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# **Smoke gets in your eyes: what is sociological about cigarettes?**

**Donncha Marron**

## **Introduction**

What makes smoking of concern to a discipline like sociology? Why does it matter? What can it contribute to a practice so heavily weighted over recent decades by medicalized concerns and public health responses?

In an influential article by a group of tobacco researchers, attention is called to the need to understand the ‘social’ context of smoking as well the ‘physiological’ (Poland et al. 2006). Here, the case is advanced that social scientists, equipped with the theoretical and methodological resources to understand the social context and distribution of smoking, are ideally placed to help advance a public health agenda. It is unquestionably the case that sociology, with its distinctive credentials to interpreting the ‘social’, has contributed much to this cause (Bancroft et al. 2003, Holdsworth and Robinson 2008, Laurier, McKie and Goodwin 2000, Layte and Whelan 2009). It is also the case, if we take the discipline’s emancipatory claims seriously, that such a project has an implicit ethical weight. Tobacco consumption has a deleterious impact on health, particularly for the poorest and, in consequence, the influence and impact of a casuistical tobacco industry needs to be combatted.

Bell (2013) highlights, however, that the application of social sciences, like sociology, for the ends of public health is problematic. Bell points to research strands on tobacco use that emphasize the agency and will rather than the passivity of smokers (eg Greaves 1996, Katainen 2006), the complex embodiments inherent to the smoking experience (eg Dennis 2006, 2011) and how tobacco control can work upon and exacerbate divisions of class and gender (eg Thompson, Pearce and Barnett 2007). In consequence, an equal ethical claim could be advanced for the discipline in articulating the agency and understanding the embodied experiences of smokers, as well as confronting the relations of power inherent to public restrictions on smoking.

However, the argument advanced here is that sociology needs to take a step back and think more clearly and systematically about what makes smoking ‘social’. Drawing loosely from C. Wright Mills’s (2000) seminal articulation of the ‘sociological imagination’, this article attempts a systematic unpacking of the category of the social, situating smoking across three interrelated dimensions: acting individuals, conditioning social structures and historical process. Analysing and synthesizing a range of literature under these headings, the argument attempts sociological answers to some rather basic questions: What does it mean to smoke a cigarette? Who does it and why do they do it? How have they come to do it?

In the first section of this article, we set out by asking how cigarette smoking became part of everyday life. Invaluable scholarship by cultural historians has pointed to the ways in which cigarettes have both invoked and inflected the development of modernity. This body of work reveals the distinctively modern pleasures and anxieties associated with cigarette smoking as represented in literature and film (Klein 1993). It connects changing modes of liberal subjectivity to the shifting cultural construction of smokers (Hilton 2000) and charts the

historical interweaving of cigarettes with the emergence of modern femininity and the proliferation of visual culture (Tinkler 2006). This work also overlays the cultural story of mass-consumed cigarettes with the gestation and bloom of the 'American Century' (Brandt 2007). The argument advanced here draws from these accounts to show how the development and expansion of cigarette consumption exhibits an elective affinity with the project of modernity in the 19th and 20th centuries. In so doing, it highlights some key elements of sociological concern: shifting beliefs about liberalism, freedom and social order; the growth of capitalist production and the advent of consumer culture; and the newfound dynamism and intensity of modern experience.

In the second section, the article draws in to look at the individual and in what ways we can understand contemporary smoking at the level of both everyday practice and experience. It is highlighted that smoking cannot be categorized as actively chosen or passively determined; nor can it be so easily reduced to questions about rationality. Drawing on concepts of practice and habit reveals the embodied, material and socially situated performance of smoking in everyday contexts. However, this section attempts also to explore how people think about, feel and experience smoking, how it blurs boundaries and gives expression to temporality.

The final section draws out to examine the domain of structure; in this case, specific focus is brought to the ways in which smoking is situated by inequality and social class. Often deployed within a framework of public health, sociological and related research has been highly attentive to this question of structure. Quantitative work has demonstrated a clear social gradient, with smoking concentrated among the most disadvantaged social groups. Qualitative research, on the other hand, demonstrates how spaces of deprivation animate the significance of cigarette smoking in the lives of the economically disadvantaged. However,

the argument here tries to go beyond these somewhat deterministic discussions to show how symbolic violence works relationally to situate smoking within the orbit of working-class practice.

