SMOKING IDENTITY AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUNG ADULTS

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BACKGROUND AND STUDY OBJECTIVE

- Many young adults do not consider themselves cigarette smokers despite having smoked in the previous 30 days.
- Efforts to reduce cigarette smoking and related health problems may not effectively address those who do not identify as smokers.
- The odds of being a non-identifying smoker are higher among ethnic minorities including African Americans.
- We explored experiences and reasons for non-identifying smoking identity among African American young adults in California, US.

METHODS

- Data obtained as part of a larger study about perceptions of tobacco denormalization efforts in this population.
- We analyzed the narrative data from 8 African American young adults non-identifying cigarette smokers.

PARTICIPANTS

- 8 African American young adults (18-25) in the San Francisco Bay Area.
- Recruited on the street, through Facebook advertising, and by referrals.
- 5 males, 2 females and 1 genderqueer.

PROCEDURES

- In-depth in-person interviews.
- Interview topics included: participants’ background, experiences as a member of a marginalized group, personal tobacco use and smoking identity, beliefs about tobacco, and the social unacceptability of tobacco.
- Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, and transcripts were linked to ATLAS.ti to facilitate pattern-level analysis.
- The code list was extensive and included codes like smoking identity, beliefs about tobacco, and the social unacceptability of tobacco.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None of the authors have a conflict of interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research and preparation of this poster were supported by grant 22RT-0093 by the Tobacco-Related Disease Research Program (TRDRP)

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FINDINGS

- On average, participants smoked cigarettes on 10.75 days in the past 30 days, compared with 24.50 days reported by those participants who self-identified as smokers.
- The mean number of cigarettes per day reported by the non-identifying cigarette smokers was 1.75.
- Analyses revealed four primary themes which can be seen as potential grounds for rejecting a smoker identity by some current cigarette smokers.

- "When I hear just the word smoker alone, when I’ve heard this mentioned, [it] somebody that’s addicted, I think in a strong sense of the word, to nicotine. … ‘He [My dad] doesn’t warn me away from [tobacco], because he takes it too granted that we’re already straying away from it, we’re not gonna become addicted, things like that. I think my mom understands that… at least for her, at her age, when she was my age, she used to smoke pretty socially, pretty often. So she understands it’s a social thing. It’s like coming of age, whatever.’ [P40]

- "I always associated tobacco with slavery because that’s, at least in my region, where it was being produced. Who was producing it? Slaves. But I always linked tobacco companies back to that. And they’re making billions in profits. And they’ve been called out… So I have a very negative view of tobacco companies.’ [P3]

- "I definitely consider myself a smoker. I guess with tobacco particularly, it’s hard to place my exact feelings on it, because I’ve never… I’ve tried specifically cigarettes before I started smoking weed too, but never felt like, ‘Oh, I need to have another one. I need to have another one.’ Or never felt a specific attachment to cigarettes or tobacco per se. It was always more about my attachment to weed…That would then bring in the tobacco. So how do I… I guess I like that it feels like a supplement to my other habits.” [P4]

CONCLUSIONS

- Results suggest that African American young adult non-identifying smokers should be recognized and targeted as a distinct group for tobacco prevention and cessation.
- The importance of marijuana smoking identity for African American non-identifying smokers should be taken into account.
- Prevention efforts can help people to recognize their smoking identity, assess aspects of their addiction (physiological and psychological) and identify personal motives to quit smoking.

- "I know with the smoking [there’s] like a stereotype. Like, “Oh, he smokes. He’s a bad person. He’s gonna get heart disease, cancer. … ‘cause it’s been advertised like that so many times. You feelin’ me? But at the same time, I still smoke. When I smoke cigarettes and weed, I don’t see it as kinda stereotypic kinda smoking, I don’t think, “Oh, I’m this person.” I’m just smoking.” [P7]