Paradoxical consumer enjoyment
A cultural perspective on cigarette consumption

Anna Felicia Ehnhage
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Consumer culture theory (CCT) has similarly ended up in a one-sided portrayal when studying consumption seen as destructive or marginalising. This thesis argues that this one-sided view is a result of how dominant discourses within CCT views pleasure. The strive to attain pleasurable experiences is often described as a motivation for consumption in CCT, however, pleasure lacks nuance and is mainly portrayed as constructive and socially accepted. That is, consumption of the seemingly irrational, destructive, or repulsive products in today's marketplace cannot be understood as motivated by pleasure as defined in CCT, as a result, much of the consumption that occurs in the marketplace is excluded from the literature.

The thesis argues that the one-sided view on pleasure in CCT is the result of a lack of frameworks encompassing ambiguous experiences. To this end, the present thesis builds a framework based on psychoanalytically informed discourse theories' view of jouissance, a form of paradoxical enjoyment, and apply it on the study of cigarette consumption. This thesis suggests to move away from pleasures when studying destructive and marginalising consumption and instead suggests paradoxical enjoyment as an alternative.

This thesis concludes that paradoxical enjoyment, in the case of smoking, further breaks with the assumptions of rationality and constructiveness often present in CCT. Smokers, on the other hand, experience enjoyment because of the regulations and social stigma that surrounds smoking. The thesis moreover shows how enjoyment of smoking is expressed as a disruption of pain experienced in crisis caused by e.g., separation or death, because the pain from crisis is out screamed with the pain felt from smoking. In addition, enjoyment of smoking is felt through the moving back-and-forth between self-imposed limits and limitlessness. Lastly, the thesis found that smoking is an isolated enjoyment, preferred away from non-smokers as well as from other smokers, because of the repulsion smokers sense towards their own consumption.

Keywords: Paradoxical enjoyment, cigarette consumption, consumer culture theory, consumer enjoyment, pleasure, psychoanalytically informed theories.

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To Axel
Acknowledgement

PhD life is – much like smoking – isolating, self-destructive and at the same time exceptionally rewarding. Just like the smokers I encountered in my fieldwork, who had more reasons quit smoking than to continue, I had more reasons not to finalize this thesis than I had reasons to finalize. At the end of my PhD I got my dream job in the industry, a house and a son. There were many things pulling me in other directions. Curiously, I ended up finishing my thesis and similarly most of my research participants continued to smoke. One of the main reasons for why I knew I needed to finish it, was because of all the people who generously participated with their vulnerable and honest accounts of smoking and of life. I would like to start by directing a special thanks to all of you, because without you there would be no thesis. Your stories always made my work with this thesis feel important to someone other than myself.

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Abstract

In a time when health is seen as an important personal achievement, it is difficult to understand why people consume cigarettes. The explanations for cigarette consumption tend to be one-sided and the most common explanation are addiction and compulsive personality. Consumer culture theory (CCT) has similarly ended up in a one-sided portrayal when studying consumption seen as destructive or marginalising. This thesis argues that this one-sided view is a result of how dominant discourses within CCT views pleasure. The strive to attain pleasurable experiences is often described as a motivation for consumption in CCT, however, pleasure lacks nuance and is mainly portrayed as constructive and socially accepted. That is, consumption of the seemingly irrational, destructive, or repulsive products in today's marketplace cannot be understood as motivated by pleasure as defined in CCT, as a result, much of the consumption that occurs in the marketplace is excluded from the literature.

The thesis argues that the one-sided view on pleasure in CCT is the result of a lack of frameworks encompassing ambiguous experiences. To this end, the present thesis builds a framework based on psychoanalytically informed discourse theories’ view of jouissance, a form of paradoxical enjoyment, and apply it on the study of cigarette consumption. This thesis suggests to move away from pleasures when studying destructive and marginalising consumption and instead suggests paradoxical enjoyment as an alternative. This thesis concludes that paradoxical enjoyment, in the case of smoking, further breaks with the assumptions of rationality and constructiveness often present in CCT. Smokers, on the other hand, experience enjoyment because
of the regulations and social stigma that surrounds smoking. The thesis moreover shows how enjoyment of smoking is expressed as a disruption of pain experienced in crisis caused by e.g., separation or death, because the pain from crisis is out screamed with the pain felt from smoking. In addition, enjoyment of smoking is felt through the moving back-and-forth between self-imposed limits and limitlessness. Lastly, the thesis found that smoking is an isolated enjoyment, preferred away from non-smokers as well as from other smokers, because of the repulsion smokers sense towards their own consumption.
Sammanfattning


Avhandlingen hävdar att underliggande antaganden om njutning i CCT är resultatet av en brist på teoretiska ramverk som omfattar ambivalenta upplevelser av njutning. Därför bygger avhandlingen ett ramverk baserat på psykoanalytiskt informerade diskurseoriers syn på jouissance, en form av tvetydiga njutning, och tillämpar den på en empirisk studie av cigarettkonsumtion. Avhandlingen föreslår att man bör frångå nuvarande definitioner av njutning vid studier av den till synes irrationella, destruktiva och tvetydiga konsumtionen. Avhandlingen introducerar istället begreppet paradoxal njutning som ett komplement till befintliga perspektiv inom CCT.
Avhandlingen drar slutsatsen att paradoxal njutning, i fallet rökning, bryter med antaganden om rationalitet och konstruktivitet i konsumentens val och som ofta kan ses i CCT:s definition av njutning. Istället upplevs paradoxal njutning som förhöjda p.g.a. de restriktioner och den marginalisering som omger rökning. Avhandlingen visar dessutom hur njutning av rökning ger ett avbrott i den emotionella smärta som upplevs i kris orsakad av t.ex. separation eller förlust, genom att överrösta smärtan med den som upplevs av rökning. Rökaren ökar sin njutning genom att röra sig mellan tillstånd av kontrollerad och gränslös rökning. Slutligen har avhandlingen visat att rökning föredras att avnjutas i ensamhet, i frånvaron av såväl icke-rökare som från andra rökare p.g.a. det äckel rökaren upplever gentemot sin konsumtion.
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1 Introduction: Unconventional enjoyments

During the financial crisis of 2008, one of my friends worked in a large French tabac company, a store that sells candy and cigarettes. My friend was looking for a new job and I had asked him about his job search since the job market was a bit shaky at the time. He told me that there were plenty of vacancies in his industry. He then turned to me with a smile and said something in French. I asked him what it meant; he told me it means overall consumption decreases but the desire for candy and cigarettes increases in a crisis. I recall this because it made me think of why these two consumer goods would be more attractive than others in a crisis. I am not sure whether my mind was skewed by my friend’s comment or whether it actually is true, but one year into the pandemic I noticed that more people seemed to be smoking in public.

More ordinary forms of consumption, which my friend believes decrease in a crisis, are typically explored in consumer research. These forms of consumption are often seen as providing value to consumers such as a pleasurable experience. Consumption that is risk-filled or socially destructive, on the other hand, is often excluded from this research as these activities do not fit current models of how we conceive value and pleasure. In this thesis, however, I explore a more unconventional form of consumption: smoking with a broader perspective on pleasure – i.e., enjoyment. I think it is necessary to widen the perspectives when studying smoking not only because people tend to have preconceptions of its motivations but also because it is an addictive substance.
I find smoking to be a fascinating form of consumption. In spite of the immense knowledge produced on the negative effects of smoking and the increasing set of regulations regarding smoking, people are still smoking and some are starting to smoke. This may seem harder to understand today than it did some decades ago. When I started thinking about smoking from a theoretical point of view, most the discussion focused on smoking as an addiction. This focus made me curious to find out what insights could unfold if the lens of addiction were dropped and replaced by another lens. While acknowledging that cigarette smoking indeed is addictive, I put that perspective aside here and instead take on a cultural perspective to understand what motivates people to partake in a risk-filled and regulated consumer habit like smoking. Therefore, I provide nuances to the currently explained motivational forces behind smoking, which can be extended to other areas of consumption.

By placing smoking in a context of enjoyment, I have been met with confusion and resistance, especially from smokers themselves. They argue that smoking was something different than their typical pleasure-driven consumption because ideas of what fits the realm of pleasure and consumption seem deeply ingrained in most people. Curiously, they were also struggling to classify smoking as something else. After nearly one hour of me asking questions about his smoking habit, Eric, a marketing researcher and smoker for many years, leaned back in his office chair during our interview and said in a brisk voice:

I have a question for you now, how will you classify this type of consumer activity in relation to other activities? I know that in your field you view consumption as something symbolically charged and as communicative in different ways.
I have always found some smokers’ voices soothing. It is as if the smoke spreads out like a blanket over their vocal cords and dampen all high-pitched tones. The result being a perfect blend of roughness and softness. This blend gives smokers fantastic bedtime voices. Eric reminded me of a father of one of my childhood friends. He rarely had the time, but I used to love it when he read to us. His soft voice demanded our full attention and created an incredible intimacy as it guided us through the magnificent worlds of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. At the time of my recollections, I was sitting in Eric’s brown leather sofa on an early spring day in Stockholm, and some 20 years had passed since those bedtime stories. Eric held his yellow cigarette package in front of me and continued:

> This brand should then tell you something about who I am. Let’s assume that the brand I smoke would be the most important thing, more important than what cigarettes do to me physically. But, for my part, there are no such elements at all in smoking. It’s possible that once, decades ago, one was seen as a cool guy when smoking in the school yard. But it’s definitely not like that now. It is rather something I want to hide.

As Eric implied, smoking used to represent a form of status, at least in some contexts, whereas now smoking is mainly marginalized and marginalizing. Eric’s light brown leather sofa squeaked as I moved around. My interview with him, being one of the first, coincided with a doubtful period where I was concerned whether my thesis topic would fly or fall flat. At times, I was worried it was at best a pipe dream, an interesting idea that would never hold once I talked to the smokers themselves. These worries were perhaps what excited me when Eric mentioned the status shift of smoking. As he spoke, a sense of
eagerness fizzed inside of me making it difficult to sit still. I changed position in the sofa to rid my restlessness and nodded eagerly when he spoke.

With these succinct sentences, Eric had illuminated how some consumer culture theorists would typically view consumption. He also nailed, what I had already been struggling with myself, how smoking does not fit into that view. In the consumer culture literature, consumer pleasure is often presented as having a constructive function as it provides a clear value to consumers and is something consumers want to display to others. For decades, consumption and possession have been presented as signalling status and identity (Belk, 1988; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008) and often in a way that reflects something desirable about oneself in social interaction (Shankar, Elliott, & Fitchett, 2009). Because of this view on the role of consumption in people’s lives, theory tends to describe it as a positive force to consumers and society (Belk, Ger, & Askegaard, 2000, 2003; Scott, Cayla, & Cova, 2017) that enchants and enriches often through a relationship-building function (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002) as well as between family members (Epp & Price, 2008). Much consumption can be described this way, but there are some examples of consumer activities that lead to isolation, marginalization, or harm. These darker sides of consumption are absent from the dominating views found in CCT. Furthermore, little is known about what motivates such consumption.

My own interest in the world of cigarettes is twofold. First, I could think of many things in the marketplace that are not represented in CCT but have something interesting to add to our knowledge of consumer culture. For example, everything that borders over-consumption with long-term negative effects would be excluded from the current dominating views in CCT – i.e., consumption that is risk-filled or seems purposeless within our frameworks of understanding. This type of consumption includes smoking, shopaholics, consumers who take loans to consume, or over-eaters. For me, cigarette smoking
is one of the clearest examples of risk-filled consumption physically as well as socially. Second, studying cigarettes reveals a clear shift in the view of smoking and the cultural symbol of the cigarette from intellectual, socialising, and blasé coolness to an almost unthinkable habit. Moreover, smoking had gone from symbolizing a form of pleasure to symbolizing its opposite – illness and death.

When Eric continued, he sounded more like a marketing professor than a smoker. His way of relating to his own habit in a hygienic and meticulous fashion resembled a biologist’s approach to dissecting an organism. He had an ability to maintain a theoretical distance and yet maintain a curious posture to his own smoking habit during most of the interview:

In some way you’ll have to create a typology of consumption activities of different kinds, and somewhere in this neat typology there is a box for smoking and some other things. Drinking alcohol – is that the same category or is it another one? It may not be exactly the same. What else is there? To over-consume other kinds of extreme uselessness, whatever it may be. Extremely useless, not just sweets, but groceries. Things you just shovel in your mouth. Somewhere, there must still be a box for such things as [they] are different from what most people study; clothes and movie consumption and other fun things, which are so visible to others and which can definitely signal who I am or who I want to be. So, how is this different then?

Despite my excitement during this episode of the interview, it was not until months later, when I listened to the recording of my interview with Eric, that I fully grasped its meaning. With his questions, he had managed to capture and identify the problems that, over the course of working with this thesis,
would return to me again and again. These problems were concerned, one way or another, with this extremely useless form of consumption, as Eric called it. What was the nature of this consumption? Were there other examples apart from smoking? What motivated smokers to smoke? In general, it was unthinkable for the participants of this study to compare smoking to other forms of consumption, but it was arguably even more unthinkable and controversial for them to place smoking in the realm of an enjoyable consumption. Indeed, it is counterintuitive for most people to imagine enjoyment to be related to a harmful, sometimes even death-inducing consumption.

I find smoking to be a rich example of the type of consumer enjoyment that essentially flips its common sense meaning. It is a distinctive – even provocative – symbol of the type of enjoyment that includes risk, discomfort, and friction, personally as well as socially. Smoking lacks the constructive traits we usually associate with pleasures. To emphasise this, I refer to this kind of isolating and ambiguous consumption as unconventional enjoyment. During my work with this thesis, it became obvious that some people have strong negative opinions about smoking. In addition, some people referred to smoking as risk-filled and costly to society. These narratives about smoking provide some background to the mental barrier people have to viewing smoking as a form of enjoyment, but plain facts about smoking are enough to contradict the conventional definitions of pleasure. Although this thesis does not aim to explore the risks of smoking per se, some of its risks should be mentioned. Smoking is largely contested, regulated, and debated because it increases the risk of cancer, lung conditions, cardiovascular disease, stroke, and numerous additional conditions (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). In Sweden, the costs of smoking in 2015 were estimated to be approximately USD 3.6 billion (Andersson, Toresson-Grip, Norrlid, & Fridhammar, 2017). This number is based on costs of health care, loss of market production (e.g., caused by sick leave, sick pay, and deaths), costs due to inability to take care
of the home during disease (e.g., cleaning), and costs of informal health care (e.g., family members performing care).

1.1 Enjoyment of cigarettes from a cultural perspective

It is pointless to smoke in absolute dark, Sten Andersson (1980) writes in his book on sociological interpretations of pleasures, because as soon as it is made invisible the taste vanishes. With these words, Andersson captures the essence of how we typically view pleasures or conventional enjoyment. The importance of sharing positive experiences is often emphasized culturally. We say things like ‘a meal tastes better in the company of others’ or ‘happiness is real when shared’. In the movie *Into the Wild* (Penn, 2007), a young man leaves his family for a solo adventure trip to the Alaskan wilderness to seek solitude. During his trip to Alaska, he experiences vivid encounters with other characters, but his restlessness forces him to leave them time and again to pursue his goal. While in solitude in the wilderness, he unfortunately dies of poisoning and starvation. Before dying, he realizes that happiness can only be experienced in the company of other people.

It is a beautiful thought and I do not necessarily disagree with it. However, in my work with this thesis, I have come to see a different kind of enjoyment adhering to other laws. Smoking is not the shared pleasure it used to be. Smokers often leave the table or physically distance themselves from others to avoid bothering others with their smoke or hide their habit altogether. This hidden, distanced enjoyment was precisely the type of unconventional enjoyment I had set out to study. CCT sometimes suggests that transgression of boundaries motivates non-shared enjoyment (Belk et al., 2003) and others have suggested that the sublimity of possibly deadly activities sparks a certain kind of enjoyment (Belk, Østergaard, & Groves, 1998; Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993). Both
of these arguments could be true for cigarette smoking, but current frameworks of CCT make it difficult to view smoking from the point of view of enjoyment.

In Sten Andersson’s (1980) view, smoking cigarettes is not as much a nerve poison as a way of relating to the world. He claims that this way of relating to the world, rather than the addiction itself, is why it is difficult to quit smoking. Without tobacco, he writes, the smoker ends up in a void where the world becomes stiff and dead. Many physicists and scientists would of course disagree with Andersson, even at the time when he wrote those words. Despite the thick and important knowledge on addiction, his words are not completely pointless. Being positioned in a sociological conversation, Andersson points towards alternative explanations of the enjoyment of smoking related to the meaning and relationship smokers as well as society have to cigarettes. It is within this space this study plays.

Forty years has passed since Andersson wrote that it is pointless to smoke in absolute dark, and much has changed. I argue that smoking now mainly happens in the dark, secluded from others. Andersson was right in the sense that many people quit smoking when more knowledge of its hazards was spread to the public and smoking itself was deprived of its symbolically conveyed and socialising attributes. In Sweden, where most the data were collected for this study, the number of smokers has dropped from 16% in 2004 to 6% in 2022 (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2022). Nevertheless, borrowing Anderson’s language, some people still seem to taste and even enjoy cigarettes even though smoking has been made increasingly invisible.

In her dissertation on how smoking has been discussed and displayed in Swedish popular culture throughout the decades, Ulrika Torell (2002) writes that one guiding idea for her work was the visual character of smoking. Her work
focuses on when and how people smoke, as well as the ideas, values, and meanings smoking has signalled throughout history. In my personal experience, the cigarette brand as well as how cigarettes are smoked were important when I was in my teens in the early 2000s. How you held the cigarette, between what fingers it was placed, or whether you inhaled the smoke signalled plenty about oneself. Being an experienced smoker could tell others that you were fearless and blasé. Today, those things are less important in many contexts, but smoking still conveys meanings, values, and ideas.

Torell (2002) studied the role of smoking in popular culture between 1950s and 1990s. During this period, there was plenty of material for her to use from popular culture. Today, it would be difficult to make a similar study – not impossible but definitely more challenging. Smoking is not nearly as visible in popular culture as it was during the decades she analysed. Today, smoking is most visible in movies and TV shows portraying a time when people used to smoke excessively like in the TV shows Mad Men (Weiner, 2007) or Stranger Things (Levy, 2016). In other cases, smoking represents a moral decay or setback of a character, where my personal favourite example is when the cigarette is repeatedly used to signify a setback in the Italian TV show Gomorrah (Comencini et al., 2014). Mostly, smoking is discussed in terms of being a problem, a burden to society, a harm to the individual, and harm to the smoker's surroundings. For me, the absence of smokers’ own voices guided me to listen to them in my work with this thesis.

At the outset of this study, I wanted to know more about how smokers themselves view their habit, how they see themselves in relation to others, their thoughts about risks associated with smoking, and how society views smoking. One of the two main points Torell (2002) makes in her thesis is that smoking is visible to others and that there is a meaning attached to smoking. Despite smoking being more uncommon and restricted today than during the decades
Torell observed, the cigarette as a symbol has not vanished; it is just what it signals that has transformed over time. For example, more recently, smoking is rarely talked about as enjoyable.

1.2 Enjoyment in consumer research

My cultural interest in smoking derives from my theoretical background in CCT. CCT takes, as the name implies, a cultural perspective on consumption and its relation to consumers’ lives. Initially, CCT was an inseparable part of consumer research, and took its initial trembling steps towards breaking free from it in the 1980s. In its separation from consumer research, the literature was also cutting the bonds to the managerial perspective in favour of focusing on the sociocultural scope (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In this separation, CCT as a field approached exploring ideological, experiential, relational, and symbolic aspects of consumption and it is against this background my own research is formulated. This way of putting the seemingly mundane aspects of consumers’ lives in a broader societal and ideological context, where the mutual impact of customer engagements and politics and societal structures is captured, attracted me to CCT.

CCT not only positioned consumption in a larger cultural perspective but also introduced the idea of pleasure in consumption. In the 1980s, a series of ground-breaking articles arguing for the importance of understanding the experiential and hedonistic motives for consumption sparked its division from consumer research (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). In my view, these articles not only helped move consumption from a managerial perspective (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) but also generated new ways of relating to consumption that was more separated from rational drives.
and closer to emotional drives. Despite their impact, more explicit presentations of pleasure waned after Hirschman and Holbrook’s series of papers in the 1980s.

Since the 1980s, pleasure has been seen as implicit forms such as desire, which is a mentally transgressive form of pleasure (Belk et al., 2003), aesthetics (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2008), the gratification of handcrafting (Moisio, Arnould, & Gentry, 2013), the pleasure of sublime experiences and loss of control in encounters with nature (Canniford & Shankar, 2013), the gratifying sensation of belonging to a community (Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi et al., 1993; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), and the pleasurable feeling of nurturing relationships through consumption (Bradford, 2009; Molander, 2011). Moreover, the implicit focus on pleasure in CCT assumes that consumers are motivated by pleasurable experiences. The nature of pleasure itself has been sparsely explored. As a result, pleasures that do not adhere to how we typically view them – e.g., non-socially accepted and risk filled pleasures – have been more hidden. In other words, pleasure has been separated from the socially-marginalized and dark consumption.

It is noteworthy that these studies rarely address the assumptions underlying pleasure. One consequence of not addressing the underlying assumptions is that most research is unquestionably biased towards a positive and one-sided outlook on pleasure. The literature often separate and polarise consumer experiences into negative and positive ones, but not necessarily consumers themselves. Consumers can – and do – engage in forms of consumption that spark pleasure and discomfort simultaneously (Alba & Williams, 2013) and much consumption is not useful or rational (Jantzen & Østergaard, 1998). The view of pleasure as something predominantly constructive for consumers has also
resulted in research focusing on socially accepted or socially gratifying consumption. While ignoring unconventional enjoyments and ambiguous consumers experience.

In an invited commentary, anthropologist Richard Wilk (1997) criticizes the way the literature of CCT polarizes pleasure, discomfort, and distaste. Although Wilk’s paper maintains such polarization by replacing pleasure with dislike as a compass for consumption, I agree with his call for less separation and polarization as a way to enrich consumer research. In the Journal of Consumer Psychology, Alba and Williams (2013) identify an ambiguous and contradicting enjoyment associated with consumption, but they note CCT lacks frameworks and paradigms that capture and maintain ambiguity. In the section above, I note that today people rarely talk about smoking as enjoyable. To understand smoking and other forms of consumption characterized by a lack of constructive and rational traits as forms of enjoyment, we need to challenge the conventional understanding of enjoyment.

The call for new sets of frameworks in consumer research (Alba & Williams, 2013; Wilk, 1997) inspired me to look beyond typical frameworks applied in the consumer culture literature. This search led me to explore the concept of jouissance that has attracted widespread attention in other social scientific disiplines. Jouissance captures precisely the ambiguous relationship people sometimes have to enjoyment, e.g. through abuse, excess or obsession. Accounts of jouissance have been made by several psychanalytically informed scholars (e.g. Copjec, 2015; McGowan, 2004; Žižek, 2002; Zupančič, 2003). What makes theories of jouissance so useful for the present study is their inclusion of precisely the tensions of enjoyment and discomfort, a dichotomy that some CCT scholars believe need further consideration.
1.3 Jouissance: a theory of unconventional enjoyment

When I was on my way home from university one grey autumn afternoon in 2019, I happened to stand behind a young mother in the subway. The subway car was crowded and I was positioned in a way that made her telephone screen fully visible to me. She was watching it intensely while her infant slept in a stroller next to her. Her captivated attention on the screen made me look in its direction. I saw video after video of the same procedure – pimple popping. I instinctively found this appalling and yet curiously appealing and yet I was unable to take my eyes from her screen. I later learned that this is a popular viral phenomenon. (If you are interested, one of the more popular YouTube channels on this topic is Sandra “Dr Pimple Popper” Lee). As I left the subway train, I realized that this simultaneous experience of enjoyment and discomfort perfectly describes jouissance.

Jouissance, a French word originally, describes an excessive and transgressive form of pleasure where suffering and enjoyment co-exist. The concept is not founded on a coherent theory, and it takes on several meanings and connotations, which makes it useful in various perspectives on enjoyment, including the enjoyment from sexual orgasm. This study, however, focuses on the double-edged elements of enjoyment. Jouissance has previously been applied by psychoanalytical scholars and has lately been adopted by various scholars in humanities because the framework helps one conceptually access people’s complex relationship with pleasure both on individual and cultural levels.

My encounter with jouissance was introduced via psychoanalytical theories. During one of my last master courses, a guest lecturer presented the idea of psychoanalytical theories as a way of understanding consumer phenomena. I was baffled to see that these two, in my view, diverging fields could converse so well with each other. The course lingered in my mind for weeks in the way
that movies or novels sometimes do when they have unlocked novel perspectives on life or described a familiar phenomenon that I previously did not have linguistic access to. Then, in 2015, the same year I started my doctoral studies, the journal *Marketing Theory* published a special issue on the call for psychoanalytical theories in marketing (introduction by Cluley & Desmond, 2015). I started reading psychoanalytical theories and how they are applied in the literature of consumption and eventually came across psychoanalytically informed discourse theories that engage the concept of enjoyment. Psychoanalytically informed discourse theories have yet to be given a label, so I am using this label as other scholars have before me (see Chang & Glynos, 2011).

At first glance, some of these theories may seem bizarre. One of my first encounters with the bizarre was when reading about enjoyment in Freudian psychoanalytical theories. These theories describe the impossibility of pleasure and how an idea of being denied access to enjoyment arises along with the development of civilized societies. Freud had the impression that societies since tribal times had the idea of a primal father who had access to all the enjoyment he wanted (i.e., unlimited sex). The primal father’s adult sons eventually grow jealous of him and conspire to murder him. After murdering him, they realize that in order for them to live together in peace, they have to collectively renounce enjoyment. Without this renunciation, there could be no civilization (McGowan, 2004) and the idea of an unattainable enjoyment rose.

Many of these original ideas are eccentric indeed, some of them akin to Greek mythology. But contemporary philosophers have elaborated these ideas and they do provide interesting perspectives on social phenomenon. Others after Freud have developed these theories and have based their analysis of consumer societies on the pursuit and impossibility of attaining pleasure (e.g., McGowan, 2004). Inspired by Freuds ideas of the primal father, McGowan e.g. writes of how cultures, often via religions that promise unlimited pleasure
in the afterlife, create rules based on deprivation of pleasure as seeking pleasure is seen as the source of envy, frustration, and ultimately dissatisfaction.

The view of enjoyment in these theories captured my interest. Here, enjoyment is described as inherently contradictory and often even impossible. Using these understandings of enjoyment, I saw a potential to enrich and add layers to the existing understanding of consumer enjoyment in CCT. For example, jouissance explicitly positons pleasure in the socio-cultural sphere, as it plays out on various levels of the human world. It permeats societal, cultural, ideological, relational and subjective levels. Taking a wider perspective on consumption and consumers is also common in CCT – e.g., CCT engages the ideological, societal, and political perspectives (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

As I started reading about jouissance, it became increasingly clear that enjoyment holds a pivotal position in all cultures and societies although this position was described in a way that was completely new to me. The consumer culture literature often assumes that consumer culture encourages consumers to be pleasure-seekers and pain-avoiders (see Belk, Ger, & Askegaard, 2003; Campbell, 1987; Jantzen, Fitchett, Østergaard, & Vetner, 2012). These psychoanalytical theories, on the other hand, overturned this perspective on enjoyment altogether.

Psychoanalytically informed discourse theories distinguish between pleasure and enjoyment (Zupančič, 2003). Pleasure is what we engage to relieve discomfort or enhance its opposite. Pleasure is positioned in the realm of the socially accepted, even encouraged. In other words, pleasure as defined here is what is represented in the CCT literature I referred to in the previous section. It is more or less free of tension, and attaining in it gives positive effects such as higher status or more social approval. Enjoyment, on the other hand, is
pleasurable but at the same time disturbing and repulsive to the person experiencing it. It also has the potential to disturb others.

Because enjoyment can be disturbing, we are encouraged to give up enjoyment for its paler socially accepted counterpart, pleasure (McGowan, 2004). Therefore, enjoyment makes itself more noticeable. The idea presented by McGowan and others is: when giving it up, we tend to become more obsessed by the thought of it. Jouissance has been described as an excessive, destructive, and traumatic experience of enjoyment. Often appearing as a violent intrusion, enjoyment brings more pain than pleasure (Žižek, 2006). Whereas pleasure is moderated and controlled, jouissance is about excess – it is a surplus of enjoyment as it is a compulsive act of repetition, over use, and excess. Žižek (2002) finds the repetitive and excessive showing of video clips of the 9/11 terrorist attack on World Trade Center as an example of jouissance. This compulsive repetition of this horrendous spectacle, Žižek argues, provides viewers with an uncanny satisfaction, which represents jouissance at its purest, as the viewer is simultaneously repulsed and entertained by the repetitive viewing of the attack and its consequences. The young mother on the subway watching pimple popping over and over again, almost compulsively, would be my own (more mundane) example of jouissance.

The obsession that may occur as we give up jouissance stretches to how others enjoy. During the course of my work on this thesis, it has become evident that jouissance is a societal concern not only of the individual enjoyer but also of her surroundings in bewildering ways. There are drives that sometimes spark impulses to intervene in a stranger’s consumer choices. The concern with obesity is an example of how one person’s jouissance becomes the concern of neighbours as well as society. In her book Hunger: a memoir of my body, Roxane Gay (2018) describes experiencing her surrounding’s reactions to her obesity. Gay portrays how the extra weight made her body a public concern.
For example, complete strangers removed food items from her grocery basket when she had left it unattended in the store, and some people took it upon themselves to enlighten her of the dangers of obesity. In addition, obesity is debated in public discourses, often as a costly burden.

Throughout my data collection, I have heard similar stories among smokers. Their habit has become a public concern because, like obesity, it causes illness and death and therefore is costly to society. Tobacco use is considered the foremost cause of preventable death in the world (World Health Organization, 2011). My choice of cigarettes as an empirical example was based on its risk-filled effects as well as cultural meanings. In many ways, smoking made the perfect example of an unconventional form of enjoyment due to its marginalization if not outright ostracization of the smoker as if society has deemed smoking a taboo.

1.4 Research focus

This section gives a short overview of the purpose and direction of this study. At the end of the next chapter, I describe and discuss the purpose and research questions of this study in greater detail and against the background of the literature review. Throughout this introductory chapter, I have argued that in order to understand contemporary consumer culture, we need to understand the nature of enjoyment as a driving force of consumption. Currently, there is a gap in knowledge when it comes to understanding enjoyment as a driving force of risk-filled consumption. Elements of enjoyment are perhaps most visible in the marginalized and risk-filled consumption, but these elements could help explain the motivation of mainstream consumption as well.

By introducing a novel approach to pleasure and enjoyment, this thesis seeks to develop, extend, and deepen existing theories of consumption of pleasure.
with existing theories about consumption. A missing piece of the puzzle is understanding what motivates consumers to consume (Alba & Williams, 2013; Wilk, 1997). The question that guides my work as well as this thesis revolves around what motivates risk-filled consumption. Specifically, why do some consumers spend a considerable amount of time and money on products and services that include a potential risk and possible marginalization and what do these products provide consumers?

In the public debate and previous research on smoking, one voice is noticeably absent: the smoker. To illuminate the voices of smokers and provide them with enough space, I decided to write the findings chapter in the form of an essay, stripped of analysis much like how I present Eric in the beginning of this chapter. The analysis is instead integrated in the discussion chapter. I have talked to smokers and read their written accounts on smoking and quitting in smoking forums to better understand their relationship to smoking. In addition, I have collected regulatory decisions, social media, and other media to understand the wider societal and cultural aspects and perspectives on smoking.

The marginalized is constantly redefined, removing some characteristics and adding other characteristics. The aim of this thesis is to provide an understanding of consumption of the marginalised despite its signifier might shift with time and between cultures. Cigarettes are seen as risk-filled and marginalized consumer activity in many societies of today. Around six decades or so ago, it had positive connotations and all socio-economic classes of society had the cigarette in common (Torell, 2002); however, over time, smoking has gradually lost its status. As a contrasting example: drugs, on the other hand, have recently gained status in some societies. A former hidden consumer engagement – marijuana smoking – has started its journey to the upper crust, where it now has replaced the cigarette’s former place among intellectuals and think-
ers (Žižek, 2014). The cigarette itself has carried numerous different meanings. Throughout time, the cigarette has been used as a communicative object where facets of what, how, when, and who smokes have signalled something to the surrounding. That is, the meaning of smoking and the symbol of the cigarette itself has also varied over time.

Finally, I would like to add some words on addiction. As I have previously mentioned, this thesis will focus on smoking from a cultural perspective and therefore not explore its physiological consequences. However, it is important to note that smoking, can result in physiological addiction and severe consequences to the smoker. Although addiction is pivotal to the understanding of physiological effects of smoking, the cultural perspective adds much to our understanding of the symbolic meanings imbued in the cigarette as well as in the act of smoking. It is important to understand smoking from a cultural perspective precisely because the risks of smoking are so obvious and serious. In a very direct physical way, cigarettes remind us of death and on a conceptual level, at least, death is closely related to jouissance.

1.5 Layout of the thesis

In the next chapter, I flesh out the perspectives on consumer enjoyment in the consumer culture literature as well as how I contribute to the current understanding of enjoyment. I also pose the research questions guiding the thesis. In Chapter 3, I provide details on my theoretical framework of jouissance. Chapter 2 and 3 mirror each other. Chapter 2 is structured into four themes: hedonistic pleasure, escapist pleasure, calculated pleasure, and communal pleasure. Similarly, Chapter 3 is divided into lost enjoyment, ascetic enjoyment, obsessive enjoyment, and obscene enjoyment. However, as the theories view enjoyment so fundamentally differently they are distinguished by being
labelled as pleasure in chapter 2 and enjoyment in chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents and discusses the methods applied. Chapter 5 describes the empirical context of cigarette consumption; its historical and current cultural perspectives on smoking, as well as brief information about its potential hazards. Chapter 6 presents the findings separate from the analysis, which are part of Chapter 7, the Discussion. Finally, Chapter 8 presents the conclusions drawn from this study.
2 Literature Review: Four Perspectives on Consumer Pleasure

About a year into my doctoral studies, I re-read the field-framing article *Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research* by Arnould and Thompson (2005) and was startled to see that the articles that initiated the very birth of CCT were inspired by ideas about pleasure. In 1982, the first studies on pleasure were published. In a series of articles on hedonistic consumption, some consumer researchers broke free from previous ideas of consumption as driven by needs and instead advocated for pleasure (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). After this, CCT has in many ways – more or less explicitly – revolved around questions of pleasure as motivation for consumption.

Despite its break with rationality in the 1980s, consumer pleasure literature still remains close to the rational and constructive. The shortcoming of these perspectives is its focus on constructive pleasures that provide consumers with something good (Belk et al., 2000, 2003; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Its underlying assumption is that consumerism is good for society as well as consumers. As a result, it predominantly depicts the consumption that fits the constructive criteria where pleasure is assumed to be moderate, socially rewarding, and often represented by an elite clique of consumers (Jantzen et al., 2012). Some voices have criticized the tendency of consumer theorists to rationalize consumption and the role of consumerism in society. Theories have yet to understand consumption as a pointless activity, even unconstructive (Gabriel, 2015; Jantzen & Østergaard, 1998), so they are
unable to unlock the motivation behind consumption outside of the rational criteria.

The more I immersed myself in the literature of pleasure in CCT the clearer it became to me that what is at stake are different, even conflicting, notions of pleasure. By reading the CCT literature through the lens of psychoanalytically informed discourse theories, I could discern at least four distinct categories of pleasures: hedonistic pleasure, escapist pleasure, calculated pleasure, and communal pleasure. Each of these categories reflects its perspective of the nature of pleasure: hedonistic pleasure is the pleasure sparked in the interaction with products; escapist pleasure presents the pleasure of escape from the mundane; calculated pleasure is the pleasure derived from restrained and delayed satisfaction; and communal pleasure focuses on pleasure as social and relationship building. These categories are my own based on my reading of the literature. Moreover, the CCT research rarely explicitly discusses pleasure.

Throughout this chapter, it becomes evident how CCT has flirted with but circumvented openly dealing with pleasure. I do not believe it was an explicit or aware choice, but I find it noteworthy that CCT, which is so focused on pleasure in so many ways, has struggled with its relationship to pleasure. As a consequence, there has been no explicit attempts to conceptualize or understand this pleasure (Alba & Williams, 2013). Instead, the literature sees pleasure as an epiphenomenon, a consequence of consumption. In the four themes structuring this chapter, pleasure is assumed to be both a motivation for and reward of consumption. Lastly, the larger parts of the studies included here take an interpretivist, qualitative approach.
2.1 Hedonistic pleasure

In one of my first business and administration classes at the university in the early spring of 2007, the professor told us that in this field ‘we assume that consumers are rational and have access to perfect information’. However, I had just left my job in a high-end fashion centre where rationality and perfect information rarely influenced the decisions consumers made. The reason for this assumption was the ideas of what motivated consumption. Before the introduction of hedonistic pleasure (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), the dominant view was that consumption was motivated by needs and the consumer was believed to be rational. The hedonistic perspective contrastingly suggested wants as the dominating motivation for consumption and the consumer as emotional. In their parting with the formerly dominant ideal, Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) suggest that consumer research should give greater attention to the ways that products provide pleasure to consumers. This theoretical turn was important for understanding consumption beyond necessities.

