

AN EXAMINATION OF EFFORTS
TO MAKE SMOKING SOCIALLY UNACCEPTABLE

Efforts to dissuade people from smoking have focused generally on the alleged health effects of cigarette smoke on the smoker. Although people are well aware of such anti-smoking claims, they continue to smoke. As a result, anti-smoking groups are using another tactic in their campaign to achieve a nonsmoking society. This tactic is the attempt to make smoking socially unacceptable by promoting an extremely unfavorable image of the smoker and smoking. It is illustrated by the use of slogans such as "Kissing a smoker is like licking a dirty ashtray," and group acronyms which express the goal of anti-smokers such as SMASH -- the Society for Mortification and Smoker Humiliation.

As a consequence of this tactic, a hostile social climate may be developing which encourages harassment of smokers and the promotion of legislation restricting smoking in public places. Comments by social observers and medical experts who have examined this anti-smoking phenomenon in our society highlight the issues raised by this campaign. Their observations, therefore, will be used throughout this paper to mirror the climate of opinion surrounding this development.

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Governmental Regulation

Anti-smoking groups have made it clear that their objective is to curtail smoking through social control:

The ultimate goal of anti-smoking groups is stopping smokers from smoking altogether. They have not been reticent about stating that their main weapon in forcing smokers to quit is social control. [1]

Probably the only way we can win a substantial reduction [in smoking] is if we can somehow make it non-acceptable socially We thought the scare of medical statistics and opinions would produce a major reduction. It didn't. [2]

We hope that smoking will become socially unacceptable. [3]

Through their efforts, smoking is becoming less a matter of personal choice and more a concern of government:

In short, what began as a movement to discourage smoking seems to be evolving into an all-out war against tobacco. And it is a war that involves the unwarranted use of government power to impose the personal health standards of one group of citizens upon another group. [4]

Health Claims

One means of making smoking socially unacceptable is the publicizing of the claim that a nonsmoker's health is harmed by tobacco smoke. This argument is used in attempts

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to justify bans on smoking in public places, thereby eliminating the opportunity to smoke. However, it has not been proved that tobacco smoke is harmful to the nonsmoker, as various medical experts have stated publicly. The most that can be said is that there may be a small group of exceedingly sensitive or ill individuals with conditions that may be exacerbated by various environmental factors including tobacco smoke.

Involuntary passive smoking under commonly occurring smoking conditions is not hazardous to health, according to the present state of scientific knowledge. This applies to long-term passive smokers, and certainly to occasional passive smokers. . . . [The] "prevailing doctrine" that passive smoking is hazardous in principle, is not verified in serious and critical international literature. [5]

The fact remains that we really do not have conclusive scientific evidence about the adverse health effects of passive smoking on the bystander. [6]

As a scientist, I am interested in reliable data which demonstrate whether a nonsmoker absorbs tobacco smoke in public places and, if so, whether the amount is sufficient to cause adverse health effects. The literature, in my opinion, does not support the theory that a nonsmoker absorbs amounts which can cause harm. [7]

Based upon the world literature and my own observations, smoking in public places does not, in my opinion, constitute a health hazard to nonsmokers. [8]

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Emotionalism

By their widespread promotion of claims that tobacco smoke harms the nonsmoker, anti-smoking groups have succeeded in creating an atmosphere of emotionalism and fear. This highly charged atmosphere, in turn, has led to overreactions to cigarette smoke in public places and outright violence in some cases. Some observers have suggested that the smoker has become an easily identified target for societal frustrations and general anxiety.

And the cues in society today to be afraid are multiplying--every day in the newspaper and television we see another reason why we are terrified to drink water, walk down the street, eat anything--and I think as long as those cues are mounting--one of them may be the smell of cigarette smoke--we are creating a society in which everybody is continually seeing some cue that terrifies them or annoys them enough to have some reaction to it.
[9]

You see, I think Americans are in the grip of a new disease, a very serious disease--two diseases, as a matter of fact--the manifestations are anxiety, fear, anger, resentment, and panic. It affects the young. It affects the old. It affects male and female, the educated, the not-so-educated. . . . Of course, the diseases I am speaking of are smokeaphobia and canceraphobia. [10]

To some people the smoker has become a ready target for general frustrations, anxiety and discontent. [11]

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Annoyance

Many scientists have suggested that unfavorable reactions to tobacco smoke can most accurately be described as "annoyance." Even the 1979 United States Surgeon General's Report stated that such reactions among healthy nonsmokers "may be due to psychological factors." [12] Certainly, the high visibility of smoke and its distinct aroma combine to call attention to the smoker and may prompt unfavorable reactions.

