



Becoming The Self Without Cigarettes: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Interpretation Of Ex-Smokers' Life Experiences

By

Alimin Hamzah¹, Yusriani², Arman³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Negeri Makassar

Email: ¹aliminhamzah@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Quitting smoking is a process of behavior change that is not only related to quitting cigarette consumption, but also involves changing the way individuals understand their body, self, social environment, and life. This research aims to understand the life experiences of individuals during the process of changing smoking cessation behavior and interpret the meaning of these changes in the formation of a new self-identity. This study uses a qualitative method with a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The research participants consisted of seven lecturers from the Faculty of Sports and Health Sciences, State University of Makassar who had direct experience in the process of quitting smoking. Data were collected through reflective in-depth interviews and analyzed using the process of hermeneutic phenomenological interpretation through in-depth readings, hermeneutic circles, identification of meaningful themes, and researcher reflexivity. The results of the study show that the experience of quitting smoking is a journey of self-transformation that takes place gradually. Four main meanings are found in the participants' experiences, namely the body as the initial space for the emergence of awareness of change, changes in the individual's relationship with himself, the transformation of the world of life through changes in the environment and social relations, and the process of becoming a new self after quitting smoking. Cigarettes that were previously part of routines, social experiences, and individual identities slowly change their meaning as participants find new ways of understanding their health, abilities, and life direction. This study concludes that quitting smoking is not just a change from smoking behavior to non-smoking, but is an existential transformation process that changes the way individuals are in their lives. These findings affirm the importance of a health promotion approach that is not only oriented towards the delivery of health risk information, but also pays attention to life experiences, personal meaning, and the process of forming an individual's new identity in living a life without smoking.

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Corresponding Author:

Alimin Hamzah

Universitas Negeri Makassar

Email: aliminhamzah@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Smoking is one of the main risk factors for non-communicable diseases and is still a major challenge in global public health. Although various tobacco control strategies have been implemented through national and international policies, tobacco use is still the leading cause of preventable death in the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that tobacco consumption contributes to more than eight million deaths each year from a variety of diseases, including cardiovascular disease, chronic lung disease, and cancer (World Health Organization, 2023). The



Global Burden of Disease analysis also shows that smoking remains one of the largest risk factors for premature death and *disability-adjusted life years (DALYs)* globally (GBD 2019 Tobacco Forecasting Collaborators, 2021). This condition makes smoking cessation efforts one of the important components in health promotion and prevention strategies for non-communicable diseases.

Quitting smoking provides significant health benefits, even when done in adulthood. A long-term cohort study of male physicians in the UK showed that smoking cessation was associated with a reduced risk of death compared to individuals who retained the smoking habit (Doll et al., 2004). Nevertheless, although the benefits of quitting smoking have been widely known, maintaining a smoke-free behavior is still a challenge for many individuals. This is because smoking is not only an addictive substance consumption behavior, but has also become part of life routines, social experiences, coping mechanisms, and patterns of individual relationships with their environment (West, 2017).

From a public health perspective, quitting smoking is understood as a complex process of behavior change. A variety of interventions have been developed to support successful smoking cessation, ranging from pharmacological approaches to behavioral interventions. Evidence from systematic studies suggests that nicotine replacement therapy, medications such as varenicline, and behavioral support can increase the likelihood of successful smoking cessation (Livingstone-Banks et al., 2023). In addition, counseling-based interventions and social support also have an important role in helping individuals maintain smoke-free behaviors (Stead et al., 2017). However, the success of quitting smoking is determined not only by the availability of interventions, but also by how the individual understands, accepts, and integrates those changes into his or her life.

Most research on smoking cessation so far has focused on identifying predictors of success, nicotine dependence levels, motivation to quit, and the effectiveness of various interventions. Behavioral change models such as *the Transtheoretical Model of Change* developed by Prochaska and DiClemente (1983) have made an important contribution in explaining that behavior change takes place through several stages, ranging from the absence of awareness of change to the stage of maintaining new behavior. However, the model explains more about the stages of behavior change, but does not fully explain how individuals experience the process of change subjectively and how these changes are interpreted in the course of their lives.