Despite having provided valuable insights and understanding about consumers and consumption, this perspective has two main shortcomings: it remains in a constructive rational sphere of consumption, and it has been overly fixated on the material traits of products. These shortcomings have led to a lack of conceptualizing and understanding pleasure itself. The perspective focuses almost exclusively on consumer pleasure of products that provide status or positive experiences. That is, it neglects a possibility of mixed experiences of pleasure and discomfort. Given the contemporary ideals of consumption as enchanting and enriching, the hedonistic perspective ends up ensconced in a rational form of pleasure from which consumers derive social as well as personal rewards (Jantzen & Østergaard, 1998). Therefore, the perspective neglects the pleasurable consumption outside the constructive sphere.
Unlike functional, necessary, and efficient products, hedonistic products are fun, appealing, and enjoyable (Alba & Williams, 2013). Consequently, hedonistic products are not required to have a purpose outside producing pleasure. This perspective emphasizes the consumer’s relationship to products (Belk, 1988; Belk et al., 2003; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) – a view which revolted the ideas of consumption at the time. Sensory experiences are pivotal to the hedonistic approach (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Smell, texture, and beauty appeal to what consumers want, using the product to spark their interests. Therefore, the intrinsic traits of the products produce pleasure through a positive sensory experience. Aesthetic traits, however, are more central in hedonistic theories because they heighten sensory experiences, which is also apparent in the market itself where formerly mundane products are increasingly aestheticized. This transformation permeates everything from vacuum cleaners and table salt to beautiful and fabulously scented soap. This makeover of things from necessity to pleasure penetrates the everyday lives of consumers as their homes, things, and even the consumers themselves are aestheticized (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2008). Consumer hedonism refers to precisely these expressions of pleasure, ranging from the extravagant to the mundane.

From this perspective, pleasure derived from consumption is predominantly seen as a result from the interaction with products or services. That is, products are assumed to have intrinsic qualities that are vital for the very possibility of pleasure; however, the consumer provides the pleasurable effect by imbuing it with subjective meaning (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The consumer’s sensory system is one channel where the experience of an object can occur although fantasy is often needed. Cigarettes, as I argued in the introduction chapter, are imbued with meaning and this meaning has changed over time. Moreover, cigarettes indulge sensory experiences: the touch of the package,
the sensation of holding a cigarette, the heat of the lighter, and eventually the taste and effect of the smoke.

Being almost exclusively seen as triggered by material products, the hedonistic perspective places the product per se as fundamental to the very existence of fantasy. In other words, imaginative constructs are based on reality or intangible traits of products. Sociologist Colin Campbell (1987) criticizes this perspective by claiming that the perspective overly focuses on material aspects of pleasure, ignoring fantasy as an explanation for why consumers’ thirst for products is never satiated. Campbell suggests that fantasy and therefore its grasp on the consumer do not reside in the products themselves. That is, fantasy is not as tied to products as to the meanings consumers project onto the products.

This perspective has been criticized for its inability, among other things, to sufficiently explain or conceptualize pleasure itself (Alba & Williams, 2013) as it relies too much on the product’s intrinsic qualities rather than contextual meanings, societal structures, and ideologies. By overly focusing on fine-grained distinctions between types of products and the specific features of consumption environments, researchers have overlooked an important understanding of what motivates consumers to consume (Campbell, 1987). In addition, the perspective focuses too much on material aspects of pleasure while ignoring meanings and contexts.

The intense focus on the product as comprising hedonistic traits downplays the role of consumer interactions, cultural and social context, as well as consumer imagination. The products studied using this perspective often signal status and, as a biproduct of consumption, provide the pleasure of social reward. Hedonism, as I have presented, has been criticized for failing to understand when, how, and why consumers take pleasure in products (see Alba &
Williams, 2013). A Louis Vuitton purse, for example, reflects luxury if worn by a certain consumer in a certain context. Placing that same bag in a different context, with another consumer, it can appear tasteless and vulgar. Product traits, such as luxury, are contingent on several factors such as the owner, the context, and the observer rather than the product itself. Unlike the material fixation and the misunderstanding of the very traits of consumer pleasure associated with traditional hedonism, below I discuss the purely experiential world of modern hedonism where the mental experiences of pleasure are seen as the heart of pleasure.

2.2 Escapist pleasure

Lately, consumer culture studies have begun to view escape as a form of pleasure. The literature often describes escape, either as daydreaming and fantasizing or as an intrusive sensation as the result of a shocking experience. The pleasure itself is seen as arising from the escape from dullness, demands, and norms of everyday life either by dreaming of alternate lives or by brutally abolishing the sense of self through, for example, skydiving. That is, pleasure is seen as arising from symbolic or mental transgressions of social norms (Belk, Ger, & Askegaard, 1996; Belk et al., 2000, 2003) or from pain, risk, and thrill (Arnould & Price, 1993; Scott et al., 2017). This perspective, unlike others, emphasizes the role of ambiguity in pleasurable experiences. The focus on ambiguity is an important addition to our understanding of pleasure and motivation for consumption partly because the ambiguity revealed by the escapist perspective suggests a complexity about pleasure that the hedonistic perspective ignores and because it moves beyond the product itself to experiences triggered within the consumer.
The escapist perspective, however, has cemented the idea of rational pleasures by overly focusing on consumption and consumerism as positive and constructive for individual consumers as well as society (Gabriel, 2015). That is, escapism is seen either as a constructive force that helps consumers make their lives more interesting and fun (see Belk et al., 2000, 2003) or as a way for consumers to become more productive citizens (see Scott et al., 2017). It is moreover seen as an outlet indispensable for tolerating contemporary consumer lifestyle, which is seen as detached from real or true experiences. However, some scholars have criticized these views for their focus on elitist and culturally conforming consumption (Jantzen et al., 2012), which tends to contribute to the dominant discourse that consumption is positive (Ahlberg, Coffin, & Hietanen, 2022) and that reason and logic can resolve tensions (Gabriel, 2015). The two main perspectives representing escapist pleasures are desire and extraordinary experiences.

The escapist pleasure derived from daydreaming and fantasizing is represented in desire literature. Desire, an intellectual and emotional state, sparks feelings of pleasure and desiring is itself seen as a willing engagement in pleasure (Campbell, 1987). This view sees desire as a pleasure more independent of products but not entirely independent as desire needs a promise of consumption. Unlike the material focus of the hedonistic perspective, this perspective poses that daydreaming and fantasizing are seen as the main sources of consumer pleasure (Jantzen et al., 2012) although the hedonistic perspective acknowledges that consumers can and do enjoy products as well as the specific qualities of products that consumers enjoy. Desire is often described as a dream of products to come – i.e., future consumption. These products represent other versions of life where the product promises to provide the consumer with desirable traits. Desire is an unsatisfiable force continually persuading more consumption and therefore it is seen as a motivating drive behind consumption (Belk et al., 2003). Here, pleasure is see as the interplay
between consumers and their context, relationships, culture, fantasy, and advertising (Campbell, 1987). Products, on the other hand, are seen as symbols or enhancers of the imaginary. This way, desire has successfully extended the hedonistic perspective to an understanding of consumer pleasure as something far beyond the realm of objects.

Attempting to satisfy their desires, consumers are constantly renewing and reinventing themselves and their lives. Renewal and relief of dullness provides a pleasure of escape for consumers. At some point, many of us truly have believed that an outfit or a product will transform us to a better version of ourselves. For smokers, purchasing a package of nicotine gum might promise a renewed, healthier version of the themselves. Unfortunately, this feeling is fleeting. As soon as the initial lure of new products wears off, we recognize our dull selves in the mirror again. Belk and colleagues (2003) argue that this circular experience of hopefulness and dullness explains why consumers are never satisfied. Desire has also been suggested to help people escape the dullness of everyday life, a way to transgress social norms and demands (ibid.). Moreover, rarely engaging in empirics, the literature on desire is criticized for a lack of knowledge of how consumer pleasure ‘exists in the wild’ (Alba & Williams, 2013, p. 12). I agree with Alba and Williams’ analysis that the pleasures of the mind are more difficult to research empirically; however, pleasures of the mind are also less transgressive than pleasures experienced ‘in the wild’ because pleasures of the mind are hidden from the gaze of others. This mental pleasure makes transgression of social ideals more or less free of friction compared to physical transgressions of social norms.

Escape can also manifest through extraordinary experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993; Goolaup, Solér, & Nunkoo, 2018; Scott et al., 2017; Tumbat & Belk, 2011). Here, pleasure is based on a loss of control and a sense of transcending
the self. Extreme pain, risk, and thrill situate consumers so brutally in the moment that everything else disappears. That is, those sensations are efficient instruments for rapid escape. Some examples of such intrusive experiences induced by thrill are obstacle racing with elements of exposure to fire and electric shocks (Scott et al., 2017), white water rafting (Arnould & Price, 1993), surfing (Canniford & Shankar, 2013), and being tattooed (Patterson & Schroeder, 2010). The risk of death has been described as a particularly efficient way of attaining pleasure. For example, Celsi et al. (1993) found that skydivers perceive the sensation of escape to be more powerful when there has been a death in the skydive community. The possibility of death seems to heighten their focus during the dive and the pleasure they experience after the dive.

Rather than being a masochist endeavour, pleasure derived from pain or fear as the result of extraordinary experiences helps people effectively escape the imperative of being themselves. The literature of extraordinary experiences suggest that such experiences merge pleasure and pain. This realization has sparked a shift where pleasure and pain are seen as one and the same motivation for consumption (Jantzen et al., 2012), a motivation multiplied by the excitement it causes. That is, pleasure is derived from self-exposure to a shocking experience because in that moment consumers become detached from dullness and in contact with feelings of something “truer”. The ongoing project of identity creation and never-ending choices contemporary consumers struggle with is seen as a burden as they dissolve during intrusive experiences. During extraordinary experiences, the self becomes shattered as people experience themselves being merely bodies, removed from the dulling comfort of their everyday lives. That is, the pain, risk, and thrill of ruthless intrusions of everyday life instil consumers with a sense of release and freedom.
Feelings of escape as the result of extraordinary experiences are primarily the result of the pain, risk, and thrill these experiences induce. Pleasure of escape is attained through sensations of surprise and loss of control. When consumers have novel experiences outside their existing frames of understanding the world, the surprise or loss of control they experience produces pleasurable feelings (Goolaap et al., 2018). From this perspective, such experiences put consumers in pre-linguistic state – i.e., they become primitive beings and therefore momentarily annihilate the reflexive self (Scott et al., 2017). Inducing themselves with extreme pain and thrill puts them in a state of flow where the demands of the world momentarily vanish (Celsi et al., 1993). The ultimate goal, as explained by the informants of this literature stream, is to reach the “true” self or at least a truer version of oneself.

This double-sided experience is at the very core of escapist pleasure. However, the literature on escapist pleasure lacks a sufficient framework for pleasure. Although much of the literature deals with aspects of pleasure, it only mentions pleasure itself in passing (Arnould & Price, 1993; Belk et al., 2003; Canniford & Shankar, 2013; Scott et al., 2017). Although this intrusive version of escapist pleasure resembles how I frame my study of cigarettes, it views escape as a constructive force as it helps consumers maintain their everyday lives or as a way to become more productive (see Scott et al., 2017). Moreover, most of this literature focuses on socially accepted, even rewarded pleasures where escape through extraordinary experiences and desires is seen as a status symbol by contemporary consumers.

Recently, criticism has been directed at contemporary consumer culture’s emphasis on excitement (e.g., through intrusive escapism) because of its conveyance of status (Ahlberg et al., 2022; Gabriel, 2015; Jantzen et al., 2012). Smoking, on the other hand, has fallen in status despite its risk-filled nature. Smoking is risk filled and can instil pain, but not in the immediate way as
skydiving and obstacle racing, as mentioned in the examples of extraordinary experience, do. Whereas escapist pleasures often involve physical strength, smoking represents a silent and slow physical decay, which is at odds with the conventional perspectives on pleasure. In short, these theories of pleasure as escape cannot explain why people smoke, a regulated risk-filled pleasure with a low social status.

2.3 Calculated pleasure

The idea of calculated pleasure permeates the underlying assumptions of pleasure in CCT. That is, the very definition of pleasure entails that consumption must be moderate and self-denying. Unlike the two previous perspectives, perspectives on calculated pleasures are based on how consumers enjoy rather than what consumers enjoy. Calculated pleasure assumes consumers enjoy self-restrain. The literature presents calculated pleasure as a mental pleasure arising from the tension that arises between a person’s desires and a person’s ability to resist acting on their desires (Belk et al., 2003). This view, which includes moderate forms of consumption, is often implicated in research that sees restraint as a highly valued quality in consumers (Søren Askegaard et al., 2014). For example, consumer minimalism, where consumers only own a small number of things, assumes each new purchase is carefully researched and selected before it is included in the minimalist’s life.

Although the perspective of calculated pleasures has helped us understand some forms of pleasures and their functioning, it has led to a one-sided view of pleasures as the calculated has reached a status of being a premise for all pleasures (Jantzen et al., 2012; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). Because this view sees moderation as a prerequisite for pleasure, its opposite – excess – is not even conceivable as pleasurable. Therefore, CCT ignores many aspects of
the market because these aspects do not fit the assumption of moderate pleasures (Jantzen & Østergaard, 1998). In addition, the literature on the calculated perspective tends to sustain the idea that some consumers have the right to consume beyond moderation. Here, ideas of urban versus rural lifestyles, class, gender, and ethnicity affect how much leeway consumers have in transgressing norms (Bailey, Griffin, & Shankar, 2015). For example, when a woman becomes inebriated to the point of losing control, she is seen as repulsive; however, when a man becomes inebriated to the point of losing control, he is seen as fun loving.

This view of calculated pleasure is also reflected in a larger social context. The disciplined gaze and the self-disciplined body have gained something of an ideological status in a time when food, goods, and opportunities excessively available to enjoy (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). That is, the consumer who manages to keep a controlled and strategic stance towards pleasure is believed to have access to heightened pleasure. These theories emphasize self-control as high status – i.e., the ability of consumers to override immediate, short-term, and concrete impulses such as the desire to eat unhealthily, to conform to long-term ideals (Søren Askegaard et al., 2014). In other words, this view highlights the ability to resist temptations (Dhar & Simonson, 1999). Some theorists have given self-control a higher order purpose. That is, self-control is seen as a moral obligation and fundamental to virtuous behaviour (Baumeister, 2002; Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000), so the exercise of self-control is viewed as good and rational and the lack of self-control is viewed as bad and irrational (Joy &Venkatesh, 1994; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). However, consumers must know these rules, which are often unwritten, to achieve and intensify pleasure through calculated pleasure.

Similarly, individuals who resist temptation are often described as morally superior than those who surrender to temptations (Søren Askegaard et al.,
In this light, the morality of self-control is often categorised as good and low or no self-control as bad (Baumeister, 2002). Concerned about the impact of self-control on issues like obesity, researchers have invested substantial resources to identify factors that may facilitate or hinder an individual’s ability to exert self-control – e.g., environmental conditions, personality traits, emotional states, and cognitive states (Dhar & Simonson, 1999; Dholakia, Gopinath, & Bagozzi, 2005). Calculated pleasure assumes that the rules for individual responsibility of pleasure (Campbell, 1987) are self-evident. Jantzén and colleagues (2012) suggest that the tendency to favour those who hold back is a result of a presumed democratization of pleasure, where several socioeconomic groups have achieved means and equal rights to define and find their form of pleasure. The classification of pleasures as more or less worth clarifies hierarchical structures better.

Implicit social rules restrict how and what should be enjoyed (Bailey et al., 2015; Goulding, Shankar, Elliott, & Canniford, 2009) and those are often expressed in consumer culture. Typically, consumers believe pleasures should not be satisfied instantly (Bailey et al., 2015). Rather, one should strive for deliberate pleasure and sophisticated pursuits (Jantzen et al., 2012). However, many reality TV shows and other popular culture media often critique a consumer’s failure to consume correctly (Bradshaw & Ostberg, 2019). For example, some reality TV shows follow overweight people who are unable to control their weight, consumers who take payday loans to support consumption they cannot afford, or consumers who obsessively shop at dollar stores. Often, the failures of these pleasure seekers are ridiculed in the TV shows. The high interest in such TV shows signals an interest in right and wrong consumer behaviour as well as watching others breaking the rules. Being able to discern correct consumption is important because the consumer who fails to abide by the rules of pleasure is not seen as engaging in pleasure at all, but rather in
Bauman (2001) suggests that a failed consumer is one of the worst stigmas in contemporary consumer cultures and Jantzén with colleagues (2012) adds that pleasure has a pivotal role to consumer status. This particular pursuit of pleasure is structured in a hierarchy where some ways of “doing” pleasures are considered better than other ways. A perspective that views some consumers as elite hedonists and others as coarse hedonists (Jantzen et al., 2012). The elite hedonists master moderation by perfectly balancing pleasures derived from consumption, whereas the coarse hedonists are slaves to their desire for excessive pleasure, exhibiting little or no restraint. Unlike drugs, smoking is not enhancing creativity or aiding in finding a truer self, and in addition, it can be both socially and physically harmful. Perhaps this is why smoking with current frameworks only could be viewed as an expression of compulsive behaviour or compulsive personality with current frameworks. Smoking which has no rational purpose or function is hard to fit in research based on the prevailing underlying assumptions.

In consumer research, non-calculated consumption has been avoided altogether or seen as a form of failed pleasure. Typically, non-calculated consumption has been framed as compulsive (Hirschman, 1992; O’Guinn & Faber, 1989; Rook, 1987; Wansink, 1994). The literature on compulsive consumption illuminates aspects of personality, will power, self-control, and self-esteem (Faber, Christenson, De Zwaan, & Mitchell, 1995; Hirschman, 1992; O’Guinn & Faber, 1989) as explanatory models for compulsive buying. This literature often assumes that consumption should be a constructive and productive force for consumers as well as society at large. When it is not, it clashes with the current frameworks of pleasure. The literature clearly supports this view of the failed consumer reflected in society, but what is more

excessive enjoyment. Since pleasure is one of our times’ high-status symbols it is important for consumers to know how to delineate right from wrong.
interesting to this research is how the framing of excess excludes any possibility that these consumer activities can result in pleasure.

What is deemed appropriate calculated pleasure can change depending on the time, person and context. CCT assumes stricter rules for what is acceptable and unacceptable pleasures, judgements that are related to aspects of cultural belongingness. For example, some lifestyles, classes, ethnicities, and gender belongings are automatically seen as doing pleasure incorrectly, or at least have stricter rules (see Bailey et al., 2015; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2012). These perspectives are examples of a cultural dismissal directed at the non-calculated pleasure. That is, these perspectives reflect an idea of the consumer as individually responsible for enjoying pleasure appropriately, and consumers who do not live up to this ideal of pleasure are often referred to as failures, unable to maintain control of their impulses. They are believed to be vulnerable to seduction and immediate gratification. Against this background, it becomes clear why smoking and pleasure so often are seen as antonyms.

2.4 Communal pleasure

CCT perspectives assume that pleasure is heightened when shared. The act of sharing pleasure occurs in the moment of a shared experience as well as when speaking about it with other people. Communities themselves create an added value to consumers (Arnould, Schau, & Muniz, 2009). Traces of communal pleasure are present in the perspectives on escapist pleasure too. While desire is mainly evoked in solitude, extraordinary experiences typically include an additional layer of communities. In the literature stream on desire, the longing for intimacy of interpersonal relationships is intertwined with desires (Belk et al., 2003). Theories on communality have shed light on the importance of tying and deepening social bonds through consumption, in intimate settings as well as in society. That is, what we consume reveals what social bonds we
have, everything from what football teams we support to where we work. In this context, pleasure via consumption helps create and maintain important relationships (Belk, 1976), including our intimate ones (Belk, 1976; Bradford, 2009; Molander, 2011), community relationships (Kozinets, 2001), and relationships based on social status, for example, through the consumption of luxury goods.

This experience provides many consumers with pleasurable feelings, but it cannot explain consumer activities that break or tear social bonds. Some criticism has been directed at CCT’s tendency to focus on belongingness (Wickstrom, Denny, & Hietanen, 2021). The criticisms specifically point to CCT’s tendency to emphasize consumption where communality is central but ignore the many examples of consumption that lack social justification (Jantzen & Østergaard, 1998). Similar to the other perspectives on pleasure, CCT assumes consumers make rational and goal-oriented decisions – i.e., they believe they can obtain their social goals through consumption.

From this perspective, consumption itself is assumed to create and maintain relationships. Both the act of consumption as well as the products themselves are seen as symbols for group belonging (Arnould et al., 2009). The act of consumption itself is involved in displaying a community belonging through rituals and gift giving (Muniz, Jr. & O’Guinn, 2001; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991; Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012). As mentioned in the previous section, it is not only what we consume, but how we consume that displays one’s social status or position (Üstüner & Holt, 2010) and in this context consumption of status symbols are important in societal as well as community settings.

The stigmatized and marginalized are usually excluded from the realm of pleasure in consumer culture literature. There is, however, an exception: when consumer culture implies some sort of pleasure and gratification associated
with belonging to a community (see Kates, 2002). In these situations, the nature of the communal pleasure is presented as a shared experience that intensifies (Goulding et al., 2009) as well as creates stronger interpersonal relationships in stigmatized groups. The marginalization is seen as an intensifier of the sensation of pleasure because of its clear division of an us versus them dynamic (Henry & Caldwell, 2006; Kozinets, 2001). In addition, the marginalized is seen as pleasurable only when it includes a communal or shared experience; however, smoking, which can be seen as a trait of marginalization, seems to lack the socializing effect found in existing pleasure studies.

Sharing experiences and reminiscing on these experiences are important practices of communal pleasure (Arnould & Price, 1993; Scott et al., 2017). Reminiscing not only heightens the thrill but also creates stronger bonds in the group, creating a heightened sense of community. Communities such as religious and political communities are sometimes shaped around the idea of belonging to something greater. In the skydiving community I described in one of the previous sections of this chapter, the skydivers often share stories about skydiving accidents, which forces them to think about death from time to time. In these moments of sharing, the skydivers experience not only a heightened sense of thrill but also a heightened sense of community because they all lived with the threat of death. This study aims to learn whether smokers, who also risk death, experience such intimate feelings of communality with other smokers. It would be interesting to understand more about how smokers relate to death individually as well as in relation to other smokers and whether they build relationships to other smokers as an attempt to heightening pleasurable feelings.
2.5 Summary of perspectives

To sum up, these four perspectives on pleasure present consumer pleasure as a straightforward, one-sided positive experience. In its essence it is described as *pleasures* rather than *enjoyments* as it is predominantly seen as a positive and productive force for individuals as well as society. Specifically, the current perspectives on consumer pleasure rests on three assumptions: 1) consumer pleasure is similar to the pleasure experienced from accomplishment or gratification; 2) consumer pleasure is a positive and productive force for society and individual; and 3) consumer pleasure promotes relationship building. These assumptions are rarely brought to the surface much less challenged. Rather, they have become reproduced to the point of being taken for granted truths. Most consumption theories view consumers as rational and acting in line with their long-term goals. I have summarized the four perspectives on pleasure in the table below.
Table 2.1 Literature review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>HEDONISTIC PLEASURE</th>
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2.6 Framing the problem

In this chapter, I present four perspectives on pleasure and discuss how CCT seems to struggle with conceptualizing consumer pleasure. That is, because CCT treats pleasure as an epiphenomenon, its underlying assumptions are ignored. Alba and Williams (2013) claim that the abandonment of studying consumer pleasure itself has led to a view of consumer pleasure as merely an act of maximizing pleasure. The assumption that consumers want to acquire, possess, claim, and display goods because they expect they will make them happy, satisfied, or give them some kind of pleasure leads any search for the
origins or causes of modern consumerism to an answer where happiness and satisfaction are achieved through consumption.

In summary, the literature treats consumer pleasure as self-evident and streamlined (Alba & Williams, 2013). This view has resulted in a focus on pleasures rather than enjoyments and any consumer activities that transgress the current framework’s underlying assumptions are expelled to the realm of unconventionality, deviance, and even pathology (Jantzen & Østergaard, 1998). There is a need for new perspectives on pleasure where consumer experiences are seen as multi-dimensional both in terms of positive and negative emotions (e.g., Russell, 1980; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991) as well as challenges to cultural ideals. Wilk (1997) rightfully suggests that the new perspectives should not engage in replacing the dogma of pleasure with negative emotions but instead broaden our thinking about human emotional relationships with the consumer world to include a much wider range of possibilities. This approach would entail a need to step away from previous dichotomies and attempt to engage in multidimensional perspectives on pleasure, including conflicting and confusing experiences.

Clearly, a fifth perspective, derived from psychoanalytically informed discourse theories, is needed, one that considers unconventional pleasures characterized by risk of disease and dismay and lacks a long-term constructive goal and social or physical achievements. Accessing new frameworks that unlock a possibility to view pleasure from new angles would add a piece to the theoretical understanding of consumer pleasure and consumer motivation. Until we can account for pleasure from more perspectives, models of consumer research will remain more normative than descriptive. Moreover, they will reinscribe ‘artificial, pedagogical exercises rather than useful phenomenologically insightful accounts’ (Belk et al., 1998, p. 209). As consumer research currently lacks frameworks and concepts to study unconventional pleasures, I
build a general theoretical framework based on psychoanalytically informed discourse theories that rely on the concept jouissance. This concept is used to analyse the data, making access to pleasure from new angles possible.

These theories, which deal with *enjoyment* rather than *pleasure*, not only break with their common sense definition but also are interrelated and simultaneously in conflict with the individual as well as societal ideals. Jouissance moves beyond pleasures to enjoyments in the sense that it encompasses discomfort, disgust, and social clashes. In French, jouissance engages with excess and disgust to understand pleasure from individual as well as societal perspectives. As psychoanalytically informed discourse theories take a similar point of view on pleasure, jouissance is compatible with the perspectives of CCT while extending these perspectives. The framework poses an understanding of internal and cultural antagonisms inherent in enjoyment such as pain, risk, discomfort, and disgust related to personal or other people’s enjoyments. Moreover, this framework provides insights into the structuring of pleasure both to the individual as well as to society and attempts to extend the understanding of the pivotal status enjoyment has gained in contemporary consumer culture.

Jouissance, as it is used here, is derived from psychoanalytically informed discourse theories. Rather than a coherent framework, these theories’ perspectives on jouissance make a mosaic of perspectives on the particular position enjoyment has attained in consumer culture. The concept of jouissance is commonly used in the humanities such as literary criticism as well as by contemporary philosophers (e.g. Copjec, 2015; Žižek, 1989; Zupančič, 2000). The ideas of jouissance problematize the role of enjoyment on a cultural-ideological level as, for example, these ideas view enjoyment as a cultural duty. Through a greater awareness of enjoyment and its relation to the interplay between consumer and society, I believe we can learn more about consumers’
motivations for consumption and the role of this interplay in society and markets.

2.7 Research questions

This study extends the existing perspectives on consumer pleasure by empirically exploring the case of cigarette smoking. Although the current notion of consumer pleasure as a calculated, shared form of escapism implies that it is a positive and productive force in society, cigarette consumption entails marginalization, risks, and discomfort. To this end, this study answers the following questions:

- How do smokers describe their experiences of smoking and make sense of its role in their lives?
- How do consumers make sense of and relate to forms of unconventional enjoyment?

Because this thesis explores the way that consumers understand their experiences and activities with relation to their perception of the societal or cultural view of their habit, a qualitative approach is the best methodology. In research on consumer pleasure and marginalized consumption, in-depth interviews combined with qualitative online data collection have been the most commonly applied methods. Similarly, I apply a combination of in-depth interviews, online data collection, and documents and media articles about smoking and smoking bans. From this perspective, dominating ideological discourses and their fragments are represented in texts and everyday speech (McCracken, 1988). That is, ideologies of smoking are evident in everything from regulations and policies to media coverage to online data collection to interviews with individual consumers.
To give a short account of my data collection, I collected online data between 2018 and 2020. During that time, I was present on forums where smokers and ex-smokers discuss their habit and its meaning to them. I also followed discussions on the new smoking ban among the wider public. To allow for nuanced and richer accounts of smoking, I conducted 16 in-depth interviews with smokers living in Sweden. In addition, I conducted a media analysis of articles covering the 2019 extended smoking ban. I also analysed the Swedish political process for the 2019 extended smoking ban and followed how the media portrayed the process. An expanded discussion of my scientific perspectives are provided in Chapter 4, which discusses how the research was designed.

This study contributes to the understanding of consumer enjoyment rather than pleasure. In doing so, this study extends and deepens existing perspectives on consumer pleasure by challenging the idea of consumer pleasure-seeking as rational and constructive by extending existing insights. Specifically, this study challenges the assumption that pleasure is inherently positive and constructive to society and individuals, explores risk-filled and regulated consumption, and uses an empirical example categorized as compulsive and addictive (i.e., smoking) rather than pleasurable in consumer research (Hirschman, 1992). By synthesizing theories on jouissance into a theoretical framework, this study adds a tool for studying the unconventional pleasures. The framework includes societal, cultural, and individual aspects of enjoyment.
3 Theoretical Framework: Four Perspectives on Jouissance

While reading the literature of psychoanalytically informed discourse theories, it struck me how often theorists use consumption and consumerism as examples. Some theorists more or less base entire books on analysing consumerism from the perspective of jouissance. The reason for the frequent connection to consumerism in these theories is a result of its focus on how subjects and societies relate to and struggle with their complex relationship to enjoyment. The perspectives are based on a Lacanian idea tradition; however, because Lacan constantly reformulated his own ideas, the original conceptualization of jouissance is fragmented and presented as a thought experiment. Lately, some scholars have reformulated jouissance in an attempt to explain the centrality of enjoyment in contemporary societies. It is this latter tradition of psychoanalytically informed discourse theories consumerism often is exemplified as well as where the framework of this thesis unfolds.

Jouissance does not exist as a coherent theory, so I appeal to how scholars in psychology, sociology, literature, and philosophy understand the concept. As these theories focus on the interface of the subject and culture, it has been frequently applied in humanities; e.g., film studies (Copjec, 2015; McGowan, 2004; Žižek, 1992), philosophy (Chiesa, 2007; Žižek, 1989, 2002; Zupančič, 2003), political theory (Glyons & Howarth, 2007; Stavrakakis, 1999), and sociology (Illouz, 2007) have found these theories useful. However, fields closer to my own such as business and administration and organizational theories have applied jouissance (Böhm & Batta, 2010; Cederström & Hoedemaekers;
Sköld, 2010). In the literature of consumer culture theory, jouissance has only been mentioned in relation to a lack causing desire (Belk et al., 2000) or passingly mentioned as a synonym for “sex”.

In this chapter, I build a framework based on theories that discuss jouissance. The framework is thematized into four sections: lost enjoyment – i.e., enjoyment is transgression; ascetic enjoyment – i.e., enjoyment is a form of suffering; obsessive enjoyment – i.e., enjoyment is an overconsumption of pleasures; and obscene enjoyment – i.e., enjoyment is a state of loathing one’s own as well as others’ enjoyment. These four enjoyments can be seen as fragments of, or different viewpoints on, jouissance. Combined, they introduce the missing perspective in consumer culture theory (CCT) – i.e., an unconventional definition of enjoyments. Before presenting the four sections, I introduce jouissance through some classic tone-setting theorists (e.g., Freud, Bataille, and Lacan) as well as more contemporary influential psychoanalytically informed discourse theorists. To fully grasp the essence of jouissance, we need to understand more about the difference between pleasure and jouissance. In the first chapter, I noted how modern views on pleasure describe pleasure as a more socially accepted form of enjoyment and that jouissance extends this notion.

3.1 Introducing jouissance

Over one hundred years ago, psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1920/2003) developed a concept he called the pleasure principle; where Freud suggests that our natural stance to life is a drive to seek pleasure and avoid pain. When we seek pleasure, we assess our possibility of suffering and weigh this possibility against the possibility to gain pleasure. Pleasures that involve too much suffering are discarded and pleasures that avoid pain are chosen. For example, a happily married wife or husband tempted to have an affair might reconsider
this choice after weighing the potential pleasures gained from the affair against the suffering of losing a spouse over the affair. However, Freud added that there is a beyond of the pleasure principle, characterised by suffering and caused by compulsion, self-destruction, repetition or aggression. He referred to the driving force behind such behaviour as the death drive. The death drive is significant for ideas of jouissance.

Lacan, who was influenced by Freud later brought up similar ideas in his texts on jouissance. To illustrate the transgressive nature of jouissance, Lacan turns to one of Immanuel Kant’s examples in *Critique of Pure Reason*; where Kant argues that the control of excess is efficiently achieved by a threat of punishment. Aligned with the pleasurable side of the pleasure principle, Kant argues that people would not choose death to satisfy lusts and the death penalty is therefore one of the most efficient means of control. Unlike Kant, Lacan, inspired by Freud’s understanding of the death drive, suggests that there are moments when people would choose to pursue lust even with the knowledge that choice would mean suffering, even death (Lacan, 1992). This neglect of suffering in the pursuit of pleasure defines jouissance. That is, jouissance can be experienced as a form of enjoyment of suffering (Fink, 1997).

Similar to the ideas presented by Freud, psychoanalytically informed discourse theorists have preserved the idea of a limit, or a border, as defining enjoyment. Satisfaction, for example, which is a companion to a climax of enjoyment, by definition needs a limit to be fulfilled (Žižek, 2006). Psychoanalytically informed discourse theories often present this limit as a social prohibition of enjoyment. Bataille (1988), whose ideas of transgression often share similar traits with jouissance, describes excess as constitutional to society *because* societies are constituted by prohibitions. These prohibitions are meant to curb antagonistic tendencies between people when sharing life space.
to enable co-existence; beyond these prohibitions, citizens find outlets for excess. Psychoanalytically informed discourse theorists often share this view and sometimes claim that in societies with endless possibilities of enjoyments, for example, in the form of consumption, all limits seem to have been abolished (Fisher, 2009; McGowan, 2004; Žižek, 1989). As a result, excess seems to dominate without clear boundaries (Fisher, 2009) and consumers are unable to reach satisfaction. What is more, enjoyment – especially through consumption – has gained a central role in many societies, to the point of becoming an expectation, a sign of personal success, even an imperative.

The command to enjoy permeates many societies. In contemporary consumer culture, we are often encouraged not only by advertising but also by our friends, families, social media, popular culture, and politicians to enjoy. Unsurprisingly, this command to enjoy via consumption coincides with the advance of capitalism. That is, as consumer culture and commodification of everyday life has increased, the importance placed on enjoyment has increased (McGowan, 2004). This strive to enjoy has come to signal social status and ultimately, according to psychoanalytically informed discourse theories, this imperative has become a command to enjoy. The command to enjoy is characterized by a constant encouragement to enjoy, leading individuals to look for new ways to enjoy.

The command to enjoy has often been present in and supported by market forces. Curiously, in my work with this thesis, I found that marketing, as we know it today, is greatly influenced by psychoanalytical theories. In the 1930s, when Freud was active, marketing practitioners made use of these theories, especially the idea of an impossible to attain enjoyment and the role of consumerism in freeing the internal drives of consumers (Schwarzkopf, 2015; Shankar, Wittaker, & Fitchett, 2006; Tadajewski, 2006). For example, adver-
tisers latched on to the female emancipation movement in the 1920s to encourage women to smoke, which at the time was seen as an unacceptable habit for women. These early advertisers understood that appealing to the command to enjoy perspective can effectively increase demand.

This internalization of the command illustrates how command to enjoy is presented to the subject as an imperative. Whatever way the individual chooses to go in her pursuit to enjoy, she still lives under this command to enjoy. This command or imperative to enjoy is similar to the spirit of what Freud referred to as the superego (Stavrakakis, 2007). The superego can be seen as an internalized conscience that dictates enjoyment as a sort of duty. Today, the duty of the superego would be in the shape of a duty to enjoy (McGowan, 2004). Because of its capacity to encompass both duty and enjoyment, the superego can be seen as the locus of both restraint and enjoyment.

The superego is characterized by an obscene form of enjoyment of watching oneself failing to enjoy. As the superego inhabits both the encouragement and the limit to enjoy, the subject enjoys doing her duty and at the same time the superego suggests an enjoyment that threatens that duty. That is, as Stavrakakis (2007) argues, we are able to enjoy our obedience, but at the same time this enjoyment threatens our obedience. Some psychoanalytically informed discourse theorists explain this equation of duty and enjoyment by suggesting that enjoyment is not a matter of following one’s spontaneous tendencies but rather a twisted duty where we experience guilt when failing to surrender to our desires (see Žižek, 2006). In a sense, the command to enjoy and the pleasure principle play out in an endless battle.

Jouissance in psychoanalytical discourse theory deals with subjects’ and societies’ complicated relationship to enjoyment, which often revolves around how our complicated relationship to enjoyment is played out on the individual,
interpersonal, and societal levels. Therefore, jouissance is aligned with the worldview of consumer culture perspectives. However, jouissance extends consumer culture perspectives by providing the possibility of viewing enjoyment as inherently ambiguous, a view propounded by, for example, Alba and Williams (2013). This view provides us with the possibility of researching enjoyments outside the realm of the socially rewarded (see Jantzén et al., 2012). By using the concepts pleasure principle, death drive, commanded enjoyment, and superego, I unfold the nature of jouissance in the coming sections.

3.2 Lost enjoyment

Lost enjoyment makes a good starting point for understanding how psychoanalytically informed discourse theorists view the role and position of enjoyment in societies. The idea is that individuals and societies struggle with jouissance so much because societies believe they need to curb enjoyment. If jouissance were to run free, people’s pursuit of enjoyment would make peaceful co-existence impossible (Fisher, 2009; McGowan, 2004; Salecl, 2011). In our journey to becoming civilized, societies have adopted laws, religions, and regulations to stop subjects from exploiting other people or common resources. These regulative social rules can be seen as the glue that makes civilizations possible as it provides a way for subjects to co-exist (see Freud 1930, 2001). Although this glue has been efficient in creating civilizations, it has also fuelled narratives about the loss of a “truer” enjoyment. This idea, lost enjoyment, is seen as the natural state of human beings in psychoanalytical discourse theories (McGowan, 2004), and we often find signs of having lost access to enjoyment we once had. For example, just a few decades ago smokers could derive pleasure from smoking but today smoking is rarely mentioned as a form of pleasure anymore. Instead, smoking is more often seen as dangerous and a form of addiction or compulsion – sometimes even an
abnormality – that does not fit the common sense view of pleasure. That is, smokers seem to have lost access to a pleasurable experience.

