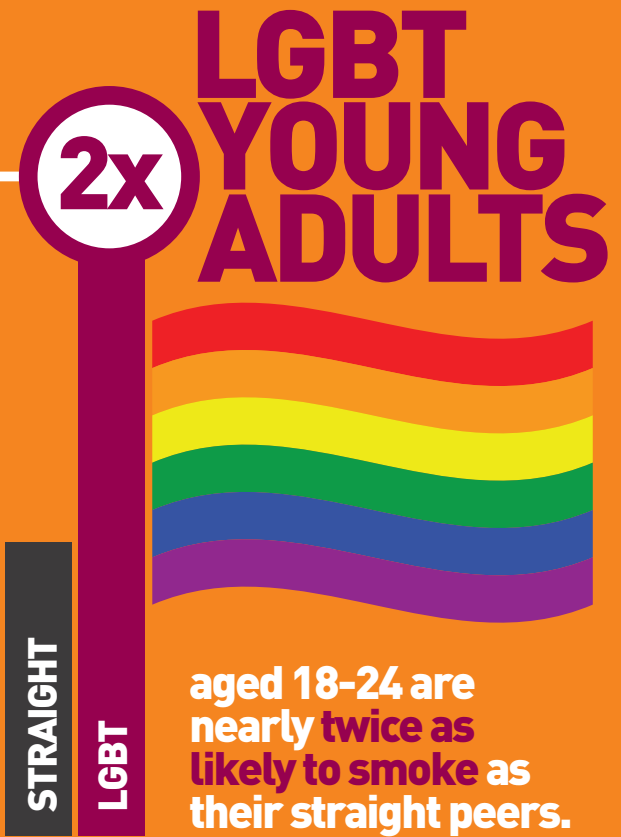


LGBT

The **LGBT community** is disproportionately impacted by tobacco.



Tobacco companies also began to advertise in **gay press** publications in the early 1990s, often depicting tobacco use as a **normal** part of LGBT life.



Project SCUM

A tobacco industry marketing strategy called **Project SCUM** targeted gay men and homeless individuals.

BACKGROUND

It's common for LGBT individuals to experience disparities that stem from social stigma and discriminatory treatment. On top of that, there is a different kind of disparity in the **LGBT** community that is often overlooked: **disproportionately high smoking rates**.

Overall, **lesbian, gay and bisexual adults smoke at rates up to 2.5 times higher** than straight adults, due in part to targeted **marketing by Big Tobacco**.² For years the tobacco industry has made efforts to appeal to LGBT consumers through things like targeted advertisements in LGBT press, cigarette giveaways and free tobacco industry merchandise. Today, the **LGBT community is among the hardest hit by tobacco**.^{5,6}

SMOKING RATES IN THE LGBT COMMUNITY

According to a 2011 Institute of Medicine report⁷, researchers “face a number of challenges in understanding the health needs of LGBT populations.” There are limited national data available regarding tobacco use among the LGBT community. Data that are available, however, indicate that the LGBT community is disproportionately impacted by tobacco:

- > Overall, **20.6 percent of LGB adults** and **35.5 percent of transgender adults smoke cigarettes** compared to 14.9 percent of straight adults. Transgender adults are 2.1 times more likely than cisgender adults to smoke.^{1,8}
- > Only **11.8 percent of heterosexual** young adults indicate that they currently smoke cigarettes, compared to **19 percent of homosexual**, **16.9 percent of bisexual** and **33.2 percent of transgender** young adults.³



- > **Bisexual women** are up to **3.5 times more likely to smoke**, try their first cigarette at a younger age and have a higher nicotine dependence than heterosexual women.^{2,9}
- > **LGBT** smokers are significantly more likely to **smoke menthol** cigarettes: more than 36 percent of LGBT smokers report that they usually smoke menthols, which are easier to use and **harder to quit**.¹⁰
- > The prevalence of smoking **other types of tobacco**, including water pipes and cigars, cigarillos, or small cigars, is **higher for LGBT adults** compared to heterosexual adults.¹¹