An approach that only sees quitting smoking as a behavioral change risks ignoring the more complex dimensions of the human experience. Health behaviors are not only influenced by knowledge and motivation, but also by psychosocial factors, identity, social relationships, and the context of an individual's life. The perspective of social determinants of health asserts that a person's health behavior is formed through the interaction between the individual's characteristics and the social environment in which the individual is located (Marmot et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding individual experiences is important to develop health promotion strategies that are more in line with the realities of people's lives.

One of the important aspects of the smoking cessation experience is the change in self-identity. Quitting smoking not only means that a person stops smoking, but it also involves the process of rebuilding the way the individual understands himself or herself as someone who is no longer dependent on cigarettes. Research based on interpretive phenomenological approaches shows that identity change is an important part of the process of quitting smoking, as individuals need to transition from an identity as a "smoker" to a new identity as an individual who is able to live a life without smoking (Vangeli & West, 2012; Meijer et al., 2020). This process involves changing the meaning of cigarettes, the body, health, and the goals of an individual's life.

Although research on smoking cessation has developed widely, most studies still use a quantitative approach that focuses on the relationship between variables and abstinence success. This approach does not fully describe how individuals experience struggles, reflections, and changes in meaning during the process of quitting smoking. In fact, individual subjective experiences can provide a deeper understanding of why a person is able to sustain behavior changes and how a new identity is formed after quitting smoking.

Hermeneutic phenomenology offers an appropriate framework for understanding such experiences because this approach focuses on the exploration of the meaning of *lived experience* as experienced and interpreted by individuals. Van Manen (2014) explained that hermeneutic phenomenology aims to understand the essence of human experience through the process of reflection and interpretation of the experiences that have been lived. In the context of quitting smoking, this approach allows research to understand how individuals experience changes in their relationship with the body, themselves, their social environment, and their life as a whole. This perspective is also in line with Heidegger's thinking about human beings as *being-in-the-world*, namely human existence that is always formed through relationships with the world of life (Heidegger, 1962).

A deeper understanding of the smoking cessation experience has important implications for the development of health promotion. Smoking cessation programs that are only oriented towards providing information about the



dangers of smoking may not be enough to answer the complexity of individual experiences. A more *person-centered approach* is needed so that health promotion strategies can consider aspects of experience, personal meaning, and the process of forming new identities. Based on these gaps, this study aims to explore the life experiences of individuals during the process of changing smoking behavior and understand how these experiences are interpreted in the process of forming a new self-identity through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. This research is expected to contribute to the development of a more contextual, reflective, and human experience-oriented approach to health promotion of smoking cessation.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research design with an *interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology* approach. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the research is not only to describe the experiences of individuals who quit smoking, but to understand and interpret how those experiences are interpreted by individuals in the context of daily life. In contrast to descriptive/transcendental phenomenology which seeks to make phenomenological reductions to find the structure of experience in a purely way, hermeneutic phenomenology views human experience as always in a certain historical, social, and existential context. In Heidegger's perspective, human beings are never present as subjects separate from the world, but are always in connection with the world (*being-in-the-world*) which shapes the way humans understand themselves and the reality of their lives (Heidegger, 1962).

In this study, the experience of quitting smoking is understood as an existential phenomenon that involves changes in an individual's relationship with his or her body, habits, social environment, and self-identity. Therefore, the process of quitting smoking is not seen only as a change in health behavior, but as a process of interpretation of life experiences that produces a new meaning about self and life. The hermeneutic approach in this study is also based on Gadamer's thought which explains that human understanding always occurs through the process of interpretation between previous experiences, the context of life, and the phenomenon that is being understood (*fusion of horizons*) (Gadamer, 2004). Thus, the researcher does not try to eliminate his entire subjective perspective, but reflectively realizes his or her position in the process of understanding the participant's experience.

Methodologically, this study follows Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological approach which places lived experience as the main source of understanding human phenomena. Van Manen (2014) explained that hermeneutic phenomenology aims to reveal the meaning of experience as experienced by individuals through the process of reflection, interpretation, and phenomenological writing.

