

Gender Variations In Support For Tobacco Control: A National Social Climate Analysis

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ABSTRACT

As the first state to reach a settlement with the tobacco industry, Mississippi was among the first to implement evaluation measures for statewide programs funded through dollars recouped from the tobacco industry. In the spring of 1999, the Mississippi State Department of Health contracted with the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) to conduct an evaluation of the Mississippi Tobacco Pilot Program. Toward this goal, researchers at the SSRC developed a societal organizational approach to monitor the social climate in which tobacco control efforts take place. The 1999 Mississippi Social Climate Survey of Tobacco Use and Tobacco Control was designed to measure, and ultimately monitor the fundamental position of tobacco control and tobacco use in Mississippi. The subsequent 2000 Social Climate Survey of Tobacco Use and Tobacco Control (July/August 2000) is a follow up study designed to capture similar information at both state and national levels. Gender variations were demonstrated across social norms, practices, and beliefs concerning tobacco use and tobacco control in each of the social institutions examined - females were typically more supportive of tobacco control efforts, rules, and regulations than males.

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1999, the Mississippi State Department of Health contracted with the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) to conduct an evaluation of the Mississippi Tobacco Pilot Program. As one element of the evaluation activities, we developed the Social Climate Survey as both a theoretical construct for tobacco control research. Specifically, the 2000 National Social Climate Survey was designed to measure, and ultimately monitor the fundamental position of tobacco control and tobacco use in the United

Social Climate

Much of the research on tobacco control and prevention over the past two decades has addressed, in some manner, the social norms that influence the initiation, maintenance and cessation of tobacco use (Evans et al., 1978; Flay, d'Avernas, Best, Kersell, & Ryan, 1983; Glynn, 1989; Moskowitz, 1983). In recent years, researchers have recognized the need for theory driven research on the social context in which tobacco use and tobacco control efforts take place (e.g., Duncan, Duncan, Biglan, & Ary, 1998; Tyas & Pederson, 1998). We have attempted to contribute to the understanding of tobacco control and tobacco use by introducing the Social Climate Survey as a measure of the social context in which tobacco prevention efforts occur. This institutional-based perspective stresses not individual variations in behaviors and attitudes, but rather attempts to use cross-sectional survey data for the measurement of societal norms, practices, and beliefs.

It has been well-established that social norms, and even people's perceptions of these norms affect behavior (Aronson and O'Leary, 1982-83; Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren, 1990). The identification of gender variations with regard to norms, practices and beliefs may allow researchers to better understand the circumstances that surround tobacco use and response to tobacco control efforts. Specifically, this research compared the social climate towards tobacco use and tobacco control among males and females.

METHODS

Survey design

The development of the survey was determined from an extensive review of extant measurement instruments in the tobacco prevention research. Comments and reviews were then solicited from senior scientists at the SSRC, the MSDH, the CDC's Office of Smoking and Health, and a panel of consultants hired to support the overall evaluation component of the Mississippi Tobacco Pilot Program.

Data Collection

The data collection for the 2000 National Social Climate Survey was done via telephone interviews with a simple random sample of Mississippi adults living in households with telephones. The data were collected in 2000 (July and August) by the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University. Households were selected using random digit dialing procedures. Of the households contacted, 1,503 completed the interview and 504 (25.1) refused to participate. The sampling error (binomial questions with 50/50 split) for the total data set is no larger than \pm 2.5 (95 confidence interval).

RESULTS

The purpose of this report was to illustrate variations in the social climate of Females and Males within several societal institutions toward tobacco use and tobacco control in the state of Mississippi. We developed the following heuristic approach to assist in interpreting the Social Climate Survey data.

