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The Juul Epidemic

TIFFANY LOPES
STAFF WRITER

The electronic cigarette company Juul Labs states its mission as seeking to “improve the lives of the world’s one billion adult smokers by eliminating cigarettes.” Unlike cigarettes, their products have not yet been shown to cause cancer, yet they still contain nicotine, a highly

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addictive substance. Even though the company markets a healthier alternative for adult smokers, the most troubling usage is in a much younger demographic. According to the Food and Drug Administration and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in five high schoolers vaped in September 2018, a 78 percent increase from 2017. Shortly after these warnings, Juul Labs announced that it would suspend the sales of most flavored pods (for smoking e-cigarettes) in more than 90,000 retail stores in the United States except for mint, menthol, and tobacco.

It is easy to see why the vaping devices have become so popular among adolescents. Juuls are tiny items that look like flash drives and can be recharged with a simple USB port, such as the ones found on laptops. The mist, or vapor, from a Juul is seemingly odorless and evaporates within seconds. The sweet and fruity flavors—including mango, fruit medley, and crème brûlée—make the vaping devices even more appealing to teenagers. Despite Juuls’ attractiveness to teens, teachers and parents were initially, and still remain, mostly oblivious to their common use.

It is difficult to determine all of the long-term effects vaping has, given that electronic cigarettes are a recent invention. Some of the FDA’s concerns about increased nicotine use are the risk of addiction and the potential harm to the

developing adolescent brain. The FDA also found that the growth in e-cigarette use has been part of an overall increase in tobacco product consumption of 38 percent among high school students and 29 percent among middle school students. Even so, tobacco giant Marlboro reported that U.S. cigarette sales are falling faster than they had expected, having decreased by 4.5 percent in 2018, with an additional 3.5 to 5 percent decline expected this year. Altria, the owner of Marlboro, has invested \$12.8 billion in Juul Labs Inc., and Altria’s CEO Howard Willard said at about the time of the investment it would “support and even accelerate transition to noncombustible alternative products.”

Juul’s sales skyrocketed last year, to over \$1 billion in revenue compared with the \$200 million it earned in 2017. It sold more than 450 million refill pods in the last year alone, and dominated the e-cigarette market with a 75 percent market share. With this rapid expansion of nicotine products, does any hopeful news follow?

Keeping the problems with adolescent usage in mind, it is still important to note that Juul does present itself as a healthier alternative to cigarettes for adult smokers. According to a report by CNBC, cigarette smoking kills an estimated 480,000 adults per year in the

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U.S. alone, making it the leading cause of preventable death. The fact that cigarette sales are rapidly decreasing as e-cigarettes continue to increase seems to suggest that the vaping option is having this good effect. But it is coming at a massive cost to teenagers. Many researchers have argued that we cannot afford to curb adult smoking at the expense of addicting a new generation to nicotine. The cons may outweigh the pros, and it is up to FDA regulators or our elected officials to address this latest trend with sound policy.

Athletes and Freedom of Speech

FRED POLLEVICK
STAFF WRITER

While everyone was preparing for the Super Bowl, the latest news about athletes and their controversial statements slid under many Americans’ radar. Daniel Radcliffe—or, as many people know him, Harry Potter—tweeted at Tom Brady to take the MAGA hat out of his locker. He was capitalizing on something that happened more than two years ago. Before the 2016 election, then-candidate Donald Trump had sent the hat to Brady. Since the quarterback’s

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relation to Trump is old news, I found this to be a cheap comment from Radcliffe. It’s also yet another example of people’s many recent objections to political expression by athletes.

Athletes have the same right to free speech as we do. It does not matter if you are LeBron James, Colin Kaepernick, or Tom Brady: there is no reason an athlete shouldn’t be able to voice his or her opinions. As we all know, there is no law restricting individuals’ freedom of speech—with a few exceptions that are not applicable to these cases. The U.S. Flag Code, enacted in 1942, describes proper flag etiquette in detail, but it begins with the statement that there are no penalties for violating those guidelines. For example, we are supposed to hold our right hands over our hearts during the National Anthem if the flag is displayed, but not everyone does. The NFL may impose these or other enforceable rules about respecting the flag, but if such a rule is broken by some of its players, they are violating the league’s rules or values, not a law.”

