrictive regulation in the external environment. It is a site of emotional attachment, providing “a sense of daily and ongoing security and stimulation, with places and objects offering predictable facilities, opportunities to relax from formal roles, the chance to be creative and control aspects of one’s life” (Low and Altman 1992, 10).

In this sense, the home is “a church in that it is the place where ultimate goals can be cultivated” (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981, 123). This religious metaphor parallels research on sacred consumption (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989) as the home demands reverence and respect and consumers strive to avoid or limit any practices which may taint or contaminate the environment. In this regard, we start to glimpse something of a paradox. On the one hand, the home is a space where consumers have free reign over their consumption activities and on the other hand, the desire to maintain a purified environment may constrain certain consumption activities that threaten such an environment. In this way, cigarette consumption and other consumption practices which may potentially damage the sacred quality of the home demand careful management and negotiation. Given the significance of smoking for some respondents, the fact that consumers are willing to sacrifice and reduce their cigarette consumption provides further evidence of the sacredness of the home.

Our analysis also clearly establishes the link between space and social relations in that consumption practices within the home may become a process of negotiation, reaffirming the home as a site of both individual and collective consumption. As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) suggest, different people in the home can be seen as inhabiting different

symbolic environments even though they are in the same household. Given that prior research has found minimal evidence of conflict in the home (Commuri and Gentry 2000), we argue that tension and conflict is most likely to emerge in relation to risky and emotive consumption practices such as tobacco consumption.

The public policy issues raised by this research are complex. On the one hand, the impact of passive smoking in the home is serious, particularly for children, and policy makers have a responsibility to protect people from these dangers. On the other hand, despite the clear and demonstrable harm caused by tobacco, it is still a legitimate choice for consumers to smoke and smokers' needs must also be considered. Given strong tobacco control policies regarding public space, smokers need private space to exercise dominion to realize the 'benefits' of their consumption. Thus legislators implementing smoke-free laws, and particularly restrictions in personal spaces like the home, need to fully assess the impact of such legislation on not only physical health but also on psychological health and well-being.

The research also questions the effectiveness of anti-smoking adverts concerning smoking in the home as findings indicate that smokers can be resistant to attempts to control their behavior. Although some authors (van den Putte et al. 2005) argue that smokers and non-smokers need to start a dialogue about smoking, this may result in negative consequences if arguments and tensions arise. This power struggle between members of the household will only be a valid target and effective campaign advertising message if cessation is shown and believed to be an effective strategy to reduce this tension. However, if this message is not effectively conveyed, using the home as a campaign setting might evoke negative reactions and resentment if smokers are coerced into facing the home as a battle ground.

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