

***How can I say that I am a man if I don't smoke?
A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Tobacco Addiction and the Construction of Toxic & Cool
Masculinities among Young Algerian Adolescents***

كيف يمكنني أن أقول أنني رجل إذا كنت لا أدخن؟
تحليل لسانيات اجتماعية لإدمان التبغ وبناء الذكورة السامة والرائجة بين المراهقين الجزائريين الشباب

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Article abstract:

The crux of this scrutiny is to explore to what extent addiction to nicotine or ‘smoking’ is associated with the construction of masculinity by Algerian adolescents. Boys often indulge themselves in smoking to negotiate and construct their masculinity which per se stipulates being powerful, tough and risk-taking. The study unveils smoking addictions by young students which tend to uphold the paradoxes between hegemonic masculinity and healthy masculinity. Smoking inter alia serves a means of fueling normative masculinity which is anti- authoritarian and boisterous, and transgressing dominant feminine constructions.

Key words: Adolescents; Algeria; Masculinity; Smoking

ملخص المقال :

المهدف من هذا البحث هو استكشاف إلى أي مدى يرتبط إدمان النيكوتين أو "التدخين" ببناء الذكورة من قبل المراهقين الجزائريين. غالباً ما ينغمس الفتيان في التدخين للتفاوض وبناء ذكورتهم التي تستلزم بحذ ذاتها أن يكونوا أقوياء وأصلا ب ومخاطرين. تكشف الدراسة عن إدمان التدخين لدى الطلاب الشباب الذي يميل إلى دعم التناقضات بين الذكورة المهيمنة والذكورة الصحية. يخدم التدخين من بين أمور أخرى كوسيلة لتأجيج الذكورة المعيارية التي تتصف بمناهضة السلطة والجموح، وتجاوز البنى الأنثوية المهيمنة.

كلمات مفتاحية: الجزائر؛ الذكورة؛ المراهقون؛ التدخين.

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Introduction

Research has been proliferated so widely and rapidly to highlight the influence on hegemonic constructions of masculinity on boys' physical, mental, emotional and sexual health and well-being. (Connell, 2000). The link between masculinity and tobacco consumption has become an essential theme to research in current gender studies, specifically as part of adolescent construction of identity (Kodriati et al., 2019). In North Africa and the Middle East, comparing smoking behaviours identify significant gender differences that conform to society-induced expressions of masculinity and femininity. This constructs tobacco use as a behaviour pertaining essentially to men, which contradicts traditional values related to feminine expression. Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity offers a backdrop to explore competing pressures influencing young men as they negotiate between dominant school-based masculine ideals and health risks. This theoretical perspective acknowledges that masculinity is not a stable or static biological concept, but rather a complex social process that differs across different cultures, historical time frames and socio-relational environments. Hegemonic masculinity works through producing a culturally dominant form of masculinity that subordinates women as well as different masculinities through a range of social practices.

Arguably the most recent rethinking of hegemonic masculinity is that of Yang (2020) who stresses its operation as a "consensual relation of domination" where force and consent are employed to subordinate alternative masculinities by implementations not only of violence but also persuasion. This reconceptualization focuses on the way in which masculine power is sustained not just through overt forms of dominance, but by producing a cultural consent that makes some forms of masculinity seem natural and desirable. Aligning with this framework, smoking appears as a sign of and practice towards masculine authenticity. The value of this research is not just in the investigation of tobacco addiction as a health issue, but its interest in smoking as a performative act by which young men produce and reproduce their gender identity (Robertson, 2007). Smoking is deemed as an act of 'performance', enabling young men to perform masculinity through embodied and displayed cultural signifiers.

