



Anthropological investigation and analysis of the significance of Fresh Air from the Outside and into English and Scottish private Homes

Executive Summary

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Executive summary: England and Scotland

It is by people's behaviour at home that the significance of Fresh Air From Outside and into the Home (FAFOH) can be identified. English and Scottish occupants' habits and perspectives concerning FAFOH are investigated in this study. The importance of FAFOH practices has been read out in **3 dimensions in the analysis**:

- One *functional* (layer-practical characteristics)
- One *aesthetical* (bodily and sensuous characteristics) and
- One *social* (solicitude & control of impressions).

These 3 dimensions are all part of the importance of FAFOH and constitute its value for people using FAFOH.

The analysis is showing that the importance of FAFOH is especially noticed in 'transitions' (coming from work->home, vacation->coming back, summer->winter, a night's sleep->morning). This is in accordance with knowledge gained from anthropological research on rituals and practices, showing the importance of particular and often routinized actions in transition from one phase to another. These transitions often reflect identity aspects such as the feeling of freedom and the need of control, here the ability to control your own home so as to enable you to control and maintain your family's health. It is a kind of caring when control is about managing activities that form part of the air intake, no matter whether it is a technical system or the use of doors and windows. To all informants FAFOH indicates a bodily openness and inclusion of the surrounding world. This is in accordance with phenomenologic research, which indicates that we are in this world through our body and it is by this that we create consciousness of our existence, our 'being-in-the-world'. To 'enjoy the breeze' will in this light represent the joy of being in the world. To have a 'good, fresh smell' in your home is in phenomenological optics the wish for being alive, not crumble, but remain open to the world and still be in a personal and physical development, in progression. To let in the fresh air into the children's rooms becomes a welcome of the morning, greeting the world through a feeling of co-existence with the surroundings. To have a 'good, fresh smell' in your home is vital to all, *but what appears more popular in England and Scotland is the use of consumer products like synthetic 'air freshener'.*

Co-existing with our surroundings implies that we are part of our environment - for better or worse - and must deal with its specificities. Apart from the south of England the rest of the country is known for its rainy weather, so it is of little surprise that the English informants seem to air out less in the cold, northern parts than in the south. Having said this, I wish to stress that it is *never* the aim to generalize on the basis of qualitative data. Still, this is the general impression from the field studies.

The use of FAFOH is:

1. **habitual and ritualized** (you do the same things with respect to air depending on the season, context and the house)
2. **bodily determined, a purely sensuous experience** (smells 'are in the nose'; individual comfort zones; to enjoy the breeze) - representing a body aesthetics
3. **socio-culturally determined**, among other things because FAFOH may be connected with risks (fear of Radon, burglary or water damage) and with certain taboos, since



letting fresh air IN also is about letting certain odours OUT (from wc & bedrooms). For this reason '**impression management**' is required for the odour backdrop in the home.

It seems like the FAFOH field has 'Openers' (mostly women) and 'Closers' (mostly men). The general picture is, however, that the women tend to care for the airing out practices of the rooms, in particular the children's rooms. The home is generally a female domain when the topic is the health of the family/inhabitants. The men stress the importance of recognizing individual bodily comfort zones and personal habits as the outset for FAFOH practices.

As expected regional thermal differences appear in England and Scotland, resulting in heating being of more concern in the colder regions and thus windows and doors are only opened for short periods. The insulation in the house and how old the house is also influence on airing practices. This illustrates that airing habits are performed in dialogue with weather and the house itself. 2 English children have participated in the study, and the other informants refer to actions of their children, mostly whether or not the children remember to air out. Some do, most don't.

The most prominent perspectives of the interviews can be stated within the 3 mentioned dimensions – the functional, aesthetical (body & senses) and emotional (social) characteristics – of FAFOH. These characteristics cannot be considered isolated from the context they are in and it is, therefore, important to look at them in connection with the meaning of *the home*. The importance of the home as framework for the family's health is playing a role for our use of FAFOH, just as the social importance of the home in form of being an 'odour backdrop' will lead to special FAFOH practices.

In a way, FAFOH is not directly about "*fresh*" or "*air*", but covers 'the good indoor climate', which involves many other things than just 'fresh air':

The freshness is about...

- anti-smelling, odour backdrop, bodily and sensuous (sensing the world & the moment)
- to consider the health of the whole family (get rid of bedroom smells, dust & bacteria)
- enjoyment (individual needs)
- free breeze, flow (freedom)

The air is about...

- Smell & sounds in the context (from nature or the city, the joy of following the seasons)
- Technique (systems to control the air so you will not have to think about airing – i.e. need of security, to control your windows & doors)
- Control (to monitor the home + cleanliness/health in it)
- Practical function (cleaning).

The following outline illustrates the 3 dimensions of FAFOH and the above mentioned points and has made a division into 'sociality & aesthetics' (soft values, not measurable) and 'functional characteristics', respectively. The 2 first mentioned are best understood as individual, subjective dimensions against the functional characteristics of FAFOH that cover the more measurable characteristics of FAFOH (although the need of FAFOH's functionality is, of course, quite individual). The borders are not sharp.



<i>Sociality & aesthetics</i>	<i>Functional characteristics</i>
Anti-smell (smells can be embarrassing); body & senses (our unique sense, body aesthetics & body comfort zones)	Smells & sounds in the context (like bird song or the distant sounds of neighbours talking)
Caring for the family health (out with bad smell & stuffiness); cleanliness=health	Technique –regulation of the indoor climate (Heat/coldness; humidity/dryness)
Pure enjoyment	Control (wish for control /monitoring of the heating bill?)
Free breeze and flow, freedom	Practical assistance (dries eg. the floor)

Most of the above mentioned aspects are framed by *the home* as a framework for 'impression management', front & back stage practices (those activities that reflect what we do, if we are by ourselves or if we have guests), the social construction of smell – corresponding to the wish for controlling how we want to conceive/sense our own home and how we want visitors to conceive/sense us and our home: Your home is your *smell*!

The knowledge and insights from the study may be the basis for new understandings of the importance of fresh air and the use of it among quite ordinary people. Sociality, body and senses, and everyday practices are important aspects for FAFOH and understanding these dimensions will ensure a more holistic understanding of FAFOH.