Heuristic Classification Scheme for Assessing the Societal Dominance of Norms, Practices, and Beliefs:

Universal Universal norms, practices & beliefs
Held by the overwhelming majority of society members:
85 of 100%

Predominant

Predominant norms, practices & beliefs
Held by a pre-dominance of society members:

Contested norms, practices & beliefs Held by ½ of societies members:

33-0

Marginal norms, practices & beliefs Held by 0-34% of society members

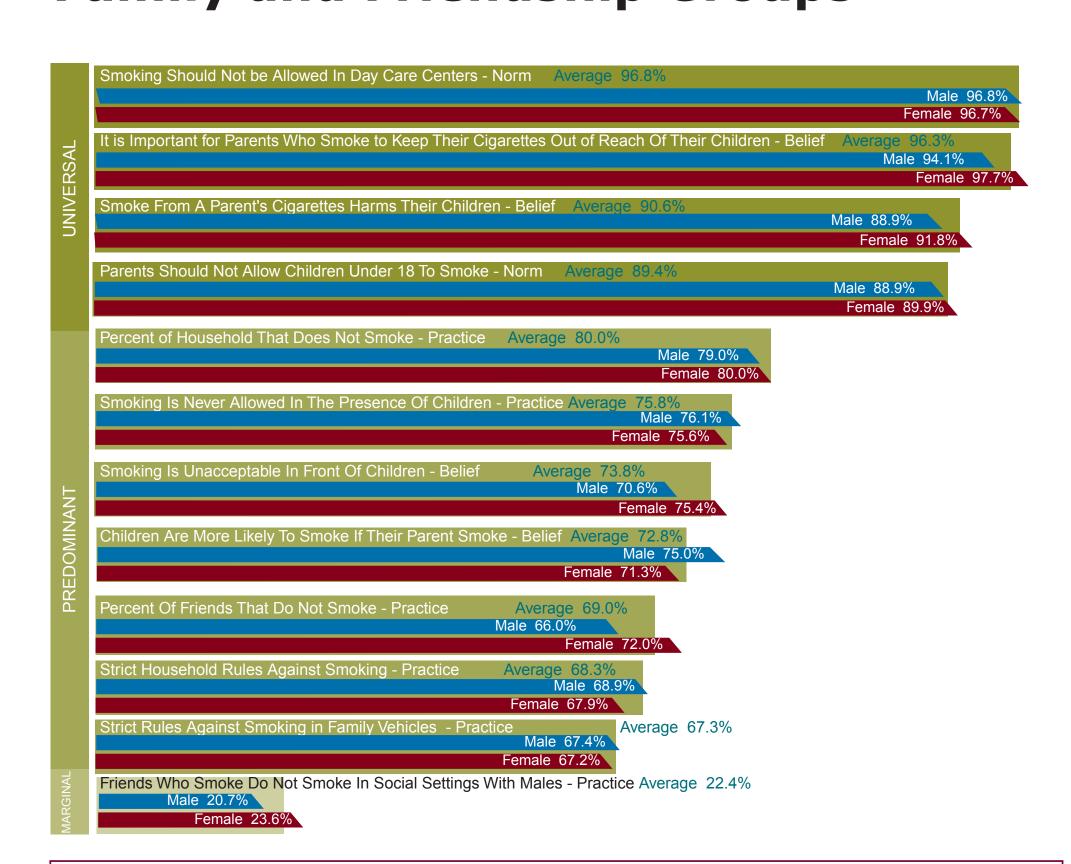
DISCUSSION

Our hypothesis that the 2000 National Social Climate Survey would reveal gender variations was supported. First, we predicted that males would have more peers who smoked cigarettes than did females, and that the physical environments of males would place fewer restrictions on smoking. In support of these predictions, males reported a higher percentage of family members, close friends, and co-workers who smoked than did females.

Second, we hypothesized that there would be gender variation in the subjective measures of the social climate, as well. Males and females were demonstrated to differ in their perceptions of the veracity of various claims by the tobacco industry, the health risks of tobacco, and the degree to which public places in the community were smoke-free. Finally, males and females held different opinions on issues of tobacco control. Females tended to be substantially more favorable towards tobacco control measures at the state-level and the community-level than males.