Contemporary hegemonic masculinity includes an inability to communicate emotions except through anger, unwillingness to appear weak or dependent on others, devaluation of women and feminine in men (Kupers, 2005) which are striking in their implication for the symbolic meanings attached to smoking. Smoking becomes intimately related with displays of risk-taking, emotional unflappability, and autonomy—central attributes of normative male identity. Smoking can be considered as masculine capital which builds social hierarchies and group membership among adolescent peer groups. When young men adopt tobacco consumption to negotiate peer relationships and make a claim to their place in masculine hierarchies, Bourdieu's (1986) vision of social capital has gendered dimensions. Smoking rituals such as sharing cigarettes, demonstrating smoking proficiency, or engaging in conversation about smoking open up venues for young men to act out and struggle over their masculinities within social settings. The cultural meaning of smoking is not limited to the rational decision-making of an individual but becomes more a matter of social belonging and the identity construction when constantly testing one's masculine sway in exchange relationships with other men.

1. Literature Review

Research that dissects the intersection between masculinity and smoking behaviour has exploded over the last three decades, with findings indicating that men perceive levels of smoking being related to such masculine traits/ideals as power, emotional stability, control and autonomy (Kodriati et al., 2019). A scoping review found that differences in smoking rates between men and women were consistently more prevalent among men across many cultural contexts, and was frequently attributed to processes of masculine identity formation (Robertson et al., 2019).

The experience of Indonesia offers particularly useful comparisons with Algeria. Among Indonesian adolescent boys, for example, many declared that “if I don’t smoke I’m not a real man,” confirming the direct link between tobacco and authentic masculinity legitimacy (Ng et al., 2007). In a sample of Chinese young adults, use of traditional cigarettes was also significantly related to masculinity performance and gender system maintenance (Chen et al., 2023). These cross-cultural results imply that the interrelation between smoking and masculinity extends beyond national or cultural borders, although at the same time it is localized in culturally specific ways. For instance, in studies on rural masculinity, conventional masculine behaviors have been found to be fraught compensatory strategies in the face of academic struggles; smoking comes across as a layer of resistant defiance against authorities (Annis et al., 2020). This becomes increasingly salient in contexts where young men have few opportunities to corroborate masculine competence through the traditional route of achievement.

Connell’s hegemonic masculinity theory has received significant theoretical elaboration in recent years (Yang, 2020). The reframing challenges the image of being hegemonic masculinity by its mechanism of domination, and not because of their masculine qualities. This approach understands that it is by a “balance of forces” that hegemonic masculinity dominates and subordinates but does not eradicate alternative modalities by which to gain access to this position permitting “daily contestation” so long as men retain overall dominance (Messerschmidt, 2019). Such theoretical development is substantial for understanding adolescent smoking, as it facilitates acknowledging that, among other things, young men may resist and reproduce normative masculinities at the same time. In terms of smoking, this is playing out with boys who use tobacco to feel empowered while putting their health and education prospects at risk. Acknowledgment of multiple masculinities involved in masculinity politics enables the theory to make sense of how smoking can be perceived as resistance against adult control and conformity with peer norms.

The results of recent epidemiological studies report that Algeria is confronted with serious tobacco-related public health problems. In Algeria, studies have investigated smokeless tobacco use and smoking and found high excess risks of cancers attributable to tobacco consumption particularly among male population (Cherif et al., 2020). Prevalence of cigarette and smoking Studies among university students in the Arab world have reported alarmingly high prevalence rates for both cigarette and water pipe use, with substantial male preponderance (Abu-Rmeileh et al., 2018).

A previous systematic literature review on the smoking prevalence among Arab countries report that one of the most important influences for smoking uptake was from peers, where non-users become users through “friends’ imitation” and group legitimization to facilitate substance use (Almutairi 2020). Evidence from studies conducted in the Eastern Mediterranean region reveal that non-users can become users only by friends’ imitation, and young people may get involved in substance use just to be accepted by their friend’s group thus emphasizing social influence as a crucial factor through which tobacco habits are adopted within peer networks.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

This study exerts the integrated theoretical framework of Connell's (2005) hegemonic masculinity theory and Wenger's (1998) community of practice theory. Hegemonic masculinity provides the macro-theoretical perspective through which to consider how hegemonic masculine gender ideals shape adolescent behaviour, whilst a community of practice approach provides a micro-analytical framework for considering how such ideals can be negotiated and practiced within particular friendship group contexts. By this token, Yang's (2020) theorization of hegemonic masculinity as functioning through "consensual domination" is useful in making sense of the ways that smoking practices are naturalized among young male groups. Instead of conceiving hegemonic masculinity as a fixed and stable set of qualities, this model understands it as a negotiation of power that occurs in various ways according to the context and culture.