### **History, modernity and mass consumption**

Within this section, we will examine some of the key economic, social and cultural changes from the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that made cigarettes products of mass consumption in the United States and Britain. As Klein (1993) notes, smoking was introduced from America to Europe precisely the time that the decline of Medieval Christian certainties about the world was met by the growth of science, rationality and the development of a modern consciousness of self. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, tobacco joined an array of exotic new commodities like chocolate and tea, products of early colonialism that became everyday items of consumption across the population (Mintz 1993). However, what was it that made new patterns of cigarette consumption different from older practices of tobacco consumption and how did its growth evoke and encapsulate important aspects and tensions of modernity?

### ***Liberalism, freedom and social order***

In the 18th century, propelled by the fashion-setting practices of the French court, smoking tobacco had lost out to snuff as a marker of distinction (Hughes 2003 p. 23-4). However, smoking was to return to force over the course of the 19th century, captured most notably in the figure of the bourgeois liberal subject (Hilton 2000). The liberal subject's valorised autonomy, his capacity for choice and self-interest found expression in his connoisseurship of

quality pipe tobacco. Beyond the narrow practice of smoking itself, he sustained a wider interest and engagement in the history of tobacco use and avidly collected curios like pipes and storage jars as ethnographic artefacts. This bourgeois smoker was a gentleman, whose private habit also held a wider public significance in terms of the comfort and aid that smoking offered to both his intellectual labour and recreational release; his smoking also signified economic worth as a site of market exchange and as an important source of state revenue.

The emerging popularity of the cigarette as a means of smoking towards the end of the 19th century attracted opprobrium precisely because it was perceived to be poorly equipped to evoke a claim to middle-class privilege. Its inherent brevity and disposability made it appear foppish and effeminate in the face of robust, masculine connoisseurship exemplified by the pipe and cigar (Hilton 2000, Sobel 1978, Tinkler 2006). Cigarette smoking was targeted more widely as a problem by urban moral reformers; like practices of gambling and alcohol consumption, its proliferation was seen as threatening to social order and in need of legislative and moral regulation (Hilton 2000, Hunt 1999, Sobel 1978). On top of class, gender too became a central fault-line for problematizing and contesting tobacco consumption. Pipe smoking had been a prevalent practice in rural and urban contexts, not only for men but for women and children too. However, with the development of new middle-class sensibilities in the 19th century, ideals of respectability stigmatized female smoking as perverse, backward or overtly sexualized (Rudy 2005, Tinkler 2006). Female cigarette consumption was held as an aberrant incursion into a distinctively masculine pursuit. It was linked also to the lascivious figure of the prostitute, her threatening sexuality evoked by the shameless smouldering cigarette that advertised her trade. Here smoking and sex evoked irrationality and attested to the seeming lack of self-control of women.

Smoking and gender, however, was a contested issue. For many upper and middle-class women, smoking was claimed as a sign of status in emulation of aristocratic Europe, albeit pursued in the genteel space of the drawing room away from public scrutiny (Hilton 2000, Rudy 2005, Tinkler 2006). With the advent of World War I, women's more prominent role in paid work and status as putatively equal citizens with the advances of the suffragette movement was symbolized by growing numbers of women laying claim to the right to smoke in public space. Here, at least for middle-class women, 'the consumption of cigarettes represented an assertion of the heightened public role women had come to have which, if only temporarily, resulted from the experience of individual economic independence and a collective sense of enhanced social freedom' (Hilton 2000 p. 146).

### *Capitalist production and nascent consumer culture*

By the end of the 19th century, the production of cigarettes was shaped significantly by technical advances and shifts in the nature of capitalist manufacture and distribution (Brandt 2007, Goodman 1993, Sobel 1978). New light tobacco strains like Bright and White Burly, pliable in production and palatable for lung inhalation, were cultivated by American growers. The development of the first reliable instrument of mechanized production, the Bonsack machine, allowed firms to advance market share through the cost savings offered by machine power over human labour. Mass manufacture also met with new innovations in corporate management and market organization characteristic of the period. The market on both sides of the Atlantic consolidated and matured as larger, regional firms absorbed local manufacturers and attempted a more global market reach.