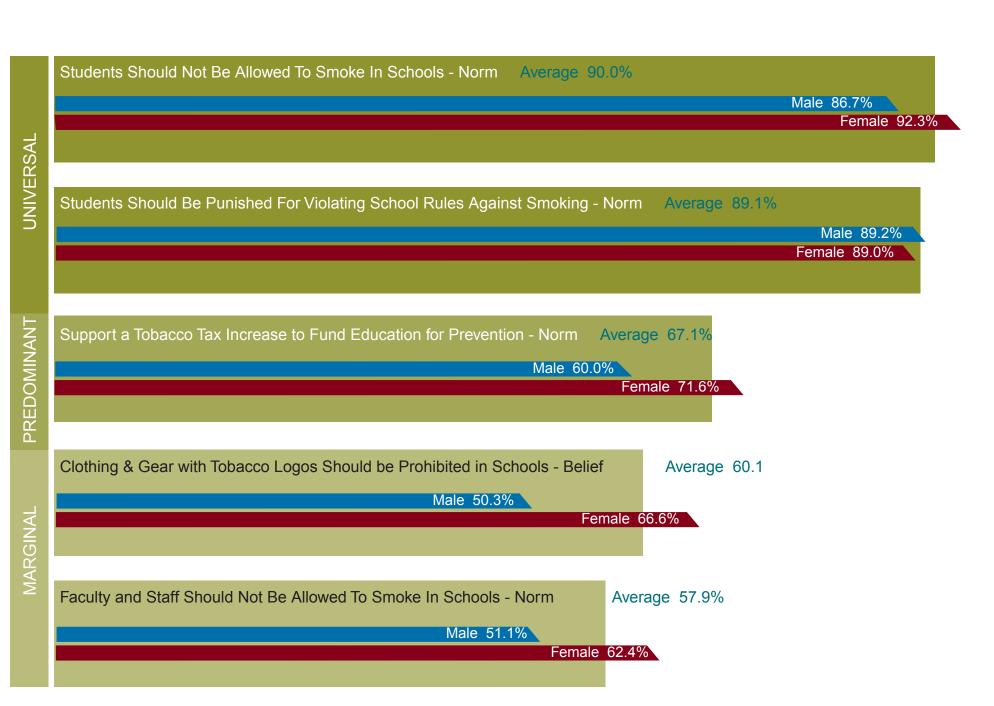
In conclusion, the 2000 National Social Climate Survey identified several gender variations in the objective and subjective social climate of tobacco control and tobacco use. Peer groups have a substantial influence on a person's perceptions of the appropriateness of certain behaviors and beliefs, an therefore the identification of these variations in the social climate is an important facet of tobacco prevention and control. People form beliefs about social norms by observing the behavior of other people and anticipating what other people think is appropriate behavior (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). That is, people observe others in order to determine what behaviors are normative in a given situation (e.g., Sherif, 1935). Because individuals use norms to guide their behavior, changing these norms, or perceptions of these norms, should change their behavior (Schultz & Oskamp, 2000).

Family and Friendship Groups



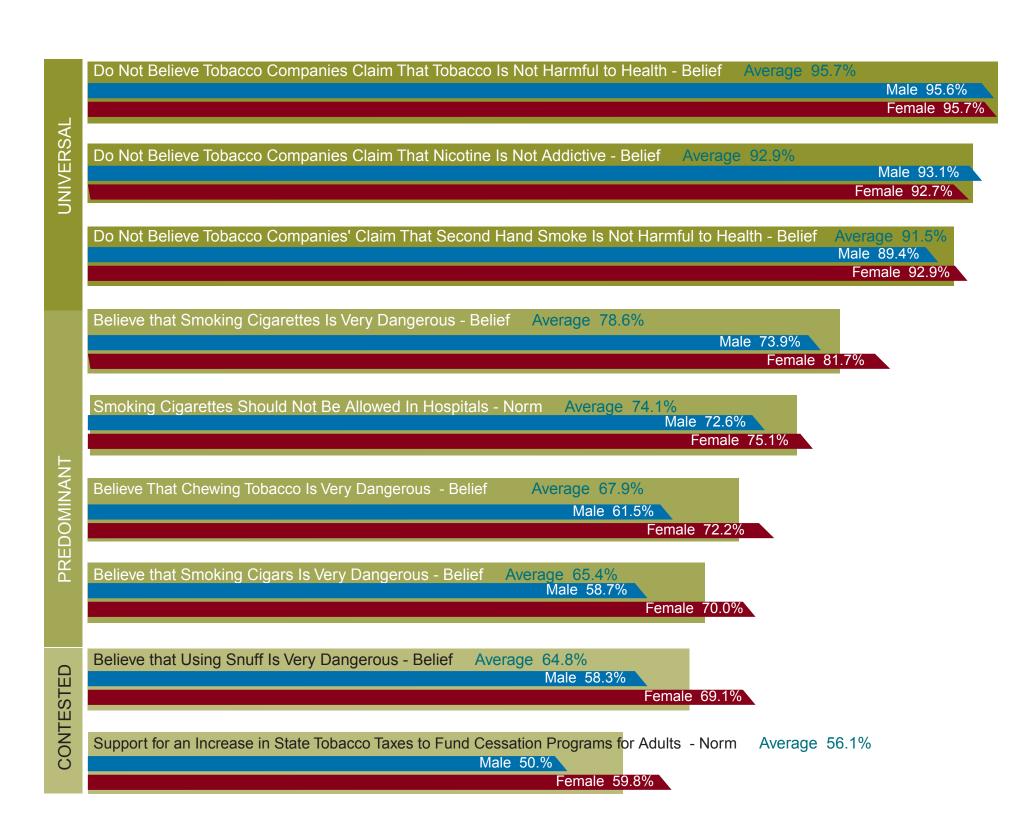
There are strong norms controlling access to tobacco products for the youth population. However, females tend to support youth access restrictions more than males.

