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## New Ci3 study finds that through game play youth gained knowledge about tobacco companies' tactics to encourage smoking, deny potential health risks of cigarettes

**Chicago** - A recent study published in the *Games for Health Journal* by researchers at the University of Chicago's Center for Interdisciplinary Inquiry and Innovation (Ci3) in Sexual and Reproductive Health found an hour-long board game can positively influence young people's critical thinking about tobacco companies, offering an alternative educational approach for teaching young people about tobacco products.

Despite the health risks, historically, tobacco companies have used marketing strategies that target youth. Youth-focused prevention strategies, such as the truth® campaign, the longest running and most successful national tobacco prevention campaign for youth and young adults, use a principle called "denormalization" to highlight the conflict between health and marketing within the tobacco industry.

The article, "Increasing anti-tobacco industry attitudes," describes the design, creation, and initial evaluation of *Smoke Stacks*, a board game intended to "denormalize" tobacco use in order to shift teenagers' attitudes toward the industry and tobacco use.

*Smoke Stacks* was created as part of a suite of games developed on the *Hexacago* game board. The *Hexacago* game board uses strategically placed hexagons to form a map of Chicago. The board is used to design playable games and also provide a template for others to learn about issues through game design. In particular, the map-like game board allows players to consider the systems that contribute to health such as transportation, policy, and distribution of economic resources. Thus, the games enable young people to understand epidemiology and the economy. *Smoke Stacks* aims to shift players' attitudes and beliefs towards the tobacco industry, and to also shift their intent to use tobacco.

*Smoke Stacks* puts the player in an initially appealing position of power. They play as a tobacco company. The game gradually reveals how marketing targets and manipulates communities and the products that harm health. Similar to the truth® campaign, the behavioral shift occurs in the game once people learn that they are being manipulated and taken advantage of by the tobacco industry.

Conducted from October through December of 2014, the game was evaluated with 67 teenagers ages 14-18 median age 15. The majority was African American and 55% of the sample was comprised of young women. This study focused on gauging *Smoke Stacks*' effectiveness at encouraging critical thinking about the marketing practices of tobacco companies and the harmful effects of tobacco. To evaluate the game, participants completed a pre-game survey and were introduced to the game immediately following the survey. Following gameplay, participants then completed an immediate post-game survey.

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After playing the game, the study found significant changes such as:

- Participants reported substantially increased self-perceived knowledge of the health effects of tobacco
- The students were significantly more likely to agree that tobacco companies encourage young people to start smoking
- Students believe that tobacco companies deny that cigarettes cause cancer and diseases
- Eighty-seven percent of the participants found that *Smoke Stacks* was relevant to their community

“We were very pleased to see that, after playing the game, young people began to understand the tobacco industry’s tactics,” said Melissa Gilliam, MD, MPH, founder and director of Ci3 and the study’s principal investigator. “Additionally, the students enjoyed playing the game, which gives us confidence that games are an important tool for educating youth about their health.”

To review the full publication, click [here](#).

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### **About Ci3 at the University of Chicago**

Established in 2012, [Ci3](#) is a research center the University of Chicago addressing the social and structural determinants of adolescent sexual and reproductive health. At Ci3, we envision a world in which all youth emerge into adulthood with agency over their bodies and futures. Ci3 houses three labs: [The Game Changer Chicago Design Lab](#); [The Transmedia Story Lab](#); and [The Design Thinking Lab](#). Within these labs, we create games and digital narratives, and design interventions with and for youth. Ci3 is committed to empowering young people, conducting innovative research, and uncovering opportunities for policy and systemic change.

### **About the Game Changer Chicago Design Lab**

The first of the three labs at Ci3, the Game Changer Chicago Design Lab was developed as an experimental collaboration between Drs. Melissa Gilliam (OB/GYN) and Patrick Jagoda (English, New Media Studies). GCC develops games for social impact with youth and for youth to address issues in sexuality, health, social justice, and youth development. At GCC, youth play and design games to develop skills and healthy behaviors. Our goal is to improve sexual and reproductive health and address critical issues that impact the well being of youth.

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