3. RESEARCH LOCATIONS AND PARTICIPANTS

This research was carried out at the Faculty of Sports and Health Sciences, State University of Makassar. The selection of the research location was based on academic and health contexts relevant to the phenomenon of healthy living behavior changes, especially the experience of quitting smoking. The research participants were selected using the purposive sampling technique, which is the selection of participants based on their ability to provide rich and in-depth information about the phenomenon being studied. In phenomenological research, the number of participants is not determined based on the principle of statistical representation, but based on the depth of experience and the ability of participants to express the meaning of their life experiences (Van Manen, 2014).

This study involved seven participants, all of whom were lecturers at the Faculty of Sports and Health Sciences, State University of Makassar. Participant criteria include individuals who have first-hand experience as a former smoker and have undergone the process of quitting smoking. The selection of participants was carried out because they had experiences that were in accordance with the research phenomenon so that they were able to provide a reflective narrative about the journey of changing smoking behavior change.

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out during the period from January to June 2026 through *in-depth interviews* with a reflective approach. The interviews were conducted using semi-structured guidelines developed based on the research objectives, which are to explore the life experiences of individuals during the process of changing smoking behavior and understand the meaning of these changes to the formation of new self-identity. In hermeneutic phenomenology, interviews are not only seen as a process of obtaining information, but as a space for interpretive dialogue between researchers and participants to understand the meaning of the experience being studied (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Therefore, interview questions are open-ended and allow participants to develop narratives based on their personal experiences.

Interviews were conducted repeatedly to gain a depth of understanding of the participants' experiences. Each interview session lasts about 20–35 minutes. All interviews are recorded using an audio recording device after obtaining the consent of the participants and then transcribed verbatim to maintain the authenticity of the experience



conveyed. In addition to in-depth interviews, this study used field notes, contextual documentation, and the researcher's daily reflective journals. Reflective journals are used as part of *the researcher reflexivity* process to help researchers identify personal assumptions, experiences, and responses during the process of data collection and interpretation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using the principle of hermeneutic phenomenological analysis by Van Manen (2014). The process of analysis is not carried out in a linear manner, but through a process of repeated interpretation between the whole experience and the parts of the experience that appear in the participant's narrative. The stages of analysis include: First, all interview results are transcribed verbatim and read repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. Second, the researcher conducts phenomenological reflection by identifying meaningful statements that describe the participants' life experiences. Third, an interpretation process is carried out through a *hermeneutic circle*, which is the process of understanding the relationship between individual experiences and the overall meaning of the smoking cessation phenomenon. Fourth, essential themes are developed through a process of reflection and interpretation to find an experiential structure that describes the deepest meaning of the phenomenon being studied. Fifth, the results of the interpretation are compiled in the form of a phenomenological narrative that describes the experience of quitting smoking as an experience of behavior change as well as self-transformation.

Keabsahan Data (Trustworthiness)

The validity of research is maintained based on the principles of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability as developed in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is carried out through in-depth involvement of researchers with data, repeated interviews, continuous reading of transcripts, and reflection on interpretations carried out. Dependability is maintained through systematic documentation of the research process, starting from data collection, analysis process, to theme formation. Confirmability is strengthened through the use of daily reflective journals that help researchers maintain awareness of their subjectivity positions during the research process. Transferability is carried out through the presentation of contextual descriptions of the characteristics of the participants, the location of the study, and the experience being studied so that the reader can consider the possibility of applying the findings to other contexts.

This study applies the ethical principles of qualitative research by ensuring that all participants obtain an explanation of the research objectives before the interview process is conducted. Participation is voluntary and the information obtained is kept confidential. The participant's identity was not included in the research report and was replaced with a participant code (P1–P7). All research data is only used for academic and scientific publication purposes.

Results

This study involved seven participants who had first-hand experience as former smokers and had undergone the process of quitting smoking. Participants were selected based on the suitability of their experiences with the phenomenon being studied, namely individuals who had experienced smoking habits and then experienced changes towards a smoke-free life. In hermeneutic phenomenology research, participants are understood not only as a source of information about smoking cessation behavior, but as individuals who have *lived experience* of the phenomenon being studied. All seven participants had diverse smoking cessation journeys. Some participants experienced changes triggered by bodily experiences, such as health conditions and changes in physical response to cigarettes. Others experience changes through personal awareness, changes in the social environment, sports activities, and changes in the way they view themselves.