Education



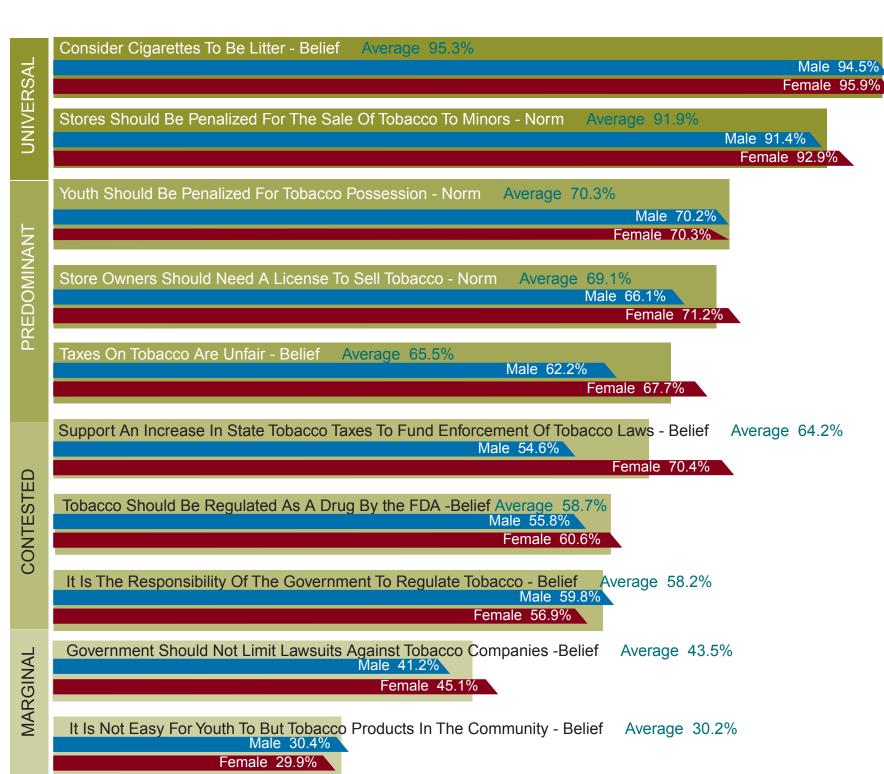
Closely following in importance of determining appropriate norms, practices, and beliefs is the consistency of limiting tobacco access in schools. Support for some of these restrictions, however, was weaker among males.