This drive to mass manufacture helped induce a new uniformity and standardization to smoking, displacing the figure of the bourgeois connoisseur or the variegated local practices of industrial working-class or rural communities (Hilton 2000). It also embodied wider shifts in the emergence of a modern consumer culture (Lears 1983). With the growing prominence of cigarette advertising and branding, a more direct relationship was forged between producer and consumer, displacing the previous gatekeeper role occupied by retailers and suppliers (Goodman 1993, Sobel 1978). Into the 20th century, campaigns commissioned through the newly formalized profession of advertising situated smokers as part of a mass whose purchasing power and brand choice could apparently be governed at a distance (see Miller and Rose 1997). Potential consumers might be persuaded by reasoned argument of the advantages of, say, Camels over Lucky Strikes. However, the deployment of depth psychology by advertisers meant appealing to smokers as more than rational decision makers; it meant also mining their unconscious needs and desires as consumers and exploiting their wish for new forms of self-expression (Hilton 2000, see also Lears 1994, Wouters 2011).

### *Modern experience*

The new machine-manufactured cigarettes resembled closely other significant cultural products of the age such as art reproductions (Benjamin 2008) and modern money forms (Simmel 1990). Like them, cigarettes as objects were fully uniform and depthless; in movement, however, they evoked new conditions of modern experience. In an emergent economic system oriented around the endless regeneration of consumer need (Campbell 1987), cigarettes were the exemplary product, habit forming yet ephemeral. Like a perpetual motion machine, the need for cigarettes was never extinguished but constantly rekindled and reborn in semi-conscious desire.



Capturing this shift, the extended and deliberate pleasures of pipe smoking were giving way to the habituated stress-relief and fugacious mood enhancement offered by the cigarette. Hilton (2000), for instance, points to the popularity of cigarettes among 19th century dandies, the new middle-class aesthetes whose restlessness and refined ennui were set against the backdrop of a spectacular new age. It was no longer equanimity and rationality but boredom and the blasé which became the typifying experiential states of the modern individual (Simmel 1950). In the 20th century, this reached a strange culmination in World War I. Faced with the unprecedented horrors of industrial mass slaughter, cigarettes afforded a moment-to-moment means for combatants to maintain their self-control, assuaging anxiety and modulating their fears of death's imminence. They helped, too, to stave off hunger and the mundanity of life lived at the front (Klein 1993).

Cigarettes were thus a supplement to the world of work and production as much as an alternative. Readily consumed and easily disposable, their relative portability and brevity in use suited the dynamism and fast-paced demands of modern life (Schudson 1986). Indeed, the relative mildness of the pharmacological effects induced by modern cigarette tobacco meant they were an instrument and enabler of self-control rather than of intoxication (Hughes 2003 p. 85-90). Flexible in use, smokers defined their own experience of cigarettes: they could serve equally as a morning pick-me-up with coffee, a means of calming the nerves, a self-contained break with workmates or a crutch for fitting into new social situations. Smoking was thus suited to a new kind of personality type, providing an accessible and unobtrusive way of dealing with the anxiety provoked by the uncertainties and social pressures wrought by the modern world (Klein 1993 p. 27).

## **Habit, practice and individual experience**

Contemporary discourses about individual cigarette use work, in various ways, to make up smokers as passive and determined (Macnaughton, Carro-Ripalda and Russell 2012).

Behavioural psychology posits that the decision to begin smoking is not and cannot be a rational act; an affect heuristic inbuilt to all human psychology trumps rationality (Lowenstein 2001, Slovic 2001). With addiction, the cigarette is framed as a vehicle for nicotine delivery, the animating substance underpinning the physiological ‘need’ to smoke (eg Bernardi 2015). Buttressing this, through Pavlovian conditioning, additional stimuli may become associated in the psychology of smokers with both nicotine yearning and gratification (Orford 2001, see also Stern 1999 pp. 176-7). Addiction can also overflow substance and environment to encompass individual subjects (Hens 2015, Keane 2002). In this sense, the smoker may possess a damaged subjectivity, a ‘disordered inner being’ traceable perhaps to genetic inheritance, which propels an addict identity.