The results of reflection on the life experiences of seven participants showed that quitting smoking was not understood as a single event, but as a journey of change that took place through various experiences in individual lives. The process involves changing relationships with cigarettes, the body, the social environment, and self-understanding. Based on the analysis of hermeneutic phenomenology, four main themes were found that describe the experience of quitting smoking, namely:

1. The body as the initial space for the awareness of change
2. Reconstructing one's relationship with cigarettes and the formation of a new identity
3. Transformation of the world of life through relationships and the environment
4. Quitting smoking as a process of becoming a new self

1. The Body as the Initial Space of Change Awareness

The experience of quitting smoking in participants shows that the body has an important role as the beginning of the emergence of awareness to change. Before quitting smoking, cigarettes had become part of the routine of daily life. However, as participants experienced changes in their body condition, their relationship with cigarettes began to



shift. For some participants, the decision to quit smoking did not come about through long planning, but through bodily experiences that made them begin to question the habit. The body is present through the experience of pain, physical discomfort, changes in the body's abilities, and changes in response to cigarettes.

The first participant described that the experience of pain was a turning point in the journey to quit smoking. Before experiencing illness, cigarettes had become a strong part of his life. However, after undergoing treatment and trying to return to smoking, he experienced a change in taste for cigarettes.

"If I quit smoking, it was because I went to the hospital. I was treated for one week because I contracted typhoid. That's when I decided to quit smoking. After I got out of that hospital, I tried to go back to smoking. It's just that the taste of cigarettes has become different, the taste is bitter. That's why from then on, until now I have never smoked again."

(Informant 1)

The experience shows that changes in the relationship with cigarettes occur when the body provides a new experience that is different from before. Cigarettes, which were previously part of daily life, begin to lose their meaning when the body presents an experience that makes participants take a break from old habits. A similar experience was found in the third participant. After quitting for some time, he tried to return to smoking but experienced a different body response.

"When I first tried smoking after three months, I immediately got dizzy. So at that time smoking was no longer accepted in me until today. That was that moment until today I have never touched the name of cigarettes again."

(Informant 3)

In addition to the experience of physical pain or discomfort, body changes also appear through improved physical abilities after quitting smoking. The fifth participant who had a sports background described that quitting smoking changed the condition of the body and supported the life he wanted to live.

"After stopping, I felt that my body condition was getting better and my breath was more relieved when I exercised. It makes me even more motivated to become an athlete."

(Informant 5)

The sixth participant also described that the awareness of quitting smoking arose through bodily experiences that had previously begun to give signs of discomfort.

"I began to realize the impact when I felt a sore throat several times, coughed easily, and the body felt less refreshed after smoking. The experience made me think that smoking was starting to have an impact on my body."

(Informant 6)

Overall, the participants' experiences showed that the body became the starting door in the process of changing smoking cessation behavior. The body is not only the place where the effects of smoking appear, but it becomes an experiential space that helps individuals understand that their relationship with cigarettes has changed.

2. Reconstructing Self-Relationships with Cigarettes and the Formation of New Identities

The results of the study show that the process of quitting smoking is not only related to the cessation of cigarette consumption, but also involves changing the individual's relationship with himself. Participants described that before quitting smoking, cigarettes had become part of their routine, habits, and way of going about their daily activities. However, after going through a process of change, the relationship undergoes a shift, from something that was previously considered important to something that no longer has a place in their lives. In the early stages, some participants described that the decision to quit smoking came about through a process of personal awareness. The desire to change does not always occur directly, but develops through repeated experiences, reflection on old habits, and the emergence of a willingness to control oneself. Quitting smoking is understood as a form of an individual's ability to take back control over himself.

The second participant explained that the process of quitting smoking did not happen in one attempt, but through several experiences of trying to quit until finally being able to maintain a condition without smoking.

"I tried to quit several times, but it didn't work. Until finally I really had the will to stop and keep that decision. So in my opinion, quitting smoking comes back to your own will."

(Informant 2)

The experience shows that the process of quitting smoking for participants is not only related to avoiding smoking, but also a process of building confidence in one's own abilities. Success in quitting smoking is understood to be the result of personal decisions and the ability to control habits that were previously inherent in their lives. In addition to personal willpower, changes in the relationship with cigarettes are also seen through changes in the way participants view smoking activities. Cigarettes that previously provided a sense of comfort or were part of the routine began to lose their meaning after the participants underwent the change process. Individuals begin to see cigarettes no longer as something needed, but as a part of the past that no longer fits into their current lives.



