

# Sociological Approaches and Theories in Smoking Research

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## Abstract:

Smoking has been a persistent social scourge with far-reaching implications for individuals and communities. To better understand this complicated phenomenon, sociological methodologies and theories have been utilized to study the social, cultural, and structural variables contributing to smoking behavior.

This article comprehensively analyzes the social approaches employed in smoking research. Drawing on several theoretical frameworks, such as social constructionism, symbolic interactionism, and structural functionalism, the essay investigates the impact of social norms, peer influence, and socialization processes in forming smoking behaviors.

Overall, this article offers a comprehensive overview of the sociological approaches and theories utilized in the study of Smoking. By examining socioeconomic determinants that impact smoking behaviors, policymakers, healthcare practitioners, and researchers can devise efficacious interventions and strategies to mitigate the prevalence of Smoking and its associated consequences. The data presented in this study contributes to the continuous endeavors to establish a society free from Smoking, enhancing public health and promoting social welfare.

**Keywords:** Smoking behavior; Social influences; Sociocultural factors; Social norms; Social identity

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## 1- Introduction

In sociological research, few topics have caught the attention of experts and the public as much as Smoking. From its historical relevance as a cultural phenomenon (Abdeleaziz et al., 2022) to its intricate relationship with health and addiction (Sider et al., 2022), Smoking serves as a fascinating subject for sociological investigation. This article dives into the numerous sociological methodologies applied to research smoking, offering insight into the delicate interplay between individuals, groups, and broader societal institutions. We seek new insights and challenge

conventional beliefs about this prevalent and frequently controversial practice by investigating smoking via a sociological lens. Through sociological research, scientists have found a range of characteristics that contribute to smoking behavior. Studies have highlighted the importance of social norms, peer pressure, and the role of socioeconomic status and cultural beliefs.

Additionally, sociologists have explored the Social factors of smoking prevalence as an essential beginning point for understanding and analysis. By adopting a sociological lens, researchers try to understand Smoking as a complex social phenomenon, acknowledging that broader social influences shape and restrict individual choices. This essay seeks to synthesize these varied sociological viewpoints to explain smoking behavior thoroughly.

## 2- The Research Necessity of Social Approaches

A social approach to intervention and prevention is necessary due to the following four rationales(Syme & Alcala, 1982):

A- When faced with a significant challenge, adopting a social strategy rather than an individualistic one can be more effective and economically advantageous. While it is theoretically feasible to use an individualized strategy, the magnitude of individuals initiating and sustaining smoking habits necessitates the implementation of social and environmental interventions, which prove to be more cost-effective than addressing smokers individually.

B- Implementing personalized programs to assist the substantial number of individuals now engaged in smoking habits would necessitate a significant allocation of resources. However, such programs may not effectively address the growing population of individuals initiating smoking for the first time. Therefore, a program restricted to providing individual therapies exclusively to novice individuals would deplete resources without exerting any influence on the societal factors perpetuating new smokers' emergence. Furthermore, it is imperative to devise more efficacious and ambitious initiatives that function on a societal scale in conjunction with personalized programs.

C- The presence of systematic patterns in the incidence of Smoking suggests that this behavior is not characterized by randomness or individual idiosyncrasies. The observation that the prevalence of Smoking varies among specific demographic categories implies the presence of social factors that exert influence on persons within those groups. While there may have been fluctuations in the numerical values throughout time, the underlying patterns of disparity have exhibited a very consistent nature .

D- The efficacy of individualized approaches in preventing Smoking has not been conclusively established. The proliferation of strategies and programs to assist individuals in smoking cessation has been observed since the early 1960s. The breadth and diversity of these cessation methodologies are extensive and cannot be succinctly encapsulated within this context. Those

who express interest in the subject matter can access a comprehensive collection of studies and assessments. Pechacek provides one particularly informative summary in the publication titled "Smoking and Health." While drawing a comprehensive conclusion from the extensive body of literature is not feasible, it appears that no single technique or approach demonstrates clear superiority over others. The success rates in aiding individuals to quit Smoking are relatively moderate, with approximately 25% achieving long-term cessation after one year. Furthermore, the means to sustain smoking cessation once accomplished remains an area that requires further investigation and understanding.