While clearly dominant as framings for understanding cigarette consumption, these accounts subdue alternative, more sociological interpretations (Macnaughton, Carro-Ripalda and Russell 2012). In the previous section, we examined the question of how smoking became part of the experience of modernity. In this section, we draw attention to contemporary accounts of smoking as an active, meaningful practice and the socially and temporally embedded ways in which cigarettes are consumed within everyday lifeworlds.

In examining smoking and health behaviours, Blue et al. (2014) attempt to disrupt what they take to be a simplifying bio-medical focus on individuals, physiology or abstract risk factors. They point, instead, to the elements that constitute, and make possible, the ongoing

performance of smoking and how these are enacted together as practice. These include: the availability of materials like cigarettes through global trade and mass production; the cultural meanings and values that individuals ascribe to smoking; and the embodied learning and social competence of smokers. The practice of smoking also interacts with other lived practices, such as drinking, socializing and work and depends on the recruitment of participants over time. As elements shift and change and become reconfigured, the conduct of smoking itself is transformed over time. However, as the authors above readily admit, ‘our central project is not that of understanding the regularity with which individuals smoke’ (Blue et al. 2014 p. 5). What, then, makes cigarettes so peculiarly compelling?

Recently, some authors have attempted to engage with the concept of habit in order to re-evaluate its potential contribution to sociological knowledge (Bennett et al. 2013, Bennett 2013, Crossley 2013); theorized as a distinct form of action, ‘the term “habit” generally denominates a more or less self-actuating disposition or tendency to engage in a previously adopted or acquired form of action’ (Camic 1986 p. 1044). Contesting its sequestration by behavioural psychology and the ways in which sociologists from Weber onwards have conventionally privileged social action, this work draw attention to the ongoing impact of the past on the present and how habit exists as a property of relationships, contexts and things rather than individuals. It also points to how habits play a dynamic and performative role in social life beyond the immediate scope of individual or collective will.

Smoking is not always imbued with conscious meaning or reflection on the part of those who smoke; on the contrary, it may persist embedded in the everyday routine of smokers’ lives (Katainen 2012 p. 135-8). It manifests repeatedly as that early morning cigarette at home or the afternoon smoke break at work. While smoking requires the self-conscious acquisition of

skills and dispositions, once these are embodied as 'second nature' through sufficient repetition they become semi-consciously played out in habit. In fact, as Hughes (2003 p. 155-6) notes, it is precisely at this point that the individual is likely to ascribe an identity as a smoker to themselves. Once this stage is reached, momentum is drawn from the weight of every past cigarette while, with each cigarette, the accumulated past recursively frames its smoking.

Habit positions the choice or compulsion to smoke not as the product of an autonomous or diseased will but as a process straddling the boundary between volition and automatism. In this sense, the act of smoking emerges not as a singular consequence of willed or compelled action; on the contrary, it is a concerted practice of the self, of mind, body, time and environment acting in assembly to condition a given routine situation as conducive to smoking. Embedded in daily routine, the habit may be unquestioned; yet this does not mean that individuals are unthinking. On the contrary, individuals can still be called upon to give a conscious account of what they are doing (see Giddens 1984); at the same time, key moments, transitions and self-questionings experienced by the individual may serve to change, disrupt, introduce or eliminate habits.

For smokers, however, habit is not uniform. In fact, smokers may actually express a pronounced dislike, in relation to themselves and others, for cigarettes that might be consumed in an unthinking fashion rather than for deliberate enjoyment or sociability (Katainen 2010 p. 297, Katainen 2012, Laurier, McKie and Goodwin 2000 p. 297). For such individuals, smoking must not become empty of purposive intent; rather, it should be characterized to some degree by moderation and restraint (Bunton and Coveney 2011 p. 14-15). Smoking also requires a disciplining of pleasure given the stigmatization of cigarette

consumption through legal and cultural restrictions in space. These governing practices call upon the smoker to be considerate, careful to govern their cigarette consumption within the shifting spaces of everyday life in order not to give offence to, or harm, others (Holdsworth and Robinson 2008, Poland et al. 1999).