The fifth participant described that the experience of quitting smoking provided a new understanding of the importance of discipline and self-control.

"For me, quitting smoking teaches that discipline starts with yourself. If we can control habits like smoking, then we can control other things in life as well."
(Informant 5)

The narrative shows that quitting smoking is beginning to be associated with broader values in the participants' lives. Behavior change is not only understood as quitting cigarettes, but as an experience that forms a new way of looking at one's abilities and responsibilities. Changes in the relationship with cigarettes are also related to the emergence of new identities. Participants no longer see themselves as someone who struggles with cigarettes on a daily basis, but as individuals who have been able to live a life without dependence on cigarettes. Identity as a former smoker begins to shift to identity as an individual who has control over his or her life choices.

The first participant described the changes through differences in his or her condition before and after quitting smoking. Before quitting, he felt that certain activities were difficult to do without cigarettes. However, after going through the process of change, he was able to carry out activities more freely.

"In the past, if I didn't smoke, it felt like something was missing. Such as not being able to focus or being uncomfortable. But now I'm used to it, I can even do a lot of things without having to think about cigarettes."
(Informant 1)

The experience showed a change in the way participants understood themselves. Cigarettes, which were previously considered part of daily life, are no longer the center of their lives. Individuals begin to build a new understanding that they are still able to carry out activities, work, and interact without the presence of cigarettes. A similar thing was also found in the seventh participant who described that after quitting smoking, his view of cigarettes changed. Cigarettes that previously gave a certain experience began to be seen differently after a change in them.

"I feel that smoking is not what it used to be. It used to feel fun, but after quitting and seeing the changes that were happening, I felt there was no reason to go back to smoking."
(Informant 7)

Based on the participants' overall experience, changes in smoking cessation behavior were not only characterized by the absence of cigarette consumption, but also by changes in the way individuals understood themselves. Participants experienced a process of shifting from someone who previously had an attachment to cigarettes to an individual who was able to define himself or herself through new values such as health, self-control, and the ability to choose. Thus, this theme illustrates that quitting smoking is a process of reconstructing an individual's relationship with himself. These changes do not occur only at the level of behavior, but also through changes in the meaning of self and life after quitting smoking.

3. Transformation of the Living World through Social and Environmental Relations

The results show that the process of quitting smoking does not take place as an individual experience separate from the environment, but occurs in the context of the participant's lifeworld. Participants' experiences show that the decision to start smoking in the past has a lot to do with the social environment, especially peer influences, gathering habits, and interaction cultures that consider smoking as part of social activities. Before quitting smoking, some participants described that cigarettes had an attachment to their social experiences. Smoking is part of a common activity, a symbol of closeness in society, as well as a habit that arises in certain situations. However, after going through the process of change, the relationship between the participants and the social environment changes. They began to build new ways of interacting without making cigarettes part of social relationships.

The sixth participant said that the initial experience of getting to know cigarettes could not be separated from the friendship environment. The existence of a friend who smokes makes this behavior slowly become something that is considered normal.

"I started smoking because I often hang out with friends who also smoke. At first, I just went along with them when I was with them, it became a habit and was hard to let go."
(Informant 6)

The experience shows that smoking behavior is not only formed through personal decisions, but also through the process of interaction with the social environment. Cigarettes become part of the experience of togetherness which then develops into an individual habit. The same thing was also conveyed by the third participant who described that the friendship environment was a factor that influenced the initial process of involvement with cigarettes.

"Because my friends smoke a lot, that's why it seems cool. At first it was just trying when we got together, but eventually it became a habit."
(Informant 3)

However, after undergoing the process of quitting smoking, participants experienced a change in the way they viewed the social environment that was previously related to smoking activities. The environment that was previously a supporting factor for smoking behavior no longer has the same influence. Participants began to make adjustments to social activities and build new patterns of interaction that did not depend on cigarettes. Changes in the social environment are also seen through the emergence of new experiences that support a life without smoking. Some participants found alternative activities that gave different meaning to their lives, such as sports activities, a healthier environment, and social relationships that supported behavior change.