Some people may believe that exposure to environmental tobacco smoke affects their health. In addition to dislike of the odor such beliefs may be an additional source of annoyance. These reactions are influenced by underlying attitudes, socio-economic conditions and other factors. [13]

The odor threshold for stale smoke components, which is also very low, may trigger emotional responses not yet well understood. [14]

It is clear that some individuals simply dislike cigarette smoke and view smoking as immoral and dirty. Others consider smoking an invasion of the nonsmoker's rights. Personal feelings, then, have become a major factor in the push for restrictive legislation. These personal reactions, however, should not be confused with health effects.

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It is important to keep in mind the distinction between health effects and annoyance. Unpleasant odors may be very annoying but have very little effect on health except on a psychogenic basis. It seems likely that irritating gases, unpleasant odors, peak concentrations, and high visibility play a part in the annoyance reaction to tobacco smoke. [15]

Moreover, dislike and annoyance do not justify restrictive legislation.

It's one thing to legislate conduct for the protection of society--to restrict behavior that endangers the life, health or safety of others. It is quite another to legislate against conduct that merely annoys. Hardly anybody can avoid annoying somebody else occasionally. When government gets one foot into the realm of behavior modification, the blue-law thicket looms ahead. [16]

Workplace

Anti-smokers are lobbying for legislation which would either ban smoking in the workplace or force separation of smoking and nonsmoking employees by their smoking practices. Unfortunately, the potential practical and economic consequences of such legislation are usually not explained to the public. The implementation of such laws could be expensive for the employer who might have to build partitions in the work area. Such laws could also create efficiency and morale problems among employees.

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When one considers possible effects on the morale of workers and on their performance, the total impact of smoking deprivation in the work place may be considerable. It would seem that decisions concerning restrictions in this area must be made with caution. This potential "cost" in terms of lower morale and poorer job performance of the deprived smoker against any "payoff" in terms of satisfying a very small but vocal minority of anti-smokers who are actually seriously annoyed by smoking must be carefully weighed in arriving at a decision on the issue of smoking in the work place. [17]

Since the issue is potential annoyance, personal courtesy and consideration at an individual level are called for, rather than the intervention of management.

It has not been medically proven that so-called passive smoking is harmful to the health of non-smokers under ordinary conditions; however, it can be an annoyance. Possible annoyances to others should be kept within limits, but this is a matter of good manners, not law. The directors of the civil service would therefore do well to leave the question of smoking in offices to individual discretion and mutual consideration on the part of smokers and nonsmokers. [18]

Our enlightened industrial society must reject questionable assumptions, false conclusions, polemical and vilifying statements, the unjustified generation of fear and anxiety and limitation of individual freedom. . . . The individual inconvenience justifies no overall prohibition of smoking at the workplace. It is rather a question of tolerance and understanding, of behavior and education. [19]

[N]ormal smoking by an average smoker does not represent impairment that would justify a claim for protection on the part of 'passive smokers' and hence, intervention by the employer or personnel manager. [20]

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Restaurants/Hospitality Businesses

Implementation of rules forbidding smoking would present numerous problems for those in the restaurant and hospitality business. For example, who is to be seated in the most favored locations? How are the rules to be enforced? How are the expenses of partitions or separate rooms to be paid? Legislating against annoyances would disrupt businesses intended to serve the public, without necessarily providing a service requested by customers.

Since atmospheric tobacco smoke in public places has not been proven to be hazardous to the nonsmoker, the only basis for the segregation of smokers and nonsmokers is customer preference. The experience of various restaurants indicates that no-smoking sections are not an overriding customer concern.

The New York State Restaurant Association, in conjunction with the American Lung Association, last fall launched a voluntary program among its 6,000 restaurant-members in the state to set aside no-smoking areas. While a few restaurants tried the program with success, the expected public acceptance has not been realized; the demand just is not there. [21]

A popular motor hotel at Olympia told the Restaurant Association of Washington its special areas have been used by about .02 per cent of its guests. In the first three months after the Health Board announced its regulations, the place served almost 64,000 diners, yet only 12 asked to sit in the no-smoking section. [22]

Each restaurant can determine how best to please its own customers.

What might be reasonable for one restaurant could be totally unreasonable for another restaurant. Any arbitrary setting of a percentage of one's business aside as smoking or nonsmoking would, in most instances, create an economic hardship. [23]

The decision on how to deal with smoking in restaurants, therefore, should be made by those in the business and not by government.