The community of practice model supplements this view, by drawing attention to the construction of gender identities in terms of 'differential membership' in communities of practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992). From this vantage view, people belong to more than one community at the same time, and that enables conflicts and contradictions in identity construction. In the school community of practice, normative expectations about appropriate conduct may revolve around achievement and compliance, whereas peer communities of practice may reward risk or consciously disrespectful behaviours. We adopt the community of practice framework which allows for a tremendous breadth of coverage of the salient aspects of how males and females come to readjust the meanings of femininity and masculinity, to shape and construct their gender identities; not as a bundle of fixed binary rules but as a tractable practice to negotiate the meaning in order to convey the *status quo* of the social actors those are interested in playing part of the social negotiation of meaning. The community of practice plays a pivotal role in cogitating about the pliable nature of an individual's gender identity; inasmuch as individuals are social actors who are constantly striving to position themselves in a wide range of different communities with different norms and values.

Wenger's (1998) community of practice theory offers a complementary lens to examine how gendered identities are negotiated in particular social settings. Emphasis in the theory on "mutual engagement, negotiation of a joint enterprise and shared repertoire" also sheds light on how smoking practices are bound up to peer networks of younger adolescents. More recent uses of the framework in gender and education show how particular identity constructions are enacted through educational contexts, creating informal communities with specific norms and activities that play out in local contexts (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992). The theory of communities of practice is especially valuable to the learning, and maintenance of smoking, as well as its meaning within an adolescent peer group.

3. Data Collection

In-depth interviews and group discussions were recorded to investigate the intersection of tobacco addiction and processes of masculinities construction in young Algerian students. The study in question was carried out in two schools that were selected intentionally-a middle school for adolescents aged 13 to 15 and a high-school students higher secondary school for students aged 16 to 17; these schools being representative of the varied social backgrounds as well as the various Algerian geographic areas. The ethnographic field work also embraced extensive participant observations in a variety of temporal and spatial settings in the school environments (e.g., informal break areas) and peripheral places where students gathered outside of school hours.

Extensive interviews were the main instrument exerted to explore young males' subjective experiences, lives stories and narratives involving identity construction: a total of seventeen interviews with boys between 13-17 years divided to regular (n=8), occasional (n=5) and non-smokers (n=4). I supplemented these individual interviews with recorded discussions conducted in groups to add another layer of ethnographic depth that

would vividly capture how meaning making occurs collectively, the importance of peers in meaning constructions, and the social construction of smoking masculinity within a group context. Three focus groups was held, classified by smoking status to promote more open dialogue and to minimize social desirability bias. These discussions utilized ethnographic group interview techniques to engage in storytelling, cultural sharing, and collective interpretation of smoking, peer pressure and masculine identity construction.

4. Content Analysis of Interview Extracts

The analysis adopts a combination of ethnographic analytic techniques and systematic qualitative content analysis procedures to analyze the cultural idioms as well discursive forms of construction arrange in the data. Drawing upon ethnographic analytic process with interwoven techniques of qualitative content analysis, the interpretation progressed in a systematic exploration of transcribed interviews, field notes, and recorded group discussions. All interviews were in Algerian Arabic dialect as representing the natural language repertoires of the participants and enabling natural expression of their experience and views. However, because the primary aim of this study was to focus on how tobacco addiction is related to processes of masculine identity construction and not linguistic analysis *per se*, the interviews were transcribed directly into English. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used for systematic content analysis in reviewing the occurrence, distribution and contextual relevance of key ideas and themes throughout the data base. Implicit content analysis reveals the latent meanings, cultural underpinnings, and discursive techniques employed by participants to negotiate their identities as smokers and rationales for their conduct within larger cultural landscapes that privileged masculinity, health, and social compliance.