### 3- Sociological Theories About Smoking

A significant flaw in previous studies of cigarette smoking from a sociological perspective has been the lack of a holistic viewpoint that integrates individual-level and self-concept elements with social context and social interactional components. Recognizing both the social background and interpersonal context that may support (or inhibit) smoking, as well as the societal and personal psychological meanings that drive (or discourage) Smoking, is necessary for a more thorough understanding of the dynamics of Smoking (Reitzes et al., 2010).

There is no doubt that sociological factors affect smoking habits at work and that corporate culture and the social environment can impact smoking regulations and cessation efforts. Additionally, smoking stigma may harm smokers. To create successful treatments to lower smoking prevalence, more study is required to understand better the sociocultural aspects that lead to Smoking or prevent it.

Numerous sociological vantage points have been examined in research on Smoking, producing several noteworthy conclusions. Sociological perspectives can be presented through several works concerned with this aspect of research.

### 4- Smoking From a Symbolic Interaction Standpoint

In order to rectify the limitations observed in previous studies on Smoking, employ (Reitzes et al., 2010) symbolic interaction theory (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980) as a framework to enhance our comprehension of both the frequency of cigarette smoking and the intention to cease Smoking. The study is grounded on three distinct sets of underlying assumptions within the framework of symbolic interaction theory. Symbolic interaction theory, as a sociological framework, acknowledges the influence of various structural factors such as age, class, and ethnicity on individuals' economic and social opportunities. Additionally, it recognizes that social interactions and network connections contribute to forming social motivations that influence behavior (Stryker, 1980). Consistent with previous research on demographics, a symbolic interaction perspective acknowledges the potential influence of age, gender, education, and occupation on smoking habits.

Furthermore, the frequency of Smoking and intentions to quit Smoking are influenced by other factors, including social network connections with individuals who smoke, the presence of a romantic partner who smokes, and a propensity to hide one's smoking behavior from disapproving individuals. Furthermore, the symbolic interaction theory posits that individuals perceive and interpret the environment through shared social meanings, subsequently shaping their behaviors (Blumer, 1969; Zerubavel, 1997). The smoking behaviors of individuals who smoke cigarettes are influenced by their comprehension of the expected outcomes associated with Smoking. Thirdly, it is commonly posited that individuals possess a motivation to uphold their self-conceptions and the meanings associated with their identity (Burke, 2004). Hence, Smoking is not solely attributable to social possibilities or peer pressure but also to an individual's aspiration to uphold self-esteem and a distinct smoker identity (Reitzes et al., 2010).

#### **5- Dramatic Smoking Practice**

The dramaturgical perspective posits that social interaction can be understood as performances akin to theatrical acts, wherein individuals aim to convey specific perceptions of themselves to others (Goffman, 1959). Impression management is a fundamental notion within the dramaturgical perspective, referring to an individual's deliberate endeavor to portray themselves in a specific manner. According to Goffman (1959), the dramaturgical perspective posits that humans engage in adaptive behavior and decide which performances to enact based on the sign equipment, which refers to the symbolic goods they possess. According to Goffman, an individual who effectively employs impression management techniques to uphold a favorable perception of themselves is said to uphold their face (Aronson, 2016, p. 11).

In addition to Goffman's (1959) seminal exposition of the dramaturgical perspective, Collins (1975/2009) has made notable contributions by providing further elaborations. Collins (1975/2009) connects Goffman's dramaturgical ideas and the conflict-theoretical concept of a pervasive contest for power and status among persons (e.g., p. 6, 25, 117). Collins (1975/2009) posits that individuals employ dramaturgical strategies of impression control as a means to acquire status and power (Aronson, 2016, p. 12).

