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## ON CIGARETTE SMOKING:

by Kathryn Anthony

## WHERE DO YOU STAND?

Where do people stand on cigarette smoking? A research team at the University of California conducted a series of experiments to answer this question.

One hundred ten undergraduates (46 males and 64 females) participated in this research project which falls under the umbrella of environmental psychology. The experiments were conducted in a large, well-ventilated professor's office. For the first experiment, each participant was asked to choose the distance s/he felt to be most comfortable for conversation between him/herself and a decoy. For about a third of the participants, the decoy was smoking. For another third, the decoy had an unlit cigarette in the mouth and a book of matches in hand. For the remainder, the decoy held no cigarette or matches. After this, participants completed a questionnaire about their first impressions of the decoy.

Results showed that smoking had a negative effect on both the attitudes and behavior of participants towards the decoy. Students stood closest to the non-smoking decoy (an average of 62.48 cms. away), at a middle distance from the decoy holding the unlit cigarette (an average of 71.20 cms.), and farthest away from the smoking decoy (an average of 80.26 cms.). Students' ratings of the decoy on 18 personality characteristics also differed in the same direction. While students checked an average of 2.16 and 3.79 negative responses to describe the non-smoking and the decoy with the unlit cigarette, respectively, they listed an average of 6.44 negative responses about the smoking decoy. A statistical analysis of both sets of data proved these differences to be significant. Results point out that the decoy's smoking was not viewed casually. Instead of the decoy's smoking being perceived as merely one of a number of characteristics, it tended to color participants' overall impressions of the decoy to be more negative.

In a subsequent experiment, 27 participants were asked, one at a time, to have a seat outside the experiment room while waiting for the experiment to begin. Directly outside the experiment room, five identical chairs were lined up in a row. For half the students, the first seat had on it a styrofoam cup about half filled with Coca-Cola and a straw. For the other half, on the first seat was placed a lit cigarette in an ash tray. Participants' reactions to both conditions differed drastically. Students who chose to sit close to the cup of Coca-Cola remained in their chairs throughout the entire wait time. On the other hand, within a short time those sitting near the lit cigarette in the ash tray either stood up, moved to another seat further away from the ash tray, moved the ash tray further away from themselves, or actually extinguished the cigarette.

Because only a handful of smokers (7) participated in the experiment, a comparison of smokers and non-smokers in this context would be meaningless. Students were not recruited on the basis of their smoking habits, as this may have caused results to be biased. Nonetheless, a quick survey of the results showed the attitudes and behaviors of smokers and non-smokers to be similar.

Comparing the results of both experiments, one can see that a lit cigarette, in any case, is perceived as a noxious or unpleasant stimulus. In contrast to situations where the lit cigarette was accompanied by a decoy, participants' reactions to the lit cigarette without a decoy (placed on the chair) were much more overt and unrestrained. Students in the waiting room later explained that because no person was present and actually in the process of smoking the cigarette, they stood up, moved away, moved the ash tray, and extinguished the cigarette without feeling guilty. However, since no one reacted so dramatically to the smoking decoy, one can assume that students felt somewhat hesitant to make such moves, even though they really may have wanted to do so.

Why students reacted negatively towards smokers is a question that should be further explored. A number of studies indicate that sidestream cigarette smoke (smoke inhaled by nearby non-smokers, as opposed to that inhaled by the smoker) contains several harmful ingredients resulting in increased absorption of carbon monoxide and nicotine. In a pamphlet published by the American Lung Association in 1975 entitled "Second-Hand Smoke", researchers disclosed that smoking seven cigarettes in one hour in a ventilated room raised carbon monoxide levels to 20 parts per million, over twice the outside air limit concentration set by Federal Air Quality Standards. In the seat next to the smoker, the level rose to 90 parts per million, almost twice the maximum set for industries. Whether participants in this experiment knew of such research is unknown.

Implications for the domains of interpersonal relations and environmental design can be generated by this study. If one accepts the belief of social psychologists that first impressions are important determinants of future interpersonal relationships, smokers might reconsider lighting up a cigarette during a first encounter with a stranger. Meeting a smoker for the first time could dampen not only one's initial, but one's future impressions of the individual. This possibility should be considered seriously when decisions of import are to be made--e.g., job interviews, etc.

In terms of environmental design, knowledge that smokers tend to generate larger spatial zones than non-smokers should be fully taken into account. Both designers and managers of spaces should consider that the spatial needs of each group are different. For instance, the presence of smokers in a typical seminar room causes the capacity of the room to be reduced. The social and economic costs of this fact are manifold. Segregating smokers from non-smokers has become an increasingly controversial issue. Evidence from this study suggests that some sort of spatial manipulation is necessary. However, segregating smokers from non-smokers could cause the evaluation of smokers to worsen. Smokers would then be viewed as possessing some sort of stigma, and a number of researchers have demonstrated that individuals' spatial reactions to stigmatized persons are negative. These conditions suggest that another alternative is needed.

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