A systematic qualitative content analysis of the provided excerpts exhibits several recurring themes that account for complex interrelations between construction of masculinities, peer pressure and smoking behaviors among Algerian adolescents. The analysis exposes both manifest content (explicit statements) and latent content (underlying cultural meanings and assumptions) that illustrate the multi-dimensional character of smoking-related identity work which tally with findings from cross-cultural research on patterns of adolescent initiation and maintenance of smoking.

Theme 1: Masculine Identity Construction and Smoking Dependency

The extracts provide a number of clear statements that directly correlate smoking with the confirmation of one's manliness: for instance, in the rhetorical question "*How can I say that I am a man if I don't smoke?*" which reflects the clearest one of this correlation between smoking and masculinity that exists in recent research. This interrogative logic of the masculinity sets up smoking as a condition for being perceived or laying claim to oneself through some signifying gesture—beyond "*I feel I'm masculine*" and onto the performative act of "*I say myself, man*". The rhetorical quality of this question reckons some common knowledge which says that a kind of masculinity without smoking is self-contradictory or beyond articulation. To some extent, this concurs with the quote above "*I cannot feel that I am a man if I do not smoke*" establishing an interconnected pattern in which smoking is represented as something that makes someone feels like or be a man - both internally and externally. Together, these phrases exemplify what content analysis literature refers to as "meaning condensation," or the reduction of complex identity processes to a single behavioral demand (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Males imagine masculinity in purely smoking terms, indicating complete incorporation of hegemonic masculine norms to associate smoking with real manhood.

The shift between feelings "*I don't feel myself as a man*" and uttering "*how can I say that I am a man*", thus, demonstrates the performative dimension of becoming a man: one first must experience oneself internally,

but only finally registration by society at large confirms masculine identity. This is consistent with Indonesian work that picture that adolescents state: "if I do not smoke, I am not a real man" (Ng et al., 2007), but goes further in demonstrating how identity as a male is mediated over the private world of experience and public stage of performance.

Theme 2: Peer Group Conformity and Social Exclusion Anxiety

The statement *"all my friends smoke and I cannot comply the rules of our group"* The phrase *"my friends all smoke and I don't fit in the rules of our group"* clearly suggests that smoking is a structured aspect of membership to the social network rather than an idiosyncratic taste, in line with significant evidence on the crucial role of peer groups for adolescents' initiation and persistence of tobacco use (Hall & Valente, 2007; Kobus, 2003). When the participant refers to "rules," it intimates formalized peer-group expectations, and to "comply" suggests that participation is compulsory and not discretionary. This reflects what has been referred to in more recent literature as 'peer conformity pressure' in smoking behavior initiation. This discussion falls in line with a growing body of evidence that the onset of smoking is rooted in processes of social conformity transmitted through peer networks where membership in a group is made conditional upon behavioral concordance with existing norms regarding smoking. The fear regarding the challenges to masculine competence are evident if we look at an extract were a friend tell him that *"if I am afraid and I cannot handle a cigarette this means that I am still young and this fear differentiates us and females"*. This construction illustrates what the studies of peer influence (Arnett, 2007) refer to as indirect coercion by challenge, in which membership is contingent upon a person proving him or herself through acts of bravery and physical prowess. The definition of smoking-being immature and feminine-defines the double threat of exclusion and magnifies social pressure.

Evidence from other cultural contexts endorses these findings as studies in Turkey and China reveal that peer relation pressures are strong predictors adolescent smoking behaviours across educational settings (Özmen & Dogan, 2024). The conversation reflects what social contagion models describe as both modeling and direct pressure processes acting in tandem through peer networks to sustain group solidarity on the basis of smoking.

Theme 3: Health Knowledge versus Social Pressure Paradox

The contradiction in *"I play sport regularly and I smoke because this will refresh my mood and it did not affect negatively my healthy habits"* exemplifies complex cognitive dissonance management tactics which are typical for current adolescent smoking practices. Such rationalization provides an example of what has been described through content analysis as "meaning making under contradiction" by which subjects generate cumulative storylines in the face of contradictory actions and knowledge systems.