Health and Medical Care

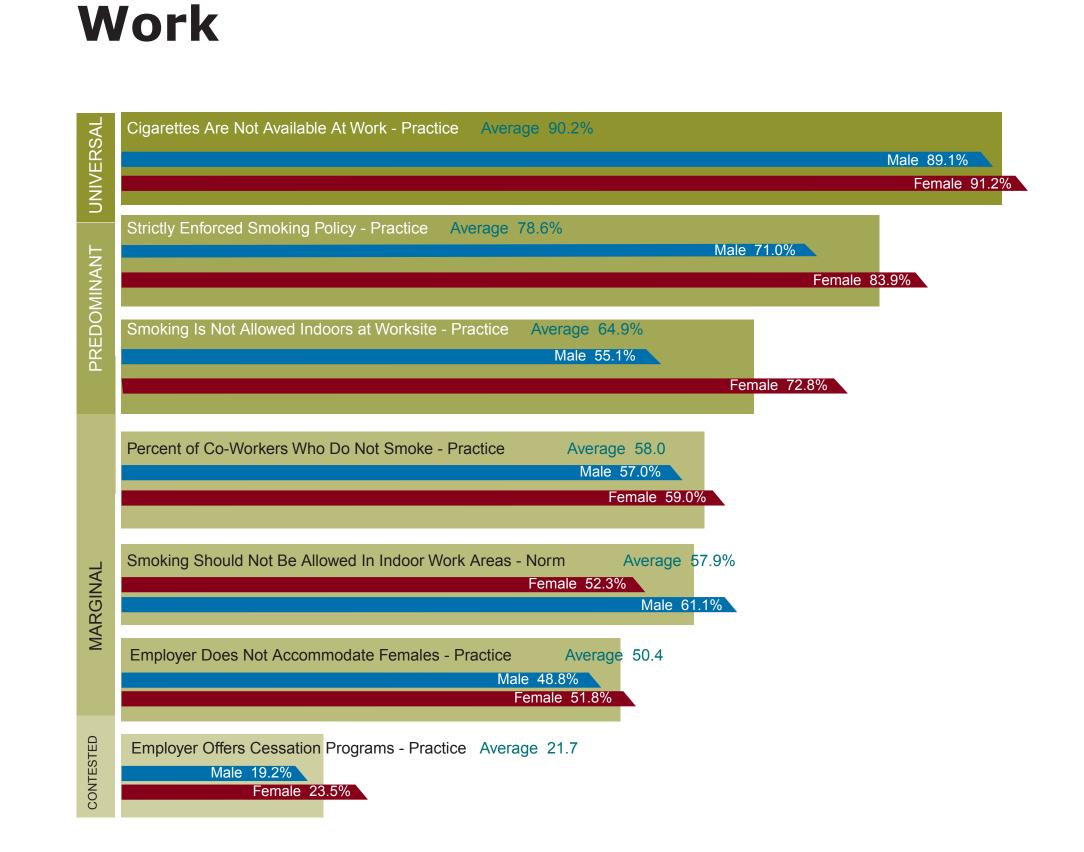


Not surprisingly most people believe that smoking should not be allowed in hospitals - however, males are somewhat less likely to support this norm than females. Beliefs about the danger of tobacco use are widespread. Males, however, are less likely to accept the health risks of tobacco use and environmental tobacco smoke than females.