That being said, I want to emphasize the importance of *all* athletes’ right to

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political expression. If Tom Brady wants to support President Trump, he should be able to, just as many other athletes support the president and have supported previous presidents. And instead of further angering people who oppose Kaepernick's and other athletes' kneeling during the National Anthem, those who favor these (or other left-leaning) protests in the sports world should take the high road and also welcome athletes who are further right on the political spectrum to voice their opinions. We

do not have to agree with those who support President Trump, but we should acknowledge their right to support him. The best way to begin a conversation is to understand another's point of view.

Of course, there are certain situations that do not call for the "high road" approach. If athletes begin to support racism or hate speech, there is no reason to respect this or to give such speech any positive attention. But often, people don't understand the reasons why an athlete protests, and instantly jump against it. If we begin to research and understand the reasons behind their

various protests and political expressions, it will foster better conversations.

Freedom of speech involves allowing all of us to share our voices, and it is important that we hear each other out. I have defended freedom of speech before because I believe it is very important to our understanding one another as Americans. Just as I encouraged our readers to attend the first "Common Ground" event at Hamilton, I encourage everyone to listen to the other side—whichever side that may be. Only when we begin to speak and listen to each other will we make any progress.

Jefferson and Buffon: Men of Science

ANDREW JUCHNO
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Thomas Jefferson and the Comte de Buffon had fundamentally different understandings of the natural world, a discord that stemmed from Buffon's "individualism," that is, what Jefferson saw as a hesitancy to categorically classify species. Such an epistemology, Jefferson argued, threatened to return the scientific community to the days of Aristotle and Pliny. It would undo the order that modern science had worked so diligently to instill in our understanding of the natural world.

A belief in the importance of such an order was crucial to Jefferson's very character. A man of science, he devoted much of his life to discovery, categorization, and systemization.

Different understandings of the natural history of the Americas and of Earth remained central to Jefferson and Buffon's debate. Jefferson heavily criticized Buffon's belief that the planet was once hot and has been constantly cooling (which was not an uncommon assertion in the then-nascent field of geology). He also worked to refute

Buffon's incorrect assertion that animals and people in the Americas were smaller than in Europe, known famously as the "degeneracy theory." This refutation was one of Jefferson's aims for the Lewis and Clark expedition; he hoped the explorers would find a mammoth that would surpass European species in size.

Despite his various disagreements with the Comte de Buffon, Jefferson understood him to be a man of science. In January of 1785, he reminded Francis Hopkinson that Buffon held a position as the head of the French king's "cabinet of Natural history." A year earlier, he had described Buffon to Ezra Stiles as a "celebrated Physiologist of the present day." Despite their academic differences, Jefferson did respect Buffon's major position in the intellectual community, never questioning his mental faculties. Ad hominem

were not quick to flow from his quill.

While Jefferson frequently challenged

Buffon's scholarship (often skeptical of his renowned mortality rate table), this actually evidences his respect, since he did not always feel the need to intellectually engage with his opponents. In some cases, Jefferson merely brushed them off as the lesser mouthpieces of greater men. For example, in a 1785 letter to the Marquis de Chastellux, he described a man named Robertson as "a compiler only of the relations of others, and a mere translator of the opinions of Monsr. Buffon." Accordingly, Jefferson's willingness to engage in what he describes as "conversations with the Count de Buffon on the subjects of Natural history" suggests that the two had, if nothing more, a working relationship.

This relationship was not static, however. In the last years of the eighteenth century, Jefferson's tone toward Buffon became increasingly negative. Writing to Louis of Parma in February of 1799, he lumped the French scientist in with Robertson although he had been careful, fourteen years earlier, to distinguish the two intellectually. In this letter, Jefferson painted Buffon as a mere dreamer, whose

naïve conceptions of natural history he could dispel "with a thousand other facts." No longer were the two men of science locked in a factual debate. Instead, Jefferson came to see himself as grounded in fact and his opponent as a mere hypothesizer with little real understanding of the natural world.

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ENQUIRY

vol. VI

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CONTINUE CONVERSATION

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