And when followed by the rhetorical question *"how can I say that I am a man if I don't smoke?"*, this motif demonstrates how structural knowledge is relegated to identity imperatives. The participant recognizes his engagement in sports and also is intending to initiate smoking at the same time, indicating that masculine ranching claims precede health concerns. This is consistent with previous findings from Pakistan on adolescent smoking prevalence, where it was found that health knowledge alone had not been able to deter the initiation of smoking when social pressures were strong (Ahmed et al., 2024).

Theme 4: Family Authority Resistance and Generational Dynamics

Complex negotiations with family authority are illustrated by comments such as, *"my elder brother will be annoyed if he knows that I smoke...He also smokes and he tries to prevent me hhhh"* and, *"my parents as well prohibit me especially my mother to smoke but this is life and reality we man cannot obey all the time."* These comments mirror generational masculine identity construction in which adult male smoking is

accepted while adolescent smoking engenders family conflict, which resonate with the large body of research on intergenerational influences of smoking and authority in the family. Studies of intergenerational smoking patterns reveal that family smoking behaviour is used to establish complex power relations that encourage and inhibit youth cigarette use. In this sense, Kandel et al. (2015) based on their research of national U.S. survey data (2004–2012) find that parental smoking effects are strong and robust after control for important parent and adolescent factors, highlighting the significance of parental nondependent past year smoking and former smoking as predictors of adolescent smoking. But their findings expose the paradox I have presented in this study: Smoking parents frequently exercise authority to prevent smoking in their children while they model a conflicting behaviour. Along this line of thinking, studies conducted among Saudi male adolescents portray that family smoking behaviours cause confusion in norms; participants reported that there are patterns of family influence yet being prohibited by parents (Mohammed et al., 2020). The study exposes that family rules may serve as a model for their smoking behaviour among adolescents, yet they also try to prevent smoking practices in adolescents; therefore, generation-based authority conflicts are reflected in the current findings.

Jackson's (2002) analysis of the legitimacy attributed to parental authority, as applied to smoking, is seminal work for understanding how adolescents engage with proscriptions at home in order to construct a masculine identity. Results divulge that adolescents' judgments of parental legitimacy are related to their resistance intentions and that challenges to authority in response to anti-smoking messages are more pronounced when perceived inconsistencies exist between the targets' judgment of parents' expected behaviour. Such evidence echoes the participant's portrayal of disobedience as an essential masculine development rather than a mere act of rebellion, thus indicating that the resistance to authority has identity construction roles beyond merely being oppositional. In this sense, the discourse "*we man cannot obey all the time*" pictures what research has labeled developmental authority negotiation, in which compliance with parental authority ceases to cohere with the new identity claims made by a transitioning young adult.

Theme 5: Gender Differentiation and Fear Construction

The statement "*if I am afraid and I cannot handle a cigarette this means that I am still young and this fear differentiates us and females*" explicitly makes smoking as a sign of gendered difference with the rhetorical question "*How could it be that I am not man if men smoke?*" reinforcing this gendered distinction. The link between refusal to smoke and femininity, as well with adolescence, entails what studies of gender calls "oppositional identity construction," and the definition of masculine identity based on the otherness from a feminine attribute. This line of reasoning is consistent with previous research into masculinity and smoking. Furthermore, a rigorous scoping review on men, masculinities and smoking revealed that men frequently identified smoking as having stereotypically masculine connotations. This is consistent with previous research on masculinity and smoking behaviour. Drawing on a scoping review focusing on men and masculinities in the context of smoking, Kodriati et al. (2019) find that "*men reported often associated their smoking behaviour with characteristics such as being powerful, being emotionally stable, being in control and having self-reliance*" (p. 8). Accordingly, men construct their smoking behaviours to demarcate themselves from women and adhere to a traditional masculinized image of smoking to enhance their expression of masculinity. Empirical analysis of how coolness operates across gender lines in adolescents further substantiates this mapping. Research on smoking reveals that behaviours traditionally thought of as masculine are, overall, linked to coolness for both genders, and that smoking ranks high among many of these behaviors linked to traditional masculinity as markers of social status, especially among adolescents (Tóth-Király et al., 2024).