Psychoanalytically informed discourse theories see contemporary consumerism as a way to access sanctioned versions of jouissance. Moreover, societies are ingrained with a command to enjoy. This command is often present in slogans that suggest we should make the most of life or indulge because we are worth it. This view is evident in everyday speech. Subjects, on their hand, have an internalized version of the command to enjoy and the restrictions to jouissance. This internalized version, as mentioned in the previous section, is called the superego. The superego is the very locus of enjoying suffering. It is often described as our struggle with wanting to attain jouissance and how we recurrently fail that quest (McGowan, 2004). The ideas revolving around an impossible and yet truer enjoyment plague societies as well as individuals. At the same time, we are exposed to, and expose ourselves to, an imperative to enjoy – a confusing and complex relationship. The idea of having lost access to jouissance is a shared fantasy that permeates most societies (McGowan, 2004). This idea, or fantasy, of having forsaken jouissance plagues subjects is also seen as an effective foundation for fantasies of better and stronger enjoyments. One foundational fantasy of the moment of renouncing jouissance, often reproduced in psychoanalytical theories (Fink, 1997), is the state before civilization or before language, a time when we had access to a stronger and truer sensation of enjoyment.

The restrictions attached to jouissance rests on the assumption that jouissance per se is selfish. To enjoy, in the sense of jouissance, borderlines on abuse and therefore by definition enjoyment is selfish and anti-social as it completely disregards the needs of others, an attitude unsustainable in civilized societies. The very premise of civilization makes it essentially impossible to reach en-
joyment beyond the pleasure principle (Freud, 2003). That is, because a sub-
ject in pursuit of jouissance disregards long-term effects and suffering, a sub-
ject sees others as merely tools to be used. The extreme example would be a 
sociopath using other humans for her own enjoyment (Žižek, 1997). These 
characteristics of jouissance starkly contradict the premises for a functioning 
and civilized society; for humans to co-exist peacefully in larger groups, there 
must be directions for how to relate to jouissance (McGowan, 2004). This type 
of enjoyment is intolerable in a civilized society as it could ultimately harm 
others and make it difficult to coexist, threatening the social order.

Lost enjoyment is the idea that the possibility of limitless enjoyment depneds 
on the assumption that we once had access to surplus enjoyment but have lost 
access to it. The effectiveness of the societal and individual narratives of jouis-
sance are based on ideas about times and places we have little knowledge of 
and therefore can project our fantasies quite freely. In Chapter 1, I introduced 
Freud’s (2001) suggestion that societies since tribal times have had an idea of 
a primary father who accesses enjoyment whenever he wants, while his an-
cestors are required to restrain themselves via rules to make co-existence pos-
sible. Freud refers to the ancestors’ sons of the primal father, but they are re-
ally just symbols of ourselves. I like this example of pre-civilization because 
it is often re-used in common speech. I believe it is such an efficient narrative 
precisely because it relates to a time that we can never go back to or really 
know much about, so it is a blank page where we can project this idea of 
having lost something better. It is against this background that psychoanalyt-
ically informed discourse theories argue that when we abide by the rules of 
civilized societies, we are also forced to forsake our jouissance (Stavrakakis, 
2007). In this idea of giving up jouissance, we retroactively invent narratives 
of an enjoyment we never had access to in the first place.
Inherent in the idea of lost enjoyment is an idea of limitlessness, excess, and a surplus enjoyment. Pleasure, which is derived from within the confines of what is accepted in society, becomes pale in comparison to the imagined surplus enjoyment we can only dream of (McGowan, 2004). This does not mean that enjoyment before socialisation really was stronger or limitless. Rather, it is our fantasy of it that heightens the idea of a lost pleasure. Products are sometimes surrounded by fantasies of lost enjoyment. Advertising often makes use of the lost enjoyment concept by suggesting that a subject’s sense of lack can be overridden by the product it is selling (Stavrakakis, 2007). That is, the product is not just any object but the effect of the object reaches beyond the object itself, a claim that encourages more desire for and consumption of the product (Žižek, 1989). The consumption of the product promises an enjoyment beyond the consumer’s previous experiences. The effectiveness of the command to enjoy, in turn, relates to the role of the superego in jouissance – i.e., an internalized version of the command to enjoy. The individual who senses the command, fantasizes of impossible enjoyments to a point where she becomes haunted by them. Moreover, the more unattainable the enjoyment appears to the individual, the more enjoyable it seems.

Through the command to enjoy and the superego, it becomes visible how our desire to enjoy and the desire to restrain enjoyment are evident on the societal as well as the individual levels. However, the subject who attempts to live up to the command to enjoy is always doomed to fail. In the moment of acknowledging the endless possibilities highlighted by society for enjoyment, the subject realizes all the ways enjoyment is unavailable (McGowan, 2004). The command to enjoy, in other words, is a duty, for example, to be productive rather than as a command to seek more enjoyment for its own sake. Individuals relate to this in different ways;
some people create their own prohibitions and limitations, which to some creates even stricter prohibitions than when prohibitions and limitations are exerted on a societal level, whereas others enjoy limitlessly without considering the consequences of their indulgences (McGowan, 2004). In many ways, jouissance can be seen as a haunting idea planted in human conscious from the beginning of culture formation to contemporary consumer culture.

3.3 Ascetic enjoyment

Ascetic enjoyment breaks with common views of enjoyment as suffering is the enjoyable experience. Ascetism, which typically refers to a stoic endurance of pain and suffering, seems unrelated to contemporary consumer culture, where alleviation of suffering and boredom is a rule rather than the exception (Fisher, 2009; McGowan, 2004). However, since suffering is the cost we are willing to pay for enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle, that I describe in the introductory section to this chapter, it is easier to understand it as a condition for enjoyment. Despite sharing traits of suffering, ascetism as enjoyment breaks with its traditional namesake as the traditional meaning of ascetism implies modesty of pleasure. Ascetic enjoyment, unlike ascetism, should be seen as excessive and passionate forms of enjoyment. Zupančič (2003) describes ascetic hedonism as rapturing as the subject immerses the self into a horrendous experience that enables avoidance of displeasures, anxieties, and depression. The idea here is that true hedonism of contemporary consumer culture is not so much a matter of an imperative to enjoy as it is an ascetic imperative, as the imperative to enjoy eventually results in restraining access to enjoyment (McGowan, 2004). We might conclude that the cessation of drinking or smoking are not impediments to our enjoyment but rather necessities for enjoyment. Our conscience, which is intertwined with the outer world’s ideal, integrates this logic of ascetism in the sense that it has developed an inherent paradox by renouncing our drives. This renouncement
itself creates its own ethics, which demands further renouncement of our drives until the renouncement itself becomes a kind of enjoyment (Zupančič, 2003): the more we obey it, the more we sacrifice; the more we sacrifice, the more it wants us to obey.

In ascetic enjoyment, this surplus is felt as a strong passionate sensation without excessively indulging in anything. For example, a person experiencing anorexia nervosa might take pleasure in purposeful starvation where the starvation itself entails suffering and the risk of disease and death while posing as enjoyment (Zupančič, 2003). This logic separates enjoyment from pleasure. The intrusive force of ascetic enjoyment can therefore also be found in abstaining itself if abstaining entails suffering. Consumer culture is often characterized by unlimited access to consumption. We are able to access things like food and popular culture instantly if we want. Binging is a common expression; for example, we binge eat, binge watch TV shows, and binge drink. This binging, a type of hedonism, is not as much an enjoyment as it is numbing or deactivating enjoyment. Abstaining, on the other hand, presents itself as the true hedonistic pursuit to some subjects. Despite the excessive number of possibilities to enjoy found in contemporary consumer cultures, today’s hedonism is deeply rooted in this self-regulation. The ascetic subjects are those who truly master the imperative to enjoy by not engaging in pleasure. They counter the exhaustion of endless possibilities to enjoy by replacing it with nothing at all, which induces the ascetic subject with a sense of surplus passion (Zupančič, 2003). That is, the subject who enjoys the very act of self-regulation truly masters enjoyment.

Ascetic hedonism is unlike the current market’s tranquilizing pleasures, structured around shocking sensations that place subjects in a state of crisis to distort dullness. In many ways, ascetic enjoyment resembles extraordinary experiences described in the previous chapter. However, ascetic enjoyment not
only encompasses suffering but also engages in suffering. Whereas extraordinary experiences help people find momentary escape from the dullness of everyday life, ascetic enjoyment results in loss of control and something more destructive. Some expert mountain climbers experience depression and anxiety disorders (Habelt et al., 2023), which suggests an unconventional form of depressive behaviour – instead of apathy some people constantly seek or need to engage in thrilling experiences. This thrill-seeking behaviour seems to be a condition for them to live a normal life and can reach a state similar to the condition skydivers described in Chapter 2. Like extraordinary experiences, the enjoyment derived by ascetism is felt as an alertness that heightens the sense of being alive. However, rather than resolving the state of depression and despair, ascetic enjoyment suspend – or outscarem – depression and despair with a sharper and more acute feeling of displeasure. It is in this sense ascetic hedonism is excessive. This form of hedonism demands more in its quest to heighten terrors and can be seen as a passion diet of ‘too-muchness’ (Zupančič, 2003, p. 48). Ascetic hedonism immerses one in the terror such that one becomes liberated from misery and melancholy.

Rather than seeking thrills, ascetic enjoyment seeks crisis to make people feel more alive. During war, people living in peaceful countries have altruistically joined the military efforts of other countries. For example, Swedes have gone to Ukraine to help them fight Russia (Örtengren, 2022). In a news report of a Swede in Ukraine, a man described how his return to his home country made him want to go back to Ukraine to fight. At home, he became haunted of feelings of pointlessness compared to the life in a state of war, which made life feel much more real and interpersonal relationships more genuine. Entering the three first letters of the Swedish word for war on Google search, I discovered the second search result is ‘go to war for Ukraine’. Of course, this interest is partly caused by the proximity and cultural and historical connections to Ukraine, but it is difficult to disregard the possibility of a longing for the idea
of this more real state of life that war offers. This way, we should think of the ascetic enjoyment as inducing a state of crisis.

3.4 Obsessive enjoyment

Although societies consistently see abstaining as a form of enjoyment, other ways exist that do not rely on the pleasure principle in their quest for jouissance. The ascetic hedonist imposes her own limits on enjoyment, but the obsessive hedonist finds limitless ways to pursue enjoyment. In other words, obsessive enjoyment is an obsessive compulsion to seek enjoyment to the point where the pursuit becomes self-consuming. That is, ascetic enjoyment, as described in the previous section, is enjoyment that abstains from pleasures or even immersing oneself in suffering and crisis. Obsessive enjoyment, on the other hand, is a fixation on attaining pleasures to a degree where the obsessive enjoyer cannot do anything but engage in pleasures to the extent that the fixated nature of the engagement moves from the realm of pleasure to the realm of enjoyment. If anorexia nervosa represents the enjoyment of ascetic hedonism, obsessive binge eating disorder would represent obsessive enjoyment. People who suffer from anorexia nervosa separate food from enjoyment, enjoying the very act of eating nothing. In its purest sense, anorexia, like ascetic enjoyment, is an enjoyment of hunger. The binge eater, on the other hand, enjoys the sensation of extreme satiety, or cloy, and the act of over eating.

The literature describes how a chronic sense of emptiness leads some subjects to a hedonistic exhaustion through obsessively engaging in activities such as binging on comfort food, alcohol, cigarettes, masturbation, and watching TV (Fisher, 2009). This excess of enjoyment resembles the death drive, an appeal to self-destruction. The obsessive hedonist engages in a form of repetitive compulsion towards enjoyment. This creates suffering and the short-term
gains, pleasure beyond the pleasure principle (Freud, 2003). Such exhaustive numbing and self-destruction suggest a state of depressive hedonism. Although depression is clinically viewed as being unable to attain enjoyment, depressive hedonia, a phrase coined by Mark Fisher (2009), is when subjects of consumer culture are unable to engage in anything other than attaining enjoyment. Depressive hedonia is the result of more freedom and abundance than subjects can handle. This freedom of the limitless possibilities to enjoy facilitates both ascetic enjoyment and obsessive enjoyment. Salecl (2011) suggests that the unrestrained opportunities of consumption become their own ethic, encouraging the obsessive enjoyer to enjoy the very act of opposing her own well-being. This disregard of one’s well-being leads some subjects to consume themselves in the form of bulimia, addiction, self-harm, and smoking despite known risks. For Salecl, the various ways to enjoy entails all the many possibilities available. Formerly, choice, especially in economics and business and administration literature, has been viewed as rationally based where the subject’s choices always maximize benefits. All the choices combined with the assumption of rationality have resulted in a strong belief in personal responsibility.

Unlike conventional views of pleasure, obsessive enjoyment is described as the opposite of rationality. Obsessive subjects are steered by an emotional regime that lacks rationality and constructive objectives, always wanting more from consumerism and the command to enjoy (Salecl, 2011). Obsessive enjoyment adds a perspective many recognize as the darker side of consumerism – the space where we see how difficult it is for subjects to relate to the abundance the market offers as well as to the command to enjoy. Because there are no, or sparse, visible limits or sanctions regarding over-consumption, the literature points towards a shifted responsibility to the subject to enjoy responsibly (McGowan, 2004; Žižek, 1989). This freedom
exhausts some subjects and pushes them further towards the endless possibilities the market offers. Smoking is one example of an enjoyment lacking sanctions but yet expected to be consumed responsibly.

There is a focus on risk prevention today e.g., by avoiding becoming ill by eating healthy and exercising. This risk prevention is suggested to be the main constrains to seek limitless enjoyment (Salecl, 2011) and this view has heightened the personal responsibility in restricting enjoyment. Often, however, this type of freedom results in guilt springing from aspects of our lives that we actually have little or no influence over. This focus on personal responsibility can result in anxiety related to making the wrong choice as well as to the will to do so. Although we might know what is right or in our best interest, we do not always act accordingly. Irrespective of how rational one is concerning risks, some people cannot avoid risky behaviours as obsessive enjoyment derives a bizarre enjoyment from acting contrary to risk prevention (Salecl, 2011). Against the background of the duty associated with endless choices, Salecl describes a rationale that is not related to ascetic enjoyment but to obsessive enjoyment. Embedded in the logic of achievements we can discern a voice that constantly complains about the subject’s inadequacies and points to all the ways she could improve – i.e., a conscience of guilt.

From this perspective, freedom becomes a sort of twisted duty often presented in the shape of guilt. Although the common understanding of freedom is seen as following our truest and deepest convictions, from this theoretical perspective freedom is seen as the opposite (Žižek, 2009) As the market presents consumers to unlimited choices consumers are, in turn, expected to thoughtfully selecting what and how they enjoy, a difficult task to some subjects (Fisher, 2009; Salecl, 2011). Salecl (2011) suggest that one market logic of today is founded on a logic of setting unattainable ideals because in a twisted way, we enjoy not being able to live up to them. The unattainable ideal, often reflected
in the many lifestyle magazines and lifestyle influencers, who unrealistically promote the possibility to transform one’s less than ideal physique or life into an ideal state. But the reason we buy the magazines or follow the influencers is because we are indulging in our own inability to live up to the ideal. This rationale seems to bring a certain enjoyment of its own, a sort of enjoyable self-torture for failing to be live up to the projection of perfection. Freedom, from this point of view, is not freedom to do what we want without the interference of others, but to do what we do not want to do.

Despite being bombarded with the encouragement to enjoy and the message that anything is permitted, many people can dismantle this illusion. The obsessive enjoyer, however, takes the command literally. She is driven towards enjoyment at all costs, which leads to an obsession of excess where she indulges in limitless amounts of alcohol, drugs, shopping, and work (Salecl, 2011). This obsessive enjoyment and associated conscience of guilt eventually results in a vicious circle, spiralling in regrets about what choices could have been made and hoping that the next choice will satisfy the feeling of emptiness. As stated previously in this section, satisfaction by definition needs a firm limit that demarcates when it is fulfilled (Žižek, 2006); the lack of restraint only pushes the obsessive enjoyer from one excess to another.

3.5 Obscene enjoyment

Obscene enjoyments are the enjoyments that repulse us. Psychoanalytically informed discourse theories suggest that we see enjoyments as repulsive when they contradict our internalized ideals, ideologies, and rules confined to enjoyment (McGowan, 2004; Salecl, 2000; Žižek, 2006). For example, when passing an obese person on the streets, some people react with repulsion because the other person’s way of structuring enjoyment is perceived as intrusive
to their own and therefore experienced as unbearable (Gay, 2018). This repulsion can be directed towards the self, other people, or other groups and societies and is based on an inability to relate to one’s own enjoyment. Smoking, for example, in many societies has gained a status of obscenity and triggers repulsion and aversion in non-smokers. Psychoanalytically informed discourse theorists suggest that this inability allows for a projection of our own fantasies of enjoyment onto another person whereby this other person seemingly possesses full access to enjoyment (Žižek, 1989), or their way of enjoying (Žižek, 2001) gives rise to envy (McGowan, 2004; Salecl, 2011) that results in repulsion.

The idea is that the repulsion we feel always originates from the subject’s personal relationship to enjoyment. Because we are ingrained in a socio-cultural sphere, our way of relating to enjoyment is contingent on how we perceive the socially accepted ways of enjoying. In psychoanalytically informed discourse theories, this socio-cultural sphere is called the socio-symbolic order or the Other (Fink, 1997; McGowan, 2004). It is called the Other because it is the one that we refer to when we say, ‘one does not do so and so’. That is, each subject perceives of the Other as an aggregate of social ideals, norms, and codes of conduct in society distilled into a single fantasized subject. In other words, the Other is set as a self-ideal (Žižek, 2006). In contrast, the repulsive is what breaks with our ideas of what is OK in the eyes of this fantasized Other.

The Other is imbued with ideals of how enjoyment is and should be structured. Lacan explains a phenomenon where some subjects view themselves as from the gaze of others (Fink, 1997; Žižek, 2006). This ability to guess what is seen as acceptable leads subjects to enforce strict rules upon themselves (Salecl, 2011). Eventually, the subject becomes completely preoccupied with and highly controlled by this internalized gaze, and this gaze is the Other. The
Other is everything included in social space (Salecl, 2011) and reflects an external societal structure or undefined mass that people sense in various ways. From this perspective, all subjects are thought to fantasize about how they are seen by the Other (Žižek, 2006). This preoccupation in fantasy eventually leads to the establishment of a relationship between the subject and the Other.

It is this complex relationship that every subject has to enjoyment that causes feelings of repulsion as the Other functions as an idealistic benchmark for enjoyment and can identify when someone enjoys in the wrong ways as well as what products are enjoyable. Therefore, it is also highly involved in repulsive sensations towards other subjects as well as the subject’s own enjoyment. From the point of view of these theories, we are recognized, or interpellated, as subjects through the symbolic order of the Other and we always act with the symbolic order as a benchmark. In this very recognition, a tension between subjects is conveyed: as a benchmark, the wealthy need the poor to be recognized as rich, the healthy need the unhealthy to be recognized as fit, and so on (McGowan, 2004). In other words, this valuing social system of recognition creates social bonds among subjects and define groups and group belonging.

In addition, the same logic separates subjects and groups. Every identification to one group exposes us to ideas of how another group structures their enjoyment. (Stavrakakis, 2007) and every identification with one group will need its obscene other (Žižek, 1989). As we saw in Chapter 5, ideas of the group “smokers” and the group “non-smokers” arose in the 1980s, a division that soon created tensions between the two groups (Torell, 2002). Tensions between subjects and groups is sometimes an expression of the obscene other.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section: how we, or others around us, enjoy sometimes influence repulsive reactions towards ourselves and the way others enjoy. It is in such moments ideas of an obscene other arises. The obscene other, can be represented by a single subject or a group and they cause
feelings of repulsion. This understanding of obscene enjoyment functions to define groups based on how they enjoy. One person can imagine a utopia of jouissance that the other person has access to but from which she herself is excluded. Our fantasy of other people’s jouissance becomes threatening (Žižek, 2015). The idea of others having access to jouissance sparks frustration and aggression because we also want this access even though we have given it up for the sake of a working society. Our own failures to reach jouissance makes itself known when we presume others are enjoying. These forces are so strong that violence and feelings of resentment kick in. This envy of others’ jouissance manifests as portraying the other person as repulsive (McGowan, 2004; Salecl, 2011). The obscene others are especially loathed because they are fantasized to have deprived us of our own access to enjoyment. From the point of view of these theories, this is e.g., a cause for racism. Salecl (2011) discusses how racism often is based on complaints of other nationalities as being too loud, eating smelly food, being deceitful, or being greedy. In essence, this repulsion masks a fear that these other people have exclusive access to jouissance.

Because we are incapable of relating to our own enjoyment, we are sensitive to perceiving other people’s enjoyment as intrusive. The feeling of repulsion is heightened along with a perceived proximity to other people’s enjoyment (McGowan, 2004). When others seem to neglect our interpretation of the very conditions for accessing enjoyment as suggested by the Other, their behaviour appears obscene. Salecl (2011) suggests that jouissance dominates the social field, which creates a sense of competition rather than of solidarity between subjects. From the point of view of this literature consumption appears as the resolution to competition. Consumption ensure everyone has equal access to enjoyment via the market (McGowan, 2004). In other words, consumption has become a means for justice as it is a socially accepted replacement for the loss of enjoyment, which we sacrifice to ensure co-existence. That is, enjoyment
of consumption helps people tolerate others’ enjoyment without feeling overwhelmed by envy. Societies need some way to ensure fairness and justice, and enjoyment derived from consumption appears as a solution where everyone can enjoy within the confines of socially sanctioned terms (McGowan, 2004). But even in the enjoyment of consumer products it is important to enjoy in the right way.

Žižek (2001) suggests that this relationship to the big Other is caused by an illusive surplus – i.e., the invisible quality attributed to products. The illusive surplus conveys the idea that people imbue products with qualities that transcend the physical attributes of the product itself. Illusive surplus is also what enables us to enjoy a product, if we enjoy it right, that is. The idea is that we can enjoy products in right or wrong ways because the presence and absence of its invisible qualities are in conflict. We think of these qualities as elementary for products. When consumed in the proper way, these qualities come to its own and the product is therefore seen as sublime. On the other hand, when enjoyment appears incorrect, the same product and enjoyment appear repulsive. That is, the product, how it is enjoyed, the enjoier, and the context are placed in a context where the product’s traits are equally crucial for it to be seen as pleasurable. When we, for example, feel like drinking a beer, the image that comes to mind is probably a cold beer in a frosted glass with bubbles rushing to the top towards the white foam. This consumption is reinforced if we also are slightly thirsty, perhaps after a day of skiing and imagining ourselves drinking the beer in the comfort of a leather armchair next to a fireplace. If we let that same sipped beer just stay in the glass, let it stand overnight and then let someone drink it alone in the morning, that same beer has suddenly lost its illusive surplus and the idea of consuming it can appear as repulsive.

The idea that we have lost access to enjoyment that an obscene other now has gained is not only very disturbing but also the cause of strong reactions based
on repulsion. In this section as well as in the section about lost enjoyment, the framework for jouissance presents how people struggle with ideas of presence and absence of enjoyment and its inherent traits. In the sections on ascetic enjoyment and obsessive enjoyment, we have seen two ways of relating to enjoyment when it lacks restraints. When enjoyment seems to have no limits, subjects can integrate their own, much stronger rules for enjoyment to the point that they employ its opposite. However, others might follow the command to enjoy and enjoy excessively to the point of self-consummation.

3.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I compose a framework of jouissance based on four fragments of how it is structured and expressed with individuals as well as in society, although there are many similarities of the sections I presented in this chapter (e.g., an ambiguous and complex relationship to enjoyment and its overarching nature going beyond the pleasure principle to a realm of the unconventional pleasures). Table 3.1 summarizes the framework and its differences in relation to jouissance. The table is presented in a similar structure as in chapter 2 as a way to illuminate similarities and differences.
This framework encompasses the missing perspective in CCT: enjoyment at odds with the conventional positive and gratifying pleasures represented in Chapter 2. In other words, this framework moves us outside of the realm of pleasure presented in Chapter 2 and into the realm of enjoyment. The main issue with the dominating views of CCT is its assumption of consumers as rationally estimating risks and disadvantages and weighing them against the advantages of consumption. As such, these perspectives remain in the realm of pleasures (Zupančič, 2003). Unlike the dominant views of pleasures in CCT, this framework challenges ideas of rationality as well as socially and individually constructive action bound in the quest to enjoy.
In hedonistic pleasure, for example, the consumer derives enjoyment from interaction with products. From this point of view, consumption is seen as the solution to our drive towards enjoyment. This perspective has been criticized for not explaining the unsatisfiable desire for more products (e.g., Campbell, 1987). Lost enjoyment, on the other hand, nuances this view by focusing on the market itself. Here, consumers’ endless focus on products is seen as being triggered by the market itself through the command to enjoy. The command to enjoy is effective because it employs a deeply rooted idea of having given up or lost enjoyment (Freud, 2001; McGowan, 2004). Escapist pleasure includes strains of typically contradictory feelings such as pain and thrill as a way to attain enjoyment, which pushes the view of enjoyment as solely pleasant. These enjoyments, however, are always situated in the realm of a social ideal that excludes non-gratifying and non-productive consumption. Ascetic enjoyment, on the other hand, advances to a point where suffering per se is the end goal – it is an enjoyment of the suffering itself. Rather than a way to spice up the dullness of everyday life, ascetic enjoyment turns depression into a state of crisis.

Calculated pleasure, which represents an underlying assumption dominating CCT and makes people unable to see any excessive behaviour as enjoyable, is here replaced with the concept obsessive enjoyment. From this perspective, calculated pleasure is seen as the social ideal or duty that makes itself felt with subjects, yet some subjects feel a drive to go beyond this duty and occupy themselves with pleasure in such obsessive amounts that it reaches the realm of enjoyment. Lastly, the communal pleasure depicts the heightened pleasure experienced when situated in a relational context. In contrast, in obscene enjoyment, the relational context is precisely what makes one’s own enjoyment seem obscene. As enjoyment is highly involved in codes of conduct, it is also involved in how we are seen by others as well as how we see others and any
break with it appears obscene. From this point of view, communality can make one’s own enjoyment seem pitiful. Moreover, obscene enjoyment implies that communality is essentially built on feelings of repulsion towards others, a reaction that serves to strengthen the bonds among the people who are repulsed by what they consider obscene enjoyment.
4 Research Design: Methods for Smoking

4.1 Academic position

This thesis takes a qualitative perspective because it allows this study to capture the everyday lives of smokers while interweaving societal and cultural viewpoints on smoking. Similarly, both CCT and jouissance research use qualitative research approaches. In Chapter 2, I presented and discussed the overarching perspectives on pleasure in the literature of consumer culture theory (CCT). Much of the research in Chapter 2 is based on qualitative approaches (e.g., Arnould & Price, 1993; Belk et al., 2003; Canniford & Shankar, 2013). Almost exclusively, qualitative approaches have been applied to unconventional enjoyments – i.e., enjoyment entailing risk, pain, and thrill – and transgressive enjoyments (Belk et al., 1998; Celsi et al., 1993; Hirschman, 1992; Scott et al., 2017). Similarly, my theoretical lens takes an interchangeable cultural and subjective focus. I find this perspective to be best suited for a qualitative approach because it focuses on social reality and lived experiences (Tadajewski, 2004), a view also visible in jouissance research (see Dean, 2009). The approach of this study is not contingent on CCT and the approaches of psychoanalytically informed discourse theories, but it shares their frameworks, which intertwine subjects and cultures and assumes that a qualitative perspective best captures the real world.

CCT perspectives are organized around a core of theoretical questions related to the relationships between a consumer’s personal and collective identities, cultures created and embodied in the lived worlds of consumers, and underlying experiences, processes, and structures (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).
Within CCT, contextual aspects such as culture, history, politics, and religion are seen as natural parts of consumer life (see Karababa & Ger, 2011; Sandikci & Ger, 2010), allowing for critical perspectives on consumption and markets. Many of these aspects are pivotal for understanding how enjoyment is positioned and structured in society as well as how it is understood by consumers.

CCT is a subfield of consumer research. It developed in a gap where consumer research lacked the tools and perspectives to explore consumption from experiential and sociocultural aspects, including its role in society, politics, and culture. CCT mainly diverges in terms of their Facebook-theoretical approaches. The predominant paradigm of consumer research in general is positioned closer to positivism and functionalism (Tadajewski, 2004), whereas CCT focuses on the lived experiences of consumers as well as socio-political, cultural, historical, and ideological aspects of consumption and consumer life (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Epistemologically, CCT is characterized by contextualized, holistic research, allowing for the unravelling of political, social, and cultural aspects of consumer life and the role of consumption in society. Therefore, CCT has increasingly viewed some types of consumption as enjoyable rather than functional or necessary. Moreover, CCT views consumers as desiring rather than rational subjects, who are motivated by their fantasies, emotions, cultures, and social relations, a complex interrelated web where new desires are born, enjoyments pursued, and many other emotions and dreams are expressed. This is where my own research interest and approach stems from.

4.2 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis of this study is smoking as a form of enjoyment with a particular focus on its tensions, ambiguities, and contradictions in society, interpersonally, and with the consumer. In this section, I discuss ambiguities
related to enjoyment, the different levels where enjoyment is analysed, and how unconventional enjoyment has previously been studied. By unconventional, I mean the events, thoughts, actions, and desires that appear as contradictory when thinking about enjoyment. Although enjoyment is often viewed as a “positive” and conflict-free experience in the consumer research literature as well as in daily speech, there are other examples of enjoyments that entail both enjoyment and suffering. Such examples are often excluded from the common view of enjoyment, so I refer to them as unconventional.

Although CCT studies aim to study conflicting enjoyments (e.g., Wilk, 1997), many times they end up doing the same polarization that they criticize. The lack of theoretical frameworks has been suggested to be the reason for the one-sided view of enjoyment (Alba & Williams, 2013). These frameworks have locked different states in opposition to each other and therefore made it difficult to understand ambiguities; for example, the states of suffering and disgust are often posed in opposition to enjoyment (Wilk, 1997). To this end, I needed a theoretical framework that could provide room for ambiguity and unconventional perspectives on enjoyment. Unlike the perspectives in CCT, my chosen theoretical framework presents enjoyment as inherently conflicting, inconsistent, and ambiguous. Enjoyment, from this perspective, is confusing, intrusive, hurtful, illogical, and painful to the subject (Fink, 1997). This enjoyment is separated from the more uncontroversial and culturally accepted pleasure (e.g., Zupančič, 2003). The greatest difference between the two is reflected in the cultural attitudes towards them. Whereas pleasure is allowed and even encouraged in culture, enjoyment is viewed as disturbing and therefore should be limited or hidden.

Enjoyment is experienced by a subject; however, from the perspective of psychoanalytically informed discourse theories, the subject is not seen as sepa-
rated from society or culture. That is, both culture and ideology are incorporated in the subject (Žižek, 2006) almost as a commentator’s voice remarking on everything we do. It is, however, important to note that the subject is not solely viewed as determined by her culture. If that were the case, all subjects of the same culture would be the same in terms of shame, fears, guilt, etc. Subjects are instead to be seen as a mix of culture, lived experiences, family relations, genetic predispositions, and worldviews. This mix allows for two subjects within the same culture to behave and think very differently; as a result, some things will resonate with one subject and be completely invisible to another.

Culture here refers to societies and social ideals. Culture is viewed as the intangible glue that keeps a population or group together in a society through ideas and ideologies such as nationalism, traditions, and religions (Žižek, 1989). Culture is shaped by and shapes norms, rituals, beliefs, rules for coexistence, the subjects within it, and history as well as external conditions such as geography and climate. Societies need rules and boundaries for enjoyment for large groups of people to live together (Stavrakakis, 1999). It is from these rules and simplifications that ideas of the conventional and its opposite are created. To capture the unconventional enjoyment of smoking, I want to learn about the rules of society and the subject’s own view of enjoyment related to smoking.

As I read psychoanalytically informed discourse theories, I found myself frequently thinking about smoking and how peculiarly quick it had become agreed upon to collectively dislike it. I also noticed that I rarely saw smokers in public spaces. This was the reason I chose smoking for my empirical context. That is, my interest in conflicting enjoyment influenced the theoretical lens and the theoretical lens inspired my choice of fieldwork, resulting in an
iterative process of going back and forth between them. The theoretical perspectives on jouissance motivated a data collection with rich accounts of experiences of enjoyment as well as subjects’ understanding of enjoyment on a societal level and attitudes in society. This perspective has been particularity important to my analysis of the data, where unlike other frameworks in consumer research, it refrains from polarizations, remaining multifaceted in its attempt to understand enjoyment as complex and inconsistent.

4.3 Empirical context

For the purpose of uncovering the dynamics of unconventional enjoyment, I studied cigarette consumption, which in many countries is very regulated in terms of advertising, taxes, and consumption such as where smoking is allowed. Cigarette consumption makes an interesting case for understanding the consumption of products that entails marginalization, regulation, and health risks. Snus, another common tobacco product used in Scandinavian countries which was considered as an option, is less regulated in terms of use and more socially accepted than cigarettes. Snus is a moist tobacco, similar to snuff, which is placed under the lip. Although snus is not in any way healthy, its negative health effects are not as prevalent and well-established as smoking (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020b). Since I set out to study risk-filled, paradoxical, and marginalized consumer engagements, cigarettes made a more suitable target than snus for my research.

The data collection primarily focused on Sweden as the interview data and media data come from Sweden although I collected data from both Swedish and international online forums. The internet often lacks geographical boundaries, which made it possible engage non-Swedish forums that were most relevant to paradoxical enjoyment. It is difficult to separate nations on international forums and this is also the beauty, richness, and purpose of online data
collection since the world is increasingly globalized (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018) and increasingly online. It is not the purpose for this study to compare national cultural smoking differences; the purpose is to understand smokers’ experiences of paradoxical enjoyment.

I found smoking was interesting as a form of unconventional enjoyment in part because it is increasingly becoming taboo in many societies, an attitude reflected in the increasing regulations placed on smoking as well as the public knowledge about risks associated with smoking, which cannot have escaped smokers. In the Swedish context, for example, a new smoking ban was introduced during my data collection. As of July 2019, smoking is no longer allowed in outdoor settings such as playgrounds and many other public places. This ban has resulted in many heated debates in the media, revealing smoking as a polarized and infected consumer engagement where freedom and autonomy are posed against suffering, greedy companies, and rising medical costs. Another important contributor to making this context interesting from a perspective of paradoxical enjoyment is the idea that the subject’s responsibility for her own health is stronger than ever (Lupton, 1995). From such point of view, smoking – being evidently hazardous – is one of the more incomprehensible consumer activities. Moreover, studying consumer perspectives intersects enjoyment, fear of the risks, as well as societal views of smoking. I view this context as one example among many where consumption contains elements of unconventional enjoyment, and its richness can hopefully contribute to its understanding. The empirical context will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter.
4.4 Methods of unconventional enjoyment

Researching unconventional enjoyment that includes subjects, societies, ideolo-
gies, and contradictions requires methods that allow for nuances and con-
tradictions. In-depth interviews, embodied interviews, ethnographies, and
documents have been used in previous research to study tensions in consumer
enjoyment within my field and research related to jouissance. Paradoxical en-
joyment entailing fear, pain, and risk has been researched with ethnographic
and interview methods (Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi et al., 1993; Scott et al.,
2017). Similarly, marginalized consumption and enjoyment related to risk of
deadly diseases have been studied with ethnography and interview data (Belk
et al., 1998; Dean, 2009). Because of their ability to make sense of sensitive
and complex topics, these methods have inspired my work.

I have applied a combination of data sets to reach a richer understanding of
smoking from subjective and cultural perspectives. I use in-depth interviews
as my main data source; however, these interviews are closely intertwined
with an online ethnography. The two data sources enriched and extended each
other. Although the online data collection allowed me to unobtrusively access
smokers’ and former smokers’ views on smoking, enjoyment, and contradic-
tions and societal, political, and ideological views of smoking, the interviews
helped the smokers recall their experiences. Whereas the online format al-
lowed for strong and one-sided descriptions that are sometimes brutally honest
with respect to experiencing fear and sadness, the interviews revealed more
nuanced understandings complete with contradictions and complexities. The
forums often gave me an entry and a foundational understanding for some of
the struggles smokers experience, information I used during the interviews.
Interviews are a resourceful data source for learning about the subjects’ worldviews, experiences, and logics. In addition, interviews are tools for understanding societal and ideological discourses and how they are interpreted, negotiated, and expressed by the subjects (McCracken, 1988). As long interviews allow for a targeted focus, flexibility, and in-depth descriptions, they are commonly used in consumer research to encourage participants to provide in-depth accounts and descriptions of enjoyment (see Belk et al., 1998; Celsi et al., 1993; Scott et al., 2017). Therefore, long interviews seemed a natural choice for understanding a subject’s sense-making of her smoking habit. A rich description of the interviews is presented in section 4.5.1.