Government and Political Order

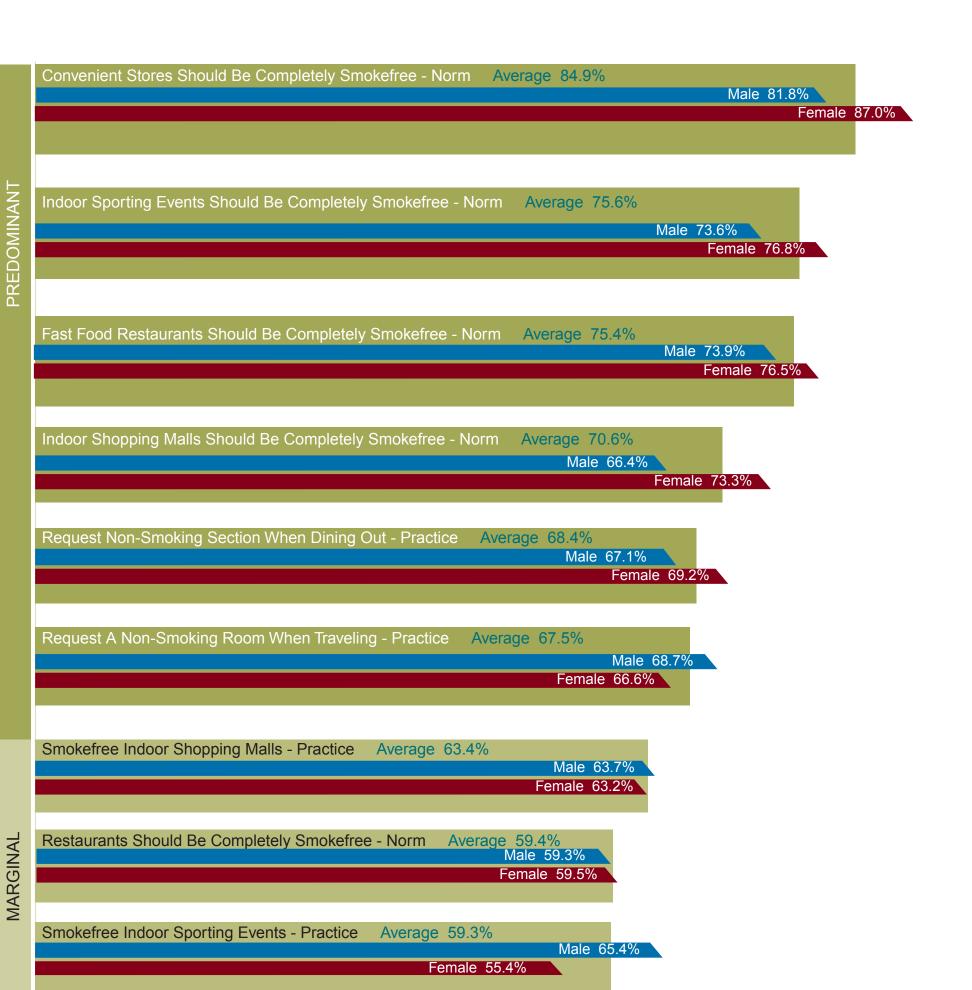


Support for enforcement of laws banning youth access tobacco and penalties for violating these laws emerged as strong norms. However, there was some variation between males and females over the issue of laws restricting access to tobacco and enforcement of these laws.

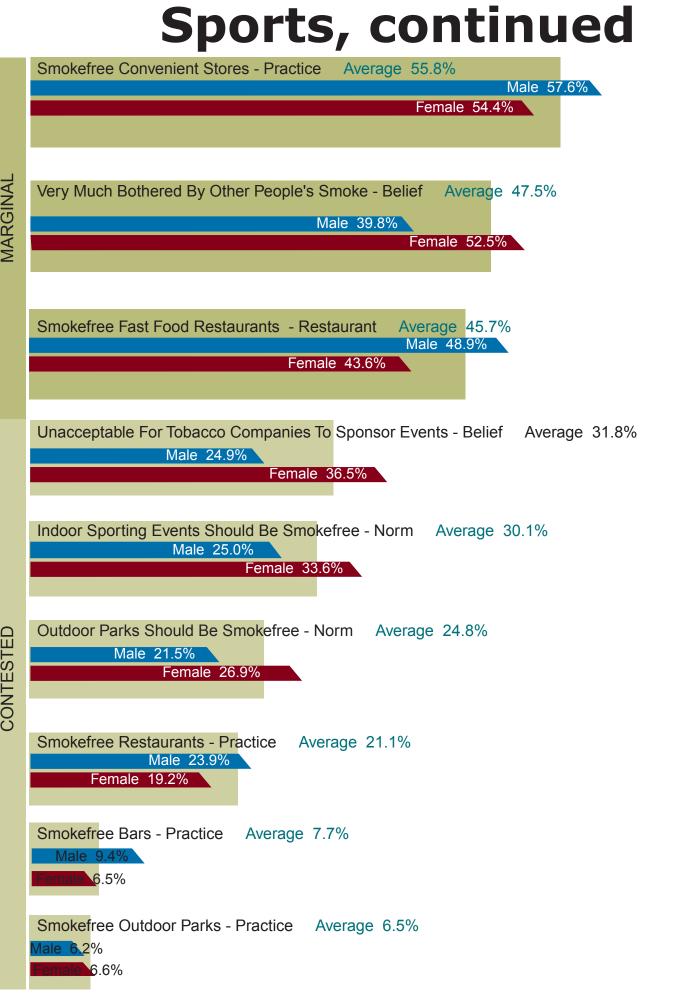


Strict bans on smoking in work areas and the support for employer's smoking policies were heavily endorsed as universal norms. Although males also tended to support these policies, fewer males were employed at worksites with strict smoking policies.