Yet, while our experience has been relatively limited, it is probably greater than any other restaurant-hotel company in the nation. And it has convinced us without a doubt that the hospitality business is no place for government regulation when it comes to smoking. [24]

The [North Carolina Restaurant] [A]ssociation's major stance, though, is that a law to control smoking in restaurants, even if enacted, could not be enforced. "We believe that government imposed restrictions on smoking in the social atmosphere of a restaurant would be unenforceable." [25]

Enforcement

Experience with public smoking laws has shown that they cannot or will not be enforced. As a result, some officials worry that their unenforceability will foster public disregard for laws in general. This attitude could

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easily carry over to situations where more serious laws may not be obeyed. Furthermore, enforcement is costly to the already over-burdened taxpayer.

Ironically, these laws, once passed, are notoriously difficult to enforce. In Minnesota, for example, a section chief in the state health department, which must enforce the Clean Indoor Air Act, says the legislature that passed the act never bothered to appropriate money to enforce it. [26]

It is estimated that from the time a call comes in to the police department, the cost of the officer's time [to enforce public smoking laws], of processing paperwork, and any court action is in excess of \$70. [27]

But to pass a no-smoking ordinance would be an exercise in futility--unless, of course, the council feels that police have other crime problems well under control and can afford the manpower to enforce the law. [28]

Ironically, the antismoking groups that fought to get the laws on the books now admit that the statutes make little difference. [29]

We are telling our officers to give it the lowest priority. Unless an officer has absolutely nothing to do, he isn't going to go out and give someone a citation for smoking in an unauthorized area. [30]

Government Intervention

The effort to make smoking socially unacceptable in order to stamp out smoking has prompted widespread actions to curb smoking in public places. As a result, the individual's freedom to smoke is being curtailed by the heavy hand of

government. However, such negative campaigns are based on the personal preferences and prejudices of anti-smokers rather than scientific fact. Thus, personal behavior is being regulated because a segment of society finds it unacceptable. It is clear, however, that legislating behavior which merely annoys some people is not a proper exercise of governmental power.

Individual liberties must not be unnecessarily restricted through State legislation. The freedom to smoke is one of the liberties. A balance between the interests of smokers and non-smokers is a question of sound judgment and individual tolerance which have nothing to do with legislation. [31]

The anti-smoking zeal that is widely translating itself into legislation is a brilliant example of authoritarian rectitude--a manacling of the individual for his own good. We are not really talking about smoking, in this instance, so much as the imposition of social control--a control that, once established, can extend itself wonderfully to areas of human activity that do not accord with the values or views of those in power. [32]

But when the state begins to move toward mandating that smoking will be banned in public places, the matter becomes a question of whether personal rights, privileges and the principle of self-determination are being trampled in an attempt to protect people from themselves. [33]

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Conclusion

Public smoking health claims have been challenged by numerous medical experts, yet anti-smoking groups continue to instill fear and anxiety in nonsmokers by publicizing such claims. As they accelerate their campaign to make smoking unacceptable in society, these groups also seek to humiliate, intimidate and shame smokers, in an effort to get smokers to quit. Slogans, advertisements, and publications are all geared toward creating an uncomfortable social atmosphere for the smoker. Furthermore, government has been enlisted to force the views of anti-smokers on others through restrictive legislation.

At a time when most enlightened governments and societies seek to promote tolerance of differences, the negative and divisive climate created by anti-smoking groups who propose segregation and exclusion of certain groups seems counterproductive and anti-social. Tolerance for individual differences has become lost in the demand by anti-smokers for conformity in personal behavior. Yet it is tolerance and mutual respect of differences that is needed to resolve the public smoking issue, not government coercion and social control.

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Tolerance towards the needs, lifestyles and opinions of others is a basic, indispensable prerequisite for all sectors of human coexistence. Without tolerance, ladies and gentlemen, it is not possible to strike a satisfactory balance of mutual interests in the tense atmosphere between smokers and nonsmokers. [34]

A little good will and some good manners will go farther toward solving mutual problems than giving one side a legal club to beat on the other side. [35]

While it is easy to understand why a person with a respiratory problem does not want to get trapped in an elevator with a guy smoking a pipeful of Old Overshoe, it is also understandable that someone doesn't want to work near you because of the way you dress or the way you smell or the way you look. There doesn't seem to be an easy way of curing such problems. And we're relatively certain that government regulation and further government intrusion into our lives is one of the worst ways to cure it. [36]

Not further restriction of the most immediate freedoms of man by prohibitive measures but only tolerance, emotion-free information, and objectivity can aid in solving these problems. [37]

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