E3-21: Difference in Smoking Identity and Smoking Behavior Among College Students

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Abstract:  
**Introduction:** Although researchers and health care practitioners tend to employ standard categories to classify smokers and nonsmokers, recent research suggests that individuals who smoke may employ a variety of self-definitions regarding their smoking behavior. The purpose of this study was to examine smoking identity and smoking behavior among college students. Specifically, the relationship between self-identifying as a smoker, non-smoker, occasional smoker, or social smoker and number of days smoked in the past month was explored.  

**Method(s):** Data were obtained during a campus-wide electronic health assessment of randomly selected full-time students (N=741). Participants completed the National College Health Assessment. Standard measures were used to assess current smoking status (at least once in past 30 days) and a single item assessing smoking identity.  

**Results:** More females (61.3%) completed the survey compared to males. There was no difference in the smoking rates between males and females. There was a positive correlation between self described smoking identity (e.g., smoker, social smoker, occasional smoker, and non-smoker) and the number of days smoked in the last 30 days (Spearman’s rho=0.678, p<0.01). However, data suggested that there may only be three distinct classes of individuals not four: (1)smokers,(2)social/occasional smokers, and (3)non-smokers. There was discrepancy between smoking-identity and cigarette use. Of the current smokers (at least once in the past 30 days; n=121), twenty percent of them identified themselves as non-smokers. Individuals classified as current smokers who considered themselves non-smokers actually smoked between one and five days.  

**Discussion & Conclusions:** This study didn't find a difference between social and occasional smokers in the number of cigarettes smoked in the past month. This suggests that the two groups may not be distinct when assessing smoking behaviors. For college students, what defines the smoking identity may be the context in which it occurs. Our study also found that smoking identity and smoking behaviors do not always coincide with one another. Therefore, researchers and health care providers must carefully assess these concepts in order to provide appropriate prevention and cessation interventions.  

**Abstract History:**  

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