Even though youth smoking rates overall are down to 6 percent¹², **smoking rates among LGB youth** are estimated to be **considerably higher** than those among youth in general, based on an analysis of data from 1987 to 2000.¹³ More than **twice as many LGBT students** in grades nine through 12 have **smoked a cigarette before the age of 13**, compared to their heterosexual peers.⁴ LGBT students also smoke more frequently. Digging even deeper, **lesbian and bisexual girls are 9.7 times more likely to smoke cigarettes regularly**, compared to their heterosexual peers.¹⁴

BIG TOBACCO'S LONG HISTORY OF TARGETING THE LGBT COMMUNITY

As the LGBT community gained more social and political acceptance, especially in the 1990s, marketers took notice. **Industry documents show that tobacco companies were aware of high smoking rates among sexual minorities,** and marketing plans show their efforts to take advantage of the emerging LGBT market.

PHILIP MORRIS U.S.A. INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE
120 PARK AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10017

TO: Nancy Conrad DATE: October 9, 1997

FROM: Yvette Robinson

SUBJECT: **C&M's Gay and Lesbian Marketing Efforts**

OVERVIEW
Philip Morris has led the competition in the gay and lesbian market, first with advertising and second with participating/sponsoring events. Having successfully negotiated some of the first contracts for sponsorship of gay and lesbian events in 1997, B&H has established itself as the tobacco company of choice for the market. In approximately 10 of the Spare Parts events that B&H has participated in, all competitive activity was brought to a halt, both as a result of B&H initiating steps to become proactive in securing organizations before the competition and based on B&H's reputation in the market. The organizers afforded Philip Morris, (B&H) the first right of refusal.

Some examples of the competition:

SITUATION ANALYSIS

A large percentage of Gays and Lesbians are smokers. In order to increase brand share and brand awareness for the Benson & Hedges brand, it is imperative to identify new markets with growth potential. Many Gay and Lesbian adult smokers also have a preference for menthol brands.

For example, one tobacco industry document in 1997 stated: **“A large percentage of Gays and Lesbians are smokers. In order to increase brand share and brand awareness ... it is imperative to identify new markets with growth potential.”**¹⁵

Big Tobacco has targeted the LGBT community since at least 1991, when tobacco company Philip Morris settled a boycott by pledging large donations to AIDS research and programs.¹⁶ The boycott, led by the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, protested the company's support of Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., a leading opponent of AIDS funding and LGBT civil rights.¹⁷ **Using corporate philanthropy as evidence of its support of the LGBT community, Philip Morris quickly gained access to the market**, leading the way for other tobacco companies to follow suit.

Tobacco companies also began to **advertise in gay press** publications in the early 1990s, often depicting tobacco use as a normal part of LGBT life. Many ads for products other than cigarettes glamorized smoking, and many articles having nothing to do with smoking were shown with tobacco images.⁵

SITUATION ANALYSIS

A large percentage of Gays and Lesbians are smokers. In order to increase brand share and brand awareness for the Benson & Hedges brand, it is imperative to identify new markets with growth potential. Many Gay and Lesbian adult smokers also have a preference for menthol brands.

In 1995, the tobacco company, **R.J. Reynolds**, created a marketing strategy called **“Project SCUM”** (Sub-Culture Urban Marketing) to boost cigarette sales by **targeting gay men and homeless individuals** with advertisements and displays placed in communities and stores.¹⁸ On top of donations, giveaways and increased advertising, the tobacco industry made **community outreach** efforts, such as hosting local promotions like “LGBT bar nights” featuring specific cigarette brands.⁶



Image courtesy of [Trinkets & Trash](#)

For more information on the disproportionate effect tobacco has on certain populations, including racial minorities, low-income communities and those with mental illness, visit truthinitiative.org.

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Note: Terminology in this document varies based on the studies that are summarized to accurately reflect original sources. Truth Initiative recognizes that some of these terms are no longer preferred in the LGBT community.



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