Cigarette smoking is a sensitive topic. I learned this at the outset of my data collection when I had set out to conduct an ethnography. I wanted to participate in treatment groups, but smokers as well as the health care providers were reluctant to allow me access. In addition, group treatment was reduced as the health care providers employed online treatment or a quit smoking phoneline. As online treatments as well as other smoking forums were both rich and easier to access, I decided to conduct an online ethnography in combination with the in-depth interviews. I realized that other researchers had similar struggles when observing sensitive topics. Online ethnographies have been applied in consumer culture research when researching secluded groups, marginalized groups, underground behaviour, and drug and alcohol use (Robert Kozinets, 2015) as it increases participation among hard-to-reach samples (Wilkerson, Iantaffi, Grey, Bockting, & Rosser, 2014) and set vulnerable populations at ease (Cook, 2012). Because the researcher often is invisible, an online ethnography is also an unobtrusive research method. There are, of course, ethical aspects to consider as I am using smokers’ discussions for other purposes than they had in mind when posting. To this end, I anonymized the usernames of the forum participants and the posters.
I conducted qualitative online data collection in line with Whiting and Pritchard’s (2021) definition. Qualitative online data collection refers to collection of text and visual media on forums, blogs, and social media. I collected text and image data related to smokers, smoking, and smoking bans on forums and social media. As with other ethnographies, online ethnography and online data collection are often combined with other methods such as interviews (Christine Hine, 2005; Kozinets, 2002). In his book *Netnography: redefined*, Kozinets (2015) argues that combining online and offline data is nonsensical because online data can and should be seen as a sufficient database on its own terms. Although I agree that it could and sometimes should be seen as sufficient, it was not the case in the present research. To capture wider accounts of societal views on smoking and the thoughts about the laws forbidding smoking in outdoor settings in June 2019, I gathered supportive data in the form of media coverage, official documents, policies, and reports from the government to understand their view of smoking and the reasoning behind this law with respect to political and ideological concerns. Moreover, I conducted media analysis to view the public debate on smoking and its prohibition, where contradictions, societal views, and ideologies were also expressed.

4.5 Data sources
Table 4.1 List of data sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>DATASET</th>
<th>FOCUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW DATA</td>
<td>In-depth interviews with smokers(^1)</td>
<td>16 interviews about 40–120 minutes</td>
<td>In-depth accounts of smoking to understand the motivators and drivers on a deeper level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONLINE DATA COLLECTION NOTES</td>
<td>Notes from finding and browsing forums</td>
<td>61 pages single space</td>
<td>Gather reflections and understanding of the context. Recollect my encounters with participants and data. Apply to my accounts of participants and forums in findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONLINE DATA COLLECTION</td>
<td>Reddit.com</td>
<td>3 years, 536 pages</td>
<td>Ideologies and opinions of smoking. Smokers’ accounts of their habit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONLINE DATA COLLECTION</td>
<td>Forum 1</td>
<td>3 years, 1165 pages</td>
<td>Understand smokers’ accounts of smoking. Smokers’ accounts of tensions between enjoyment and risk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONLINE DATA COLLECTION</td>
<td>Forum 2</td>
<td>132 pages</td>
<td>Ideologies and opinions of smoking and the extended ban among smokers and non-smokers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONLINE DATA COLLECTION</td>
<td>Forum 3</td>
<td>94 pages</td>
<td>Perspectives on smokers. Ideologies and opinions of smoking and smoking among non-smokers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONLINE DATA COLLECTION</td>
<td>Facebook, Instagram</td>
<td>90 pages</td>
<td>Smoker’s accounts of smoking as an enjoyment. Ideologies and opinions of smoking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOCUMENTS OF THE SWEDISH GOVERNMENT</td>
<td>Legislation proposition, referrals, press release and reports</td>
<td>2427 pages</td>
<td>Founding arguments and reasoning behind the 2019 ban.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDIA</td>
<td>Articles, editorials, opinion pieces</td>
<td>33 articles, 81 pages</td>
<td>Polarization in the public discourses about the 2019 smoking ban in Sweden.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) A detailed table of the interviewees is presented in Table 2.
In-depth interviews and transcripts

Inspired by McCracken (1988), I conducted 16 in-depth interviews, which lasted between 45 and 150 minutes. I initially conducted 12 in-depth interviews, transcribed them, and analysed them. Thereafter, I iterated between my data and the theoretical framework and revisited the field to conduct four additional interviews. At that point, the interviews supported previous data and I did not attain any new findings.

When I was recruiting participants, I realized the recruitment process was more difficult and time-consuming than I had first thought. As I mentioned in the previous section, smoking is a sensitive topic, something that was visible throughout the data collection process. I started out by contacting health care staff who encounter smokers in their daily work to see if they would contact potential participants for me. Only one person replied, but she did not want her patients to be involved in the study. Therefore, I turned to social media and posted an advertisement on my Facebook page and on support group forums. Despite there being over 800 members in the largest support group, it only resulted in two interviews. I started asking my own acquaintances if they knew anyone who might be willing to participate. Many smokers were hesitant as they thought I would judge them for smoking. After the first interviews, participants started recommending other smokers for me to contact, so I continued recruiting via snowball sampling.
Table 4.2 List of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>INTERVIEW DATE</th>
<th>INTERVIEW DURATION IN MINUTES</th>
<th>SMOKING HABIT</th>
<th>AGE (AT TIME OF INTERVIEW):</th>
<th>SMOKER FOR:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LISA</td>
<td>2019-03-18</td>
<td>56:47</td>
<td>Smoking daily</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERIC</td>
<td>2019-03-14</td>
<td>56:46</td>
<td>Smoking daily</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>37 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELISABETH</td>
<td>2019-05-15</td>
<td>53:35</td>
<td>Smoking daily</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>48 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URSULA</td>
<td>2019-09-19</td>
<td>1:24:44</td>
<td>Smoking daily</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>39 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHILLIP</td>
<td>2019-04-02</td>
<td>74:15</td>
<td>Smoking daily</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>27 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHIARA</td>
<td>2019-02-14</td>
<td>79:19</td>
<td>Smoking daily</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VICTOR</td>
<td>2019-03-21</td>
<td>138:46</td>
<td>Quit smoking</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>18 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HELGA</td>
<td>2019-03-14</td>
<td>53:53</td>
<td>Smoking daily</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>48 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FELIX</td>
<td>2019-05-14</td>
<td>83:41</td>
<td>Smoking occasionally</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID</td>
<td>2019-03-11</td>
<td>43:51</td>
<td>Smoking nearly daily</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>32 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIRI</td>
<td>2019-03-07</td>
<td>1:00:00</td>
<td>Smoking daily</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>57 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JANE</td>
<td>2019-03-29</td>
<td>55:30</td>
<td>Smoking daily</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>55 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHENG</td>
<td>2020-12-10</td>
<td>75:11</td>
<td>Smoking weekly, trying to quit</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PENNY</td>
<td>2020-12-15</td>
<td>75:03</td>
<td>Smoking daily</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEODORA</td>
<td>2020-12-05</td>
<td>71:02</td>
<td>Smoking daily</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIMI</td>
<td>2020-12-21</td>
<td>56:03</td>
<td>Smoking daily</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before conducting the interviews, I created an interview guide that included themes I wanted to discuss. Throughout the interviews, I adjusted the guideline and added or replaced questions according to what I learned during the previous interviews. I used the guideline as a guide – i.e., I used it to pose initial questions to spark the conversation and to remind me of the topics I wanted to discuss while remaining open to what the participants found important to discuss in regard to smoking. Being overly focused on a specific set
of questions could have been a distraction, resulting in neglecting germane aspects and perspectives brought up by the interviewees.

I began each interview by discussing my background and the research project. I then encouraged the participants to provide as rich accounts as possible about their experiences, reactions, and memories about smoking. I asked the interviewees to introduce themselves. Next, I asked them to recall a smoke that they especially remember and to describe it in as much detail as possible. By this point in the interview, we had usually initiated a conversation. I asked follow-up questions based on their own accounts, and, if needed, I posed questions based on the themes in the guide. The interviews developed into deep conversations where the interviewees discussed many aspects of life in relation to smoking. Smoking seemed to be involved not only in everyday life activities or happy moments but also during rough times. During the interviews, I was entrusted with secrets the interviewees’ closest friends and family did not know. I was also entrusted with hearing about life crisis, suicidal thoughts, loneliness, and fears. These stories developed into rich and deep material.

For each interview, I focused on building trust. This often meant engaging in small talk until the participants were ready to open up. Because of the sensitivity of the topic, the interviews were not strictly structured and the distance between the researcher and the informant was not maintained, contradictory to what some research guides recommend (see e.g., McCracken, 1988). The reason for it was that it would not have placed the interviewees in a comfortable state to open up about the role of smoking in their lives. That is, I had to exhibit empathy and allow the interviewees to speak freely to establish a trusting relationship with the interviewee. Although cigarette smoking is not illegal in Sweden, I quickly learned in the recruitment process that smoking was a delicate matter. Throughout my interviews, I had to be careful because some
of the interviewees were cautious, sometimes even defensive to the purpose of my questions. Thus, it was especially important for me to create a safe atmosphere where the participants felt comfortable to open up.

Thanem and Knights (2018) suggest researchers should avoid creating distance between themselves and interviewees by acknowledging that the encounter is between two human beings and therefore involves two bodies situated in dynamics that involve power, class, culture, body language, and previous experiences. I found this perspective helpful and enriching because in my encounters with smokers I realized that it was a situation where many interviewees felt exposed, and they easily held a reserved approach towards me if I had remained distant. Typically, the interviews started slowly. I was uncomfortable asking some questions about smoking. Some interviews started off in a fumbling and awkward manner and some participants even acknowledged that they were suspicious of my intentions. This lack of trust in my intentions made me feel like I was overstepping my boundaries, especially when I asked some of the more intimate and private questions. On their hand, the interviewees could respond with a reserved tone. It was difficult for them to disassociate the prevailing public attitudes towards smokers and this attitude could easily be associated with me as a researcher. The public view could further enhance the imbalance between the researcher and the interviewee.

An interview is not a natural or relaxed format to talk to strangers, and the topic did not make it seem easier. Despite this, each interview eventually got more relaxed and confident and the interviewees always found a way to open up. Most of the interviewees told me they felt relieved after our conversation and expressed that it had actually been nice to talk about smoking, since they rarely talked to anyone about it, not even with other smokers. This intimate stance towards the interviewees helped me reflect on my own reactions to the
interviewees and my encounters with the tensions that were sometimes present. That is, I was able to include myself and my reactions as a part of the data. I also included interviewees’ reactions and language beyond their words in the data. Because I recorded the interviews, I took the opportunity to reflect on things like body language, facial expression, and tensions during the encounters. After each interview, I wrote these reflections in a field journal. This method was beneficial because it allowed me to learn more about smokers’ experiences of smoking as well as cultural and political actions and their views of their own smoking experiences. Moreover, this approach allowed me to ask for further explanations and clarifications, to penetrate deeper into the topic to learn more about assumed truths about the subject, to examine the subject’s perceptions of societal views on smoking, and to inquire about topics raised in the online ethnography.

I transcribed the interview data carefully. I transcribed each interview directly after the interview and used my notes from the interviews to ensure richness. I focused not only on what was said but also on it was said – e.g., the tone of voice, hand gestures, and facial expressions. I also wrote in a field journal where I described the interviewee, the atmosphere and chemistry between us, the surroundings of the place we met, some salient topics we had talked about, how the participants had reacted, as well as my own reflections or struggles. When I thematized the data for the findings, I let some time pass before I went back to the collected data and the theoretical framework to understand the data as a way to process the experience myself.

Online qualitative data collection
The method I used has many names: cyber ethnography, virtual ethnography, virtual methods (Hine, 2000, 2005), netnography (Kozinets, 2006), and online qualitative data collection (Whiting & Pritchard, 2021). Although the descriptions are slightly varied, they all refer to the same thing: collecting data online.
An online ethnography, including the approach I used, generally relies on texts and visual forms of data and focuses on understanding the topics, the digital voices, and/or the digital locations – i.e., the forums themselves. Online ethnography includes a mix of data, such as textual, video, and photographic data or a combination of all or a mix of memes or GIFs. Because so much content is produced every second online, ethnographies often generate a large amount of data.

People invest a great amount of time and emotion into forums and social media. Their diversity and anonymity make them great gathering points for smokers who want to share, reflect, and support each other without feeling judged. Moreover, governments as well as private health care providers worldwide increasingly use websites, forums, and apps to help smokers who want to quit. The openness of the posters made these platforms rich sites for collecting cigarette consumption data. Despite the role of social media in our everyday lives, some find using them as sources of data suspect. Online data are often neglected as data sources, and some suggest that online data are not sufficient. Christine Hine (2005), an early pioneer of virtual ethnography, argues that researchers no longer can neglect the internet as a data source, and I agree. Kozinets (2015) has extended Hines’ opinion by arguing for a view where online ethnography data sources are seen as substantial data sets on their own.

Although a great resource for data, unobtrusiveness, and researcher bias, the use of online data has tended to be limited to analysing the forums themselves or topics involving cultures formed around consumer groups (see Kozinets, 2002). Rather than viewing the internet as either a cultural artefact or a place ‘where culture is formed and reformed’ (2000 p. 9), suggests it should be viewed as both. Similarly, I view online data as a space where smokers as well as non-smokers can openly and anonymously discuss their experiences and
thoughts about smoking. As I see it, cultural perspectives and discourses will be represented in these forums. It is important to note that the forums also have their own social codes and these codes might differ from how we speak face-to-face.

In line with Hine’s (2005) description, my own online data collection process was divided in four steps: searching, familiarizing, browsing, and downloading. Initially, I took time to search and browse forums, support group webpages, and other platforms related to smoking. Next, I familiarized myself with the forums by going through the posts and posting myself to learn more about the social codes. When I found forums best suited for the purpose of this study, I began to browse them once a week throughout the fall of 2018. Then, I began to browse the forums about once a month until the end of 2020. I downloaded data via the platforms when possible. In cases where downloading was not feasible, I made screenshots of posts, discussions, or images. Although I remained open to interesting new findings, I focused on material related to enjoyment, risk, pain, health, and societal views on smoking. Throughout the online data collection, I collected field notes in line with Kozinets’ (2002) recommendations. I wrote down my reflections, impressions, the atmospheres I perceived in the forums, subtexts, personal emotions, and reactions. The journal was a great way of enriching and contextualizing the data and made it easier to recall and present the data.

Although the online data collection provided a good overview of the context, especially in terms of smokers’ comments on the societal view of smoking as well as its cultural and political polarities, I wanted to enrich my data further with interviews, which is a good compliment to online data collection (Kozinets, 2002). The nature of the topic made it important to capture the nature of lived experience of smokers because it would provide a layer of nuances, thick descriptions, and bodily interactions. Unlike Kozinets’ experience
of collecting online data as being ‘extraordinarily rich’ (Kozinets, 2002 p. 70), I found that the forums provided a great deal of data but this data lacked depth and richness. A group of posts possessed important information on smoking, but generally the posts were not nuanced and were fragmented and rarely went in-depth.

Online ethnography shifts the traditional focus on geographical place in data collection in ethnography (Hine, 2000). Online data collection means geography is no longer be the defining framework of culture as consumers are involved in many cultures including those defined by tastes, ideologies, worldviews, languages, religions, and social networks. As Hine notes, we should not simply reject what anthropologists have learned from studying places; rather, we should recognize that it is not the complete story. Against this background, the role of geography is toned down in the present research as I my main focus is on how smokers and non-smokers discuss bans, regulations, brands, enjoyments, and struggles related to smoking.

I set out overviewing search engines and social media to look for discussions on smoking, bans on smoking, as well as smokers trying to quit. I wanted to access platforms where discussions on struggles of risks and enjoyment, societal discourses on smoking and smokers, ideologies and bans and regulations were prevalent. My work with selecting platforms and data was therefore aligned with Whiting and Pritchard’s (2021), a combination of tracking and trawling. Trawling refers to a search across a variety of source types (e.g., social media, blogs, and forums) using keywords aligned with the purpose of the research. Trawling is mostly conducted in retrospect and engaged with data present before the start of the research project. This was true for some of the data, but I also studied forums where the data were published during my data collection, which corresponds to trawling. I eventually collected data from six platforms: Facebook; Instagram; Reddit r/Thread 1, which discusses
smoking and cigarettes; Forum 1, which supports smokers in their attempts to quit smoking; Swedish platform 1; and Swedish platform 2. The Swedish platforms were selected because they discussed smoking and had many users who posted frequently.

In 2020, Reddit had around 430 million users. Browsing the Reddit forums, I found that two forums had the word cigarette in its topic – one mainly discussed vaping and one mainly discussed cigarettes. As the latter thread had more members (21,800 members in June 2019), I picked it for my data collection. Forum 1, on the other hand, is part of a webpage that also offers smoking cessation plans, help via telephone, medical check-ups, live chats, an app, text message services that encourage smoking cessation, and coaches who offer advice about smoking cessation. This forum includes ex-smokers and smokers who intend to or currently are trying to quit. I intended to use the data collected to better understand the enjoyment smokers experience from smoking as well as the struggles, risks (e.g., disease), and fears smokers experience when trying to quit smoking. The forum does indicate the number of users; however, some forums, like Reddit, had many new posts every day. These posts included people writing freely about their attempts to quit smoking, including their fears and obstacles. Often, these posts were in-depth reflections about their experiences. Facebook and Instagram, which have fairly free access, are two of the largest social media platforms in terms of active users – i.e., users who post frequently (Statista, 2021). Their number of users and number of posts were decisive in my choice. Here, discussions about smoking were represented by smokers and non-smokers and therefore the posts represent diverse viewpoints. Forum 2 and Forum 3 are similar to Reddit as anything and everything is discussed. These forums include many discussions on the topic of smoking as well as discussions on the 2019 smoking ban.
Additional data
Throughout this process of collecting and working with my data, I wrote in a field journal to understand myself as a non-smoker, my experiences of the conversations with my interview participants, and the culture we share. In the field journal, I acknowledged and discussed reflections about myself as a researcher, my emotions, my thoughts, and my own perceptions of smoking and smokers in society. The field journal was an important tool for me as it helped me process the discussions and online posts. It provided an opportunity to reflect on what I read, heard, and saw and my own reactions and thoughts. After the interviews, I wrote notes so I could more easily recall the encounters. This tactic allowed me to add extralinguistic observations to the verbatim transcripts of the interviews, such as notes about body language, tone, or silence. Moreover, I used the field journal as an outlet where I could reflect on my own position in the overarching culture that I and the participants share as well as my own relation to some of the overarching societal discourses and views of smoking and smokers. My notes, thoughts, and reflections were very useful when presenting the findings.

To further extend the understanding of political and regulatory decisions and how they are debated, I included regulatory and public health documents in the data collection such as propositions, inquiries, reports, and laws addressing the 2019 smoking ban and restriction of sales in Sweden. My work capturing the societal discourses, structures, and perspectives of enjoyment was extended to news reports. Consumer culture research that focuses on societal structures and discourses often collect data from informative texts and verbal material (i.e., recordings or quotations) as well as from the culture and conduct of the groups being studied (e.g., Arnould & Price, 1993; Canniford & Shankar, 2013; Celsi et al., 1993; Goulding et al., 2009; Scott et al., 2017) and historical, political, and regulatory documents (Karababa & Ger, 2011; Sandikci & Ger, 2010).
Lastly, I observed many other forums and people in official smoking spots at hospitals and airports and other public places and buildings. These data were used to immerse myself in the context and to better grasp the situation for smokers in terms of discourses as well as where they are allowed to smoke and how the physical planning for smoking in cities and public places is structured. As these data are not explicitly included in the findings, they are not discussed further. An overview of the data sources included in the findings and their role in the study is presented in Table 4.1.

Presentation of data
To flesh out the richness of these stories, I iteratively moved between the findings and the analysis; as at this point in my exploration my familiarity with the theoretical framework and data made it possible for me to thematise the data. The findings are here presented separate from the analysis. Rather than analysing the findings per se, I present the findings in a literary style to illustrate the richness and depth of both the online data and the interview data. That is, for the presentation of findings, I use an essay format. Although unconventional, using novel formats for presenting data has increasingly been used by scholars to uncover interesting aspects about consumer culture (Coffin & Hill, 2022; Hietanen, 2012; O’Sullivan & Kozinets, 2020). Today, the entire Journal of Customer Behaviour is devoted to unconventional ways of representing research. I present the data in an essay format because it is a lively and engaging way to present data and seems to better capture the lived experiences of the participants. While working on this thesis, I have also thought more about my own memories and my own relationship to smoking than I would have otherwise, so I decided to present and examine my own experiences with smoking when I present my findings.
To give voice to my own experiences and memories, I use the example of a childhood friend when presenting the data. My recollections of my friend, who I introduced in the introduction, illustrates my own view of her rather than her own perspective. I used this technique to illustrate how othering of smokers can be expressed in an attempt to make the experience more relatable. In some parts of the presentation of findings, I explicitly engage in othering related to disgust, which is a topic of one of the subthemes in the findings. This engagement is not to point out smokers as disgusting but to illuminate what some non-smokers think of smokers.

Although all interviewees are present in the data, they are not given equal amount of space in Chapter 6 as I selected the richest quotations. It should however be noted that the quotations chosen are representative of what several interviewees had to say. I had a rich an extensive dataset of both verbatim and online ethnography data, so I had to select the most representative quotations for my findings. Every selection leads to an abandonment of another possibility; however, as the interviewee quotations and the forum posters often repeated what several participants had to say, I limited myself to two steps. First, I identified and selected the stories that were representative of many others and were richer and more illustrative in their descriptions. Next, I selected quotations that were both rich and succinct.

Most the quotations are from the interviews because these data were often more succinct, nuanced and richer than the online data. But also because the smokers’ voice was in focus of this thesis. Although it is important to portray all the voices of society presented in the forums, media, and documents, the smokers’ voices are the focus as their voices are often neglected. The voices of others will mostly be presented in the next chapter, the empirical context. However, the online ethnography data permeate the entire text as well as the
selection of quotations. The contrast of the forum and interviewee tone is striking, and this is prevalent in the quotations presented in Chapter 6. This choice reflects the difference in how we speak to each other and how we write online. Moreover, these differences complement each other: the interviewees add nuance and richness, and the forums add brutal and blunt openness. Many aspects of smoking that the interviewees hinted at and were reluctant to extend further were often openly discussed in the forums. In most cases, however, the tone of the interviewees was more suitable to the essay format because the interviewee data encompassed more complexity than the internet data.

4.6 Data analysis

The process of immersing myself in the theoretical perspectives and the data has been an iterative one. That is, I moved between the two to find suitable aspects of this framework to understand what I saw in the data and make sense of the literature based on my data. I found some reoccurring themes when I processed the empirical material. I divided the text into a messy mix of themes and interesting quotations representing each theme. Next, I went back to the framework to categorize the many themes into four overarching themes of smoking. These themes led me to include more aspects of jouissance until the many themes were categorized into the four accounts of smoking found in Chapter 6.

A structured method of preparing the data could have impeded my strive to maintain ambiguities regarding enjoyment. Interpretation is sometimes suggested to be a freer and often iterative process (Spiggle, 1994). Others are concerned that the richness and important aspects of data are lost when a detached and distanced way of logically sorting, coding, and analysing data are used, for example, in software programs (Thanem & Knights, 2018) rather than describing the data by engaging with its organic nature and physically
engaging with it by printing transcriptions, highlighting, writing, or colour coding. Most studies ignore or tone down ambiguities enjoyment in the output. I, however, believe that the data analysis requires room and flexibility to maintain and, in my case even, emphasize these ambiguities. CCT studies that examine unconventional enjoyment often code data using qualitative data software, which the researcher uses to connect the data to the study’s theoretical framework (e.g., Canniford & Shankar, 2013; Scott et al., 2017). When applying online data collection, Kozinets recommends using coding and software solutions as the large amounts of online data are difficult to process by hand (2002). However, these software solutions tend to reduce the data to the point that ambiguities are deemphasized, a limitation of the methodology I wanted to avoid.

Against that background, I thematized the forum data in lines with the accounts of smoking that emerged from the interviews in the online data collection. To maintain a focus on ambiguities, I did not to use coding programs to categorize the data, as this would mask ambiguities and remove the descriptive thickness, contradictions, and fragmentations needed when exploring non-conventional enjoyment. I allowed for the analysis to remain messy by highlighting the contradictions and inconsistencies in the data. I wanted room for contradictions rather than to strictly create a streamlined narrative. This way of doing analysis allows for the creation of lucid concepts that depict distinct features of the lives of participants in a context that allows for conflicts and contradictory constructions (Thanem & Knights, 2018), a context that complements the iterative process. In practice, I began my analysis while carefully transcribing the interviews and my notes in my field journal. After transcribing the interviews, I highlighted the topics that the interviewees discussed as well as their emotional reactions. The online data from each forum were saved in a Word document. I also wrote my feelings, thoughts, and reactions after each session of online data collection. When I had gathered the data, I
printed the material, read it, and highlighted significant interviews and posts. In the first selection, I thematized each story based on the struggles and accounts of enjoyment, fear, contradictions, and social aspects of smoking. In a second phase, I grouped reoccurring stories and created a theme name for the group.

4.7 Ontological position

The ontological position of this study does not adhere entirely to the typical research on pleasures in CCT. Here, I will avoid fully placing the ontological outlook in an interpretive and hermeneutical tradition because it often implies a possibility of some kind of inner core. The hermeneutical tradition assumes iterations eventually reveal something coherent or to some extent even something true. As I stated in Chapter 2, few CCT frameworks allow for inconsistencies and contradictions, a limitation that results in the literature’s one-sided view of pleasure. This study, however, focuses on the fragmented and unconventional. From my point of view, it is not useful to think in terms of reaching a core understanding. Although I am indeed performing an interpretive gesture when coding and sorting the data, the end result does not reveal a core understanding. The interviewees and the posters on forums relate inconsistently and incoherently to their own behaviour and strong beliefs. They shift positions and deceive their own ideals. Similarly, the cultural symbolism of smoking is constantly changing. Because of this inconsistent nature of smoking, my ontological point of view is inspired by Douglas Atkins’ (2005) view of the essay as a subjective alternative of making sense of the world, which fits well with psychoanalytically informed discourse theories.

In this thesis, I am experimenting with and elaborating on my own experiences in combination with theoretical concepts and ideas. Although my approach might differ from the traditional format of a thesis, I am placing this study in
its theoretical tradition of experimenting. The way I present the data in combination with my own experiences resembles the traditional essay features. Atkins (2005) as well as scholars in my field (Coffin & Hill, 2022; O’Sullivan & Kozinets, 2020) describe the essay format as a subjective attempt to sort topics and questions. This approach differs from the typical journal article’s more “objective” façade and layout. I see the essay as a freer instrument for making sense of the complex and inconsistent sprawl that smoking embraces. In Chapter 6, I present the findings in an “essayish” format separate from theories and analysis. Although I am not discussing theories by explicitly referencing them, the data are still processed and analysed based on the theoretical lens. Therefore, Chapter 6 can be viewed as a pre-analysis, and Chapter 7 can be viewed as an extended and deepened analysis and discussion.
5 Empirical Context: Cigarette Consumption

In my work with this thesis, I learned how much smoking truly engages people. Most people I talked to outside of my research either had a relationship to cigarettes or smokers. Some revealed a soulful aversion towards cigarettes, reminding them of friends or family members who have a disease or died as a result of smoking or reflecting smoking’s status as useless and harmful. For others, like me, the smell of a cigarette puts me back in my childhood. In less than a second, the smell of cigarette smoke takes me to a time when restaurants were filled with smoke and parents were smoking under the kitchen fan. The journey of the cigarette from a natural part of our everyday lives to an almost unthinkable habit is the result of a cultural shift.

This shift was inflated by a heightened knowledge of its risks (Torell, 2002), which coincided with novel outlooks on individual health management as a social ideal (Lupton, 1995). It is also one of our more symbolically charged products because of its historical symbolism of Europe; since tobacco’s first discovery by Europeans in South America, it has been symbolically charged. The tobacco industry has held a curious stance towards the symbolic rollercoaster of cigarettes. The coming sections will make visible how the tobacco industry, always in the background, has subtly and trend-sensitively found ways to permeate and sometimes even master the direction smoking takes in popular culture by being involved in restrictions and lobbying efforts. These efforts are still evident in the public relations and marketing campaigns from 100 years ago. The cigarette’s different historical cultural meanings still infuse cigarettes with meaning and surround it with strong opinions. In this chapter,
I depict how the cigarette’s symbolic meaning and status has shifted over time and explain that process through scientific, historical, legal, cultural, and promotional shifts in society.

5.1 Smoking – a risk-filled and addictive habit

It is impossible to research consumption of cigarettes without mentioning its harms and addictive nature. This thesis does not aim to judge smoking and smokers but to move beyond value judgements of them to see if there is more to learn about the motivation behind consumption. Nonetheless, smoking’s risks are well-documented, and it is important to acknowledge them. Enjoyments are often imbued with symbolic meanings; as a symbol, the cigarette might be so culturally charged precisely because of its risks. The aim here is not to go into the details of risks and addiction but to give an account of them because they affect smokers as well as the meaning and status of smoking today, which is at the centre of this study.

When I was around 15 years old, my friend’s dad, whom I mentioned in the introduction chapter, coughed up blood. I remember how he and his wife – who usually were the unworried kind – now looked pale and terrified when they told me and my friend what had happened. His condition was taken seriously by health care; he had already scheduled an appointment to have his lungs examined. When I got home, I asked my dad what coughing blood could mean, and he told me that it could be a sign of lung cancer. Lung cancer, this frightening and diffuse word that I had heard of but never fully grasped, frightened me. It was a great relief to all of us when it eventually turned out that my friend’s dad did not have lung cancer. He stopped smoking for a while, but after a few months he smoked with us again as if nothing had happened. I asked him why he smoked again. He must have heard the fear in my voice as
he calmly responded that the blood had been a false alarm, so there was no need for me to worry.

In Sweden, over half of habitual smokers die from smoking and 90% of all the cases of lung cancer are believed to be caused by smoking. Smoking heightens the risks of getting other deadly cancers, but it also causes cardio-vascular disease, stroke, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease according to the Swedish Cancer Association (Wetterhall & Klefbom, n.d.). In other words, habitual smoking is known to be a risk-filled and sometimes even a deadly habit. According to World Health Organization (WHO) (2020), up to half of smokers die from their habit. In other words, each year around seven million smokers die from diseases caused by their smoking. I always find it difficult to truly grasp numbers presented in this way, taken out of context or in relation to other diseases, but clearly the numbers are not in favour of smoking. To give some context, smoking is directly or indirectly the cause of death of more people than traffic accidents, drugs, and suicide together. Moreover, smoking also kills people close to smokers via second-hand smoke; according to the WHO, over one million deaths are caused by second-hand smoke. This fact makes me think of my friend who spent the majority of her time, from birth until she started smoking herself, breathing second-hand cigarette smoke.

The information campaigns that focus on the risks of smoking have produced great results as the number of habitual smokers has drastically decreased. Around 7% of the Swedish population between 18 and 84 smoke on a daily basis (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2020a), which is slightly more than a 50% drop in smoking over 16 years. When looking further back in time, the drop is even greater. In the 1980s, for example, 65% of people in Sweden smoked (Torell, 2002). Despite an awareness of the risks, people still smoke and the most common explanation is addiction. Nicotine, a psychoactive drug, provides addicted smokers with a sense of a modified mood, higher concentration ability,
and a well-documented sense of well-being (Larsson & Damberg, 2017). Smoking is well-known to be addictive and therefore it is worth emphasizing again that this thesis does not focus on addiction, the effects of smoking, or smokers per se. Although these topics will be noticed in the background, it is the unconventional enjoyment that is in focus here. Precisely because of its harmful and addictive nature, smoking is used as one example of such enjoyments.

Of course, addiction could have been one way to explore unconventional enjoyments. Although it is an important subject to address, it is not the path this study takes as discussions purely focused on addiction easily become a matter of brain chemistry and biology versus culture (Hirschman, 1995). Furthermore, when smoking is looked at in relation to consumption, the study usually ends up in a discourse on compulsivity (Hirschman, 1992). These discourses are not the focus of this thesis. There are many things related to consumption that are assumed to induce physiological addiction other than nicotine such as alcohol, salt, sugar, and shopping. Solely focusing on physiological addiction would imply leaving out many other interesting aspects of these outlets of consumption, such as its position in culture, its symbolical meaning, and its forms of enjoyment. These latter aspects involved in smoking are illustrative examples of the inconsistencies often involved in enjoyment as well as how some sources of enjoyment become socially accepted and others do not.

The cigarette is an object charged with symbolism that gives rise to disagreements on various societal levels. At times, the cultural and physiological perspectives clash. On the cultural side, some take it so far as stating that smoking habits are to a higher degree determined by culture and social belonging than by a physiological addiction (e.g., Tate, 2000). This is not a viewpoint I take here; however, by discussing some of the strong statements I have encountered in my work with this thesis, I hope to illuminate the political, polarizing, and
symbolic effects the cigarette has in many societies. Rather than debating superiority of the cultural perspective, the intention here is to give one account among many on smoking.

5.2 Cigarettes and shifting cultural ideals

In my work with this thesis, I have read numerous legislative documents, magazines, and forum posts and one thing is clear: the cigarette is polarizing. Although one side sees it as a sign of liberal freedom to do whatever they want, the other side sees it as a threat to their health and a sign of corporate greed. The cigarette as we know it today is a result of its long history of strong cultural symbolism positioned in religion, class, and ethnicity. To understand the cigarette and the meaning of smoking we are faced with today, I discuss smoking’s cultural history. From its first encounter with the Western parts of the world, tobacco has been a contested product, reflecting the present contradictions surrounding the cigarette. The West had its first encounter with tobacco smoking during the conquest of South America, where it was frequently used by shamans in religious rituals and was believed to provide a link to the divine. Some of the mythical properties of the cigarette in modern times bears traces of South American tribes’ view of tobacco smoking (Gately, 2001). For example, some indigenous societies used tobacco in rites of passage that guide adolescences into adulthood.

The many cultural guises of the cigarette have been conveyed through advertising, lifestyle magazines, music, and movies. Cigarettes reached more people through Hollywood movies and became a natural part of mass consumption. Both Hollywood and advertising presented positive attitudes towards smoking to mass culture from 1900 through the 1950s, exposure that significantly influenced tobacco consumption in North America (Ribiero, 1996). Many Hollywood movies, which have a global reach, portrayed the cigarette
as a natural part of characters’ lives. In his encompassing thesis *Smoking in British popular culture 1800–2000*, Matthew Hilton (2000) draws on a wide range of popular cultural material to describe some of the cultural roles of the cigarette. He demonstrates how smoking went from a secluded engagement of bourgeois men to a mass cultural activity that eventually returned to its former secluded realms in the sphere of subcultures. In art history, smoking has provided image creators with a symbolic language for social positions. For example, tobacco has been used to signify attributes for gender, class, and ethnicity (Mitchell, 1987).

In addition to signalling established social positions, the cigarette has been used to contest them. The cigarette has a long history of rebellious symbolism, often in relation to challenging norms related to class, ethnicity, and gender (Torell, 2002). This symbolic language has been useful in times characterized by change, where categories of tobacco use came to reflect ongoing processes in society at large. Patricia Berman (1993) identifies a number of visualized stereotypes of cigarette smokers in Western high culture and popular culture at the end of the 19th century. She shows how the cigarette was used to challenge definitions of class, gender, social categories, and norms in society. For example, in the 1920s, cigarettes became a symbol of the female liberation movement (Shankar et al., 2006) as smoking had been the domain of men and a socially unthinkable habit for women to engage.

Nancy Bowman (2001) challenges the cigarette as a rebellions symbol, suggesting that this symbolism was really just playing in the hands of corporations whose only concern was to find more customers. In her study of the portrayal of women smoking during the first decades of the 20th century, she applies a critical perspective to describe how women’s ‘social advancements’ rather than gender norms were the grounds for the tobacco industry’s massive advertising aimed at women. In 1929, a famous campaign, Torches of Freedom,
seemed to be a female liberation movement call to allow women to smoke in public. In reality, however, Torches of Freedom was created to increase market share by appealing to the female liberation movement (Shankar et al., 2006; Tadajewski, 2006). The PR campaign aside, smoking has a long history of being the exclusive enjoyment of men.

In the beginning of the 20th century, women were not allowed to smoke in public. Despite the Torches of Freedom campaign, the idea that smoking was masculine affected the consumption of cigarettes for decades. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, movies mainly limited onscreen smoking to men, a reflection of mainstream society. Smoking took on different meanings and tended to say something about the smoker. How tobacco was smoked was very important to how the smoker was perceived. Pipes, for example, signalled that the smoker was a father, cigars suggested that the smoker was a successful businessman, and cigarettes signalled vital, single men with sex appeal (Torell, 2002). James Dean, the popular 1950s actor, was associated with both cigarettes and sex appeal. He was also seen as a rebel, often looking into the camera with a defiant gaze while a cigarette dangled from his lips.

Around the 1970s, when gender equality was on the agenda of many Swedes, women began to smoke more (Torell, 2002). In the 1970s, one-third of all women smoked on a daily basis and eventually more women than men smoked in Sweden. In the 1980s, on the other hand, smoking started to decrease, even among women (Cancerfonden, n.d.). The 1980s was, unlike the 1970s, characterized by a new wave of consumption spirit – individuality was put in focus. The 1980s was a decade characterized by the individual, and this concerned cigarettes too as society began to demand smokers take responsibility for their health as well as those exposed to their smoke. The menace of second-hand smoke had become common knowledge, and the smoker was seen as responsible for harming others through passive smoking. At the same time as
the awareness of the hazards of smoking began to increase, society was becoming reluctant of restrictions (Torell, 2002). Moreover, health had become pivotal, and the healthy body dominated lifestyle-magazines.

To counter this change in attitudes, the tobacco industry introduced light cigarettes, which they claimed were less harmful. Advertising during this time started to inform consumers of the risks of smoking, something that they had previously neglected. However, they also provided their own solution to the problem: light cigarettes with lower amounts of tar. For the health-concerned smoker of the 1980s, two options had emerged: quitting smoking or switching to light cigarettes. Despite these efforts by the industry, the ideal of individual responsibility led to smoking and smokers being criticized and questioned because of the increasing knowledge of the effects of second-hand smoke (Torell, 2002). Along with a heightened focus on individual health responsibility (Lupton, 1995) and the effects of second-hand smoking, smokers and non-smokers were for the first time seen as in opposition to one another. Disagreements between smokers and non-smokers were displayed in public. Lifestyle magazines presented rules for how smokers and non-smokers best should co-exist (Torell, 2002). For example, previously non-smokers were expected to leave an area where smokers were smoking if they found the smoke to be an annoyance, but the new expectations placed the onus on the smoker to leave areas where a mix of smokers and non-smokers gathered.