Recreation, Leisure and Sports

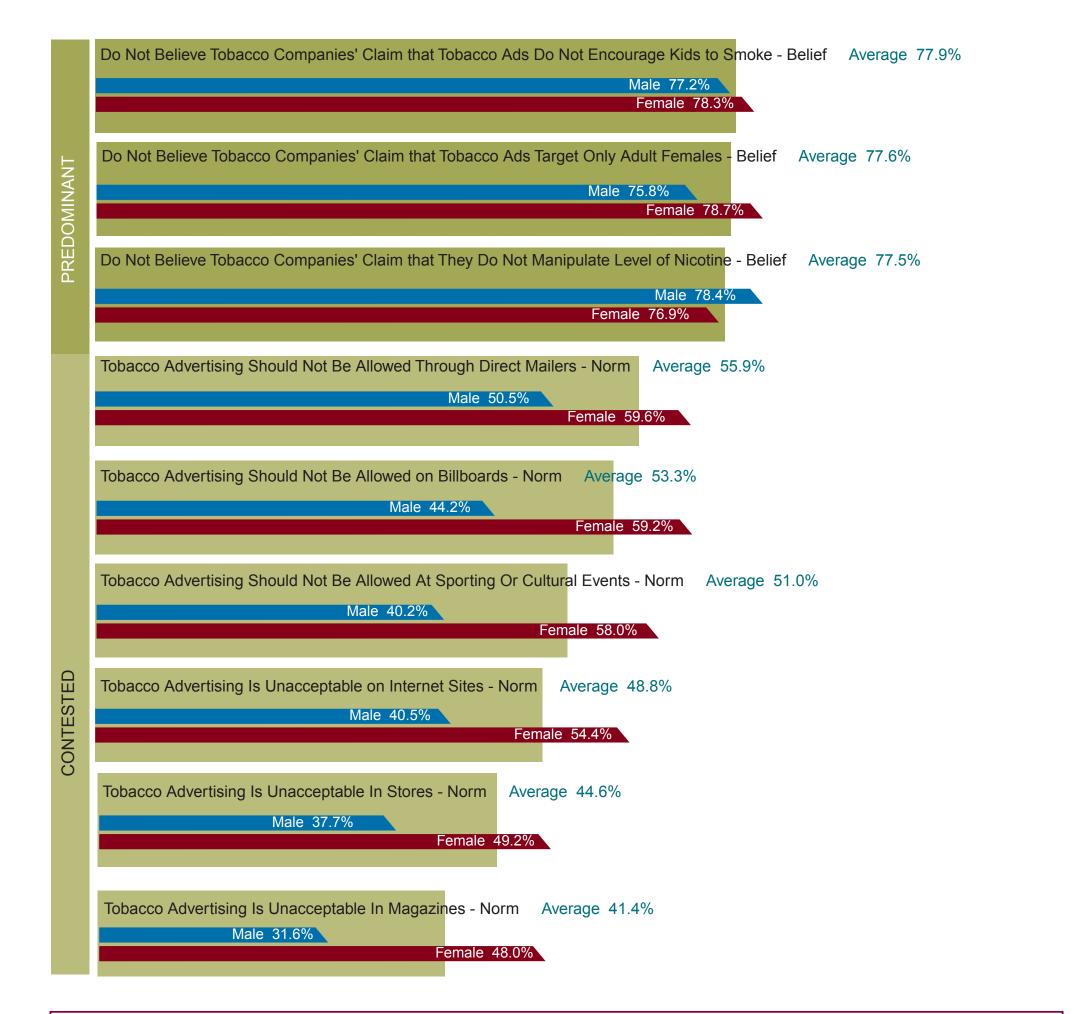


Recreation, Leisure and Sports, continued



The institutional arenas of recreation, leisure, and sport appears to be lagging in the evolution of strong tobacco control norms, particularly among males.

Mass Culture and Communication



There is substantial skepticism towards the tobacco companies' marketing claims. However, males are more likely to accept these claims than females. Support for restrictions on advertising are more contested, with substantial variation between males and females.

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