

## Synthesis Essay Sample

### Understanding Smoking

Is smoking such a horrible thing? Is it really as bad as some claim it to be, or is it just a bad habit that some of us carry around, which warrants little public attention? There are many, widely varying answers to these questions. Which ones are right? Though they may claim to, no one really knows. These questions will always be debated. What many fail to realize is that the answer undoubtedly lies somewhere within an ever evolving and adapting compromise between the consciousness of smokers and the tolerance of anti-smokers. Failing to realize this leads many, when faced with the question of public policy toward smoking, to take a hardline stance. In the end, these extreme, uncompromising positions do nothing toward contributing to the further understanding of the issue. Rather, they inflame the fury of those on the other side of the fence, and inspire them to do the same. This is why we rarely come across a writer or politician who has a moderate stance on this issue. Most of the readings one can find on this issue are no more than the bickering of those who refuse to realize that the answer to this issue, like any public policy issue, will not be found on the fringes, but somewhere in the middle. I recently read two examples of these types of writings; one pro-smoking, and one anti-smoking.

The first I read was a piece by Lyndon Haviland, called “A Silence That Kills.” This was a three-page rant about the hazards of smoking, written from the perspective of a health professional. As I’m sure you can imagine, her writing is full of medical statistics which credit her argument. She explains how “Tobacco remains the leading cause of death in the United States, killing more people than AIDS, suicide, murder, car accidents, and drugs combined (Haviland 150).” She also points out, for example, that “The World Bank predicts that by 2030, tobacco-related illnesses will cause more than 10 million deaths per year, more than any other cause (Haviland 150)...” The facts she presents are compelling. She does a great job of conveying the scope of the impact that tobacco has on our species. In every sentence of her essay, Haviland seems to make the assumption that the reader is of the opinion, as she is, that smoking should be abolished in America. The entire

work is a call to action. She uses terms like “we have failed to” throughout the piece. She makes no concessions toward opposing arguments of any type, and doesn’t acknowledge in any way that the reader may have a slightly differing viewpoint.

The second essay I came across was written by a long time smoker named Florence King called “I’d Rather Smoke Than Kiss.” In her essay, King takes a very pro-smoking stance. She begins with the story of her childhood. She explains that she was raised by a mother who started smoking at 12 years of age, and who smoked up to four packs a day, and how she turned out fine. “My smoke-filled childhood was remarkably healthy and safe, says King (King 145). King herself started smoking for reasons that differ greatly from most smokers. She bought her first two packs at the age of 26, just for the packaging. She wanted to store paper clips in the packs. This part of the story lends itself toward her pro-smoking stance because it debunks the anti-smoker’s commonly held belief that all smokers started smoking simply to look cool. She also shares with her reader the story of how she came to enjoy the “post coital” cigarette. However hard and unforgiving her position is, she does a great job of concealing it behind a very light-hearted tone. My personal belief is that, with regard to public policy, the answer to the smoking issue lies somewhere between Haviland and King.

I do agree with all of the points that Haviland makes about the health risks of smoking. They are indisputable facts. Smoking is, no doubt, unhealthy; not to mention, financially irresponsible. The problem I have with Haviland is two fold. One is that drinking a Monster energy drink is also unhealthy, and a waste of money. The same could be said of eating Cheetos or drinking a beer, yet these products are not illegal because, though the majority of Americans agree on these assertions, we place great value on the choices we have as individuals. We would rather have the choice of both unhealthy and healthy products than allow for only the healthy ones to make it to the shelves of our stores. This is something that will not change in the foreseeable future. The second issue I take with Haviland’s argument is simple. Prohibition does not work. Any one can see, by looking at history, summoning common knowledge, or reviewing the data available, that this is the case. Because of America’s prohibition of marijuana, enormously powerful and increasingly violent drug cartels have nearly destroyed Mexico. American prohibition of alcohol in 1920 fueled huge growth within the Italian Mafia in cities like New York and Chicago, and led to the rise of violent gangsters like Al Capone. The fact that Haviland calls for prohibition

of tobacco severely discredits her argument. This is simply not a feasible or sensible suggestion.

King, on the other hand, is harder to disagree with. [It is often the case that the more hardline and extremist view comes from the anti-smoker.] She means well and is simply defending her right to live her life the way she wants to. She is a likeable character who shares stories of her life that prompt the reader to both relate to her and understand how she's arrived at her position on smoking. That being said, her argument is not without flaw, she's just a very clever and tactful writer. King seems to suggest that there are no noteworthy health risks associated with smoking. She begins her story with how her mother smoked four packs a day and "made no effort to cut down while she was pregnant (King 145)." There is simply too much empirical evidence that proves that this is a bad idea, and King acts as if all mothers should smoke when pregnant.

I think that once we can hold back our urges to push the extremist form of our viewpoints and we realize that arriving at the best solution will involve understanding and compromise, we will start to make progress. Smoking is unhealthy, but it shouldn't be prohibited. Many people enjoy smoking to little negative effect, yet it is not advisable to smoke while pregnant. It is with this understanding that we will eventually find the ideal public policy, if we do.

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