I was born in 1986, in the midst of the light cigarette and second-hand smoke era. When I was around five, the idea of individual responsibility and the damaging effects of second-hand smoke on children had reached me too. I often engaged my friends in the mission of picking up cigarette butts from the ground and coughing around smokers. As children, we felt obliged to claim our rights to clean water, soil, and air, and we were cheered on by the non-smoking adults. Yet, I also remember many adults around me smoking, among
them my childhood friend’s dad. Most of the smoking parents had started smoking under the kitchen fan to spare their children the potential damage of second-hand smoke.

In the 1990s, the role of the state became more central again and an advertising ban on cigarettes altogether was implemented in 1993 in Sweden. Smoking was now seen in weekly magazines where actors and artists were seen smoking. During the 1990s, the cigarette came to symbolize lust as it was depicted in images of supermodels and erotic pictures in men’s magazines. Smoking was now a restricted but seen as a social activity and the “party smoker” became a common expression (Torell, 2002), referring to those who only smoke at dinners and parties. Torell’s account of smoking in society stretches throughout the 1990s. After the 1990s, the main change in the cultural view of smoking is related to a further elevation of individual responsibility of health first expressed in the 1980s. Although quitting smoking is one of the interventions that makes the biggest difference in terms of improving the health of smokers (Fleetwood & Al, n.d.), the idea of individual responsibility has spread to other areas too.

Throughout the decades, smoking provided a certain set of ideals, where the consumer’s body has gone from being exposed to a matter of fate to individual responsibility (Askegaard, Gertsen, & Langer, 2002) to the point of people being sceptical towards governmental and expert ability to prevent unhealthy outcomes. Scepticism has become more of a rule than an exception, which has given rise to a belief in other ways of attaining health. With time, health has become equivalent to ideas of discipline and will power (Kristensen, Boye, & Askegaard, 2011). This point of view, together with increasing knowledge of smoking’s risks, has affected the view of smoking and its development into one of the most obvious cases of how individuals can influence the direction of their own health.
Along with an increasing scepticism and individual responsibility, there has been a shift towards the idea of the body as being subjected to human will. Disease, as a result, is increasingly viewed as a result of human failure and failing will power (Crawford, 1980; Metzl, Kirkland, & Kirkland, 2010). People who become ill are seen as having allowed the disease because of a failing lifestyle (Lupton, 1995). This trust in the individual influence over one's health is expressed in severe illnesses, where, for example, individual agency often is overemphasized in cancer treatments and survival is referred to as a moral calling while dying is seen as a personal failure or unwillingness to live. Treating the ill is costly and increasingly seen as burdening to tax payers (Metzl, Kirkland., & Kirkland, 2010). Because of a greater belief in the individual influence of health, the non-disciplined body is seen as an unwillingness to contribute to society. The increasing scientific knowledge about lifestyle choices has made unhealthy individuals easy targets of narratives that they cause their diseases themselves by being lazy, lacking self-control, or over indulgence. The narrative of unhealthy choices is often placed in a class discourse (Lupton, 1995) where working classes often are pointed out as a uncareful with respect to their health.

Metzl and colleagues (2010) argue that the contemporary ideas of health are taken for granted and rarely questioned. The idea that health is a transparent, universal good masks moral messages. These ideas of health as an individual responsibility are reflected in medical research as well. Despite lung cancer being the deadliest cancer in Sweden (Cancerfonden, 2020), it is an under researched cancer, partly because some medical researchers traditionally have viewed smokers as individually responsible for their disease (Appelquist, 2019). Placing blame on the patient has resulted in a lack of awareness of how to cure lung cancer and a low understanding of what causes lung cancer (Jakobsson, 2018). The mentality of the smoker as being responsible for her
illness has recently been challenged along with the detection of higher levels of lung cancer among non-smokers (Abrahamsson, 2015). Because smoking has decreased during this time, the reduction in passive smoking is not the reason for this development and the hypothesis is that there is something other than smoking that causes this development.

Because of the decrease of smoking and habitual smokers in Western countries, researchers are puzzled by the rise of lung cancer among non-smokers; 10 to 15% of people diagnosed with lung cancer in Sweden have never smoked (Abrahamsson, 2015; Jakobsson, 2018). They are to a greater extent women and younger than the typical smoker when becoming ill. Non-smokers suffering from lung cancer often describe how they are met with unemphatic response when revealing their cancer. These patients report avoid specifying the sort of cancer they suffer from because the belief that lung cancer is caused by the actions of the patient, a view that is so ingrained in the population that they are told that they only have themselves to blame for their disease (Abrahamsson, 2015). In these types of rather cold debates, smokers are regularly discussed in terms of costs, burdens, or deaths. Along with the increased regulations and restrictions imposed on cigarette sales and use, a narrative of the cigarette as a symbol of liberty and rebelliousness has emerged. Once again, the cigarette has become a symbol of transgressing norms. This time it is used as a symbol of libertarian ideals and consumer rights. Seen through this perspective, smoking, overeating, and inactivity are seen as brutal violations to basic health maintenance, so it is easy to understand how cigarettes, a completely superfluous enjoyment, has become a detested consumer object in our time.
5.3 Restrictions and regulations

Today, cigarette advertising and sales are highly restricted and regulated. In Australia, which is seen as a precursor in regulating cigarette sales and use, advertising in the form of text, images, audio, and video are banned. Also signs, symbols, and trademarks are banned as the country implemented a tobacco plain packaging act where tobacco products have to be packaged in a certain colour without logos, branding, or promotional text (Australian Department of Health, 2011). In parts of Australia, cigarettes are not allowed to be displayed in stores (Wynne, 2014). In Britain (Daily Mail, 2011), similar actions have been discussed to extend the current regulations. In 2019, during my data collection, the Swedish smoking ban expanded from an indoor restriction to include outdoor public places.

In Sweden, tobacco advertising is strictly regulated, but tobacco companies are allowed to display commercial messages in stores and other points of sale. Logos, colours, and images are allowed on the package as long as there is a warning about the health risks (Swedish Consumer Agency, n.d.). These restrictions have developed gradually since the risks of smoking have been published. Cigarette consumption is exposed to a highly prioritized political engagement and regulations in Sweden as well as globally. The 2019 Swedish cigarette ban was only a step towards a greater goal: the Swedish government has formulated an agenda to make Sweden smoke-free by 2025, which is defined as less than 5% smokers (Hallengren, 2015). The justification of this agenda often returns to monetary savings.

Smokers are often referred to as a costly burden to society, and the main argument for imposing a Swedish smoke-free agenda is that cigarette smoking is the single most common reason for cancer. The societal cost of cancer is approximately SEK 36 billion (Regeringskansliet, 2018). On the other hand,
a report requested by the Swedish Ministry of Finance found that the taxes from tobacco sales exceeds the costs of health care associated with tobacco consumption. This report, which weighed the costs of health care against tax revenue and life expectancy, found that smoking is less costly to Swedish society than e.g., alcohol consumption. Moreover, since tobacco taxes exceed social costs and smokers have a lower life-expectancy, the report argues that the Swedish state actually makes profit from smokers, whereas alcohol consumption is more costly because alcoholics often live longer and require more health care than smokers (Sundén, 2019). This rather cold, purely economic way, of looking at people at least questions the assumption that smokers are a burden to society.

In addition to legislation, smoking has also become a focus of employers. Smoking during work hours is increasingly seen as costly for the employer and unfair to the other employees since the smoker gets more breaks than non-smokers (Zupek, 2007). A Swedish company recently advertised for employees who do not smoke since smokers are costlier and more frequently sick and smoking does align with the company’s focus on health (Nygren, 2013). Although some critical voices point towards discrimination laws and that indulgence is essentially a private matter, discrimination is absent in the dominating discourses.

Similar actions have been taken by employers globally. The WHO stopped hiring smokers as smoking does not align with their efforts to reference to reduce tobacco use globally (Svenska dagbladet, 2005). Walmart started voluntary programs for employees teaching them the benefits of quitting cigarette smoking, and health care firm Weyco banned its staff from smoking altogether in an ultimatum where employees had to choose between quitting or losing their jobs (Zupek, 2007). At Baylor Health Care System in Texas, new employees take a blood test to detect whether they use nicotine products. This
action is an effort to become a fully smoke-free workplace (Jacobson, 2011).
It is moreover noteworthy that employee nicotine tests are increasingly al-
lowed in the US (Sulzberger, 2011), where cannabis has recently been legal-
ized (US National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020), pointing to a shift in the view of the harmful effects of cannabis and cigarettes.

It has been striking how scientific knowledge, cultural ideals, and legislation have walked hand-in-hand in changing the symbolic meaning of cigarettes and smoking. Since the time tobacco first reached the coasts of Spain, tobacco has been a contested and banned source of enjoyment in the Western world (Gately, 2001), mainly motivated by religious beliefs. Since its proven correlation to lung cancer in the 1950s, regulations have been motivated by health reasons. The connection between smoking and lung cancer was established already in the 1950s; however, the strong connection to risks was not met with the concern the scientists must have desired. It would take at least 20 years for this knowledge to reach consumers but still without any radical interventions as the tobacco companies that, via PR and internal research tools, managed to plant tiny seeds of doubt smoking’s role in developing cancer. Their tactics were enough to delay any legal restrictions by decades.

Before any scientific papers were published about the dangers of smoking, physicians began expressing concern that smoking was leading to unnecessary death and disease. Many doctors and researchers became concerned after it was discovered that lung cancer had significantly increased. Several years later, the U.S. health authorities published a report with the gathered scientific results on the effects of smoking at the time. This research was followed up by the authors and published in 1954, and the relationship between deaths and smoking became officially established (Hammond & Horn, 1954). The research results spread globally and sparked public discussions about smoking. At this point, Sweden and many other countries lacked any regulations on
smoking. Not until the 1990s, smoking itself increasingly became the target of restrictive legislation. In 1997, almost 30 years later, smoking was banned on all airplanes flying in the European Union (Mark, 2016). This restriction got the ball rolling, and Sweden began discussing banning smoking indoors at restaurants along with an increasing number of other countries. After the 1990s, many countries began discussing more restrictions and bans.

It has been a long process from discovering the risks of smoking to implementing legislative action, and it is clear that the tobacco industry has had a significant impact on the distribution of knowledge as well as regulations and legislation. Because tobacco companies to a great extent have been invisible, their actions and agendas have been – and still are – difficult to trace. Although cigarette advertising is not as prevalent today as a few decades ago and despite the numerous campaigns against smoking, it seems difficult to completely disregard its effect on cultural symbolisms. Some proponents of the cultural perspective argue that every attempt to erase tobacco from our societies will fail unless we acknowledge its complex cultural meaning (Goodman, 2005). If that prediction is accurate, I hope that my research, in some way, can add to the discussion.

5.4 The tobacco industry today

While reading the extensive knowledge of the negative effects of smoking, the increasing regulations, and the focus on individual responsibility of health, I had a hard time understanding what the tobacco industry would make of all of this. Changing this cemented public view seemed like an impossible quest to me and advertising was an impossibility, at least that was how I had interpreted it. When I started reading about the tobacco industry’s own vision, I learned that Phillip Morris recently announced that Sweden will be the first smoke-free country as a first step towards their new smoke-free vision, the
same vision of the Swedish government (Hallengren, 2015). The Swedish director of Phillip Morris announced in the Swedish news that smoking is dangerous and that the most efficient way smokers can improve their health is to stop smoking (Lublin, 2019). The company, however, has no plans to leave the smoking market, as it believes that an exit would mean that new tobacco companies would enter and that they might take no responsibility with respect to smoking’s damages. Phillip Morris claims that it, on the other hand, wants to collaborate with governments to reduce cigarette smoking.

Their statement has raised critical voices arguing that leaving any responsibility to reduce smoking to a cigarette company is akin to placing a child in a candy store. Moreover, the company’s duty towards shareholders, employees, and manufacturing chains would never allow them to simply stop sales (e.g., Hackley, 2018). Instead of cigarettes, Phillip Morris will expand their heat-not-burn products – i.e., e-cigarettes. They also have invested in other local tobacco products. In Sweden, many people use snus, a form of snuff. Snus is more socially accepted and there is less proof of health damages than for cigarettes, and many cigarette companies have tried to enter the snus market (Tobacco Tactics, 2019).

Parallel to the investment in alternatives to cigarettes, cigarette companies employ marketing and PR strategies via third parties like influencers, event firms, and PR companies. A petition was recently filed against Phillip Morris, British American Tobacco, Japan Tobacco, and Imperial brands for targeting young American consumers with deceptive social media marketing (Kaplan, 2018). The PR actions are often so difficult to trace that a group of interdisciplinary scholars developed a Wiki-like homepage, called Tobacco Tactics, collecting research revealing PR actions and acquisition and mergers that affect their influence over customers. The purpose of this is to make the public aware of the tobacco industry’s novel ways of advertising. Along with the advertising
of cigarettes being regulated in many countries today, the tobacco industry has taken a subtler approach by engaging in brand promotion through social media and influencers. These campaigns are sophisticated and circumvent regulations of cigarette advertisement. By using hashtags with subtle connections to the brand or promoting events where cigarettes are displayed and freely distributed, cigarette brands finds their way to adolescents and young adults.

Similarly, concealed lobbying actions are financing a smokers’ rights organizations that promotes cigarette smoking as a liberal right (Clark, 2015; Forest, 2019a, 2019b; TobaccoTactics, 2019). The same organization can be traced to the largest global tobacco companies (Tobacco Tactics, 2019). Simultaneously, the tobacco companies have privately financed research reports focusing on the positive effects of vaping and e-cigarettes (McKeganey & Dickson, 2016). The tobacco company’s use of the cigarette as a freedom symbol seems to be as alive today as it was in the 1920s (Clark, 2015; Forest, 2019b, 2019a; McKeganey & Dickson, 2016). The cigarette has since then been used to represent lust, intellect, fertile manliness, and religious rites as well as death, disease, and working class belonging. Although the cigarette has taken on different guises and symbolisms, it has been persistently contested and seen as challenging societal norms and ideals. As a token of the right to enjoy at the risk of inducing oneself with illness without state involvement, the cigarette has lately become one of the stronger libertarian symbols for freedom of choice.

This chapter reveals something beyond the symbolisms and meanings of the cigarette – the right to talk about cigarettes and smoking belongs to everyone but the smoker. Scientists, tobacco companies, regulators, politicians, PR agencies, and many others have been active in the most recent debates on freedom versus health ideals. Nowhere to be found is the voice of the smokers themselves. Although I find these historical and contemporary outlooks on the cigarette as a symbol that helps explain why people smoke, I am curious to
know whether the smokers themselves place their habit in these discourses or if they have something else to say about being a smoker today.
6 Findings: Accounts of Smoking

My childhood friend with the dad who smoked, whom I introduced in Chapter 1, eventually started smoking like her parents. I remember how she once brought a cigarette and a lighter to kindergarten and we pretended to smoke it in one of the playrooms just a few meters from our tiny friends who were absorbed in a play of chasing each other back and forth in the corridor outside. She showed me how to do it like she had seen her parents smoke so many times before. Afterwards, I felt bad for doing it and even worse when another friend told on us and we were punished. I remember being surprised of how my friend did not seem to care at all. Only a few years later, when we were around twelve, she brought cigarettes again and this time we really smoked them hiding by the trees next to our schoolyard. Around a year later, she smoked a pack of cigarettes daily. The reasons for smoking are perhaps as many as there are smokers, but in my friend’s case I believe that she was destined to smoke. Studies have shown that whether teenagers start smoking or not greatly depends on their peer group (The Centre for Epidemiology and Community Medicine at Region Stockholm, 2019). My friend was not only highly likely to start smoking but also smoking quickly came to define her.

In this chapter, I present the findings of individual experiences of smoking – in a similar manner as I have presented of my friend – to try to understand the experiences of smoking. I present the findings in four themes that deal with the most recurring accounts I encountered in my field work: rebellious smoking; disruptive smoking; limitless smoking; and isolated smoking. In the first theme, rebellious smoking, the findings revolve around ideas of smoking as
part of a rebellious identity where some smokers feel in touch with a higher order enjoyment because they break common code of conduct. In the second theme, disruptive smoking, participants describe cigarettes as an intrusive force with the ability to alleviate personal crisis. In the third theme, limitless smoking, the participants describe how smoking often is perceived as limitless and strategies for handling the limitlessness. Despite the strategy the smoker took, episodes of uncontrolled smoking usually reappeared. In the fourth perspective, isolated smoking, smoking is described as tastiest when enjoyed in isolation, but the cigarette moreover seems to stand in the way between the smoker and other relationships. Unlike the subcultures seen in consumer culture theories (CCT), smoking is isolated even among smokers. Here, the smokers struggle with disgust towards their own uncontrolled episodes as well as disgust towards other smokers.

6.1 Presentation of interviewees and forums

Interviewees
In total, I interviewed 16 smokers and they will all be presented in this first section. This section provides a background of the interviewees’ relationship with smoking to add richness and depth to the data. In addition, this section illuminates that the participants are not seen as defined by their habit but are people with personality traits, interests, families, and emotions. In one way or another, traces of all of these interviewees are present in the data; however, it is important to know that not all of them are explicitly represented in the findings. These introductions are based on statements of the participants as well as my field journal notes of the interviews.

6.1.1.1 Ida
Ida, a 35-year-old nurse, lives in Stockholm with her partner and two children, three and six years old. She is easy-going, open, and unguarded when it comes
to talk about her smoking. She has a curious gaze, to the point of almost being scrutinizing, and has a loud contagious laughter. She has short blond hair, a tiny pointy nose, and brown eyes placed in her roundly shaped face. Her voice is strong, and she speaks in a clear, confident, and articulated way with a strong Stockholm dialect. She has a cheerful and light-minded personality, not the type who overthinks things, which made her appear youthful to me. She had smoked since she was 14, and she told me she misses the social networking and intimacy that smoking provided before most people she knows quit. Ida smokes three cigarettes per day but has not told her partner about this; she never smokes in front of her children and rarely on weekends when she spends time with her family.

6.1.1.2 Judith
Judith, 63, wear a short black leather jacket, worn jeans, and black boots. Her hair is at shoulder-length and brown with some grey strains. She has big blue eyes, a small nose and a rounded mouth. The lines on her skin and lips reveals that she has been a smoker for many years and is the only trait that reveals her age. She has a tough appearance and throughout the entire interview maintains a reserved tone and keeps her arms crossed over her chest. After a while, she softens and reveals a vulnerable side. She then comes off as calm, sad, and the type of person who talks only when she has something succinct to say. She is noticeably uncomfortable talking about smoking and remains reserved throughout the interview. She expresses feelings of loneliness and eventually reveals that her husband died a year ago. They used to smoke together. After her husband’s death, she cannot force herself to quit smoking. Cigarettes have been helpful throughout this time. Judith mentions having children, but nothing more about it. She tells me that she likes spending time with her friends.

6.1.1.3 Eric
Eric is 55 years old and lives in an apartment in Stockholm with his wife and two sons. He works at a university in Sweden. He has dark-grey hair and black
glasses and is wearing jeans and a hooded sweater, the kind you wear for outdoor activities like hiking. He gives a youthful, rebellious, posh, and macho impression at the same time. He likes football, reading, and movies and he bikes everywhere. He talks openly and naturally about smoking and his understanding of the outside view of his habit. He started smoking regularly at about 18 or 19 and tells me of how smoking used to have a strong social meaning to him and of that he misses it. Erik smokes several cigarettes per day. He never counts how many, and buys a new pack before the current one is empty to remain unaware about the number of cigarettes he smokes.

6.1.1.4 Chiara
Chiara is a 41-year-old woman living with her partner and their adopted Irish dog in Stockholm. She has light brown hair, big grey eyes, and a friendly and open face. She is of average height and wears sportswear. She talks openly and vividly about smoking and of her view of other smokers. At the time of the interview, she was between two jobs where she just left a start-up to commence her new position as financial assistant at an accounting bureau. Her dad is half Italian; she lived in Italy for some years in her 20s and identifies with being Italian, especially the Italian relationship to smoking. She told me that she has been smoking more or less since her confirmation camp when she was around 14 years old. The number of cigarettes she smokes has varied over time; it used to be more, but for some years, she tries to stick to smoking three cigarettes per day. She has tried to quit on several occasions.

6.1.1.5 Felix
Felix, a 27-year-old student living in the Stockholm area, takes undergraduate courses in two different fields and has not yet decided what to make of it. He has dark hair, brown eyes, and round thin glasses. He has a girlfriend, likes computer games, and sings in a power ballad choir. He works at a summer camp for teenagers with neuropsychiatric disorders. He tells me that he started smoking in his teens. His parents smoked during his childhood and still do
today. When they travel together, they all smoke together. He used to smoke every day, but since he started dating a girl, he only smokes on the weekends on festive occasions. He tells me that smoking conveys an ironic stance for youths of today; because most people do not smoke, he thinks it is amusing to do the opposite and see people’s reactions.

6.1.1.6 Mimi
Mimi, a 42-year-old woman, lives in central Stockholm. She smokes daily but never so her two preschool-aged kids can see. She is a landscape architecture and manager of a municipality area. She has dark-brown hair to her shoulders and green eyes. She gives the impression of being calm although she several times during the interview digs into her big purse to find her lipstick among clothes, protein bars, sunglasses, cigarette packages, water bottles, wallet, and phone to pick something up. She smiles a lot, except for when she tells me she recently got divorced. At that point, she started smoking much more excessively. To Mimi, smoking has represented being single and is one strategy she applies during hard times.

6.1.1.7 Helga
Helga is a woman in her 60s who works as an assistant nurse. She is a mother of two adult children and grandmother of two and tells me that she puts them first. She lives in a small town, about an hour from Stockholm, with her husband. Her daughter and grandchildren live there too, and she spends time with them as well as others in their community. She is beautiful; tall and skinny with a slim nose, almond shaped eyes covered with glasses with a slight brown-grey toning. Although being friendly and talkative during the interview, her facial expression became tense, and she seemed guarded at the onset of the interview. She told me of how she in general tends to worry and feel distressed about her children’s well-being. She started smoking in her teens. After her children were born, she switched to a light-brand, which she still smokes today. She used to smoke more but now smokes about three cigarettes
per day. Her children know that she smokes, but not her grandchildren or other people living in her town, unless she knows them well.

6.1.1.8 Phillip
Phillip is in his 40s, has light brown hair, and is a bit shorter than the average Swedish man. He seems stressed and all over the place throughout the first part of our interview but a while later relaxes. He tries to explain his occupation to me, but he is a man of great variety. He works with fashion, has a podcast, and likes to read and quote statistics. Phillip started smoking when he went to one of the few elite boarding schools in Sweden. He has smoked since then, and he refers to himself a smoke romantic. His smoker idols are Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin. He strongly prefers smoking indoors with a tuxedo, and he thinks that smoking outdoors is trashy. He is a man of strong opinions when it comes to smoking etiquette, but he does diverge from his own rules occasionally.

6.1.1.9 Penny
Penny is cheerful and energetic and works with user experience at a tech company in Stockholm. She has long, thick light-brown hair and light-blue eyes. She was 29 years old when we met at her studio apartment in central Stockholm. She smokes daily but tells me that she usually smokes periodically. She had just recently broken up with her boyfriend, which sparked a new period of daily smoking. Being single, she started to go out and party more, which led to a lot more smoking during the weekends. Penny tells me of how she tends to smoke more during hard times. She likes working out and hanging out with her friends.

6.1.1.10 Siri
Siri, a talkative and calm woman in her late 70s, short and slim, has a short bob haircut, and was wearing blue and white clothes. She lives with her husband in an apartment in Liljeholmen in Stockholm; they have an adult son. She is now retired but formerly worked as a dental technician and has worked
as a fitness instructor. In her later years, she took a bachelor degree at the university, as she had always wanted to go to university, but her mother would not allow her. She was chatting openly about things outside of smoking, but a bit reserved when it came to talking about her habit. She likes doing gymnastics and hanging out with her friends. Siri never told me the amount she smokes per day because she does not count. But she said that she decreased the number in later years and that she started smoking in her 20s. Her husband has a psychiatric disease that at times is tough to handle. Siri says she smokes for support and to ease the rough times.

6.1.1.11 Victor
Victor, who looks much younger than his 61 years, has grey hair but maintains a healthy physique through his interest in sports. He is tall and wears a black polo and blue jeans. Everything ranging from his speech to his clothes is impeccable. He speaks extensively of his two longest relationships throughout the interview. During both relationships, he started to smoke. The relationships lasted around 15 years each. As soon as he felt like a slave under the cigarette, he quit, but then started again. For Victor, smoking is an act of intimacy and he returns to this several times. This intimacy includes colleagues as well as partners. Victor works at a university in Sweden.

6.1.1.12 Ursula
Ursula is 62 years old but looks older than Victor. Her smoking has clearly marked her face and features. She is an ex-politician who quit two years ago because of a dispute with one of her colleagues. Having been forced to leave her assignment, she started working in mental health care. Ursula grew up with smoking parents. She quit smoking twice in her life: once 25 years ago and remained smoke-free for 23 years. Two years ago, she started smoking again. It happened gradually. She eventually told people she had resumed smoking and prefers doing it in solitude.
6.1.1.13 Theodora
Theodora is a 29-year-old teacher who talks lovingly about her students. Her light blonde hair reaches her shoulders, and her light-blue eyes give a defiant and at the same time sad impression. She seems restrained and at the same time calm throughout the interview. Theodora is quiet but firm when she speaks. She started smoking ten years ago and she has been wanting to quit for a long time but has not had the energy to take the step. She suffers from anxiety and tends to smoke more intensely during anxious periods.

6.1.1.14 David
David is in his late 50s, lives with his wife and their two sons in Stockholm. He has black hair and black-grey beard and wears glasses. He has a youthful air to him and an open and curious gaze. He works at a university in Sweden. He first tried smoking as a teenager but started smoking more frequently at the age of 25, perhaps because his wife smoked. A few years later he smoked every day. For some years, his wife stopped smoking, so he avoids smoking with her. Today he mostly uses snuff, but smokes around three cigarettes a day, mostly after having accomplished something or when a colleague asks him to join. He comes off as family-oriented and likes to travel. To David, smoking signals intimacy and it reminds him of some cherished moments with his dad.

6.1.1.15 Jane
Jane, a retired nurse, now works part time when she is needed. She is short and thin, and her hair is cropped. She has lines around her lips and wears glasses. It seems as if her body has to adjust to her practical ways. She is in motion all the time and cannot seem to sit still during the interview. She grew up with her parents, who smoked extensively and started smoking herself in her teens. Her mom used to ask Jane’s dad to smoke cigars to get to smell the smoke; it reminded her of Jane’s grandfather. Jane attempted to quit once with her husband. He smoked cigars and it was his suggestion that they should quit.
when they had children. He quit for good, and few days later, she started smoking again, but they never mentioned it. She has two adult children and two grandchildren. Her grandchildren are unaware of her habit.

6.1.1.16 Cheng
Cheng was 36 years old when we met at his office on a dark December afternoon. He has short, thick straight black hair, a blue-greyish college sweater and maintains a reserved gaze throughout the interview. He gives the impression of being reticent and contemplative. He works at a university in Sweden. During the interview, he tells me of how he has been trying to quit for a long time. He has smoked for 14 years and used to smoke extensively some years ago. At the point of our interview, he had managed to not smoke every day of the week, but he smokes weekly.

Forums
In total, I observed five forums in the online data collection although posts from all of the forums are not included in the findings as I wrote in Chapter 4. In my selection of posts, I ended up using data from three forums. Here, I will provide a short presentation of these three forums. With this presentation, I hope to provide a background and understanding of the atmosphere and structure of these forums. A full list of the forums is found in Table 1.

6.1.1.17 Reddit r/Thread 1
This thread is predominantly a forum for current smokers, but it is all-embracing and non-smokers, ex-smokers, or anybody subscribed to Reddit can post. The tone is humorous and easy-going and discusses everything from health risks to cigarette brands. For example, the posters share taste experiences, brand preferences, aesthetics of cigarette packs, health frights, and critiques of warning texts. The posters discuss smoking from the point of view of enjoyment, as a consumption hobby, and even a political statement. Many dis-
cussions revolve around liberal values in terms of free choice to smoke without governmental intervention. Some members display their brand of preference, and some are more active than others. The posts here were in general concise and phrased as a statement or a question. Other members post their reactions, opinions, and experiences.

6.1.1.18 Forum 1
This forum is embedded in a government webpage to support smokers to quit. The webpage contains information about smoking, and smokers who want to quit can interact with coaches and physicians. The forum, on the other hand, is a meeting point where the struggles with quitting, success stories, and support can be shared among the smokers themselves. The tone here is friendly and compassionate. There are, for example, some regular users who take a lot of time and effort in their commitment to helping others. The major topics here, unlike on Reddit, are focused on the benefits of quitting, risks of smoking, fears, and disease, and there were often rich descriptions of struggles of enjoying smoking and the benefits of quitting. Some participants have diseases such as lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which are often associated with smoking, and they openly write about their fears. In general, people on this forum are compassionate of others’ struggles and celebratory when people had managed to overcome obstacles or milestones. Here, members only post texts, no pictures, and the word count of these posts and replies varied from only a few lines to longer texts.

6.1.1.19 Forum 2 and 3
Forum 2 and Forum 3 are two Swedish forums on one and the same platform, similar to that of Reddit. I selected them because they contained plenty discussions on the topic of smoking as well as on the 2019 smoking ban. They are similar to Reddit in the sense that any person is free to start a thread. In turn, anyone entering the forums can reply. There is no requirement to be logged in to read the posts; however, a reply requires starting a thread or post.
The tone and characteristic of these forums is that anything and everything is discussed, often things close to the poster’s own life or experiences. A thread starter might pose a question and many replies revolve around attempts to answer it, but many responses consist of side tracks of other posters’ opinions, ideas, and thoughts. The forums often contain agitated posts, but many are humours, and many are serious.

6.1.1.20 Facebook and Instagram
Facebook global social network service contains many pages and groups where written opinions, videos, and pictures on smoking are posted. Instagram, on the other hand, is mainly focused on visuals and therefore includes images and videos. I selected these because both provide services where people express opinions and ideologies. I also selected them because the platforms serve as advertising tools for businesses, where the advertising can be both explicit and more concealed by influencers or consumer organizations. In my work with this thesis, I learned that these more hidden ways of marketing are used by the tobacco/nicotine industry to circumvent laws and regulations (Kaplan, 2018). On Facebook and Instagram, I accessed many sides of the ideological point of view of smoking and smokers. Here, the debates are often heated, and strong cultural artefacts are applied in these emotional debates. For example, smoke bans are portrayed as expressions of fascism, while smokers are seen as neglecting ego-centrists.

6.2 Rebellious smoking
Throughout the interviews, the participants told me they felt like rebels because of their smoking habit. To them, smoking signalled rebellious personality qualities from the point when they started smoking through today, and there was no difference between those who had started smoking in the 1960s and those who had started a couple of years ago. Many mentioned the extreme
health ideal in society and connected their own sense of rebelliousness to not being as health conscious. In a sense, they felt like they were the only voice of reason left in a time when people are too preoccupied with risk and healthiness. The nonconformist ideal of smokers even extended beyond smoking; they felt like they were pushing against the health ideals as well as other ideals of society. Some even told me they have a rebellious personality. Intertwined with the ideal image of the rebel, the interviewees expressed ideal images of the perfect smoking situations, which were often in the sun with a drink or a coffee. I could recollect similar ideas from my own childhood friend.

From her early teenage years, my friend explored the world with a cigarette in her mouth. She grew up to become a young adult still with a cigarette glued to her lips. I remember her ideas of what smoking meant as well as of how to be a smoker. For her, smoking signalled carelessness and intellect. It was a statement and a choice that fit the rebellious identity she developed in her teens. It took me a long time to understand that her self-perception as a smoker was greatly influenced by her interest in mid-20th century popular culture. At the age of ten, she had begun to skip school to watch Hollywood movies from the 1950s, her favourite decade; at the age of 14, she spent more time at home than she did in school. When we hung out at her dad’s place, she introduced me to music from the 1950s. In her room, she had posters of James Dean, Marlon Brando, and famous singers from that time, always smoking. It was not until my work with this thesis that I realized that some of the posters in her room were old cigarette advertisements. Although it had passed unnoticed to me at the time, I guess she had felt like the people in her posters when she smoked. When I later interviewed Phillip, he described something that reminded me of my friend’s interest in popular culture and smoking.

I met Phillip at his combined office and showroom in one of the posh areas of Stockholm. When I arrived, a tiny white fluffy dog barked at me before his
co-worker rushed in to hush the dog. She greeted me and let me in. She informed me that Phillip was busy in a meeting and made a gesture towards a room to my right where two office desks and computers were placed. Phillip sat by one of the computers, talking on the phone. With the phone squeezed between his shoulder and his ear, he was conducting the meeting while simultaneously replying to emails. After what seemed like ages of me standing there, he half-turned my way and made a gesture, which I interpreted as a mixture of “hello” and “I am busy”. This gesture made his co-worker react, and she hastily placed me in another room. After some time, Phillip’s meeting was over and he arrived. He seemed remarkably rushed. We were seated in a room cluttered with paintings, clothes, and slippers in various colours. He told me that he lets some of his friends display their products in his showroom. I interpreted it as a way of explaining why there were so many things everywhere. His hair was brown and his nose turned upwards. His skin and facial features deceived me into believing he was younger than his 40-something years. We sat at a round dark brown timeworn wooden table. His workplace was situated at the bottom floor of a building with big windows, a combination that made the room seem both dark and bright at the same time.

After introducing ourselves, Philip quickly started talking of his view of the perfect smoke. He described himself as a smoke romantic. He explicitly associated his idealized image with his great smoker muses Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin. Philip told me that these members of the Rat Pack were two of the most prominent entertainers of the mid-20th century. They wore tuxedos, always with a whiskey in one hand and a cigarette, seemingly naturally, pinched between their fingers of the other hand. I watched some video clips Phillip had referred to after our interview; they contained the perfect combination of glamour and intelligent entertainment. I am not sure I would have noticed the cigarettes in the clips if it had not been for my research project. To
Phillip, on the other hand, the cigarettes were central to these videos. To him, the cigarettes played the lead role and they had inspired his own smoking:

My absolute favourite smoke is indoors at any kind of festivities. You and the others there are dressed up. You have your tuxedo on, a cold drink or a glass of wine in your hand and precisely at that point you light your cigarette. Then it is a part of the milieu and it is not particularly dangerous either I would say.

He often returned to the tuxedo and a drink as the best setting for a smoke. He also preferred smoking indoors. Curiously, he did not see these perfect smokes as dangerous; this was reflected in other interviews as well. Chiara, similarly, talked in length about how the tasty perfect cigarette is not the hazardous. When talking about his favourite smokes, Philip also mentioned how he sometimes chain smoked alone at home in his underwear. He told me he hated when it happened, and quickly moved on to talking about the glamorous smoking. Associations like these were common during my interviews. The smokers I interviewed described their ideal image of smoking in relation to their worst types of smokes. It almost seemed as if the ideal smoke needed its opposite to be fairly described as superior. Similarly, Ida’s ideal smoking image was when she held a glass of cold wine in her hand and sensed the Mediterranean breeze brushing her cheek. Right after finishing the sentence, she told me that the worst smoke is outdoors during winter with freezing hands. Perhaps that was why Ida’s stories of how she started smoking again always was at summer parties and she always tried to quit during the cold and dark months of the year.

Throughout the data collection, I realized how participants recurrently identified with being nonconformist because of their smoking. Today, more than ever, when fewer people smoke and health ideals are the norm, daily smoking
is even more rare than it was when I was hanging out with my friend. Around that time, about 18% of the Swedish population were daily smokers, whereas today only around 7% of the population between 18 to 84 years old are daily smokers (The Centre for Epidemiology and Community Medicine at Region Stockholm, 2019). My data collection made visible how some smokers view smoking as being a genuine sign of having made an aware decision to not follow the herd. Instead, smoking symbolized a rebellious personality.

Chiara was like Philip, a great smoke romantic. Her perfect smoke included an aperitivo, a pre-dinner drink, in Italy. Chiara and I met at a café integrated in a spacious garden shop outside Stockholm. We crossed many rooms comprising great areas filled with plants, pots, and extraordinary plant arrangements. We entered a well-lit greenhouse where thousands of plants of various stages were placed underneath strong lamps; it gave the impression of passing through a field outdoors. Passing through the brightly lid humid warmth of the greenhouse was energizing and felt like a nice contrast to the grey and cold February weather. We opened a door at the end of the greenhouse and entered a café. It had not opened yet, but the lady working there gave us permission to start the interview. Chiara wore black running tights, black trainers, and a thin neon yellow wind jacket underneath a black thin down jacket. She had long brown, thick hair. We sat down at a table next to the greenhouse and the light of the greenhouse turned Chiara’s eyes into a fluorescent mix of grey and green.

Like Ida and Philip, Chiara often returned to the ideal smoke image and its opposite. For Chiara, the ideal smoke itself was permeated with its opposite. Chiara told me that she perceived herself as a rebellious personality type but inherent in her description of her favourite smoke rested a paradox: while luxuriating in her smoke, she feared she would not be able to control her habit. At an earlier point in the interview, she told me that smoking in the morning
was the shabbiest (her choice of word) thing she could imagine. Yet, when I later asked her which one was her favourite cigarette in the day, she told me it was the morning cigarette. When I asked why she had said that it was shabby, she told me that is how she perceives other people’s opinions of morning cigarettes. She told me that she feels ashamed of smoking too early. The paradox deepened as she then told me that smoking in the mornings not only was her favourite cigarette of the day but also made her feel rebellious:

I created a habit of . . . uhm, over 1.5 years ago . . . I decided to arrive later to the office instead of rushing. So, I went to my favourite coffee place, where you can stand outside and have a coffee. No matter if it’s snowing, raining, in short: [you can stand there in] any kind of terrible or nice weather. At that point, I created a habit of buying a nice cup of coffee and smoking a cigarette there every morning. And the time was around . . . well it was rebel time to smoke! I was smoking exactly where people were rushing to work!