To understand individual smoking more fully, we need to go beyond practice and habit to address experience. In an important sense, a phenomenological sociology draws our attention to the sensations and impressions that smokers have and how smoking can situate and frame the worlds they encounter and produce (see Ferguson 2006).

Some interesting work points to how cigarette smoking problematizes the categories of things and their boundaries, in particular, the demarcation of subject and object (Klein 1993, Macnaughton, Carro-Ripalda and Russell 2012 p. 462-3). The cigarette object is partially absorbed into the body and the body itself projected into the external environment through the exhalation of smoke. By taking us ‘outside our familiar interiority’, the smoker experiences pleasure through transcending these constructed categories of society and nature, creating personal ‘possession’ of specific spaces (Haines-Saah et al. 2013 p. 24). In fact, as Dennis (2006) notes, notions of pleasurable movement, travel and escape have often served as focal points for manufacturers’ advertising campaigns. In the same vein, Dennis also describes how smoking blurs and reinscribes conceptions of corporeal borders. Exhalations of smoke, for instance, may serve as a prop in acts of flirtation, curtly dismiss another’s sexual advances or, in that cliché of the post-coital cigarette, help gently untangle intimate couplings:

Last moments of the night, I breathe smoke into your mouth, watch you absorb this gift so thoughtlessly, so greedily. Your sleepy sensuous appetite wakes again, for a moment, a wanting-more in me. Then you slowly exhale, smoke circles, touches our skin, puts desire to sleep. (Stern 1999 p. 1)

Most prominently, of course, the idea of smoking and bodily entanglement finds a more malign manifestation in the development of passive smoking as a widely-accepted scientific fact (Berridge 1999). Here, circulating smoke appears as an externality, an overspill from the boundaries of the smoker's body; risks, freely-borne by adult smokers as the cost of gratification, transcend the limits of the embodied liberal subject and bear upon the bodies and wellbeing of innocent others (Dennis 2013).

Beyond space, smokers also manipulate time while smoking (Klein 1993). In the midst of dominant notions of linear time under modernity as represented by clocks and calendars (Adam 2004), smokers can reconfigure temporality on their own terms:

Cigarettes are fiery batons with which you can summon the future and conduct it, slim, white facilitators of anticipatory thinking and imaginative hypotheses, instruments of ecstatic projection away from the present to a future time in which the present for a moment no longer exists... They allow you calmly to project yourself forward to possible future worlds that may never be, but, for the time of a cigarette, are ... (Klein 1993 p. 52).

This account stands in stark contrast to the discourse of addiction where clockwork cravings trap the smoker in a mindless, repetitive routine and the future is imagined in terms of

looming risk (Keane 2002). Here, smoking rips a hole in linearity, allowing one to step outside oneself and the immediacy of one's current situation to imagine and contemplate. For instance, Hilary Graham (1993) has noted in her research on working-class mothers how cigarettes permit a taking of time for oneself, a reassertion of autonomy within the pressing context of caring responsibilities, sometimes under conditions of stress and material poverty. Elsewhere, some smokers report elongating the present in particular ways; confounding the simple addiction model, they deliberately hold off from smoking for periods of time in order to preserve the desired physical effects of nicotine or intensify the pleasure of that next cigarette (Hughes 2003 p. 165-6).

In important ways, however, smoking can have more profane, linear qualities. From the repetition of the everyday to the episodic stages of the life-course, smokers use cigarettes to both spend and mark time. The most pleasurable cigarettes commence the day or conclude a meal; cigarettes at work provide space for a legitimate break, bringing relaxation from the demands of labour, an opportunity for sociable engagement or otherwise steel individuals for the performance of work tasks (Katainen 2010, Katainen 2012, Laurier, McKie and Goodwin 2000). Smoking might even characterize the conduct of ethnographic research, with the exchange of cigarettes interpersonally framing and enabling the recruitment of informants by a researcher in the field (Dwyer 2011). Meanwhile, over the life course, critical moments such as changes in family, work and relationship circumstance might be marked by cessation, shifts in routine, or changes in the meaning one attributes to one's smoking (Haines-Saah 2013 p. 147-9, Laurier, McKie and Goodwin 2000).