A third participant described that environmental change and involvement within a particular community are part of the process of sustaining the decision to quit smoking.

"In 2018 I started to associate with the community of hijrah friends. From there I started thinking a lot about changing myself and how to live a better life."
(Informant 3)

The experience shows that quitting smoking does not only happen through self-control, but also through changes in the social space in which the individual lives his or her life. The new environment provides alternative experiences and meanings that help participants sustain behavior change. In addition to the social environment, changes in smoking cessation behavior also affect the way participants carry out their daily activities. Activities that were previously related to cigarettes have changed their meaning. The situation that was previously a trigger for the desire to smoke can begin to be lived without dependence on cigarettes.

The fifth participant described that lifestyle changes after quitting smoking were closely related to physical activity and orientation to health.

"After quitting smoking, I focused more on exercise and maintaining my body condition. I feel like life becomes more directed because there is a goal to achieve."
(Informant 5)

The experience shows that quitting smoking creates a new space for participants to establish different life patterns. Changes occur not only in the loss of smoking behaviors, but also in how individuals manage their activities, social relationships, and life priorities. Overall, this theme suggests that the experience of quitting smoking takes place through a changing relationship between the individual and his or her world of life. Participants not only abandoned cigarettes as a habit, but also experienced changes in the way they interacted, chose their environment, and carried out their daily activities. The world of life that previously supported the existence of cigarettes is slowly undergoing a transformation towards a life that is more in harmony with a new identity as an individual without cigarettes.

4. Quit Smoking as a Process of Becoming a New Self

The results show that the experience of quitting smoking not only describes a change from smoking behavior to non-smoking, but is a self-transformation process that changes the way participants understand themselves, their health, and their lives. After going through the journey of quitting smoking, participants no longer see themselves as individuals who have lost something by quitting cigarettes, but as someone who has gained a new understanding of their abilities, self-control, and direction of life. The process of change takes place gradually. Initially, some participants described a strong attachment to cigarettes, both physically and psychologically. Cigarettes used to be part of a routine, a companion in certain activities, and even considered helpful in dealing with certain situations. However, after going through the experience of quitting smoking, the relationship underwent a change. Cigarettes are no longer an important part of their lives and are slowly losing the personal meaning they once had.

The first participant described that before quitting smoking, the existence of cigarettes felt difficult to separate from their daily lives.

"I used to feel that if I didn't smoke, there was something missing. It's like there's a lost habit and it's hard to go through certain activities without cigarettes."
(Informant 1)

However, the experience of quitting smoking made participants experience a change in the way they understood themselves. After going through the adaptation process, he realized that life can still go on without dependence on cigarettes.

"Now I can carry out activities as usual without having to think about cigarettes. I feel freer because I'm no longer controlled by those habits."
(Informant 1)

The experience showed that the biggest change experienced by participants was not only the loss of smoking behavior, but a change in the position of cigarettes in their lives. Cigarettes that were previously part of their identity and daily lives slowly no longer determine the way they live their lives. The second participant also described that quitting smoking is an experience that builds awareness of one's abilities. The process of quitting is not only understood



as an attempt to quit smoking, but as proof that individuals are able to control habits that were previously difficult to let go.

"I think when a person is able to quit smoking, it shows that he is able to control himself. Because the most difficult thing is actually not the cigarettes, but how to control the desires from within."
(Informant 2)

The statement shows that the experience of quitting smoking gives a new meaning to the concept of self-control. Participants no longer see themselves as someone who is controlled by the habit of smoking, but as an individual who has the ability to make his or her life choices. In addition to changes in self-control, participants also experienced a change in orientation towards health and the future. Quitting smoking is beginning to be understood as part of efforts to maintain quality of life and achieve better life goals.

The fifth participant explained that quitting smoking changed the way he viewed his health and life activities. "After quitting smoking, I felt more responsible for my own body. I pay more attention to health because I am aware that this body must be taken care of to live life in the future."
(Informant 5)

The experience shows that quitting smoking becomes a turning point in an individual's relationship with his or her body. The body is no longer just seen as something that receives the impact of habits, but as a part of the self that must be cared for and appreciated. The change in identity was also seen in the way the participants viewed themselves after quitting smoking. They no longer define themselves based on past experiences as smokers, but through new values that develop after the process of change. The new identity is related to health, discipline, responsibility, and the ability to control oneself.

