

Student Name

Mrs. Verwys

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### An Inside Operation: Dismantling the Vaping Empire from the Inside Out

“E-cigarettes are now the most frequently used tobacco product among adolescents — some 2.1 million middle and high school students were e-cigarette users in 2017” (Martinelli, 2019). Vapes are becoming a staple in high schools, and as evidence proving the activity dangerous continues to come out, we have to ask ourselves: Why isn’t the rate of teen vapers slowing down? In order to understand the vaping epidemic occurring amongst American teens, it is important to investigate the social aspect it plays in high schools, and the easy accessibility paired with false advertising that creates a positive culture around the issue.

Vaping is becoming sort of a “social staple” in American high schools. “I think this is something that will remain in the fabric of adolescence” (Ibarra, 2019), says Aaron Sicotte, the principal of Needham High School in Massachusetts. What was once sharing a conversation over cigarettes by that one tree during lunch is now passing around a Juul and swapping stories in the handicapped bathroom. It becomes a habit, an everyday thing, a social “activity” that kids look forward too, sharing laughs and puffs around the toilet. The thought that this part of their day should cease to exist suddenly isn’t even an option. The social pull is obviously stronger than the facts, as the number of teen vapers is set to triple in a year (Jarmul, 2017).

The easy accessibility and false advertising creates a positive culture around vaping. Despite newfound information on the dangers of vaping, the devices allow “former and even

never smokers ... to get a nicotine fix without the irritating effects and social stigma of cigarette smoke” (Jarmul, 2017). The vape community boasts 30 conventions held around the country each year and a slew of dessert-like flavors (Jarmul, 2017). Why wouldn't that be appealing to teens? Perks like the ones mentioned above are surefire ways to get a product considered “cool” with the kids. False advertisement only adds to the positive air clouding adolescents' heads. “Given the near-universal transition from a known harmful product (traditional cigarette smoking) to a far less harmful product (nicotine vaping), one would think that massive health benefits would accrue” (Seifer, 2019). The “safer than cigs” schtick works wonders when getting kids to hand over their money, but it's important to remember that “safer” doesn't mean “good”.

In order to understand the vaping epidemic occurring amongst American teens, it is important to investigate the social aspect it plays in high schools, and the easy accessibility paired with false advertising that creates a positive culture around the issue. Over the course of a few short years, vaping has inserted itself into the social structure of American high schools, taking; the place where smoking cigarettes once held the crown. Vaping has built a flashy, “cool” culture around itself, built on the foundation that it's safer and “better” than smoking cigarettes. These factors alone are enough to protect it from the onslaught of fear inducing results released about the product every day. In order to combat this epidemic, changes need to be made to chip away at the foundation. By educating our country's authority figures on the place vaping holds in schools and the positive culture the government has allowed it to hide behind, maybe we can inspire change that will save 2 million kids from perishing at the hands of a fruit-flavored stick.

Works Cited

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