Her voice shifted from insecure to confident; she smiled defiantly and continued:

At that point, I thought, goddamn, this is lovely. Partly because it was the best cigarette in the day and because it was combined with this delicious coffee. But it was also really nice to be like fuck you all, you can’t do or say anything about me or my life. I’m just standing here enjoying life, while you run to your jobs like scalded cats to make it in time for . . . yeah well important things in your offices. I’m a qualified bon vivant for doing this! That was, I think that made me rebellious because, sort of . . .
Sure, I was being considerate of others, but I took up space for once. And that was, well, a nice feeling.

I love this quotation because she is so nakedly describing her struggle with taking up space. As a smoker, she felt ashamed and wanted to hide her habit from others, but she also derived strength from defying that mental control mechanism. This struggle was often associated with the risk of upsetting others through passive smoking and in terms of being a societal burden. The view of smokers as a burden was something I found reflected in legislative material as well as in chat forums. In the 2019 bill that extended the regulations on smoking, societal health costs are stated as the main reason for the new regulations (Hallengren, 2015). Chiara describes a paradox of enjoyment that many smokers would return to throughout my data collection: Enjoyment is heightened because of other people’s negative opinions about smoking.

It was the thought of other people’s ideas of smoking that made smokers feel more like rebels. This idea of other people, the masses, just doing what they are told while my participants made aware choices was a reoccurring theme. Many smokers I met, expressed an ability to truly see what was going on, beyond how things appear. The smokers gave an impression of having reflected and thought through choices of how they wanted to live, which seems to be more often than not the opposite of what the masses are told. Even in regard to the risks, Chiara and David told me that they had considered them and made informed choices. It is true that they have acquired a habit only a few people engage in, something many others find undesirable. In that sense, they might have been forced to think it through. Curiously, David, Chiara, and others who told me that they made considered decisions also emphasized that they are not addicted or chained to their habit.
The idea of having a rebel personality seemed strengthened by new restrictions and regulations. This was reflected in the interviews as well as in the forums. Smoking had almost reached a political status. At one point, my childhood friend had told me her smoking was aligned with her centre-left ideals. In these forums, 15 years later, it had come to reflect a libertarian ideal. Libertarians often point out that the state should not influence matters concerning health. The freedom of choice to smoke was a recurring topic on Reddit. Similarly, in a debate on a Facebook forum about the extended 2019 regulation in Sweden, a woman wrote the following:

I hate this nanny state mentality 😒 And people who tell smokers how dangerous it is and so on . . . I believe we are aware. Smokers should of course respect others and not bother them with their smoke, that’s a given. But to LEGISLATE??? Omg.

When I was processing the data, I recognized the contrast of the interviews and the forum posts. I realized how blunt and one-sided the forum posts often were compared to the more nuanced and balanced tone of the interviewees. On social media and social forums, you have a limited amount of space to convey your message. In an interview where someone fully listens to you for more than an hour, there is no need to work harder to make yourself heard. On the forums, on the other hand, a post is one among millions and sometimes reading the forums felt like reading hundreds of screaming voices. Nevertheless, the threat towards libertarianism reflected in the Facebook post was reproduced in the forums as well as in the interviews. To a great extent, smoking and smokers were seen as the final libertarian outpost. The argument was intensively applied by smokers posting on smokers’ rights and consumers’ rights on Facebook pages. It was here I found the following post reacting to a suggestion that smokers be banned from smoking outside of a children’s hospital:
Smokers have been banned from pubs, cars with children and playgrounds. Now Birmingham Children’s Hospital is trying to ban us from the streets too. [There is a need to act to] push back against this illiberal move.

The agitated tone on forums was sometimes reflected in the interviews, but only momentarily, for only a second, so I barely noticed it. It was a frustration of feeling banished altogether because of their smoking habit. It made me think of Judith, who gave a calm and timid impression, suddenly blurt ing out that she felt as if smokers were cleaned off the streets like dirt. Her tone was sharp when she said this, and red blotches appeared on her chest as she got agitated. Eric, Chiara, and David had at one point during the interview mentioned something similar with that frustrated tone. They felt pushed away by society and that they always had to excuse themselves, but at the same time it made them angry. To some posters, smoking came to symbolize the freedom to engage in any enjoyment. Many posts on the forum argued that smoking regulations would increase the number of restrictions of other pleasures too. Patsy argues that alcohol, McDonald’s food, and soda soon will be limited too unless something is done:

Anyone who says my choice is better than yours and fights for others’ choices to be restricted, doesn’t deserve to have anything they enjoy either.

This idea revolved around health as a way to impede personal choice of what to enjoy. The restrictions on smoking took away what the smokers felt to be their entitled enjoyment, which also give rise to the strong tone in the forums. The posters were threatened by the bans. David also talked about these health ideals and had a fear that they would never end unless someone put a stop to
it. I felt as if I was sitting on my friend’s dad’s balcony again when I talked to David. It was a grey, cold, and humid Tuesday morning in November 2019. I entered the door of his office, walked up a short stone stairway. I reached a pair of glass doors and looked in at a corridor with numerous offices on each side. After a bit he appeared and greeted me. He was tall and had an open and curious gaze, his dark hair straggly. We entered the kitchen. He offered me coffee and milk, and then got some for himself. We sat down in the kitchen; he sat in a small two-seat sofa and I in a chair. It was the type of furniture you find at most offices and waiting rooms, straight lines and minimal softness. The colours were dominated by sharp shades of green, blue, purple, and red. The texture of the fabric was coarse and would hurt if it rubbed against the skin.

David had just told me how he thinks that people today live a Calvinistic life where they are no longer allowed to do anything. It is not for him, he said. Arguments like this one were frequent in the discussions that regularly played out on my friend’s dad’s balcony. I had always looked up to my friend’s dad. He expressed similar opinions about authority and yet always listened with curiosity to what I had to say. I felt that there was a similar open curiosity to David. I asked him whether he thought that the Calvinistic lifestyle had increased lately. He leaned back in the sofa and looked up at the ceiling for a brief moment to signal that he was pondering. He told me how he thinks that it has almost become trendy now to be so extremely healthy. It used to be cool to be a smoker, but now it is cool to be fit. His opinion was that it is more about the trend than being healthy per se. He then added that he believes we are unable to really think about the long run. But then, he paused and looked down at his hands, before quietly adding:

All things equal I don’t really want to smoke. I mean, it can’t be good.
He remained quiet for a while. The interviews were never coherent; short sentences like this were blurted out from time to time. It was similar in the smoker forums where most the discussions were about the upsides of smoking. Then out of the blue, a worried voice momentarily interrupted the otherwise light-hearted tone. Sudden exclamations of fear, sadness, and frustration jumped out in between the theorizing and calculations. David eventually broke the silence, looked me in the eyes and smiled. He took a deep breath and exclaimed, louder this time:

But perhaps I have a certain type of personality, at least I believe my wife would say so, where I can’t stand anyone else telling me what to do. In those cases, I get childish. It’s like: OK in that case I’ll smoke damn it, just for the sake of it! It’s because, in those situations it’s more about a personality issue. Potato chips are dangerous, peas are dangerous, coffee is dangerous, coffee is not dangerous – please, please! We get it: don’t drink 50 cups of these.

He lifted his hand and made a gesture towards our empty coffee mugs to show that he had referred to coffee:

If you drink three, you’ll die in the long run. And you probably will [die] in the long run, no matter what.

Many smokers I talked to referred to their personality as rebellious; if everyone did one thing, they claimed they would do the opposite. It is impossible to find out whether they were rebellious before smoking was restricted or whether it is a construction they created after it “went out of fashion”. What
is interesting here is the ideal image of the smoker as a rebel, which has flourished since the 1950s. Its rebel status seems to have survived all changes in the societal view of smoking. It is a major component in the ideal image of smoking as well as of the smoker. Being a rebel, smoking in the morning while watching people rushing to work or smoking indoors at a party or whatever image of the perfect smoke is expressed, is often in tension with ideas of what is accepted. It was precisely the feeling that it is a right to enjoy and that all enjoyments should be allowed that seemed to disturb the smokers most. Instead of quitting, they were preoccupied with statistical calculations and rational reasoning of risks like the one David makes here. Whereas the non-smokers and healthy masses around them continuously impeded their lives in a seemingly never-ending pursuit to cheat death, the smokers guarded this threatened outlet of enjoyment to make sure that all enjoyments would be protected.

6.3 Disruptive smoking

The special bond smokers have to cigarettes, which I first observed with my friend, stretches well beyond the ideal images of enjoyment and rebellious identity I presented in the previous section. For me, this relationship became further tangible when participants gave accounts of the role of cigarettes in time of crisis or throughout tough periods in life. At times when it had seemed like some of my participants’ lives were falling apart, the cigarette was a way to hold it together or get in touch with the present again, either as a force or as a comfort. It became clear that the cigarette appeared as a friend who could be relied on during good and hard times. Smoking’s comforting and supportive role often made itself known to those who had quit and then experienced a setback. For many of the smokers I talked to as well as smokers on the support forum who tried to quit, setbacks often led to them starting to smoke again
because smoking disrupted them from overthinking, discomfort, and anxiety. The disruption offered by the cigarette served to sustain a state of normality.

Victor and I met at his favourite café in the heart of Stockholm on a grey and cold morning in March 2019. The café was dark, and the furniture was made of exclusive materials and sober colours but had been worn out over many decades. The café looked like one of the old Parisian cafés that you would find hidden in a forgotten corner of Montmartre. I recall the dominating colours as a mix of burgundy and brown. When Victor entered, I first noticed how tall he was. We greeted and almost immediately he started talking to the waiter. They conversed for a while. The waiter asked him if he wanted the usual. The scene was almost movie-like; it was Victor’s movie. I imagined him being the meticulous director behind this scenery. When we eventually sat down, I noted that everything about him was meticulous. His grey hair was cut to perfection and rested precisely as it was meant to. His nails were cut with a careful precision. His black turtleneck looked as if it came fresh out of the store. Even his skin had a glow of faultlessness to it. As we started speaking, I noticed that his manner of speaking was correct and well-articulated. His voice was deep, and his choice of words signalled high culture; the only thing that seemed off was his broad Stockholm accent, an accent traditionally spoken in the working-class areas of Stockholm.

The first thirty minutes of our interview were dominated by Victor talking about things unrelated to smoking. I let him go on to allow him to land in this situation, which seemed awkward to him. After a long while, he mentioned having an ex-wife and two children. He then talked about other things for a while and after an hour or so he returned to the divorce. First, he talked of the divorce in a distanced and clinical way. It seemed difficult for him to open up. At the end of the interview, he opened up more in relation to the divorce and
the role smoking had played. It was not until this moment I realized how traumatic the divorce had been for him. He described what he had been thinking at the time:

What the hell have I done?! With all the goddamn conceptions I had grown up with. When I grew up there were only two children of divorced parents. Children of divorced parents were like pff—poor little thing!

His childhood ideas about divorce seemed to have made it difficult for Victor to process his own divorce. At this point in the interview, the lunch guests had arrived, and the sound of porcelain clatter and conversations intensified. Victor spoke quietly when he talked about the divorce, and I had to focus to hear what he said. His facial expressions looked plagued as soon as he mentioned his children. As an employee shouted ‘grilled sandwich’ in his seemingly impossible attempts of finding its owner, Victor recalled advice his father gave him:

Today, there are more children in my kids’ school that have divorced parents than there are children with parents who are still together. It wasn’t like that back then. My father always said, ‘Whatever you do Victor, always stick together! Think of the children’.

He laughed after the last sentence. Possibly at the generational differences or a sense of having failed to live up to his dad’s standards. I could tell that Victor still struggled with the divorce even though five years had passed. On the one hand, he claimed that there was nothing else they could have done; on the other hand, he suffered from thoughts of how it affected his sons. When talk-
ing of the divorce, Victor’s own relationship to smoking became more understandable. His lowest point had been when he moved out of the apartment. At that point, the cigarettes had an important role in his life, to bring him back to life:

When we got divorced, I moved to a small apartment in Vasastan before moving to where I currently live. During that time, I smoked quite intensively and I believe it was a way for me to handle things.

He switched to an annoyed tone of voice and added:

I don’t know. I haven’t thought about it much. But I think I needed to get in contact with my existence in a way, sort of.

He often said that he rarely thought about smoking, but he contributed with some of the most colourful portrayals of smoking. His ambiguity towards smoking was present from the first interaction we had. He wrote a long email telling me that he felt reluctant towards doing the interview because smoking was not related to enjoyment for him. Shortly after, he emailed again and changed his mind.

Early during the interview, Victor had told me of how he would never smoke a cigarette without a filter. He blurted that it is stupid to do such thing, and he mentioned this out of the blue on an unrelated note. I recall it because it had been unrelated to the degree that it made me confused. An hour or so passed when he told me that he sometimes removed the filter. I did not have any conceptual understanding of removing a filter, but to Victor this act seemed to mean something. Ambiguities like these were not exclusive to Victor; ambiguities were expressed in most the interviews, often in relation to something
the smoker perceived to be an unacceptable behaviour. We had returned to talking about the divorce when Victor said that he used to remove the filter from his Camels some mornings when the pain of the divorce was too difficult to bear. He had told me that he rarely acts on his emotions, but during the divorce he seemed to have diverged from his usual self. He had a ritual for it, which he shared with me:

Some mornings I would drink a double espresso, enter the balcony and remove the filter. I was almost choking goddamn it. At that point, I was really there. You know, like that!

He lifted his hand in front of me and looked into my eyes with an excited gaze. I was surprised by the eye contact since he had thoroughly avoided it until that point. He then snapped his fingers to illustrate how rapidly he was put in the present:

Like that all my – goddamn it – crappy anxiety disappeared, and I thought: What the hell have I done? Just because smoking . . . is such an intrusive experience.

Throughout the interview, Victor repeated how cigarettes helped him disrupt his anxiety. This disruptive trait of smoking as a pause from worries or tensions was described in other interviews too. For example, Chiara described similar experiences with Marlboro Red cigarettes because they are so strong. Although mentioning and talking about it, none of the others were able to describe how it affected them as intensely as Victor:

Smoking is that [intrusion] but in a smaller version . . . Smoking is [intrusion] in a compact format just because there is so much at stake there.
Victor repeated that many times throughout the interview. He told me how he thinks of smoking as something transformative that makes him feel more vivid. He compared smoking to falling in love or getting cancer but in a condensed format. All of a sudden, he imitated taking a puff on a cigarette: he formed his lips in the shape of a circle and closed them lightly and finally sucked in air. He held the air in his lungs for a brief moment and blew out the imaginary smoke over the café:

You do it. But you actually put your entire life at stake, you really do! It’s no fantasy or imagination. But I, you know, pinched the filter between my thumb and index finger and broke it off. Then I was about to choke from the intense strength of the smoke. It ached in my entire existence, you know, because it’s so goddamn strong. Does that sound weird?

I replied that it did not. Similar accounts have been given by several participants, sometimes in relation to losing a family member or friend. Siri told me how smoking is a way for her to endure living with a spouse suffering from psychiatric disease. While collecting the data, I was reminded of this special relationship to cigarettes that my friend had. Without the cigarettes, the informants expressed feelings of loss and were unable to do the things they would normally do. To them, the cigarettes seem to have become a condition for existing. Smoking had become a part of their personality and to some extent come to define who they are. I soon learned that this relationship is so intimate to some smokers that they end up in a depressive state when quitting much like when losing a close relative or good friend.

I met Jane during the early spring of 2019. The sun had just begun to peek from its former whereabouts, where it had forsaken Sweden to the grips of a
dreary grey fog, for what felt like ages. I entered her workplace, a small doctor’s clinic in the bottom floor of a building. The first thing I saw was an empty reception. The walls, bookshelves, and tables were white, and the furniture had a flower pattern in tones of green, red, and yellow. I heard Jane shout from downstairs that I should come down. I spotted the stairs to my left and started descending to the basement to the lunchroom. When I reached the end of the spiral-shaped stairs, I saw a short skinny woman with short greyish hair in front of me. We had only briefly greeted when all of a sudden, she started running up the stairs while shouting back to me that she had forgot to lock the door. She told me to fetch a cup and coffee from the countertop.

This behaviour triggered memories from so many mothers and grandmothers I have seen in my life doing the exact same thing. I felt at home and started arranging my things on the table. A brief while later, a rushed Jane returned, and soon we started chatting in a relaxed way about her children and grandchildren. When I asked her if I could record our conversation, she stiffened and hesitated for a moment. I reassured her that it would solely be used for my transcripts, and she gave me a confused gaze. I tried to explain the word transcript but found it surprisingly difficult. Despite my explanation, she still seemed confused so I plainly told her that I would be the only person with access to the recording. She relaxed and told me it was fine.

Jane’s accent was distinct and revealed that she grew up in northern Sweden. I always found the northern accent peaceful and alert at the same time. It has a certain crispness to it, similar to the characteristically fresh air of northern Sweden. We sat in the lunchroom, and she seemed childishly unable to sit still. Several times during the interview she got up and started doing the dishes or just randomly moved things in the kitchen. I never once got a cue beforehand. It just happened in an abrupt way. I did not mention it; I just let happen. She spoke rapidly and rarely listened to what I said. It seemed as if she did not
have the time to listen or to sit down. She seemed to be in a chronic state of hurry. Her behaviour reminded me of my Norwegian grandmother so much that I during brief moments I found myself thinking I was sitting in my grandmother’s kitchen talking to her instead of Jane. Throughout the interview Jane remained quiet for a while after having said something. A moment later, she would typically add something. When she did not add anything, I posed another question. Initially, I was uncertain of how to relate to these moments, but after a while we found a pace for our dialogue. At one point, following one of her longer quiet moments, I bluntly asked her whether life without cigarettes would be more boring. She breathed in as if she was about to say something, she then breathed out, her shoulders fell down. She was quiet for a moment, and then repeated the same act again. She then said:

Well, I believe that . . . I guess you’ve heard this from a lot of smokers already . . . It’s sort of, like a little buddy.

When she uttered the word “buddy”, her voice changed to a childish one. I was not sure whether it was the kind of voice used to urge sympathy or the kind used when explaining something to a child. Jane was quiet for a while. I interpreted this as an appeal for me to confirm her statement. When I did, she continued to speak with the childish and delicate voice:

It’s like a little buddy who is always next to you, and quitting is like losing a friend.

The child-like expression sharply contrasted to the voice she otherwise used. Her regular voice was loud and clear, almost stubborn in its regular state, to the point of being brisk. I got the sense that she shielded herself against possible future attacks using a confident tone. This fluctuation between the two
contrasting tones captivated me. I remained quiet and waited for her to con-
tinue. She returned to her usual uncompromising voice and said:

A lot of people say that. To quit smoking feels like you lose someone – or something – something dear to you.

Her voice then softened and she added:

It sounds strange, right?

Something about her way of posing a question following her bold statement made me sympathize more with her. I quickly reassured her that it did not. She was quiet for a long while and then continued in her brisk tone:

I also know from my friends who have quit that they sometimes end up in a crisis, a mild depression. Yeah, so they don’t find anything to be fun anymore and end up in a depression. After a while they start smoking again and think that sort of . . .

She burst out in a wide smile and stretched her arms out to the sides, then lifted them up towards the sky to illustrate a person who is happy. Her smile faded and her arms fell down to her sides again. She then asked me:

Perhaps you never heard that before? Nothing is fun when you can’t smoke.

Jane and Ursula were strikingly unalike. The most remarkable difference had to do with their energies. Ursula appeared calm, almost to the extent of being passive, while Jane seemed rushed and constantly active. It was almost as if Jane had a chronic battle with life, and Ursula had resigned herself to the life
she had. Ursula’s face was marked by lines, and a tired expression made her seem much older than her 61 years. I was surprised when she told me she is an active and social person who has exercised regularly, almost daily, throughout her life. Her voice was strikingly marked by cigarette smoke. It was deeper than the average female voice with a characteristic dryness. She spoke with a cheerful tone throughout our entire conversation. This light-hearted tone conflicted with her words. Through the course of our interview, I would learn that Ursula is a woman of many inconsistencies and much befuddlement. At one point, she told me of a depressive episode she had a couple of years back. Barely noticing anything, it gradually snuck up on her and eventually permeated her entire life. A while had passed when she finally noticed how she had changed completely from the person she used to be. At one point, she was in such bad shape that she could not get out of bed, and she stayed in her pyjamas during the entire weekend. I remember finding it remarkable how she disclosed this distressing experience with the same cheery tone as before.

Well, as soon as the nicotine left the body entirely and I knew that I could never . . . Or, my body. My body registered that I would never get to smoke again. That’s when I ended up in [a depression]. It started with a slight sense of apathy, and I didn’t want . . . and I did not exercise or do anything, sort of.

When she finished describing her experience with depression, she burst out in laughter. This laughter made me uncomfortable as I was unable to tell whether it was a sign of nervousness, whether she wanted to keep up a good spirit in front of me, or whether she truly did not find it unsettling. Only passingly, she then told me about having had thoughts of ending her life, still in the same clinical distanced tone as a mechanic describing a malfunctioning engine:
And eventually I did not want to live anymore. And at that point I got scared of myself. Compared to today, that feeling is just so incredibly distant.

Soon after realizing that she was depressed, Ursula took up her habit again. I was curious whether starting smoking again had made her happy. Rather than providing her joy, she replied, taking up smoking had made her feel whole again. It put her back in a state of being herself, as she had known herself before the depression. At that time, the cigarettes had pulled her out of the apathic state. She was certain that if she were to quit again, the feelings of hopelessness and despair would return. Despite the awareness that it lacks reason or sense to smoke in order to live, she told me she was unable to find a better way to handle the apathy. In the end, ‘it is the craving [for cigarettes] that controls the body’, she told me. It was remarkable to hear that a habit we so often are told is hazardous is also what kept Ursula alive. Her habit of smoking has not only kept her alive but also made her feel complete.

My friend never uttered these words to me, but if I were to guess, her relationship to cigarettes would be like Ursula’s. My friend was born in 1986 and at that time the knowledge of the risks of smoking and the effect of second-hand smoke were well-established in Sweden (Torell, 2002). My friend, like many other children before and after her, grew in her mother’s belly while her mother smoked extensively. She was then born, and soon moved between her parents’ apartments where smoking sometimes happened under the kitchen fan, but mostly it happened anywhere in the apartment. Smoking had been a natural part of her life before she was born; it was her safety net. Ursula was born 29 years before my friend. She told me that her childhood was characterized by smoke. She emitted a dry laughter after having claimed that she had been addicted to nicotine since she was a baby. Her parents smoked at home, in the car, everywhere. Her mom was Norwegian, and they frequently drove
to Norway to visit her mom’s family. It was a long ride, during which numerous cigarettes were consumed. Ursula had once asked her mom to roll down the windows, but her mom firmly declined her wish because the wind would ruin her hair style. I imagined her mom as having the characteristic 1950s big hairstyle with loads of hairspray. A hairdo that might have taken her hours to fix. Today, it may seem unthinkable to many to make such priority, but at that time the negative effects of smoking had just recently been scientifically proven (Torell, 2002). To Ursula, the smell of smoke was a part of her life since childhood. It had come to be a significant part of her.

At the time of these interviews, I was not surprised to hear Ursula’s and Jane’s experiences of apathy when quitting. I had heard numerous similar stories when I collected data online. On Forum 1, depression and anxieties were discussed as side effects by smokers as well as coaches. There were numerous posts and stories of smokers who experience similar struggles; some were treated by doctors, but others tried to endure it. Ursula had considered medication for her depression, but she ended up deciding not to. She was afraid that the anti-depressants would do more harm than good, so she decided to take up smoking again. To a non-smoker, the choice to choose smoking over medication might seem odd. But during my data collection, I realized it was a common struggle for smokers who tried to quit. On Forum 1, username 1, who at the time recently had quit, seemed unmistakably distressed in her post as she asked other participants when she will start feeling better again. Similar to Ursula’s struggle, she was confused as to why she should not smoke when she felt so bad without it and enjoyed it so much. From my data collection, I got the impression that there was more than the abstinence that disturbed the smokers who wanted to quit. For some, cigarettes seemed to have provided spiritual consolation. Username 2, for example, writes about how smoking offers a constant source of comfort. I find myself thinking that this is perhaps
what Ursula had experienced – a comfort that maintained her sense of being whole.

Behind Ursula’s seemingly inexhaustible cheeriness, I discerned something else. It took me a while to formulate it, but then it hit me: she seemed lonely. At one point when she talked about the first time she had quit, she told me she has a son and a grandchild. She mentioned them only in relation to quitting and then never mentioned them again. It might just have been a coincidence, but Ursula’s way of leaving her son and grandchild out contrasted with the approach of the other mothers and grandmothers I interviewed. They talked about their children and grandchildren throughout their interviews. Ursula had tried to quit 25 years ago and managed to stay smoke-free for 23 of those years. She told me of how she had quit for her son’s sake, and quitting for him, as she put it, was never difficult but a relief. Twenty-five years later, when I spoke to her, it seemed as if it did not matter to her anymore whether she would smoke or not:

Nah, I don’t give a damn about it [smoking]. I mean, where I am in my life now it’s OK to be lazy and passive. No one has anything to do with it [her choices] anymore. It’s impossible to compare the two times [she quit], since I was so eager and motivated [the first time] for my child. I only saw all the gains. Today it’s just pointless, what the hell difference does it make if I smoke, I think to myself.

The day we met, in stark contrast to that first time she quit, it seemed like the cigarettes had taken a more crucial role in Ursula’s life. As with my friend, the cigarettes seemed to have developed into her most intimate relationship and brought her away from other relationships. She had not told her son that she was smoking again and instead she had pulled away from him and closer
to the cigarettes. It had become her little buddy, a reason to get up in the mornings and a way to maintain a normal life. In this section, we see how smoking helped participants maintain a normal life. Smoking represents a disruptive force of uncomfortable states of sadness, anxiety, loss, and depression. For some, the disruption was a way to handle the most urgent crisis and anxiety by brutally reminding them of their existence as smoking puts them back in the present. For others, smoking disrupts hopelessness as it becomes the purpose of life – i.e., it is what makes life worthwhile, their closest friend, and their most intimate relationship.

6.4 Limitless smoking

In this theme, we are allowed to take part in the personal accounts of some paradoxes of enjoying smoking. That is, smokers who struggle with their own inconsistencies, wavering between thinking about of risk and establishing limits and restrictions. These paradoxes were often characterised by episodes of limitlessness followed by episodes of control, and vice versa. Surprisingly many smokers had decided on limiting the number of cigarettes they smoked per day or on certain days or time of day. Even though there were some exceptions to the rule; i.e., smokers who did not impose any restrictions but instead accepted a chronic state of limitlessness, I have not encountered any habit surrounded by so many individual and dynamic restrictions as smoking before or after my data collection.

These self-imposed limits were often exceeded and as a result the participants felt a loss of control over their smoking. When succumbing to the limitless periods of smoking, smokers described a mental experience of being chained to their habit. What was more, the limitless smoking gave rise to unpleasant experiences like headache, nausea, and breathing problems. The controlled and the limitless periods were seen as different in many ways; e.g., only the
excessive smoking periods were seen as a health hazard while the restricted smoking periods did not. The limitless smoking was often instilled with fear and thoughts of risk. Some smokers started smoking more excessively when they or a family member were diagnosed with cancer from smoking, a controversy that they cannot even try to explain but one that creates strong feelings of fear and guilt.

My friends’ parents were divorced, and she adored her dad. He was fun, outgoing, and someone she respected and listened to. She and her older sisters moved between their parents every other week. At the age of 12, when her sisters had moved to their own apartments, she told me that she was legally allowed to choose to live at one of her parents. I asked her who, but I already knew that she had decided to stay with her dad. Shortly before, she had confessed to me that her mom had a drinking problem, and that she had experienced and suffered from the effects since she was very young. Her dad, on the other hand, had a new wife whom my friend adored and two kids and it was nice to hang out with them. When she moved in with him, her dad put up rules for her to make her go to school and do something every day. At her mom’s house, she had no rules; they both just stayed indoors watching TV for days and days in row, a behaviour that had started already when she was ten. This depressive state she experienced when staying with her mom was the reason she decided to stay at her dad’s place. However, eventually she developed a pattern where she stayed with her dad and lived a normal life where she ate and slept on regular hours and went to school or to a job. Then, from time to time, she went on sick leave, moved in with her mom and chain smoked and binge ate for days in front of the TV. Although my friend never restricted her smoking to my knowledge, her smoking was more controlled when she stayed at her dad’s place and was without limits when she stayed at her mom’s place. Chiara, who also struggled with the limitlessness from time to time, was about
to describe her first experience with smoking, when she all of a sudden said this:

I don’t know if one would call it [smoking] an addiction. To me, it’s more a reward than an addiction. In periods addiction, certainly. But generally, it’s a behaviour. It’s something I do for enjoyment.

Others described it as a habit or a routine, but Chiara referred to it as a behaviour. The difference had seemed trivial to me at first, but as I noticed that Chiara and others returned to this difference, I was curious to know more. My interview with Chiara was my second, and I would come to hear that explanation of addiction as a period of loss of control in many other interviews too. Later, Chiara as well as others expressed a wish to be independent from cigarettes. This desire for independence is what drove most of the interviewees to restrict their smoking. Chiara, Ida, Phillip, and David emphasized a desire to be in control of their habit and to avoid being fettered to it. To this end, Chiara divided cigarettes into something she referred to as ‘addiction cigarettes’ and ‘reward cigarettes. I would later learn that Ida instead called them ‘necessary cigarettes’ and ‘unnecessary cigarettes.’ Others had similar words for separating the type of cigarette. The reward/necessary cigarettes were seen as enjoyable, good, and not hazardous. The addiction/unnecessary cigarettes were characterized by a limitlessness and a surpassing over what the smoker had decided, a loss of control. Moreover, the addiction/unnecessary cigarettes were not tasty and were seen as hazardous, often instilling the smoker with fear for their health. Chiara and Philip told me that without the unnecessary cigarettes, their smoking would probably not have any negative physical effects.
One common way of dealing with the unnecessary cigarettes among the interviewees was to limit their smokes to three per day. I was surprised that so many of them had set on the number three. For them, these three cigarettes were seen as deliberate, pleasant, worth the limitations, and typically smoked in a nice setting. For both Chiara and Philip, these cigarettes would be smoked sitting outside in the sun before or after work, whereas Ida and Helga had a special path to and from work. Chiara and Philip both expressed how the necessary/reward cigarettes were not only more enjoyable but also not hazardous to their health. However, the natural laws of smoking, according to the participants, seemingly pushed them back into the limitless state again. Philip described how this behaviour happens to him rather than by him, seemingly unintentionally:

But the problem with smoking is that it is so terribly difficult to stick to normal amounts. I guess that is what . . . I do have shabby-smokes, or how to call it, from time to time. When I’m at home alone in front of the computer in the kitchen and then after a while, without me even noticing, I look down on the ashtray and am like what . . . what happened now? How did all of those cigarettes end up there?

These slips like the one Philip described are precisely what the interviewees try to control by putting limits to their smoking. However, he also described the slips as a normal state of smoking; it is the very problem of smoking that he cannot really control how much he smokes. Similar accounts were portrayed by others. For example, Penny and Theodora reflected on how they would buy a pack of cigarettes before an evening out with the aim of just smoking a few cigarettes, but the next morning they realized that the pack was almost empty. The limits vary. Sometimes the interviewees said they limited their smoking to parties, walking to or from work, in a certain setting, after a
shower, or on certain days or limiting themselves to certain number of cigarettes irrespective of setting or activity. At the beginning of the interview, Chiara told me that she only smoked three cigarettes per day. Despite a desire to be in control, later during the interview she told me that she was presently in an addictive period. She explained the addictive period as a time when she smoked more than the three cigarettes per day, smoking without a sense of control. Similar accounts were given by other interviewees who smoked only three cigarettes per day. Chiara told me about being in an addictive phase at the time of the interview. She described it as coinciding with periods when she usually overthinks things and being sad but not willing to deal with her sadness. She called these smokes adult pacifiers as they provide her with comfort. A sadness spread over her eyes and she sighed:

Precisely this addiction I’m experiencing right now, it’s when I get . . . Yeah well, I guess it is a nicotine addiction where I feel the urge to smoke despite having all those great circumstances I have when I’m smoking a “behaviour-cigarette”. Where I am right now, the sun is not in zenith for smoking. I walk my dog and it is wet and slippery on the walking path. I’m ashamed since it’s not even nine in the morning. At that time your *definitely* not supposed to smoke among people. That’s just embarrassing! Ten is OK, maybe later, but people who are smoking in the morning are really shabby, sort of.

I was surprised by her choice of words and replied in a surprised tone. Many others separated smokes into enjoyable and non-enjoyable like Chiara did here. It was common to view the non-enjoyable cigarettes as addictive, while the ones that confined within the limits of the smoker were seen as enjoyable. However, Chiara described what many others said in less explicit ways: being in the limitless periods meant not being able to control oneself and wait till the
perfect moment to smoke. Chiara, who liked to smoke in the mornings when it was part of her routine, now called it shabby. When I asked her about this change in attitude, she said that it was more a matter of how she was perceived by others when she exceeded the limit. She laughed out loud, possibly at my surprise or at her choice of words, and then explained in her deep voice:

Yeah well, because in that case you’re stuck in some sort of . . .

Her smile dissolved and her face turned serious; she was quiet for a long time and then said:

Your feathered or what to say . . . Yeah, you’re stuck in something. Because I think that otherwise, if you engage in behaviour smoking you would not start with it at eight in the morning. No, now I’m lying . . . yeah well.

Phillip and Chiara both used the words “chained”, “shabby”, and “trashy” when talking about smoking in the wrong contexts, like early in the mornings or in the streets. Phillip did not have this three cigarette limit, but he had many other rules when it came to smoking. Being chained to smoking seemed to be horrifying to him too. Some smokers I talked to wanted to be free from their addiction or at least in control of it. Ida and Helga dealt with their addiction in another way: they avoided smoking during the weekends when they were with their families. They told me that not smoking during weekends was proof of not being addicted. A paradoxical relationship to excess and limits unfolded in my interviews. It was often expressed as a self-induced limit of cigarettes. There was some kind of restriction present for each participant: only on weekends, only outside of work hours, only on vacations, or sometimes on weekdays because vacation was just finished or soon to start. Most of my interviews
started with an excuse that explained why they smoked before or during the interview.

It became obvious how the goal was set to limit the smoking to enjoyable cigarettes, but also to prevent physical harm. Smoking has the risk of making people ill. Although many smokers avoided talking about this association or claimed not to think about it during the interviews, it popped up in all interviews. Sticking to the controlled number of enjoyable cigarettes was one way of reducing the risks of getting ill from smoking. Both Chiara and Phillip told me that physicians had told them that smoking three cigarettes is not more dangerous than living in a large city. As Philip previously revealed, these limitations were frequently exceeded. At least half of my interviewees adhered to the three cigarettes per day limit. For Chiara, surpassing this limit occurred in episodes. She called them addiction periods and deviation from the three cigarettes was seen as risking hurting oneself. Chiara’s tone sounded annoyed and her voice dry when she said the following:

I don’t like it when I enter these addictive periods. From a health perspective it doesn’t make sense.

Chiara not only believed smoking three cigarettes per day was fairly unharmful but also believed that enjoyable cigarettes were not hazardous from a health perspective. Rather, it was these periods of exceeding the enjoyable cigarettes she thought were harmful. Phillip also expressed this view of enjoyable cigarettes as unharmful. Chiara told me how she could sense a physical reaction when she exceeded her limit, something many of the smokers I talked to expressed:

Often times I get headaches from smoking these cigarettes. Or dizzy. Or queasy. And it’s exactly those cigarettes that . . . They
are not enjoyable at all and they make me annoyed too, you know. They’ve occurred more frequently lately so I take more notice of how straightforwardly they affect my health. I never get these bodily retaliations from the reward-cigarettes. It’s as if my body tells me: you should not be doing this. It’s not good for you!

For Chiara, the physical reaction – or retaliation as she refers to it – was the way her body reminded her of her destructive behaviour. She and many other interviewees described pleasant feelings as bodily signals of doing something good, whereas unpleasant feelings were the body’s way of signalling to them that they had done something wrong. During nearly all my interviews, smokers told me of having experienced such physical reactions to excessive smoking. These reactions sparked thoughts of self-blame and regret. Others told me of similar experiences when smoking excessively. It was almost felt as self-sabotage. On Forum 1, username 3, who recently had quit, described the difficulty of quitting:

Had a slip – I had quit for almost 2 months and then smoked the weekend my husband and I went away. It wasn’t my husband who sabotaged me. I did it to myself. I think I had worked myself up to allow myself to smoke. After 3 ½ days of smoking I couldn’t breathe again. I had to use both my puffers and my breathing was very laboured. [...] Those three days of smoking sent me right back into a lung distress.

Username 3, a frequent poster on this forum, was supportive and compassionate of others and openly shared his struggles with quitting. His experience includes the physical reaction Chiara interpreted as a physical retaliation, with a remorse of not being able to do what is believed to be best for oneself. Username 3, however, took it a step further: unlike Chiara, he is happy the
body retaliates, because it gives him a reason not to smoke. For the participants, it is essentially the recklessness or ignorance that could entail long-term physical harm. This reminded me of Eric who told me he felt filthy for chain smoking before travelling. He had also told me how he felt physically sick when he smoked like that. These bodily retaliations seemed to remind smokers of what they feared: to get a smoke-induced disease.

