

FEEDBACK REPORT FOR PARTICIPANTS

Smoker Job Interview Stigmatization

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Research Project conducted by:

Dr. Nicolas Roulin

Dr. Namita Bhatnagar

Chantal Corbeil

Department of Psychology

Saint Mary's University, 923 Robie Street, Halifax, NS B3H 3C3

& Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba

Email: nicolas.roulin@smu.ca

This research comprised multiple experimental studies examining how the discovery of an applicant's smoking or vaping habits through cyber-vetting impacts hiring evaluations, incorporating factors like performance, timing, stereotyping mechanisms, and gender.

The Issues: The research addressed several interconnected issues in personnel selection:

- **Stereotype and Stigma:** Negative stereotypes surrounding cigarette and cannabis users, often stemming from history of prohibition and drug-control campaigns, create stigma that can adversely influence hiring judgments.
- **Cyber-vetting Risks:** The increasing common practice of **cyber-vetting** (scanning job applicants' social media footprints) frequently uncovers personal, potentially stigmatizing information unrelated to job performance.
- **Evaluation Integration:** It was unclear how assessors integrate information gathered from formal methods (like a strong interview or resume) with negative personal information obtained via unstructured cyber-vetting.
- **Scope of Discrimination:** Previous work focused mainly on visible cigarette smoking cues in interviews, leaving gaps regarding the hiring implications for:
 - **Cannabis smokers**, especially in jurisdictions where recreational use is legal.
 - **E-cigarette vapers**, whose social perceptions are mixed and evolving.
 - **Intersectionality** with gender, particularly whether women who smoke or vape face a "double jeopardy" of extended stigmatization.
- **Mechanisms and Timing:** The specific psychological mechanisms driving negative evaluations (e.g., specific stereotypes) and whether the timing of cyber-vetting (pre- or post-interview) altered outcomes were not well understood.

What the Research Did: The research consisted of multiple experimental studies using realistic hiring simulations that paired interviews (or resume reviews) with social media cyber-vetting:

- **Study 1 (Paper 1):** Used 224 Canadian business students role-playing as hiring managers. It compared evaluations of cigarette smokers, cannabis smokers, and non-smokers, manipulating applicant qualifications (strong vs. average interview performance). Cyber-vetting occurred post-interview.
- **Study 2 (Paper 1):** Used 318 Canadian business students and focused on applicants with strong interview performance. It explored **mediating mechanisms** by assessing perceived warmth, competence, and likelihood of Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWBs) for cigarette and cannabis smokers.
- **Study 3 (Paper 1):** Used 185 HR professionals in California. It examined the effect of **cyber-vetting timing** (pre- vs. post-interview) for cigarette and cannabis smokers.
- **Study 4 (Paper 2):** Used 400 Canadian and U.S. hiring professionals. It investigated the effect of applicants identified as cigarette smokers, **vapers**, or non-smokers via Instagram

cyber-vetting (following a resume screen). Crucially, this study also examined the combined effects of **applicant gender** and smoking/vaping status.

The Main Findings: The research consistently found that cyber-vetted smoking status led to lower evaluations, often overcoming positive interview performance:

- **Negative Evaluations for Smokers and Cannabis Users:** Job applicants revealed as cigarette or recreational cannabis smokers received **significantly lower final evaluations** compared to control candidates. A high-quality interview performance, while helpful, was generally **unable to overcome these lowered evaluations**.
- **Vapers Evaluated Negatively:** Applicants identified as vapers also received significantly lower evaluations than nonsmokers. In the study comparing smoking and vaping, **vapers were evaluated as negatively as traditional cigarette smokers**.
- **Mediating Mechanisms:** Negative assessments of cigarette and cannabis smokers were partially driven by diminished **perceptions of warmth and competence**, which in turn increased the perceived likelihood that the applicant would engage in **Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWBs)**, such as being late or stealing.
- **Rater Attitudes Matter:** Evaluators who held **more negative personal attitudes** toward smoking or cannabis use were particularly prone to making negative assessments of smokers' warmth and competence. For cigarette smoking, this negative impact was strongest when raters possessed negative attitudes toward the behavior.
- **Timing Effects:**
 - For **cigarette smokers**, negative evaluations persisted regardless of whether cyber-vetting occurred pre- or post-interview, suggesting a deep-seated stigma.
 - For **cannabis smokers**, negative evaluations were **most apparent when discovery occurred post-interview**, suggesting that the recency/salience of the stigmatizing information at the time of the final decision was critical.
- **Gender and Vaping Interaction:**
 - There was **no significant double jeopardy** for women who smoke cigarettes (i.e., female smokers were not evaluated worse than male smokers).
 - However, applicant gender **did moderate the effect of vaping**, such that **female vapers received significantly lower evaluations** compared to male vapers.

The Practical Implications: The findings highlight the urgent need for structural and ethical improvements in hiring practices:

- **Mitigate Cyber-vetting Risks:** Employers should consider **avoiding cyber-vetting on personal social media platforms** like Facebook, or, at a minimum, implement a standardized, structured process. This process should include informed consent, assessor training, and focus only on job-related information.
- **Implement Training and Guidelines:** Organizations should use training and internal communications to **caution hiring professionals about the potential stigmatization of smokers** and provide periodical reminders to improve objective decision-making. Non-stigmatizing terminology (e.g., "cannabis" rather than "pot" or "weed") should be employed.

- **Optimal Timing:** If cyber-vetting is used, hiring managers are advised to **review cyber-vetted information before (pre-) the interview**, rather than after. This gives applicants a chance to "disconfirm stigmatized expectations" through a strong interview performance, especially where stigma is less entrenched (like cannabis use).
- **Applicant Social Media Management:** Job seekers who smoke or vape should be aware of the stigma and employ impression management tactics. These include enabling privacy settings, **removing smoking/vaping related content**, and proactively sharing content related to positive accomplishments to boost perceptions of competence and warmth.
- **Regulatory Need:** Given that smoking is generally not a federally protected ground for discrimination in the U.S. or Canada, the need for **greater regulatory safeguards** for cigarette and cannabis smokers may be warranted.