The rhetoric of "*How can I say that I am a man*" rests on the assumption that masculinity is not something learned and internalized but something which must be publicly spoken and socially recognized: private masculine feeling itself carries no weight without external, behavioral evidence. This finding is consistent

with wider research on identity development among smokers where smoker identities were "*multifaceted and incorporated individuals' defensive rationalizations, and both positive and negative feelings attached to it*" (Tombor et al., 2015, p. 127). This research indicates that the creation of cigarette identities fulfills specific social roles, smoker portrayals deploy tobacco in creating "aspirational individual and social identity" (Pathak & Pappu, 2014) while drawing boundaries around non-macho traits. Cross-cultural research on toxic masculinity and smoking in Indonesia also supports the current examples of this gendered stratification. The research indicates that "*for young Indonesian fathers, smoking cigarettes is associated with masculinity because masculinity is a socially constructed concept*" that requires continuous performance and social validation (Rohmah et al., 2023, p. 1). This research thus accommodates the participant's construction of smoking as an essential means by which one can "declare" oneself a man, so that fear of smoking is incompatible with claims to authentic masculinity.

Theme 6: Temporal Identity Management and Smoking Inevitability

The extract ends with temporal negotiation : "*I dont know may be in the future but not now... as a man I must smoke one day but now I think it will create big problems with my dad.*". This reflects what qualitative content analysis recognizes as "temporal identity management," by which the participant asserts his masculine identity claims, while postponing smoking acts caused by practical limitations. The phrase "*I must smoke one day*" combined with "*How can I say that I am a man if I don't smoke?*" constructs an inevitability story between time and power; where smoking isn't a choice, but a developmental necessity that resonates with broader societal ideas about masculine development, which place emphasis on themes of risk-taking and group belonging rather than health. Research exploring the construction of identity among young adult smokers shows that "*smoker identities take time to develop, are subject to change, and are context dependent*" with identity playing "*an important role in quit attempts*" (Tombor et al., 2015, p. 127). The study demonstrates how people can maintain a number of smoker identities simultaneously, and even incorporate 'aspirational identities' linked to future smoking behaviour that are used to support the participant's portrayal of their smoking as an inevitable future necessity.

The discourse of managing temporal identity corresponds with the wider discursive patterns found in masculinity research where internal self-narratives formed by men's beliefs about masculine characteristics are instrumental in men's decisions to smoke (Kodriati et al., 2019, p. 12). The studies suggest that the narratives generate a "psychological attachment" to smoking that works through time where anticipatory smoking starts serving identity construction purposes even before the physical act of starting to smoke. Further contextual information can be drawn from research which investigates gender differences in patterns of smoking. This is consistent with research that has demonstrated differences between males and females in their smoking trajectory, as the former begin and uptake smoke earlier (and at higher increments) compared to their female counterparts (Chinwong et al., 2018). These results substantiate the participant's narrative that smoking is a masculine developmental task that should occur at set time intervals in order to ensure continuation of social group inclusion and deflect threats to male identity authenticity.

Conclusion:

This study elucidates that tobacco consumption among young Algerian men is a manifestation of toxic masculinity working through deleterious gender socialization processes, which place maintaining authentic masculinity ahead of health and well-being. The research illustrates how narrow ideals of masculinity become entrenched within peer groups to constituting strong social incentives for smoking uptake, juxtaposing non-smoking as fundamentally at odds with an 'authentic' expression of manhood. This research, in theory, helps us to understand processes of the operation of hegemonic masculinity through

consensual domination within communities of practice in adolescence. Bringing Connell's theory of masculinity into dialogue with Wenger's communities of practice framework demonstrates how general gender norms are entrenched in social practices that enable and restrict individual level agency. The research unveils that toxic masculinity is a product not just of the opinions of individuals, but of entire social systems reducing harmful behaviour to the *status quo* while marginalizing those who stray from gender norms.

The paper evinces that we cannot address tobacco addiction among youth in Algeria without addressing the broader cultural phenomenon of toxic masculinity at various layers—within peer circles, educational structures, family dynamics and media portrayal. Future work should be sensitive to the complex, community-based practice of smoking as identity construction and develop interventions that offer alternative routes to developing a masculine self while addressing the legitimate social needs that smoking serves.

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