I have experienced queasiness and regrets after smoking too many cigarettes during nights out myself. My friend, on the other hand, never seemed to be bothered. I was often astounded at her determined way of smoking the first thing in the morning after those evenings. I used to think that she deliberately wanted to harm herself. Not only because of her habit, he was so obviously neglecting to take care of herself in more ways. At other times, I interpreted my friend’s behaviour as a part of an act. Here, she played the role of opposing her surrounding as well as society by doing the exact opposite of what was commonly seen as good. Unlike her, some of the smokers’ opinions aligned with public opinions of smoking and smokers in society at large. Sometimes, being extremely careful not to seem irresponsible or ignorant, the smokers told me about the risks and emphasized that they took measures to ensure their smoking did not affect other people. However, some of them slipped up in way similar to what Philip described. Moreover, some continued to smoke despite a diagnosis of cancer or people close to them diagnosed with cancer. I came across a post by Username 4 on a grey day in October 2018. Username 4 was one of the posters on Forum 1 who posted when she managed to quit and as well as when she had a slip. Unlike many other posters, she persistently shared her ups and downs. I was browsing the forums to check for new posts when I was struck by the following post by Username 4:

I used to smoke maybe 2 cigarettes a day. During the evening and after supper. My mom was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and
then I quit smoking for 6 months after her surgery. After a lot of stress, I started smoking again. The cancer spread to her bladder and I started smoking a lot more each night.

She posted this text in the middle of the night. The brutally honest despair was the kind of reaction one pushes away during the daytime but sneaks up on you when in bed. I was captivated by Username 4’s post because it was almost as if she could not make sense of her own behaviour. Her post was permeated with her own questions of how she could do the exact opposite of what she found most sensible. The data were replete with similar accounts of complete and utter confusion over limitless smoking. On Forum 1, for example, many smokers had family and friends diagnosed with deadly diseases, some diagnosed with cancer. Nonetheless, they started smoking more than before learning about these diagnoses as if they unwillingly escalated their worst fears. Similarly, Chiara told me of periods when she has lost control over her smoking and how she believes these episodes affect her health more than her usual smokes. When I asked Chiara whether that frightens her, she seemed surprised. She remained quiet for a while and then said:

_If, knock on wood, there would come a day when I would get… if it would go so far that I would get aff… Yeah, it’s even difficult just to say it aloud, but if I would get negatively affected or deadly ill from smoking. Yeah, it would be disastrous. Because then I would have caused it myself._

Her voice trembled as she uttered these words. I found myself surprised that the worst thing to her about getting deadly ill from smoking is not dying as much as having caused the suffering herself. This risk is engraved in the agreement between every smoker and cigarette in the world. Many smokers estab-
lish limits to their smoking to maintain a sense of control and avoid the unpleasant feelings of chain smoking. Nonetheless, they occasionally struggle with excessively smoking beyond these limits. The major struggle with smoking is abiding by self-imposed smoking limits – i.e., smoking ‘normal amounts of cigarettes’ as Philip put it. Smoking is characterized by over-consumption as the slips seem more like the regular state of smoking as sporadic attempts to control over-consumption are typical. During the data collection, a new perspective unfolded: experiencing powerlessness and fear was the normal condition and experiencing control and comfort was the abnormal condition. However, these smokers wanted to control their habit all the time, so they could enjoy smoking without feeling that they were engaging in self-harm.

6.5 Isolated smoking

Unlike other marginalized enjoyments investigated in CCT, smoking does not have a subculture. That is, smokers shun other smokers as their behaviour appears repulsive to the smoker. Moreover, non-smokers avoid smokers making smokers isolated from them too. The guilt of not being able to quit and the idea that other people are repulsed by their habit seems to haunt many of the interviewees as they hid their smoking from family and friends. Some of the interviewees saw smoking as a lonely and isolating activity, a perspective reinforced by the fact that many people are able to quit smoking. Smoking is essentially isolating as it marginalizes smokers and therefore it becomes an enjoyment best enjoyed in solitude as well as a way to be left alone. This last theme suggests that smoking has transformed from a relationship-building enjoyment to an isolating enjoyment as societal attitudes about smoking have changed.
Today, it seems that smoking is best enjoyed in isolation. Smokers does not feel like being part of a subculture or community, because smoking now requires adhering to laws and regulations. These new requirements might explain why smokers are repulsed by other smokers. When discussing the second theme, limitless smoking, I mentioned how some smokers had set up rules for their smoking – e.g., right vs. wrong contexts for smoking and when and where to smoke. When these codes of conduct were violated, the violator was repulsed by the very act of exceeding their self-imposed restrictions. They referred to these smoking occasions as shabby and trashy when done in the wrong contexts. This condescending view of smoking in the wrong contexts targeted other smokers as well. Since every smoker has their own particular rules for smoking, other smokers are likely to transgress these rules.

Eventually, smoking took over my friend’s life entirely. Hanging out with her meant submitting to her smoking schedule. We were interrupted every time she felt the need for a smoke, which was often. We met in places where she could have full access to smoking, preferably at her place since she could smoke inside there. As the years passed, she cared less for her friends, including me, but she seemed to care more intensely for smoking. Over time, she cared for cigarettes as if they were the most precious relationship she had. Our paths parted many years ago, so I do not know whether she ended her relationship with cigarettes. The last time I saw her smoking was in full bloom while most other pieces of her life had faded away. Sometimes when I listen to the transcripts of the interviews, I am reminded of her and her family. Smokers have a special bond to cigarettes, perhaps one that I will never understand or be able to portray here. I just know that it is so much more than a cigarette to them. The data suggest smoking to be characterised by an inner struggle with loneliness but at the same time a desire to be left alone.
My first interview was with Siri in February 2019. After a long period of trying to recruit interviewees without any luck, I was able to contact her and was surprised by the rapid turn of events. She told me she was willing to do the interview if we did it right away and over the telephone. This set off alarm bells in my head: Had not the qualitative research courses and books clearly stated that interviews over the telephone were close to unthinkable? I recalled a course leader emphasizing the importance of body language. The essence of this message was that without body language the data would lose too much of its richness. After a short internal struggle, I decided that one interview over the telephone was better than none, so agreed to her terms. I asked for a couple of minutes to prepare my taping equipment and redialed her number. Siri’s voice possessed the characteristic deep dryness of a smoker’s voice and her voice revealed that she was considerably older than me, something she later confirmed when she told me that she was in her 70s. Her voice also sounded as if she were a purring cat. This soothed me and was perhaps why our conversational pace was slow and serene throughout the interview. Siri’s speech was well-articulated and clear. It fluctuated between firmness and approval and fear. Her way of taking long pauses to think and rarely saying anything without adding her own thought and analysis made her seem reflective and intelligent. At one point, she said something that reminded me of my friend’s relationship to smoking. Siri told me she often woke up in a bad mood. This created problems whenever she and her husband stayed over at some friend’s house. The sleepovers taught her that she cannot stand people who are perky and chatty in the mornings. To be left alone in the mornings, she walked away a few meters to have a smoke until she felt resilient enough to engage in a conversation with others. After revealing this to me, she laughed and explained this tactic in a guileful tone:
People shun away from smokers today. They stay meters, no hundreds of meters away when I smoke. So, I’m certainly left alone when I smoke.

She said this with a sense of pride, as if she had figured something out that others had not. Siri wanted to be left alone and this was her most efficient tactic to achieve her goal. This way of using cigarette smoke as a way of alienating herself from others reminded me of my friend. Siri formulated something I had been unable to verbalize. My friend often seemed to use smoking as a way of distancing herself from some people, physically as well as mentally. After this interview, other smokers told me similar stories of how they identified with being loners and smoked as a way to distance themselves from others. Chiara told me that she mostly uses this strategy of alienation at social gatherings when she wants to be left alone. During these smokes, she gathers the energy she needs to continue to socialize, which she finds draining. Furthermore, she also enjoyed smoking in solitude. Jane said that during outings with friends all she can think about is being at home where she can enjoy a smoke in solitude. Isolated smoking was the height of enjoyment as it isolated her from other people’s opinions, providing her with a moment by herself. Similarly, Helga said that she smokes to be left alone during her breaks at work, as her colleagues are non-smokers. My friend never told me that this was something she purposively did. Rather, it was my own interpretation of her relationship to smoking and its effect on her relationships to other people that made me think of her when Siri told me her story. My friend’s alienation was more of the lasting kind than momentary kind when being left alone at parties: allowing for the cigarettes to dominate all social gatherings resulted in a selection of those who accepted it and those who did not. Over time, isolation and loneliness became a substitute for distance, and they eventually became commonplace to her. Some smokers I talked to desired to distance themselves from others and smoking helped satisfy this desire. They seemed to
employ the marginalization of smokers to their benefit. However, other smokers expressed a sense of loneliness associated with their smoking.

During my data collection, I read and heard numerous stories like Siri’s about how smokers use smoke to be left alone, but at the same time they expressed sadness as the result of the undesired isolation or loneliness. When speaking with Eric, the university professor who reminded me of my childhood friend’s dad, I realized that he experienced loneliness due to his habit despite its ability to provide him with the integrity he needed. We had decided to meet at Eric’s office. I arrived early and with the help of some of his colleagues I located his office at the end of a corridor on the second floor of the building. When I entered, Eric seemed relaxed and welcoming. His office was covered with books and piles of paper on the walls, furniture, as well as on the floor. He asked me to sit down on his sofa, and removed some piles of paper to make room for me. He sat opposite of me in his office chair. His soft voice captivated my attention.

A while into our conversation, he told me there are two balconies at his apartment. His wife and two sons have banned him from smoking on one of them. Naturally, he takes his refuge on the other one. As soon as he began telling me this, a tormented expression spread over his face. Unfortunately, the other balcony is positioned close to his neighbour’s teenage son’s bedroom. Whenever Eric smokes there, the teenage son unmistakably yells to his mom that ‘the man’ is smoking again. And like most other mornings, the mother shouts to Eric not to stop smoking. He mumbles an apology, puts out the cigarette, and slinks back into his apartment. A reoccurring facial twitch I had noticed earlier intensified in Eric’s face, accompanying the tormented expression as he told me this. These quirks sparked an immediate empathic reaction in me. I could tell that it was difficult for him to talk about it. After a while, Eric returned to his former way of being correct and well-articulated; regaining his composure.
seemed to soothe the twitching. He shifted to talk about his reflections on being a smoker in more general terms:

Some activities we engage in entails a social link to others. We can drink or take drugs together and it does something to our mutual relationships. But now, it is impossible to smoke together since there are no other smokers anymore.

He told me how smokers gradually have disappeared from public life. Eric had at one point told me he started smoking during the 1970s. Indeed, since the 1970s, there has been a significant decrease in the number of smokers in Sweden. Since the 1980s, the number of daily smokers has been reduced by 50% (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2018). Eric told me that he believed there still were smokers out there, but they were just not visible anymore. Eric believed the true reason for this shift was because smoking and smokers were seen as filthy. I looked Eric in the eyes during the silence that spread in his office since I had posed my question. He pondered for a while and then said:

Sometimes it strikes me just how peculiar you appear as a smoker today. Part of that package is that people tell you things. But the most common would be that they let you know that you are a filthy person.

When uttering the word filthy, Eric emphasized it by carefully articulation and with a tone imitating a disgusted person. I asked him whether other people ever comment on his smoking. ‘All the time’, he replied. He told me that sometimes the disgust is explicitly expressed in words, but more often it is expressed in signals. Eric then explained to me how he interprets these signals of disgust. His voice was agitated as he continued:
It is the type of signal where they want to communicate: ‘You shouldn’t be doing this. At least not in proximity to me’.

He went quiet for a while. In a calmer tone, still imitating someone commenting on his smoking, he put into words what he believes these signals are meant to convey:

I don’t care about you or your life, I just don’t want your smoke on me.

He articulated each word carefully. Behind the precision with which he uttered these words, I discerned a coldness to the point of callousness. I thought to myself that Eric’s understanding of non-smokers’ view of him as a smoker seemed coloured by antagonism and unfriendliness. Accounts of what Eric refers to as ‘signals’ from non-smokers were given by other interviewees too. The data include many experiences of slamming windows when interviewees smoke outside a house or building and people feigning a cough while walking behind them when they smoke in the streets. Some of the interviewees described situations where they found it difficult to distinguish whether these signals were imagined or real. At other times, they were more certain. It happened that non-smokers reported on forums how they distinctly distanced themselves from smokers who had recently been smoking to signal that they smell like tobacco.

Nonetheless, the awareness of the risk of being viewed as disgusting seemed to be common. Eric’s words were often confirmed in forums where non-smokers often revealed an aversion as well as a strong aggression towards smokers. Smokers were repeatedly painted as ego-centric and disrespectful, not thinking of anything but their own enjoyment. A man had posted on Forum 2 to
discuss the new restrictions of smoking at bus stations. After a lengthy discussion of smokers as disrespectful and exposing others to risks, Username 5 writes this:

Unfortunately, lots of people are smoke in the bus queue, right before getting on the bus, in the bus shelter (even when it's not raining), or smoking outside of entrances, etc. Smokers do the kind of things you’d think no sane person would do. Many draw parallels to other strong scents that cause shortness of breath for those with allergies, but smoking is not prohibited because of its smell. Strong perfumes and animal fur cause breathing problems for some people, smoking on the other hand is harmful to EVERYONE. Not only is it difficult to breathe when you're standing next to someone who smokes, the health risks are greater and long-lasting. It should be enough for smokers to show concern, but unfortunately, they rarely do.

The tone Username 5, and others on forum 2, holds towards smokers made me uncomfortable because it is difficult take in how smokers are attributed to many negative traits e.g., selfishness and disrespectfulness. It is also impossible to know whether this is just something people write but do not act out in reality or if some smokers are met with hostility in real life. However, it seemed as if there was something else there. Enjoying a smoke among non-smokers is unbearable because it is the ultimate act of selfishness especially since smokers expose others to potential harm in a selfish pursuit to enjoyments. Whether smoking during pregnancy, on a private balcony, in an apartment, or waiting for the bus, the online forums presented a grim picture of how non-smokers feared being exposed to passive smoke as well as hostility towards being exposed to smoke as the result of people engaging in their enjoyment. Similarly, when we were talking about the prevailing opinions of
smokers and smoking during the interview, Victor told me how his aunt had said ‘Oh, so you’re that kind of person’ when she saw him smoke for the first time. He told me that he was bothered both by her judgmental view of smokers, which include him. He sighed and said to me:

Everyone knows it. Smoking is preceded by, or occurs parallel to an inner battle. Because everyone knows exactly what it is about, right? You know, all the goddamn warning signs and all the negative things written about it. People die from smoking. It radically shortens your life, you know. It’s no secret. And yet, it’s just like, there are so many aspects of pleasure, delight and enjoyment. [...] It’s sort of, I guess it is precisely that battle [...] You know how dangerous it is and yet it is so enchanting.

Perhaps it the very resignation to smoke that causes such strong sentiments in non-smokers. Breaking the habit of smoking is something we all can relate to as we all have battles with unhealthy behaviours. In a sense, a non-smoker’s agitated reactions to smokers is a projection of her own insecurities with respect to overcoming unhealthy habits. That is, when non-smokers see smokers succumbing to their desire to smoke, they are reminded about their own vulnerabilities to unhealthy habits, projecting their disgust with themselves onto the smoker.

My childhood friend and I started taking different paths in life. I had developed other clusters of friends than the one I shared with her. On the few occasions, she entered one of them, and I suddenly saw her with what I perceived to be the eyes of my other peers. She aggressively lashed out at them and this aggressiveness frightened my new cohort of friends. Suddenly, I saw her as possessive and controlling of me. As I grew more bothered by her behaviour, I grew increasingly annoyed with her relationship to cigarettes. I now realize
that I eventually became the Other of my friend. I knew her and had often smoked together with her, but I was not a daily smoker and had often seen her behaviour from the point of view of a non-smoker. I internalized ideas flourishing in society about smoking and smokers. Sometimes, I resented her smoking and I embarrassed by it. The resentment was especially prevalent in terms of the number of cigarettes she consumed per day and her way of always putting the cigarettes first. Eventually, I found myself irritated by the sounds she made when she was smoking during our telephone calls. We spoke several times a day as she called whenever she was smoking. She rarely called when she was not smoking. Had I missed her call by a second and returned it, she would already be on the telephone with someone else. I felt like I was her smoking company. My irritation gradually grew stronger. I remember how my frustration flared up earlier and earlier during her smoking. Eventually, the initial sound of the gas from the lighter and the following sound of burning paper was enough to trigger my irritation. It became unbearable for me to hear her relaxed content when I heard the sound of her blowing out the smoke of her first puff.

More than ten years had passed since I last spoke to my friend on the telephone when I met up with Chiara at the greenhouse café in a public garden. It had not opened when we arrived, making the setting peaceful, still, and quiet. Her relationship to cigarettes seemed to be a world away from that of my friend. She told me of her strong opinions concerning how, when, and where she finds it appropriate to smoke. I was baffled the first time she expressed disgust towards other smokers. She then explained that her disgust is mostly triggered by deviation from her own ideas of smoking etiquette. At this particular moment in our interview, the targeted symbol of her disgust was airport smoking lounges. Her voice was deep and confident when she blurted out:
I would never set foot in one of those! They are the waiting rooms of death! They are incubators of the living dead.

The light of the greenhouse next to us made Chiara’s hair look soft. Her face was distorted by distaste. Her voice was strong and confident when she talked about her disgust for smoking lounges. Without pardon, she revealed revulsion towards them, but what seemed to be truly unnerving to her were the smokers using them. Visitors started passing by our table, unknowingly signalling that the time was 10 a.m. and that café was open. I asked her whether she liked something from the cafeteria and she replied that she would like a latte. As I stood up to fetch the beverages, she added that she has been doing a liquid fasting during the first half of the day for the past month. I returned with her latte and a coffee for myself. Painting an ugly picture of smokers using the lounges, Chiara’s disgust unfolded in front of me. She described their skin as marked by an unhealthy shade of grey. In her depiction, a blend of smoke and sinisterly sounding coughs continuously left their greyish lips. Chiara’s voice disrupted my thoughts, as she continued:

There is this expression in Italian where they say that people are *svegato*, it means something along the lines of . . .

She pondered for a moment and sucked in air in a thin gap between her lower lip and upper row of teeth causing a high-pitched noise. She leaned in towards the microphone, tilted her head forward and looked up at my eyes from below, all confidence in her voice was gone. She whispered:

They are sort of . . . Lesser worth. I mean, they haven’t grown up in, sort of . . .
She remained quiet for a moment as if she weighed her words and then added, this time with a higher and more confident voice:

They have been unlucky, I mean really unlucky, in life. The Italians sometimes insult each other by saying: you’re a bloody svegato. Which means you’re not worthy. Not in the same way we are. Yeah. Smoking lounges are boxes of humiliation. They’re really disgusting!

Her idea of svegato seemed to refer to inveterate smokers. For Chiara, chronic smokers are partly defined by an incapability to travel without smoking. This inability to exert self-restraint seemed to be what disturbed her the most. During our conversation, I was faced with her division of smokers into different compartments. I had never thought of smokers in such distinctive categories. Before my interviews, there were smokers, party smokers, and non-smokers in my world. After having talked to Chiara, the number of categories of smokers I had previously known had increased.

Phillip, David, Helga, and Siri shared Chiara’s disgust for the type of smoking they perceive to be conducted in inappropriate settings. Such smoking lacks style and elegance, words they themselves used during the interviews. Moreover, a conflicting relationship to this disgust evolved during our conversations. They served me various examples of when they had experienced disgust towards other smokers. Most salient was their irritation towards smokers who are too shackled to cigarettes. One reoccurring example was the inability to abstain from smoking in some settings and wait for, in my interviewees’ view, more appropriate settings. This delay could range from minutes to days, depending on the situation. Ida, for example, who told me she otherwise smokes on a daily basis, stops smoking during weekends when she spends time with her two children and her partner.
Parallel to these unappealing smokes, tales of idyllic moments of smoking emerged. Although the perfect moments varied from smoker to smoker, they shared their ideas of what makes the perfect smoke. These personal smoking ideals seemed to include the same loathing towards other disgusting smokers. As I revisited the data, I debated with myself whether the smoking that diverges from these idyllic representations could threaten their own relationships to cigarettes altogether and perhaps even their view of themselves as smokers. Confusingly, no matter how assured they appeared when uttering these bold statements about disgusting smokes, they would eventually disclose that they regularly violated their own rules.

Phillip seemed determined in his belief in smoking etiquette. He spent a great deal of time and effort telling me about various accurate and inaccurate smoking scenarios. He personally preferred to smoke indoors at private parties. During the first third of the interview, he ate a ciabatta bread sandwich filled with mozzarella and sundried tomatoes, which he washed down with a Coca-Cola Zero. When he had finished his meal, he burped loudly and then apologized for his rudeness. Politeness and etiquette were important to Phillip; however, several times during the interview he told me that he systematically diverged from his rules. I told him it was fine. He replied in an indignant tone that it certainly was not. He went quiet for a while, and then said:

I think that the interesting thing [when it comes to enjoyment] is really that smoking out there . . .

He lifted his hand and pointed to the street outside his office, shifting his gaze from the room to the direction where he pointed:
There is no enjoyment in that. In my world at least. It is sh... I find it a bit shabby. And smoking on the way to work is disastrous! Smoking while walking never looks good.

His aversion was palpable. As his opinions about shabby and non-shabby smoking were distinctly explicated throughout the interview, I was surprised when he cleared his throat and added:

Even if it does happen that I do it [shabby smoking] myself.

When Phillip talked about how and where not to smoke, he did it with the confidence of an etiquette authority as if he were channelling Miss Manners. The contrast of his certainty and his honesty about breaking these rules mesmerized me. Chiara had a similar way of expressing the do’s and don’ts of smoking; she also told me how she repeatedly engaged in the don’ts. Later, she confessed that she had used airport smoking lounges. A conflict between the desire to set up standards for their smoking and the inability to live up to these standards unfolded during some of these accounts. Perhaps, their disgust of other smokers was a projection of the way they felt about themselves when they broke their own rules.

Eric, for example, explicitly expressed a sense of self disgust. I leaned back into the comfy leather sofa in his office when he began telling me of the occasions when he smokes more than he wants or needs. He told me that these smoking episodes mostly occurred before an anticipated lack of access to cigarettes, for example, while travelling. To compensate for the future deprivation, he often smokes excessively in an airport smoking lounge before boarding his plane. He sighed and sounded irritated when he told me that the few smoking lounges in airports are always placed in inconvenient locations. I wondered whether they are really placed there to make it inconvenient for
smokers or whether Eric just believes this. After finding a smoking lounge, which is always far from his gate, he told me that begins to bargain with himself. As soon as he finishes his first cigarette, he tells himself to leave. However, because he is facing a long period without the means to smoke, he typically stays and smokes a second one. This thought process repeats, and he smokes a third and a fourth. While talking, Eric moved around books and piles of paper. When he was done, he sat back in his chair. He was quiet for a while seemingly thinking about what to say next. He then made some jerky, restless movements and said:

Yeah, at those moments I feel filthy for engaging in this habit.
What is the point of this, really?

I remember being surprised when he said this, because he was one of the few smokers who I talked to who had not set any limits for himself in terms of smoking. Therefore, I interpreted this as a sign that he did not care whether he smoked more and less. Instead of keeping count, he practiced a type of deliberate oblivion where he buys new cigarette packages before he is close to finishing a pack so he can never know the number of cigarettes he smokes per day. I had believed that feelings of disgust only haunted the smokers with strict ideas of when, where, and how much to smoke, but Eric’s account widened my perspective.

Ida and I met at a café in central Stockholm, near a subway station. It was dinnertime and she had just left her shift at the hospital. The café was crowded and noisy, and she had ordered a Caesar salad while I grabbed a coffee. Her light-blonde hair stood in sharp contrast to her brown eyes. She remained cheerful and generously sprinkled her laughter over our conversation. Her mood shifted to melancholy when we talked about her current relationship to smoking. To Ida, smoking used to be a social activity, perhaps because she started
smoking with her friends when she was in school. She told me of how smoking provided her with friends from her first smoke to the first time she quit. Today, she feels lonely not only when smoking but also in general as most her friends have quit.

A waitress shouted, ‘Number sixty-one’, as she desperately tried to find the owner of a ciabatta. Ida turned around to see if it was her salad. We talked about her current relationship to cigarettes, and her formerly cheerful and unreflective guard evaporated. Distress slowly spread over her face as she told me of how she started smoking again. She had quit smoking as soon as she became pregnant with her two children; she had previously told me that quitting for her children’s sake was not hard at all. It was later, during her maternal leave, that she took up smoking. Both times she started smoking after giving birth it was summer. It was sunny and warm, and she was out partying with her girlfriends for the first time since becoming pregnant. She smiled and then told me that smoking during summers with a glass of chilled white wine in her hand is one of the best things she knows. Jokingly, she exclaimed, ’always these damn summers’. Her smile faded away, and she then said:

Now I have this super crazy relationship to cigarettes and my family. Because they don’t know that I smoke. No. That’s where we are now. It is sick, super, super sick – so freaking weird! But that’s where I’ve ended up now.

Ida’s salad eventually arrived. She took a few bites and chewed for a while before recollecting how she and her friends collectively stopped smoking in 2005. It coincided with the indoor smoking ban in restaurants and clubs. Her friends managed to quit at that point, but she started again after a while. Then she returned to her current situation of not having told her family about smoking again:
I’m not telling my family because it would make me feel like a big fail.

How come?

Today, smoking is something ugly. At least among the people I hang out with. It’s sort of ‘ew, gross why would you do that?’ It’s dangerous, you know, and if you’re aware of that you shouldn’t be doing it.

I was startled by the way she combined disgust with recklessness. I had never thought about recklessness as sparking disgust with other people, but I would come to learn that this idea repeatedly occurred in the data. Similarly, Ursula told me that it is a social disgrace to be a smoker today and that she wanted to be one of the sensible people who understands the risks. Whereas the smokers I encountered expressed a paradoxical relationship towards this enjoyment, the societal debate was clearly divided. The societal view was felt by the smokers. For Ida, the polarization and the bans marginalized smokers. We talked about marginalization extensively as this had been on her mind for a while. After she finished her Caesar salad, I asked her how she thinks that the smoking ban will affect her. Melancholy infused her voice, and she said:

In Sweden you are more marginalized as a smoker today.

I asked her what she meant by marginalized:

Sort of, you can’t smoke at a subway platform, a bus stop or anything like that. I guess it also includes outdoor restaurants now too. So, I’m not sure it would feel OK to smoke there either.
Ida took a sip from her sparkling water and watched me with her intense gaze. Ida believed that the changed view of smokers his responsible for marginalizing smokers and accepting that this marginalization is acceptable and even beneficial. Victor, who shared her view, also recalled a time when he felt marginalized by another person. In stark contrast to how we usually view enjoyment, smoking is isolating. This view was confirmed by most the smokers I came across during my data collection; Eric was one of them. Eric rolled closer to me in his office chair when I had asked him about a recent extended cigarette regulation. He told me he thought such bans were passed to control the costs of health care. He then rolled away from me, closer to his desk, frowned for a while, and in a mechanical manner said:

I realize intellectually that it is harmful to smoke and that others disapprove of it. There are few advantages at all nowadays. In the past, there were some social advantages: smokers met up and smoked together, but now there are no such advantages anymore.

Ida and Eric point to a shift where smoking is not only something done in solitude but also an isolating habit. The shame and guilt for not being able to quit makes it more isolating because some smokers feel they need to lie to conceal their lack of will power. The data reveal that smoking is an isolating habit, but a habit some smokers as a way to be left alone. In this isolation lies a feeling of aversion towards oneself as well as other smokers, especially when not adhering to one’s personal norms and rules with regard to what counts as a pleasant smoking experience.

Smoking in the wrong contexts or in the wrong way sparks strong feelings with smokers. As Chiara said, the smokers who breaks their own code of conduct are svegati, of lesser worth. Because every smoker has different outlooks
on the “right way” of smoking, some smokers will end up breaking those rules and remind other smoker of all the times they break their own rules, sparking an inner hatred or self-resentment. Essentially, smoking has become an enjoyment that is impossible to share. To the outside world, the habit creates strong feelings such as anger, aversion, and repulsion. Smokers feel the resentment and feel filthy for smoking. As we learned in the beginning of this section, some smokers use their habit to be left alone, and some, such as Ida, end up feeling isolated because of their need to conceal their habit. Smoking has become a strong representation of the lost battle of being able to do what is reasonable and good for oneself. A battle we all know too well, so it becomes too disturbing to watch.

6.6 Chapter summary

Throughout my work with the data, I noticed how participants unfailingly presented inconsistencies and contradictions in their accounts of smoking. When presenting their ideal image of smoking, they told me about how they more frequently did the opposite, as if the ideal needed its opposite to exist. Smoking was described as a tactic that helped one endure the strife associated with life itself even though smoking could result in severe illness, perhaps the ultimate source of strife. Although described as an intrusive force that out-screamed the sufferings associated with life, smoking provided smokers with a vivid sensation of freedom. Their contradictive relationship to their habit makes smokers feel disgusting in the eyes of others. At the same time, other smokers appear to be disgusted with themselves for their lack of will power. Enjoyment, unlike pleasure, is per definition filled with paradoxes of this kind, including attempts to control smoking while at the same time indulge in smoking.
The data consistently points to this paradoxical nature of smoking – i.e., smoking is a paradoxical enjoyment. Although the participants were able to paint beautiful ideal images of smoking, they often suddenly shifted to telling me that smoking is extremely ugly, presenting smoking as a Janus-like image. Smoking, although imbued with risk of disease and death, is also used to help smokers through a crisis and maintain normalcy. The cigarette is a little buddy without whom smokers would feel endlessly lonely, yet it is also what isolates them from the world. Balancing on the edge of self-imposed limits while violating these limits gives rise to discomfort and self-loathing. In spite of this discomfort, smokers usually end up smoking more cigarettes than their self-imposed limits allow. Against the background of smoking as a paradoxical enjoyment, in the next chapter I discuss the findings in more detail in relation to theories.
I open this thesis by claiming that the understanding of enjoyment in consumer culture literature (CCT) has one-sidedly focused on the culturally encouraged consumer enjoyments – i.e., hedonistic, escapist, calculated and communal enjoyments. This imposes a limitation to the theoretical understanding of CCT as pleasure rather than enjoyment is conceptualized in different forms. In Chapter 2, I present CCT’s four perspectives on pleasure and concluded that the main limitations to these current perspectives are positioned in its underlying assumptions and empirical contexts. That is, they are preoccupied with pleasure, which leaves no room for studying consumption as expression of enjoyment. My main critique is that these perspectives currently do not accommodate for enjoyments beyond those that are calculated and socially rewarded.

In the previous chapter, I show how smokers themselves struggle making sense of why they smoke – their habit appears as a paradox because they seem to enjoy smoking in spite of the known risks of smoking and its low social status. Smoking as a paradoxical enjoyment appears as unsettling, repulsive and harmful; in other words, it is an enjoyment imbued with a high degree of confusion. As previously noted, existing CCT perspectives cannot account for this paradoxical form of enjoyment. Psychoanalytically informed discourse theories present alternative ways of viewing smoking as a consumer enjoyment. These perspectives shed light on how complex our relationship to enjoyment is and reveals the modern world’s one-sided view of pleasures as driven by logical and rational rewards: belongingness, happiness, success, and
health (Illouz, 2007; McGowan, 2004). By combining the work of psychanalytically informed discourse theory with the findings presented in chapter 6, the present thesis contributes to CCT by introducing paradoxical enjoyment as a complement to pleasure.

7.1 Contribution: Paradoxical enjoyment

The dominating discourses of pleasure in CCT cannot explain the richness of how smokers make sense of smoking and why they continue to smoke despite the awareness of its risks and social exclusion beyond referencing compulsiveness. That is, CCT is preoccupied with reproducing social ideals of “correct” ways of doing pleasures. Moreover, the smokers’ own voices are absent in the literature as well as in public debates about smoking, an approach that tends to enhance a one-sided view of smoking. The aim here has been to understand how smoking is perceived and made sense of by smokers themselves. To this end, I formulate two research questions at the end of Chapter 2. Let us first return to them as a point of departure for a general discussion of the role of jouissance as a motivation for consumption:

- How do smokers describe their experiences of smoking and make sense of its role in their lives?

- How do consumers make sense of and relate to forms of unconventional enjoyment?

To answer these two questions, I return to the separation between pleasures and enjoyments. Whereas the terms pleasure and enjoyment have been used interchangeably in CCT, psychoanalytically informed discourse theories define CCTs accounts as pleasures, not enjoyments. The reason for that is: CCT
assumes consumers’ choices entail a degree of rationality regarding their purchases. That is, they are drawn to socially and physically rewarding consumption rather than marginalised and physically harmful consumption. Psychoanalytical informed discourse theories, on the other hand, see the type of consumption described in CCT as driven purely by pleasures (Zupančič, 2003). Against that background, I want to disentangle the idea of pleasure from the idea of enjoyment by leveraging the full theoretical potential of enjoyment to address the darker sides of consumption. To make the distinction between pleasure and enjoyment even clearer, I label this type of consumption a paradoxical enjoyment, further removing the concept of enjoyment from pleasure.

This study contributes to the literature by showing how the regulated, risk-filled, and non-sensical enjoyment that smoking provides is what makes smoking one of the few outlets for jouissance. Today, when most pleasures are allowed, it is easy to draw the conclusion that the same goes for enjoyments. On the contrary, as I have pointed out previously, enjoyments are often seen as nonsensical and disconnected from pleasures. Smokers themselves have a hard time viewing their habit as driven by pleasure; however, when describing their most enjoyable cigarettes, they describe a feeling of having access to a fuller enjoyment precisely because of its break with common ideas of health management. Participants often mentioned health and healthism as the predominant status symbol in today’s society (at least Swedish society), and they see themselves as autonomous from socially acceptable views. Cigarette regulations together with the low status of smoking and the risks that come with smoking also contribute to some smokers’ belief that they are participating more fully in enjoyment than those who succumb to society’s conventions and regulations.
One major difference of how this thesis contrasts to CCT is how this thesis does not view rationality as the driving force for consumption. Chapter 2 describes how CCT introduced pleasure and pleasurable experiences as a way to break from the idea that consumption is defined by consumer rationality (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). However, in contemporary markets, group belonging, social reward, and risk avoidance are forms of rational and constructive incentives for consumption. The role of rationality has been associated with utilitarian assumptions; in many ways, consumer research still assumes consumers make rational choices (Jantzen & Østergaard, 1998). Therefore, consumer research ignores much of the consumption that happens in the marketplace.

Paradoxical enjoyment, on the other hand, lacks the cautious and sensible long-term perspective found in CCT-based studies, which focus on pleasure. This thesis, in line with e.g., Illouz (2007) illustrates that emotionality trumps rationality as a driver of paradoxical enjoyment. Emotionality, unlike rationality, is driven by emotional needs rather than socially or physically beneficial needs. That is, cigarettes have an emotionally regulative function that is central to smokers’ everyday lives. Smokers describe how they use smoking not only as a comfort during hard times but also as a way to maintain their mental clarity, both conditions needed to lead a regular life – i.e., get out of bed, take care of their children, go to work, eat, and sleep i.e., being able to pursue the basic needs for oneself and the family – a clear difference from escapist pleasures where pain and shock are applied to enhance productivity and self-fulfillment. All the interviewees referenced the emotionally regulative function of smoking and described it as a disruptive force that helps them deal with emotional pain experienced when, for example, a loved one passed away. This emotional function, however, is not relaxing or tranquil but intrusive and upsetting, akin to a cold shower.
The findings of this thesis also challenge the predominating view in CCT of calculated and moderate consumption as a condition for studying hedonism. This underlying assumption places CCT in the realm of pleasures and rules out much consumption characterised by excess. Psychoanalytically informed theories, on the other hand, have suggested that much consumption today is characterised by limitlessness (Fisher, 2009). Paradoxical enjoyment on the other hand is characterised by a play with limits and limitlessness; smokers use self-imposed restrictions but find ways to exceed these limits. Most of the smokers that I talked to had imposed their own restrictions on their smoking in terms of when, how, where, and how much they allowed themselves to smoke. These restrictions had periodicity, so they were (bound to be) exceeded. Excessive periods were described as an unaware state. Periods when the smokers followed their self-imposed rules were described as an aware state. This cyclical play of limitation and excess was also a way to attain heightened enjoyment.

Lastly, this study contributes to the dominating discourses in CCT by adding that some consumption is not at all about belongingness. Unlike the view presented by communal pleasure, paradoxical enjoyment is isolating, isolated and best enjoyed in solitude. That is, today’s smokers, lack any solidarity with other smokers, making smoking an isolated and isolating enjoyment. In CCT, marginalized consumer groups are predominantly described as building stronger social bonds because of their shared suffering (Henry & Caldwell, 2006). However, as the data in this study show, smokers tend to keep to themselves. Furthermore, isolation itself is triggered by and triggers smokers to be repulsed by other smokers. The smokers I interviewed often had strict ideas about how, where, and when it was appropriate to smoke, although these ideas varied from smoker to smoker. When other smokers broke these rules, they categorized them as an ‘obscene other smoker’. As a result, other smokers could easily set off feelings of repulsion as well as self-loathing as they often
projected onto other smokers their own insecurities about adhering to their self-imposed restrictions. As a result, smokers often preferred to smoke in solitude. In the next sections, I expand the contribution and paradoxical nature of enjoyment. First, however, I discuss the structure of the coming sections and the overarching structure of this thesis.