#### **6- Approach to reproducing social norms for smokers**

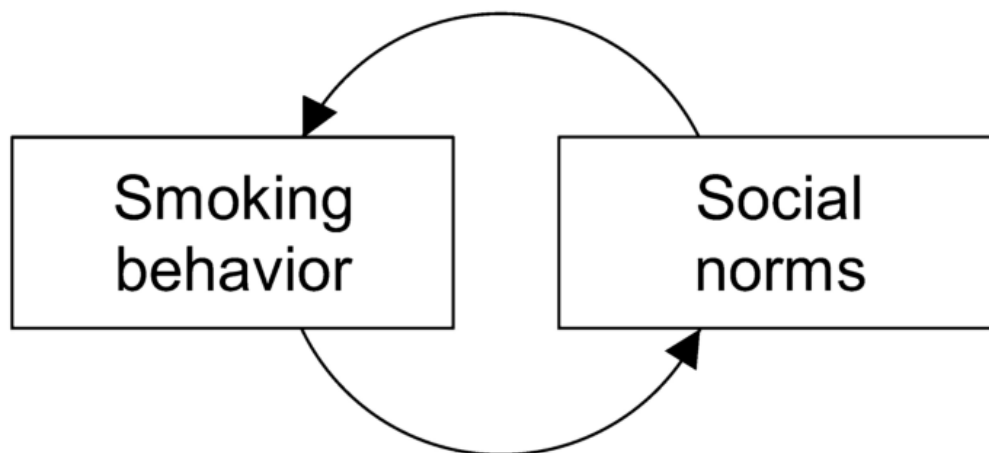
One of the most essential sociological perspectives in smoking research is linked to social norms and norms provided by (Östergren, 2022) In his research, profound analysis of this relationship, I propose the utilization of Giddens' structuration theory as a conceptual framework for comprehending health behavior. According to Giddens (1984), agency can be understood as a dynamic interplay between conduct and cognition, where these two processes are intricately linked, continuous, and inseparable. From this particular vantage point, Smoking can be construed as a recurring behavioral pattern that is consistently enacted. This perspective on agency presents a counterargument to the belief that agency comprises distinct behaviors

resulting from an internal decision-making process. In the context of daily existence, individuals engage in monitoring both their own activities and those of others. This establishes a prevalent implicit comprehension of a particular social circumstance. The acquisition of this knowledge has the potential to shape subsequent agency, and an unexpected outcome of deliberate agency is its alteration of these conditions above. Individuals possess a certain level of expertise and act as agents who creatively utilize their information while also being capable of effectively applying their knowledge to novel situations. Individual behavior refers to the mechanism by which social norms are replicated and disseminated across many temporal and spatial dimensions and the mechanism by which these norms undergo transformation. According to Giddens, the concept of the duality of structure refers to the notion that the structural characteristics of social systems are not separate from human action but are consistently involved in creating and perpetuating such action(Östergren, 2022).

There exists a substantial body of empirical evidence supporting the notion that the smoking behavior of their peers influences the smoking habits of individuals. Meeting et al. (2016) demonstrate a positive correlation between an individual's likelihood of Smoking and their social connections to other smokers. Furthermore, the study reveals that the extent to which an individual engages with smokers is proportionate to their inclination to smoke. Incorporating cigarettes and smoking into one's standard and unique identities might contribute to a sense of belonging for the individual. A strong sense of identification and belonging might motivate individuals to engage in smoking behavior, mainly when Smoking is prevalent within their social network. According to the nomenclature proposed by DiMaggio and Garip (2011), Smoking exhibits network externalities since its perceived worth by an individual is contingent upon the number of other individuals who partake in the consumption of the product or engage in the behavior. From this particular standpoint, Smoking can be understood as a process that generates and perpetuates the societal expectations and standards associated with Smoking within a particular social group(Östergren, 2022).

Figure 1 illustrates the correlation between smoking behavior and the prevailing social norms about Smoking within a given social context. Social norms play a significant role in shaping the behavior of individuals about Smoking. Smoking is a behavior that is characterized by repetitive engagement and serves as a deliberate expression of individual agency while also contributing to the perpetuation and reinforcement of societal conventions. Smoking activity is subsequently linked to societal norms through a reflexive mechanism(Östergren, 2022).

Figure 1 : The reflexive relationship between Smoking and social norms



Source : Östergren, O. (2022). The social gradient in Smoking : Individual behavior, norms, and nicotine dependence in the later stages of the cigarette epidemic. *Social Theory & Health*, 20(3), 276–290. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41285-021-00159-z>

#### 7- Smoking and social learning

Albert Bandura's social learning hypothesis contends that humans learn behaviors through imitation, reinforcement, and observation. This idea has found extensive application across diverse disciplines, including smoking research. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the significance of social learning theory in the context of smoking behavior can yield significant insights into the various determinants that influence the initiation, continuation, and cessation of smoking. This literature review aims to examine the utilization of social learning theory in the context of smoking research and underscore its importance in comprehending smoking behavior.

The primary study on social learning theory by Albert Bandura provides a thorough analysis of the underlying ideas and principles. Bandura emphasizes the significance of observational learning and underscores how individuals acquire novel behaviors by modeling others. Bandura's seminal work from 1977 serves as a fundamental source that provides a framework for comprehending the utilization of social learning theory across several domains, such as the realm of smoking research. (Bandura, 1977).