### **Structures of class and relations of distinction**

Up to now, we have attempted to discern how smoking cigarettes became a significant, even typifying, characteristic of modern life and the ways in which individuals experience and encounter smoking in their everyday worlds. In this section, we turn to the question of social structure and power and to some of the ways in which contemporary smoking practices are distributed. This section concentrates on social class and focuses on how smoking is shaped by processes of class formation.

Contemporary concerns for public health attempt, in part, to go beyond individualist, biomedical and narrowly epidemiological approaches to examine the ways in which the experience of health is structured by social factors. With the identification of smoking as a major public health issue, it is no surprise that much applied research has been devoted to the identification of how social factors such as economic status, poverty, race and age impact on rates of smoking (see for example: Buckner and Vinci 2013, LaVeist et al. 2007, Layte and Whelan 2009, Peretti-Watel et al. 2009). This research, usually drawing upon survey and statistical evidence, seeks to discern how individuals are affected by such factors, raising or lowering their relative risk of being smokers (for a broader critical account, see Mair 2011).

On the specific question of class, quantitative research identifies how class-based relative deprivation structures rates of smoking (Layte and Whelan 2009) or how markers of class situation cumulatively impact upon the risk of women smoking during pregnancy (Graham, Hawkins and Law 2010, Pickett et al. 2002, Spencer 2006). However, while such work is able to muster precision and representativeness, it faces the old interpretative charge of being unable to elucidate the role that smoking plays in the lived experiences of individuals as meaning-bearing social actors. In response, some qualitative research has attempted to



transcend the limits of such positivist accounts in framing the problem of smoking and health. Using data collection tools, like oral histories, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, this work endeavours to open up the particular lived contexts of poverty and working-class life.

In this interpretative camp, Stead et al. (2001), Wiltshire et al. (2001, 2003) and Bancroft et al. (2003) conclude that smoking is normal, permissible and pervasive within the marginalized working-class and disadvantaged communities they examine. Their respondents, in various ways, articulate how the everyday stresses and challenges of work or childcare, the boredom of long-term unemployment and the need for pleasure under conditions of material deprivation all work to underpin smoking (see also Graham 1993, Katainen 2010). These smokers are also innovators, often sourcing cheaper contraband tobacco through a network of illicit local suppliers to counteract the financial burden of a highly-taxed product. However, smoking is also a trap whereby the practicalities of being surrounded by other smokers and the community acceptance of smoking make it difficult for such individuals to quit.

These accounts may be praised for their sociological insight in detailing the ways in which smoking is lived. Yet, curiously, they also mark certain smokers as lacking subjectivity. Motivated by necessity or an absence of power, these problematized social groups may smoke for pleasure or sociability; yet this smoking is marked by a persistent, underlying 'cause' rooted in structured positions of economic and spatial marginality, maintained and transmitted through community-specific culture. In these accounts, smoking is problematized as an experience of unfreedom, determined in this case not by physiological craving but by the conditioning effects of poverty.

The work of Robinson and Holdsworth (2013) suggests two further grounds for caution.

Firstly, there may well be a tendency for researchers, explicitly concerned for the problem of smoking within excluded communities, to over-emphasize its significance. While working-class smoking might be of interest to sociologists, it is within itself a peripheral and protean element of working-class life. Secondly, smoking is not just a product of cultural context; rather it exercises a performative role in the creation and expression of culture (see Miller 2009). The practice of communal smoking and the circulation of cigarettes as gifts, loans and debts within the moral economies of working-class communities work to constitute social connections. To stop smoking means, in a real sense, severing oneself from these affective ties.

Underlying the premise of the kinds of qualitative investigation discussed above is the presupposition that smoking is problematic, not only in terms its consequences for health but in the ways in which these health consequences exacerbate the wider suffering of subordinate groups. However, such accounts operate with a reified view of inequality as something that exists 'out there'. Sociologically, it is important to approach the question of inequality, class and smoking relationally, drawing attention to the ways in which the practice itself has historically served to demarcate class.