In this thesis, I have not only composed a framework for psychoanalytically informed discourse theories but also have shown how the framework can be applied. As mentioned in Chapter 1, one reason for the one-sided focus on pleasures in CCT is its lack of a framework that embraces contradictions and paradoxes (Alba & Williams, 2013; Wilk, 1997). Commonly applied frameworks tend to assume that pleasures motivate consumption, and that those pleasures are rational, constructive, calculated, and socially fulfilling. This framework, on the other hand, enables the study of consumption that falls outside of the realm of pleasures and into the realm of enjoyment – it has allowed me to study cigarette consumption as motivated by enjoyment. Moreover, it has allowed for a shift further away from the view that consumers act rationally to attain higher status, better health, and more social connections. The overarching structure of the thesis is based on the structure of my theoretical framework: lost enjoyment, ascetic enjoyment, obsessive enjoyment, and obscene enjoyment. Therefore, Chapters 2, 3, 6, and 7 are organized as representations of the perspectives of the sections describing the theoretical lens in Chapter 3. Whereas Chapter 3 and 7 are organized in the same way, Chapter 2 is structured into four perspectives on pleasure: hedonistic pleasure, escapist pleasure, calculated pleasure, and communal pleasure. Chapter 6 is structured into the four corresponding themes: rebellious smoking, disruptive smoking, limitless smoking, and isolated smoking.
7.2 Lost enjoyment

CCT uses the idea of hedonistic pleasure to help explain the importance of commodities in our lives. For example, CCT sees pleasure itself as triggered by intrinsic values and aesthetic features of a product and experienced through sensory experiences or fantasy (i.e., imagining how the product will improve one’s life). However, these perspectives have been limited to common sense views of pleasure. At the end of Chapter 2, I note that CCT assumes that consumption is a productive and a constructive force for consumers as well as society (see Belk et al., 2000; Belk, Ger, & Askegaard, 2003). For example, the constant thirst for more products is based on dreams of improving one’s life via consumption. In a sense, the research itself fuels the fantasy that consumption is inherently positive but neglects the negative aspects of consumption (Gabriel, 2015). However, cigarette consumption, which cannot be seen as a constructive force for individuals or society, abides by other rules. This study shows that the comforts that smokers gain from cigarettes combined with the restrictions, regulations, and social disapproval produce a paradoxical enjoyment – i.e., an enjoyment that smokers are simultaneously drawn to and repulsed by.

Perhaps it would have been possible to view smoking as a source of pleasure in line with the hedonistic perspective in a different time i.e., in the 1950s, possibly even some decades after. That is, before the knowledge of smoking’s harmful effects and changes in its symbolism, smoking was seen as form of pleasure. Today, however, smoking is no longer viewed as pleasurable by society. In this study, smokers told me that they missed the time when smoking was considered pleasurable. For example, Lisa and Eric often reminisced when smoking was a social glue and reflected something positive about them. Eric specifically emphasized that he no longer sees smoking as pleasurable. The explanations of CCT would end there. Smoking is not seen as a pleasure
anymore, but rather a form of morbidity. With the existing frameworks at hand, CCT makes similar conclusions (see e.g. Hirschman, 1992). The concepts of lost enjoyment (McGowan, 2004; Stavrakakis, 2007; Žižek, 1989) and the command to enjoy (McGowan, 2004) have complemented theories on hedonistic pleasure in terms of the nature and motivation of enjoyment. There are two areas where this thesis has shown that smoking clearly differs from how pleasures are portrayed in CCT. First, smoking is enjoyable because of its marginalised status. Second, smoking is surrounded by perfected images that often makes the smoker continue the habit despite fear and doubt of its effects.

This thesis shows how smoking is an outlet for jouissance. Because it is restricted and is no longer seen as pleasurable, smokers feel deprived of their access to jouissance. As soon as something seems to have been taken from us (e.g., by a regulation restricting access to consumption of an item), this idea of having lost jouissance is triggered (Fink, 1997). This was expressed in my interviews with smokers, where the regulations and changed views of smoking had deprived it of its pleasurable status. Smokers have numerous reasons not to smoke and these reasons were often repeated in the interviews as well as in the internet forums. It is not only that smoking no longer has an enjoyable status but also smokers feel deprived of their access to draw pleasure from smoking in public. Eric told me of how smoking used to be seen as a legitimate pleasure, but now it is seen as a ‘filthy habit’. Paradoxically, this very deprivation of its pleasurable status is also what makes smoking so enjoyable.

During the interviews, it became especially prevalent how smoking, because of its contrast to contemporary important status symbols like health, signalled a rebellious personality. Chiara told me of her most enjoyable smoke was on weekday mornings at her favourite coffee place, watching dutiful and plagued workers running to the subway to get to work. Chiara did not just see herself...
as any kind of rebel – she was a rebel because she truly enjoyed. She took up space because she was smoking in the midst of the morning rush, taking up space was something she struggled with, but this defiant posture made the experience pleasurable as it set her apart from the ‘sheep’ scurrying off to work. That is, her enjoyment was heightened because it contrasted with the conventions. That is, she was prioritizing her enjoyment over work. This type of disobedience symbolized a liberation from domesticated forms of pleasure. Chiara was not only transgressing conventions mentally, by smoking at the coffee place she was physically transgressing norms.

This study adds to CCT’s understanding of transgression as something that goes beyond a transgression of the mind (see Belk et al., 2003) to a real transgression of cultural norms and ideals. Smoking confirms current perspectives in psychoanalytically informed discourse theories on how enjoyment needs regulation to become an enjoyment. Restrictions and regulations surrounding smoking heightens its symbolic status as lost enjoyment. Specifically, the command to enjoy extends CCT perspectives by pointing to the impossibility to derive enjoyment from the mainstream marketplace. The more accessible pleasures are in society, the less enjoyment they provide (McGowan, 2004), because enjoyment needs regulations to attain its enjoyable status (Stavrakakis, 2007; Žižek, 2006). Precisely because of its risks, status, restraints, and regulations, smoking is a way to attain jouissance. That is, the idea of being deprived of the access to one’s enjoyment is central to its sublime status.

Chiara, as well as other interviewees, told me of how enjoyment was heightened because of others’ negative opinions of smoking. The very condition for transgression is breaking social rules. The idea of smoking as transgression was present in all my interviewees as well as in the online ethnography and documents; they all pointed to how smoking and cigarettes were charged with
strong symbolisms of transgressing social norms. Through the concept of lost jouissance, this thesis extends current views in CCT by shedding light on how its low status and regulations make smoking a symbol of the last legal enjoyment beyond pleasure. This shift in the view of smoking has become a source for smokers to perceive themselves as transgressing societal prohibitions when smoking (Bataille, 1988), fuelling the idea of the self as rebellious. Many interviewees returned to the idea of the alarmed, dutiful health freaks that they had chosen not to be part of because they had a rebellious personality. David found others’ obsessive preoccupations with health similar to religion. Siri added that she finds people’s preoccupation with health an expression of a general and increasing fear of dying. Most the interviewees viewed the fear of smoking as exaggerated; for smokers, it was a question of quantity. By not doing what others tell them, smokers told me they had access to a source of enjoyment that others lack. In addition to breaking social rules, smokers expressed that ideal images of smoking often motivated them to continue or return to their habit.

Through psychoanalytically informed discourse theories, this thesis enriches CCT by showing how consumers’ perfected ideas of pleasures, both in terms of imagery and of how we enjoy, are not limited to the more socially accepted pleasures but present in paradoxical enjoyment as well. In the case of smoking, it has the function of continue smoking despite doubts, discomfort and fear. Žižek (1989) points out that the sublimity of consumption is attained only when products are consumed in the right way at precisely the right moment. Psychoanalytically informed discourse theories explain that bound in the idea of having lost access to enjoyment is a tendency to fantasize about perfected images of that same enjoyment (Freud, 2001). Through the example of smoking, it becomes visible how these “perfect images” become a reason to continue to smoke. Many interviewees returned to their idea of the perfect smoke.
The mental image of the perfect smoke was a drive to continue smoking despite doubting the value of their habit. Often, the ideal image of smoking pushed them to start smoking after having quit. For Ida, this ideal image of smoking involved a hot summer breeze with a drink in her hand. Ida, who had tried to stop many times, repeatedly found herself smoking at summer parties. Moreover, the hope provided by the ideal images of smoking helped the interviewees justify their habit even when smoking caused nausea, headaches, and other physical distress.

Unlike how consumption is described in CCT, the smoking that accords with one’s ideal image is rare as most smoking occurs in less than ideal contexts. A central critique of the hedonistic perspective is its focus on positive experiences, leaving negative or double-sided and ambiguous experiences aside (Alba & Williams, 2013; Wilk, 1997) and placing consumer hedonism within the confines of pleasure. Paradoxical enjoyment, on the other hand, is only possible because of its ugly sides – in this case nausea, difficulties with breathing and fear. It is the suffering that makes these occasionally perfected moments possible as they were formulated in relation to its opposite. Philip’s context for the perfect smoke is being perfectly groomed and wearing a tuxedo at an indoor party. However, when describing this scenario, he told me how difficult it was to attain the perfect smoke, so he often ended up doing the opposite: sitting in his house robe alone, late in the evening in front of his laptop chain smoking without even noticing what he was doing until seeing all the cigarette butts in his ashtray.

These idyllic smokes are not only perceived to have been taken from the smoker personally but also as an undesired societal shift. As smoking has lost its status in society and cigarette consumption has become increasingly regulated, smoking has also come to symbolise freedom. In the forums as well as
in the interviews, smokers expressed fear of how far the impediments on enjoyments would go. Impediments on smoking were often referred to as just the beginning of infringements on other enjoyments. In an extreme quest to make people healthy, they feared governments would begin to limit alcohol, fat, and sugar consumption, further fuelling the view that smoking is a symbol of freedom. In some internet forums, preserving the right to smoke and breaking the rules for how and where to smoke were seen as standing up for democratic values and freedom of speech.

7.3 Ascetic enjoyment

Extraordinary experiences, unlike other perspectives in CCT, include suffering as a part of pleasure. This way, this CCT perspective also has most in common with paradoxical enjoyment. However, they are different in some fundamental ways. Extraordinary experiences are aimed to heightening productivity, attaining social status through stoic endeavours and provide social reward through that same status and being part of a community. In escapist pleasure, elements of pain are included to disrupt current states of dullness and heightening productivity and excitement in other parts of life, often work (Scott et al., 2017). The pleasure seen in extraordinary experiences, is derived from enduring a painful or demanding physical challenge, providing these experiences with a high degree of social status (Jantzen et al., 2012). These extraordinary experiences maintain high social status because they require physical and mental strength and endurance – i.e, maximizing the health ideal. It is moreover socially rewarding to engage in extraordinary experiences both because of the status it provides and because of the strong community that surrounds the experience. Communities often feel closer because of the shared pain they have endured or the shared thrill that they have experienced, creating a clear line between the in group and out group or us and them. Against this
background, extraordinary experiences can be seen as a form of pleasure derived from achievements requiring some degree of stoicism.

As such, it would be impossible to view smoking from the perspective of extraordinary experiences. Unlike extraordinary experiences, smoking is rarely calculated to maximize long-term positive physical or social effects. Smoking often expresses the opposite: emotionally driven and short-term focused choice with long-term negative physical or social effects. Extraordinary experiences, which entail a momentary suffering and a reward of pleasure in the long term, differ from ascetic hedonism in the sense that the latter relieves suffering in the short term by instilling suffering with more suffering. Smoking is not an experience that entails physical endurance and social status, quite the opposite. Unlike extraordinary experiences, smoking has long-term negative effects on the body. Furthermore, smoking entails a prolonged suffering, often in the form of guilt. Unlike extraordinary experiences, smoking is used to disrupt a major life crisis and other painful mental state such as anxiety with the goal of being able to seize the energy needed to fulfil basic needs. It is, however, important to point out that smoking has a similar function as extraordinary experiences. That is, its disruptive role. According to the findings presented here, smoking is a form of disruption although it has some significant differences from extraordinary experiences.

Although extraordinary experiences provided some insight to the pleasure of suffering, it has remained in the constructive realms of consumption i.e., it is performed to provide beneficial effects in other parts of life by: increasing performance at work or improve parenting by being more present. By applying the concept of ascetic hedonism, this study has further shifted away from rationality in its view of enjoyment. This thesis extends extraordinary experiences in three significant ways. First, smoking is enjoyed because it adds one suffering onto another. Second, smoking is driven by emotionality rather than
future benefits. Third, smoking is used to maintain a life rather than as a way to heighten performance.

Escapist pleasures are based on excitement, motivated by shocking experiences and high status due to the need for physical and mental strength and endurance (Arnould & Price, 1993; Hill, 2005; Scott et al., 2017). Ascetic hedonism, on the other hand, sees the nature of enjoyment as motivated by the wish to replace one suffering with another (Zupančič, 2003), and it is in this regard the concept of ascetic hedonism has extended current perspectives on extraordinary experiences. In line with psychoanalytically informed discourse theories, the empirical example of smoking shows why smokers choose to smoke despite the risk for suffering – i.e., because it is an attempt to attain jouissance (Lacan, 1992). The findings similarly show that the disruptive effectiveness of smoking is related to precisely what smokers put at stake when smoking: damage to their physical health.

When asked to describe the disruptive function of smoking, the interviewees returned to the symbolism of cigarettes as physically depriving. This physical deprivation literally made the potency of the cigarette felt in the throat and in their lungs, signs that they were putting their lives at stake in the pursuit of their enjoyment. For example, Victor often returned to his divorce as a traumatic experience that made it difficult for him to take care of his children and maintain normalcy in his everyday life. Smoking was a disruption from the feelings of guilt and thoughts spinning in his head; it provided clarity and focus for him. Similarly, Penny and Mimi explained how smoking helped them through their separations. Judith and Siri smoked more when their husbands were sick and after they had died. For a non-smoker, this behaviour might seem counterintuitive. This counterintuition is precisely why we need to leave the realm of rationality when attempting to understand smoking as a disruption. The cigarette was described as a little buddy, perhaps the best friend in
difficult times according to the interviewees and losing it could result in a crisis for some smokers.

Ascetic enjoyment extends current perspectives of CCT by shifting further from the realm of rationality and closer to emotionality. Specifically, the concept of choice points towards consumption as an emotional rather than a rational activity (Illouz, 2007). Unlike the idea of physically and socially beneficial behaviour, smokers describe the emotional function of cigarettes as painfully intrusive way to express their suffering, providing them a quiet space away from their thoughts. This emotional function provides a painful and intrusive comfort that masks what really hurts them. The concept of choice adds to extraordinary experiences as it explains why smokers indulge in what society despises. As a contrast to the rationally justified consumption often reflected in CCT, Eva Illouz’s (2007) concept of emotionality and Salecl’s (2011) concept of choice extends the rational and sensible perspective reflected in CCTs portrayal of pleasure. The data has sown how cigarettes become a compact and accessible way to suffer that one can bring everywhere. To make the most of the disruptive effect of smoking, Victor would pinch off the filter or smoke a stronger brand to intensify the effect of the smoke and nicotine. To him smoking in these moments meant putting his life at stake. The smoke feeling his lungs and almost choking him became an intrusion similar to death but in a compact version.

The emotional need was often described as a feeling of emptiness, not “feeling like oneself” as Ursula described it. Without the cigarettes, many interviewees expressed feelings of loss and being unable to do things they would normally do. To them, the cigarettes seem to have become a condition for existing. Some had felt a lower emotional need for cigarettes in periods of their lives, but when being in more vulnerable episodes as e.g., feelings of loneliness that a divorce or death could trigger, the emotional need for smoking increased.
To many smokers, in hard times as well as in good, smoking had come to define who they are. I soon learned that this relationship is so intimate to some smokers that they end up in a depressive state when quitting. In a similar way, smoking was the buddy who made it worth getting up of bed in the mornings during crisis. Soon after having realized that she was depressed, Ursula took up smoking again. When she told me of how she was able to work, eat and get out of bed again, I asked her whether starting smoking again had made her happy. Rather than providing her joy, smoking made her feel whole again.

7.4 Obsessive enjoyment

CCT has provided a prominent understanding for the motivation of calculated and moderate pleasures. That is, most pleasure studies in CCT assume consumption in general is controlled and moderated by rationality. This is a result of an underlying assumption of a bond between restraint and well-being (Askegaard, 2014). This assumed bond has resulted in viewing moderation as culturally enhanced and excess as an incapability to stay in control. According to this perspective, by controlling impulses and drives and enjoying moderately, consumers can effectively attain pleasure (Baumeister, 2002; Belk et al., 2003; Campbell, 1987), and everything beyond moderation is seen as compulsive behaviour or even a flawed personality trait (Faber et al., 1995; Hirschman, 1992; O’Guinn & Faber, 1989). This idea makes a clear distinction of what can be included in the realm and understanding of pleasure – as well as what cannot be included. The CCT literature excludes anything that is not moderate or calculated from the sphere of pleasurable experiences. Instead, what is beyond moderate is seen as compulsive consumption and explained solely with psychological models that assume addiction and compulsiveness (e.g. Hirschman, 1992; Wansink, 1994). Therefore, there has been no outlet to study obsessive preoccupation of pleasure in the realm of enjoyment.
and this has resulted in excluding compulsive consumption from consumer enjoyment.

This exclusion has resulted in reducing the complexity and richness inherent in smoking to compulsiveness. Consequently, smoking cannot be researched from the point of view of the pleasurable. By applying the concepts death drive (Freud, 2003) and depressive hedonia (Fisher, 2009), this study has pointed out the role of excess in enjoyment. The thesis contributes to CCT by in some distinct ways. First, smoking is enjoyable because it is excessively consumed. Second, enjoyment of smoking is heightened self-imposed periods of restrictions. The study moreover adds to the concept of depressive hedonia, that subjects apply limits to heighten enjoyment of excess and that these restrictions are self-imposed by the subject.

Smokers of this study gave accounts of attaining enjoyment from smoking as well as how it is both consumed in limitless amounts and enjoyable. This paradoxical relationship is impossible to capture with dominant perspectives of CCT. The limitlessness was especially prevalent in my interview with Phillip where he explicitly told me that it was almost a natural law to always over-consume cigarettes. The concepts of depressive hedonia and death drive extend CCT perspectives by viewing compulsion and hazardous effects as prerequisites for attaining enjoyment. Depressive hedonia extends the assumption of calculated pleasure in CCT by suggesting that enjoyment is motivated by feelings of emptiness that subjects try to rid themselves of by consuming excessively (Fisher, 2009). In other words, depressive hedonia overthrows the underlying assumption of what is defined as enjoyment. The concept of death drive (Freud, 2003), on the other hand, suggests that enjoyment needs strains of self-destructions to become enjoyable.
This study moreover extends dominating assumptions of calculated pleasures and compulsiveness by showing how smokers engage limitations and excess to obtain enjoyment. As this study notes, smoking is experienced as enjoyable when controlled and as a source of suffering and fear when not controlled. What was striking in the interaction with smokers was their untiring preoccupation with controlling their habit. They expressed numerous conditions for when they were allowed to smoke: only on weekends, on the way home from work, only when partying, only seated, and only three cigarettes per day. Smoking outside of these restrictions was not allowed. For many of the smokers, limiting their consumption to three cigarettes per day almost seemed to have a magical status. For example, Chiara declared three cigarettes per day was not only enjoyable but also good for her. Despite these strict frameworks, smokers always ended up breaking their own rules.

Through the example of smoking, this study additionally extends the concept of depressive hedonia by moving beyond the idea of depressive hedonism as merely an obsessive pursuit of pleasures (see Fisher, 2009). Although the smokers in this study often ended up in obsessive states, they fluctuated between overconsumption and imposing limits as a way to obtain more enjoyment. In other words, violating these self-imposed limits heightened their enjoyment. Rather than smoking obsessively and chronically, smokers described a periodic relationship to the limitlessness. Many described their smoking as marked by periods of addictive or rewarding pursuits or necessary or unnecessary cigarettes. The difference was clear: when they remained within their self-imposed limits, their smoking resulted in an experience resembling pleasure; however, when they exceeded their self-imposed limits, their smoking resulted in suffering, which, paradoxically, increased their enjoyment.

In psychoanalytically informed discourse theories, the limit of excess usually comes from outside rather from within the subject. This study, on the other
hand, found that the participants needed boundaries to enjoy smoking, but the boundaries were self-imposed. They balanced the pleasure principle and the death drive (Freud, 2003). The death drive periods were labelled as ‘addictive’ and the cigarettes that exceeded their limit were described as ‘unnecessary’ cigarettes as opposed to the ‘necessary’, ‘tasty’, and ‘non-dangerous’ cigarettes consumed within their self-imposed limits. The societal limit is quite clear when it comes to cigarettes: smoking should be avoided altogether. That is, smoking in general has a low cultural status and is both regulated and restricted. For an occasional smoker, it is enough to smoke to feel that one transgresses the norm. However, the fulltime smokers who were unable to adhere to societal limits set their own limits. If they consumed more than their limit, they suffered, feared disease, and were physically distressed.

The tension between control and excess is a peculiar paradox of smoking. This study shows that smokers develop an ongoing tension between periods of control and periods of powerlessness over smoking. However, this tension is what made enjoyment possible. Unlike most sources of enjoyments in general (Zupančič, 2003) such as sugar-free, fat-free, nicotine-free products, the danger of smoking remains intact despite filters, light brands or menthol flavour. However, by imposing limits, smokers felt that they could eliminate the danger of smoking. For Chiara and Phillip, imposing limits was especially important as both mentioned believing that smoking only three cigarettes per day would not be hazardous to their health. In addition to heightening jouissance, their self-imposed limits seemed to impede– or mask – the risks of smoking.

Interestingly, their main argument was that enjoyable cigarettes are not dangerous because they produced pleasure. Similar to the perspectives of CCT, the smokers I talked to thought of the experience limited smoking provide as a form of pleasure rather than a paradoxical experience, and therefore it was seen as unharmful. When exceeding the three cigarettes, on the other hand,
smokers would sense their bodies retaliating in the form of dizziness, nausea, or a rough sensation in their throat. The cigarettes that created an unpleasant physical response felt directly dangerous. The motivation behind smoking in those moments were harder to explain and thus felt more confusing. Username 3, for example, who had not been smoking for a couple of months, described how he ended up in lung distress and breathing problems after having chain smoked during a weekend. Username 3 and others believed their bodies told them that they should stop smoking. The loss of control was also seen as the potential cause of disease. Chiara, Username 3, and many other users in the online forums expressed guilt and fear that they would develop smoke-related disease because of their own actions.

In summary, this section has showed how the concept “death drive” extends existing CCT theories by shifting its underlying assumption of compulsiveness to a form of enjoyment – i.e., an understanding of smoking beyond it being merely compulsive and addictive. The concept flips CCT’s understanding of subjects as calculated and controlled. Through the concept depressive hedonia, smoking can be viewed as a form of enjoyment where compulsiveness is seen as central to the experience of an enjoyment. Depressive hedonists are characterized by an inability to do anything other than pursue pleasures – they become compulsive subjects in their interaction with the market (e.g., Fisher, 2009). Smokers added some nuance between CCT and depressive hedonism by suggesting that smoking inevitably ends up being too much despite restrictions. Through these concepts, we can understand obsessive smoking as a form of enjoyment precisely because of its obsessive traits.

7.5 Obscene enjoyment

In CCT, pleasure has often been depicted as a way to signal affection, build relationships, display status, and feel a sense of belonging to others in the same
situation. From this point of view, consumption is seen as motivated and elevated by a sense of communality or when shared with others. Consumption, experiences, and gift-giving are ways to express social bonds with others, but community belonging, status, and gaining social acceptance are also central to the communal pleasures (Arnould et al., 2009; Belk, 1976; Bode & Ostergaard, 2013; Kozinets, 2001; Molander, 2011; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012). The foundational assumption is that pleasure itself is felt in common with other people.

It is difficult to fit smoking within the confines of communality nowadays. Smokers feel lonely as they feel isolated because of their habit, and some smokers use smoking to distance themselves from others. Given the assumption that we derive pleasure from things that build social bonds, smoking is a conundrum. Some smokers described what the intimacy of smoking had previously meant to them. In those moments, smoking with someone immediately set a confidential atmosphere in the room. Today, however, the intimacy has been reduced to a memory. Through the concept of the big Other (McGowan, 2004; Žižek, 1989), this study has shifted the current view of consumer enjoyment as primarily being socially fulfilling to one where some consumption is essentially isolating. There are especially three things about smoking that diverge from the current view of pleasure in CCT. First, smokers do not share their enjoyment with other smokers – i.e., smokers lack an inherent solidarity. Second, smoking is used as a way to be left alone. Third, smoking is now preferred to be experienced in private.

In CCT, the idea of belongingness is also applied to marginalized groups, communities, and subcultures, who often use their “otherness” as a way to bond, clearly demarcating the boundaries between us and them – i.e., between the in group and the out group (Kates, 2002; Link & Phelan, 2001). Smoking,
being a marginalised form of consumption, lacks the socialising function described in the previous paragraph. That is, despite sharing the same habit, smokers do not perceive a belongingness to other smokers. In contrast to CCT, where marginalized consumption is seen as bringing consumers closer to each other (Henry & Caldwell, 2006; Kates, 2002; Kozinets, 2001; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2012), this study shows that smokers distance and isolate themselves from other smokers. It became clear that every smoker had its obscene other smoker. While conventional perspectives in CCT have seen consumption as a way to establish and maintain social bonds, the findings in this thesis show that smokers perceived other smokers as repulsive. Chiara and Philip told me that they did not like it when people smoke in airport lounges. For Chiara, these smokers were the living dead, of less worth. Often, the interviewees were disgusted by other smokers because they violated the interviewee’s rules about smoking. Obscene enjoyments are isolating, and smokers enforce their own strict rules of how, where, and when they can smoke. This happens individually so there is no common ground for how to behave around other smokers. Therefore, others will break smokers’ rules and as a result every smoker has its obscene other smokers.

In general, participants often experienced – and avoided – other people’s resentment towards their habit. When I asked participants about how others had expressed disgust, they had a hard time identifying a specific occasion when someone had said something directly to them. Rather, they felt a general sense of disgust and judgement in subtly aggressive acts such as coughing or slamming a window shut. These events appeared as an aggregate, an undefined mass of events, that led them to draw the conclusion that their habit was repulsive to most other people. Chiara confided that she was not sure whether she imagined these things because she was sensitive or whether they really were expressions of others’ disgust. Eric, on the other hand, sees himself as filthy in the eyes of non-smokers, the figurative gaze of the Other. Some other
smokers, however, told me that they employ the knowledge of other people’s disgust to be left alone. Siri, for example, took advantage of people moving away from smoke to keep to herself. She used the distance the smoke created between her and others to be left alone. As a result, she was able to enjoy the cigarette more since she puts distance between herself and other people’s opinions. Despite hearing many stories like Siri’s, in the interviews, smokers also told me of how they constantly thought of and adapted to their surroundings to avoid, or in other ways relate to, non-smokers resentment.

Unlike most pleasures described in CCT, smoking is a moment of enjoyment hidden from the eyes and opinions of others. Rather than building intimate relationships with others, the cigarette seems to provide an enjoyment preferred in solitude. When I asked my interviewees to describe their most enjoyable cigarette during the day, the response was almost exclusively the cigarette enjoyed in private – away from friends, co-workers, and family. It was their moment, shared with no one else than the cigarette itself. Social rules and other people’s opinions – or other smokers’ repulsive manners – were so intrusive that their presence made enjoying the cigarette difficult and even a burden. By applying psychoanalytically informed discourse theories and specifically the concept of the obscene other (Žižek, 1989), this study flips current perspectives in CCT where belongingness, affection, and communality are seen as prerequisites for pleasure. Because smoking is experienced as paradoxical – i.e., a balancing act between enjoyment and repulsion, it has become an activity preferably performed in solitude.

### 7.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I present my contribution of paradoxical enjoyment as the idea of lost enjoyment, ascetic enjoyments, obsessive enjoyments, and obscene enjoyments. Using concepts from the theoretical framework I built in Chapter 3,
I have challenged the underlying assumptions of pleasure in the dominating perspectives in CCT and thereby extend current views of motivation, the nature of enjoyment, and smoking’s status in society because it moves beyond the rational, constructive, and socially accepted. Paradoxical enjoyment stretches beyond CCT’s current focus on pleasures as gratifying, rational, calculated, and communal. Paradoxical enjoyment suggests a focus on enjoyments driven by transgression beyond the socially accepted, emotional functions that heighten suffering, a play with limitlessness and self-imposed restrictions, and isolation. Moreover, this study contributes to psychoanalytically informed discourse theories by applying the empirical example of smoking. Specifically, the example of smoking reveals that smokers play with limits in relation to limitlessness.
8 Conclusion: A Theory of Paradoxical Enjoyment

I recently saw my childhood friend on the subway. I was on my way to my allotment (a plot of land rented to grow vegetables) outside of the city centre and saw that she got off five stations before my stop in town. When I saw her, she looked at me. She looked at me with a curious and, at the same time, scrutinizing gaze – almost as if she wanted to read from my appearance what I had been up to lately. With some distance from the situation, my guess is that my own gaze appeared similar to her gaze. I only had a few seconds, but by looking at her I could read that she was now a woman in her mid-thirties, neatly dressed up in a black skirt with a light touch of makeup, probably on her way to meet friends or family this early spring Saturday. I was relieved to see that she seemed at peace. Despite everything that had happened between us, I did want her to be happy. I guess I will never know whether it was just my interpretation or whether my friend really was in a good place in life. I do, however, hope that this study, in some way, has added her voice as well as other smokers’ voices to the general debate about smoking, where, as I have pointed out previously, smokers’ own voices have been absent. In addition, the example of smoking has resulted in the framework of paradoxical enjoyment as a complement to the predominant view of pleasures in CCT.

Paradoxical enjoyment complicates the dominating views of pleasure and consumption as driven by rational and constructive motifs. Although critical voices always existed in the literature (Alvesson, 1994; Anderson, 1986; Bradshaw & Brown, 2018; Wickstrom et al., 2021), they have been scattered
and have had little effect on the dominating discourse. It has previously been suggested that the reason for the inability to challenge dominating discourse is that consumer research lacks frameworks that go beyond the dominant assumptions (Alba & Williams, 2013; Wilk, 1997). This study contributes to by introducing a framework that can be applied to understand irrational, counter-intuitive, and emotional enjoyment as a driver for consumption with destructive consequences, which does not fit current perspectives. In addition to contributing to CCT in general by introducing a framework and showing how it can be applied, this study contributes to some specific literature streams of CCT. Specifically, the findings in this thesis contribute to the literature streams of consumption and irrationality (Jantzen & Østergaard, 1998), terminal marketing (Ahlberg et al., 2022; Gabriel, 2015), dark marketing (Brown, McDonagh, & Shultz, 2012), critiques of communality (Wickstrom et al., 2021), and the application of jouissance in CCT (Belk et al., 2000).

This thesis extends perspectives on what has previously been labelled as, irrational consumer behaviour by suggesting a further shift from a view of consumption as rationally driven to a view of consumption as emotionally driven. By adding emotionality as a driver of consumption (Illouz, 2007), we can leave the view of consumers as driven to maximize pleasure and drawn to consumption that provides long-term rewards. More specifically, this study has shown how smoking signifies a suffering that replaces crisis. Smoking provides a painful and intrusive comfort that masks what really hurts. This way, smokers are able to maintain life although it to some of them seems pointless. This study therefore contributes to literature streams of consumption and irrationality. The literature on irrationality argues that there is rationality in irrational behaviour (Jantzen & Østergaard, 1998). The literature stream moreover argues that consumer life is not exclusively goal driven and successful as consumer theories tend to portray it. In line with Bradshaw and Zwick (2014), paradoxical enjoyment has pinpointed the role of the death
drive in behaviours contradicting societal and individual long-term needs and goals. Paradoxical enjoyment focuses on the here and now rather than long-term aims despite knowing the risks, suffering, and possible death associated with habits, such as smoking, that are perceived to be dangerous.

This study adds to terminal marketing by the empirical example of smoking, which is filled with irrationality, inconsistencies and paradoxes. The physical deprivation made smokers enjoy the cigarette even more, and at the same time it made them suffer even more. Smoking includes disgust of oneself and of others, pain and physical deprivation and yet it is also the smoker’s closest friend. Similarly, terminal marketing criticizes how the dominating discourses of consumption tell neat fairy tales of the consequences of consumption. Because the dominating view neglects a great part of consumption that does not fit into these neat fairy tales, they often insufficiently explain what is going on in the market (Ahlberg et al., 2022; Gabriel, 2015). Here, identity, choice, and freedom have been challenged and seen more as an illusion with short-term gratification and long-term discontent (Gabriel, 2015) than anything else. I read somewhere in the literature for this thesis that the worst thing a person can be is deadly ill, not only because the person will not live anymore but also because society often sees deadly illness as a personal failure.

As more responsibility is placed on the individual, it is unthinkable that some people choose to do things that might put them in that position (Lupton, 1995; Metzl, J., Kirkland, A., & Kirkland, 2010). In many ways, smoking embodies the symbolic essence of disease, death, and loneliness. It is precisely its marginalised status and risks that makes smoking one of the few outlets of jouissance of today. This study has contributed to terminal marketing by showing how smokers despite fear and doubts continue to smoke. Here, ideas of rebelliousness and perfected images of smoking drives its continuation.
Paradoxical enjoyment extends the literature on dark marketing by introducing lost enjoyment and limitless enjoyment as consumers’ internal receptors to the endlessly encouraged over-consumption. Dark marketing suggests that the very logic of marketing and retail encourages consumers to over-consume and over-indulge by suggesting to consumers they are always lacking and always needing something new (Brown et al., 2012). Paradoxical enjoyment shows that ideas of having lost access to jouissance creates a perfect futility for such messages and adds to dark marketing a depended understanding of how consumers relate and react to this command through, for example, ascetic, obsessive, and obscene enjoyment. The study moreover added that smokers, although consuming cigarettes excessively, imposed restrictions to heighten their enjoyment.

By studying an isolated enjoyment, this study increases the number of voices raised against the idea of consumption as being driven by belongingness. This study has shifted the current view of consumer enjoyment as primarily being socially fulfilling to one where some consumption is essentially isolating. Much of these unconventional consumer activities are difficult to communicate to our peers as they are personally gratifying but socially lack meaning (Jantzen & Østergaard, 1998). Paradoxical enjoyment contributes to the critical voices of communality as a taken for granted driver for consumption (Wickstrom et al., 2021) by showing how disgust creates a distance to others, even in the same marginalized group. For me personally, the lack of solidarity among smokers was one of the findings that made me most surprised. Through this study, we are able to understand that some forms of consumption are isolating – i.e., consumption used to attain isolation from non-smokers as well as other smokers.

Through the example of smoking, paradoxical enjoyment has contributed to the understanding of motivations behind consumption in general. What we see...
in markets today is to a great extent fragmented, irrational, unconstructive, and filled with ambiguities (Jantzen & Østergaard, 1998). Like smoking, it is motivated by a short term focus, ideal images and an idea of having lost access to enjoyment. Like smokers, consumers in general struggle with their desire to consume and its negative effects on other people and on the environment. For example, the entire value chain of consumption: manufacturing, transportation and consumption, is represented in the majority of points on the UN’s list of the major causes of climate change (United Nations, n.d.). Nevertheless, we consume more goods than ever before. It is increasingly difficult for any consumer to present a coherent narrative to the question why they consume. What is more, some consumption is exposed to a similar status journey as the cigarette: flight shaming and meat guilting are two examples of how consumption can be shifted to a lowered status. Like smoking, these movements are increasingly polarizing as they represent freedom to some and a threat to others.

Lastly, I would like to say a few words about jouissance and how this study extends the use of jouissance in CCT. Consumption and consumer societies are frequently used as examples in psychoanalytically informed discourse theory (see Illouz, 2007; McGowan, 2004; Stavrakakis, 2007; Zupančič, 2003). Although perspectives of jouissance have many interesting insights to add to the current understanding of consumption, the concept of jouissance have only been used sparsely in CCT. When mentioned, jouissance is typically used as a synonym for lack, or pleasure. For example, jouissance is described as a cause of desire because it instils consumers with a sense of lack that can never be fulfilled (Belk et al., 2000). The only further introduction given by Belk et al. is an early version of the Lacanian view of jouissance, where jouissance is suggested to be felt as lack caused by the child’s break with the initial intimacy with her mother (Fink, 1997), a fairly specific view that to many scholars might be difficult to apply. Other than this Lacanian perspective, jouissance is
mostly used as a synonym for sex, for example, a synonym for feminine sexuality (Thompson & Hirschman, 1998), sexual experimentation and cultural freedom (Stevensson, 2002), physical enjoyment beyond the heterosexual ideological socialization (Kates, 2000), a more general sensual or sexual experience (Martin, 2005), and for shopping as a passionate experience and expressive act (Brottman, 1997). In other words, jouissance is mostly used as a synonym or as an explanation for another concept or theory but rarely on its own terms to understand consumption.

By applying how psychoanalytically informed discourse theories view jouissance, this study encourages moving beyond jouissance, yet another esoteric French word, to a concept where we can see its value when discussing enjoyment in contemporary consumption. Jouissance – or paradoxical enjoyment as I have suggested – as applied here contributes to the understanding of consumption beyond the rational and neatly ordered sphere. Specifically, this study contributes to the application of jouissance in CCT by adopting jouissance as a concept to explain how enjoyment permeates not only the motivational drivers of individual consumers but also how society at large is structured around ideas of enjoyment, lost enjoyment, and envy of other people’s enjoyment.
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In a time when health is seen as an important achievement, it is increasingly hard to understand why some people consume cigarettes. The most common explanations are addiction or a lack of self-restraint. The view of smokers is increasingly polarised and smokers are often seen as a costly burden to society. The thesis suggests that the lack of smokers’ own voices and the lack of a suitable theoretical framework contributes to this one-sided view. Against the background of in-depth interviews with smokers and online ethnography of smoking, this thesis argues that smoking is motivated by a paradoxical form of enjoyment.

Combining the work of psychoanalytical discourse theories with consumer culture theories, this thesis offers an alternative perspective on consumer enjoyment in which self-destruction and social isolation – in contrast to existing perspectives – plays a central role in enjoyment. The thesis moreover develops and applies a framework which can be used for studying other forms of paradoxical enjoyment.