Sussman and Dent highlight the significance of incorporating elements from social learning theory into studies on smoking habits. Repeating observed actions, known as motor reproduction processes, is vital in equipping individuals with practical skills and approaches for smoking cessation. Interventions ought to encompass the implementation of nicotine replacement treatment, counseling services, and supplementary resources to foster non-smoking behaviors and diminish tobacco use's prevalence ((APA), 2023; CDC, 2023; (NIDA), 2023).

In the same context, Bandura et al.'s study falls into studying the effect of aggressive models influenced by films on children's behavior. The research findings indicated that those exposed to violent models tended to imitate aggressive actions. This study supports the thesis that observational learning is a significant factor in developing habits such as smoking (Bandura et al., 1963).

Andrews, J. A., Tildesley, E., Hops, H., and Duncan, S. C. (1997) conducted an independent investigation wherein a longitudinal analysis was employed to examine the influence of parental drinking modeling on alcohol consumption among adolescents. This analysis was conducted within the framework of social learning theory. The findings suggest a significant correlation between the drinking habits of parents and the consumption of alcohol by adolescents, highlighting the impact of observational learning on the formation of substance use behaviors (Andrews et al., 1997).

Another significant study by Harakeh et al. (2004) expands on planned behavior by incorporating parental traits as potential indicators of teenagers' smoking behavior. According to Harakeh et al. (2004), the study revealed a strong association between parental smoking behavior and perceived parental norms and the beginning and persistence of smoking among teenagers. These findings support the influence of social learning processes on smoking habits.(Harakeh et al., 2004).

## 8- Conclusion

Smoking is a practical practice within a wide range of social relationships governed by laws and changing systems (Omotayo & Eze, 2015, p. 149); the sociological examination of Smoking has yielded significant insights into the complex and widespread nature of this social phenomenon. Researchers have expanded their investigations beyond explanations that focus solely on individuals. Instead, they have utilized sociological methodologies and ideas to explore the intricate relationship between social variables, institutions, and smoking behavior.

The symbolic interactionism theory has provided insights into the role of smoking in constructing and negotiating identities within social groupings, as discussed by Goffman in 1959 (Goffman, 1959). The analysis of social norms and social control has brought attention to the impact of societal expectations and consequences on smoking behaviors (Durkheim, 1997). Additionally, previous research has demonstrated a connection between smoking prevalence and socioeconomic class, highlighting the influence of social stratification on smoking behaviors (Townsend et al., 1988; Murnaghan et al., 2009).

The examination of Smoking within broader societal frameworks has played a pivotal role in revealing the impact of tobacco industry marketing tactics and public regulations on smoking habits (Ling & Glantz, 2004; Murnaghan et al., 2009). The inquiries above have underscored the

importance of considering power dynamics, social establishments (Sider et al., 2022, p. 1759), and cultural conventions while tackling matters about Smoking.

Through the amalgamation of empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks, sociological investigations about Smoking have significantly enhanced our comprehension of the intricate social dynamics associated with this phenomenon. This understanding has the potential to contribute to evidence-based programs and policies that are designed to decrease smoking prevalence and tackle health inequities.

In order to advance scholarly understanding, it is imperative to persist in examining the sociological aspects of Smoking, taking into account the dynamic nature of the social environment and the emergence of new obstacles. By incorporating sociological frameworks into public health interventions, policymakers can formulate more holistic and efficacious approaches to address the societal factors influencing smoking behavior.

It is imperative to acknowledge the significant significance of delivering healthcare, psychological support, and social support that coincide with the arduous and demanding trajectory of those who smoke. Lack of social aptitude and exposure to numerous stressors are characteristics of this trajectory. According to social learning theorists, preventative programs should focus on cultivating several abilities, including decision-making, goal planning, stress management, self-confidence, and communication. These skills ought to be associated with diverse health-related events and behaviors, This is reflected in the emphasis on the concept of 'de-normalisation' which underpins various aspects of tobacco control work such as advocacy for restrictions on smoking in public (Paul et al., 2010).

Using the sociological perspective has enhanced our comprehension of Smoking as a social phenomenon, highlighting the necessity of interdisciplinary endeavors to tackle this multifaceted matter.

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