It was discussed earlier how, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particular forms of smoking often served to distinguish the bourgeoisie, a form of conspicuous consumption attesting to their privileged status. Later, as we saw, this sense of exclusivity was lost with the emergence of mass consumption and the proliferation of relatively homogenous practices of smoking across the population. By the late 1950s, health risks were beginning to emerge forcefully into public

consciousness and rates of smoking went into long-term decline, manifesting in a public sentiment opposed to smoking as both an individual and public health risk (Brandt 2007, Kim and Shanahan 2003). However, as it now well known, this decline has been disproportionately enjoyed by privileged middle-class fractions (Bayer and Stuber 2006, Frohlich et al. 2010).

It might be interpreted that an inequitable distribution of education and income, structured by class, systematically produces inequalities of health knowledge and know-how that translate into class differentiated patterns of smoking (Pampel 2006). However, a relational approach to social class points to the ways in which working-class practices and lifestyles are othered through middle-class habitus as base and common; correspondingly, middle-class tastes evince a tendency towards a rejection of function and necessity in favour of distance and refinement (Bourdieu 1984). Furthermore, in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Bourdieu noted how an emergent ‘new petite bourgeoisie’, establishing itself in new kinds of services employment, pursue and promote the self-conscious development of lifestyle as an ideal, organized around notions of consumerism, therapy and a calculated management and presentation of the body (Bourdieu 1984, Featherstone 2008).

The combination of rising public concerns about health, historical shifts in the nature of middle-class tastes and long-term declines in middle-class smoking have, in consequence, rewritten the cultural meaning of smoking: gone is the sexy, chic glamour of cigarette consumption captured in television shows like *Mad Men*; in its place, the image of smoking as a grim, polluting addiction, a manifestation of appetitive and bodily excess. A further implication is that smoking cessation campaigns devised by health-promotion professionals are indelibly imbued with middle-class concerns and normative values. As a result, when

experienced and encountered through an opposed working-class habitus, such messages are likely to appear alien; they may even be interpreted in contrary ways (Dennis 2011, Frohlich et al. 2010). Furthermore, as public policy deliberately attempts to denormalize smoking through the cultivation of stigma in the name of health – from smoking bans in public places to the introduction of plain cigarette packs – it leads to the exercise of symbolic violence against working-class dispositions (Bell et al. 2010, Thompson, Pearce and Barnett 2007).

Middle-class habitus does not merely look-down upon working-class tastes. Rather, middle-class identity is partially constituted through disgust at working-class tastes and subjectivities (Lawler 2005). Hilary Graham (2012) argues cogently that the othering of working-class identity, its denigration in middle-class worldviews as irrational, weak-willed and polluting now, in part, occurs through the stigmatization of smoking. Objectively, it has become concentrated in working-class contexts where the specific dynamics of habitus and field render it natural. At the same time smoking, particularly irresponsible variants such as smoking in front of children or while pregnant, joins the panoply of stigmatized dispositions projected onto the working class such as criminality, welfare dependency and teenage motherhood (Skeggs 2009, Skeggs and Loveday 2012). Indeed, in shared public space, smoking is an evocative marker of class precisely because it threatens class boundaries through smell (Tan 2012, 2013); it effects disdain not just through its attributed baseness but through how wafting, formless smoke symbolically threatens bodily limits, ‘entailing undesirable intercorporeal relations with others’ (Dennis 2006).

Of course, while the taste for cigarettes might appear incompatible with a contemporary middle-class habitus, some middle-class individuals do smoke. In consequence, the experience of smoking itself might be structured by class. Katainen (2010) shows, for

instance, how her working-class respondents approached their smoking in an unreflexive way, seeing it as an habituated activity that resonated with their routinized work lives. In contrast, her middle-class respondents reflected upon their smoking in a more expansive fashion. Although noting its addictive properties, they framed it as a self-determined practice, a product of autonomous choice and a site for the pursuit of pleasure (see also Frohlich et al. 2010 p. 40). They explicitly denigrated any smoking they perceived as a failure of self-control. In addition, they also reproduced some of the wider disdain attaching to cigarette consumption; for instance, they avoided the overly-smoky break room at work and advocated the importance of smoke-free work and leisure environments.

One can see here how the practice of smoking itself can be entered into the game of distinction. By using their symbolic resources and elevated cultural capital, middle-class smokers can, at least in part, recode the practice as one involving a ‘calculated, pleasurable way of life’ (Katainen 2010 p. 1099). However, evident from Frohlich et al.’s (2010) in-depth interviews, middle-class smokers do not enjoy a full capacity to reinscribe the social meanings attached to their smoking. They feel strain when they reflect upon their smoking, given the ubiquity of anti-smoking messages and their heightened class disposition towards self-management of health. Through the operation of the habitus, such smokers are more prone to conflicted feelings about their identity as a smoker and liable to hide their smoking from the judgement of others; they sense, in overt and tacit ways, how it does not fit into the forms of taste expected of them (Frohlich et al. 2010 p. 41-2). Indeed the middle-class embrace of tobacco control policies in public spaces might be explained because it is a desired external constraint (see Elster 1984). If the smoking experience is culturally tainted and thus characterized by feelings of ambivalence, then paternalistic architectures of space that inhibit opportunities for smoking might well be embraced in order to escape the habituated self.

## Conclusion

When we think about cigarette smoking today, the health consequences are the dominant imaginary; beginning in a sustained way from the 1950s, the efforts of medical and public health authorities have bound cigarette smoking inextricably to risk, harm, disease and premature death. Inevitably, sociological research – whether situating the social distribution or problematizing public health interventions – has been defined heavily by this agenda.

While drawing upon these approaches, this article has tried to steer the focus away from this emphasis on health, to some degree, to ask: What is sociological about cigarettes? What can sociology say about smoking as a practice? In the United Kingdom for instance, despite the longevity of public health concerns and the intensity of governing responses over recent years, tobacco is still a multi-billion pound capitalist endeavour. 20 per cent of over-16s identify as smokers. Traversing the city, smoking is still a common sight on streets, in the vicinity of office blocks and in the doorways of pubs. Despite puritan counter displays, virtually every corner shop sells an array of international tobacco brands and accoutrements; while tobacco control proponents celebrate successive victories, none have yet dared seek outright prohibition.

Smoking is of sociological concern not just because it is decidedly harmful to health or because new tobacco control responses are characterized by expressions of power. While these avenues are important, it is worth reflecting more fundamentally upon what makes the practice of smoking, in and of itself, ‘social’ and thus open to sociological enquiry. C. Wright Mills argued that what marks out sociology as a way of making sense of the social world is a focus on the triad of individual-structure-history. This article has sought to show that smoking cigarettes has a history, a trajectory and a line of development that has been bound

to processes intrinsic to modernity and to modern sensibilities. It involves individuals in everyday life worlds who enact smoking in quotidian contexts of work and leisure, impart and derive diverse personal and contextual meanings to and from smoking and use cigarettes to manipulate bodies, time and space. Finally, smoking cigarettes is shaped by structural inequality, impacted by poverty and social class among other such social currents while, in turn, providing new ways for rendering and inscribing class distinction.

While this article has concentrated on the practice of cigarette smoking, there are many examples where smoking serves as an important instantiation of wider processes of interest to sociologists. In the first section, we drew attention to the relationship between the development of cigarette consumption and modernity; in turn, it could be argued that the medical case built against smoking in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century intimates a number of significant characteristics of *late* modernity. The blackening of Big Tobacco, for instance, is a particularly potent example of the development of a wider public scepticism towards social institutions since the 1960s (Douglas and Wildavsky 1983). In a related vein, contemporary concerns about consumerism and the manipulative effects of advertising, particularly on the young (Schor 2004), resonate closely with public health drives to push tobacco advertising out of the public sphere, particularly from the view of children. Elsewhere, the prerogative invoked by contemporary forms of governmentality to manage one's health (Lupton 1995) finds purchase in a range of private solutions to the problem of quitting smoking, from best-selling self-help guides to the marketing of nicotine patches and gum. Finally, the fraying of social bonds and one's chariness of strangers in everyday life (Bauman 2000) connotes the identification of environmental smoke as a risk to one's health.

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