The seventh participant described that after quitting smoking, his view of cigarettes changed fundamentally. "I feel like now cigarettes are not something I need anymore. I used to feel close to cigarettes, but now I see that my life can be better without cigarettes."
(Informant 7)

These changes show a shift in the way individuals understand themselves. Participants not only succeeded in abandoning a behavior, but experienced a change in the way they saw the life they lived. Based on the overall experience of the participants, quitting smoking can be understood as the process of becoming (*becoming*) a person with a new understanding of self. These changes include changes in the way the body is perceived, relationships with the environment, self-control, and orientation to life. Participants are not only moving away from cigarettes, but moving towards a new form of life that is more in line with their health values and personal goals. Thus, this theme illustrates that the experience of quitting smoking is a process of self-transformation that takes place gradually. Quitting smoking is not just about eliminating certain behaviors, but it is shaping a new way for individuals to understand who they are and how they want to live their lives after quitting smoking.

4. DISCUSSION

1. Smoking as a Transformation Rooted in the Body's Experience: The Body as the Initial Space of Change

The experience of quitting smoking in this study is understood as an experience that begins with the body, not in the sense that the body is only a place where health problems appear, but as the first space where individuals experience, feel, and give meaning to changes in their lives. For participants, the decision to quit smoking was not solely born from knowledge of the dangers of smoking, but through the body's experience that slowly changed the way they understood the relationship between themselves and the smoking habit. In the daily experience before quitting smoking, cigarettes have become part of the participant's lifeworld. Cigarettes are present in routines, social activities, and certain ways of living their daily lives. However, when the body begins to present a different experience—whether through a state of illness, a change in physical ability, or discomfort after smoking—relationships that were previously considered normal begin to experience disruption. It is at this point that the body becomes a space of reflection, where the individual begins to question habits that were previously accepted as part of life.

This understanding differs from the view that sees the body only as a biological object that receives the impact of smoking behavior. In the phenomenological tradition, the body is understood as a *lived body*, which is the way humans experience themselves and the world before consciously reflecting. Merleau-Ponty (2012) explained that humans do not have a body as they have an object, but humans experience the world through their bodies. The body is not just something that is possessed, but the main medium through which humans feel, understand, and relate to their lives. In the context of quitting smoking, the experience of the body becomes important because the change does not start from outside the individual, but arises through the direct experience experienced by his own body. When participants experience changes in their body condition after quitting smoking or when the body responds negatively to



cigarettes, the experience is not only understood as a physical event, but becomes a meaningful experience that changes the way an individual sees himself and his habits.

This perspective is in line with Heidegger's (1962) thought that human beings are always in the world (*being-in-the-world*) and understand their existence through lived experiences. The body cannot be separated from the way humans are present in the world, because humans always experience life through embodied existence. Thus, the experience of quitting smoking is not only a change in the body as an object of health, but a change in the way an individual is in and relates to the world of his or her life. The experience of the body that appears during the process of quitting smoking can be understood as a moment when the old meaning of cigarettes begins to change. Previously, cigarettes might have been understood as something that provided comfort, accompanied certain activities, or became part of everyday identity. However, the experience of the body presents a new understanding that the relationship is no longer compatible with the life you want to live. The body becomes the place where the interpretive process takes place, when individuals begin to reread their past experiences as smokers through a new perspective.

In the perspective of Gadamer (2004), human understanding is always formed through the process of interpretation that takes place in the context of his historical experience. Individuals do not understand an experience neutrally, but through a horizon of understanding that has been shaped by previous life journeys. In the experience of quitting smoking, the experience of the body becomes part of the process when the individual brings together an old understanding of cigarettes with a new awareness of his or her health and life. Thus, the body's experience in quitting smoking does not only serve as a trigger for behavior change, but as a starting point for changes in the way we understand ourselves. The body allows the individual to realize that the habits that were previously inherent in his life begin to have different meanings. These changes then develop into broader reflections on health, self-control, and the direction of life.

This understanding expands the study of smoking cessation which has so far explained many behavioral changes through aspects of motivation, health knowledge, or nicotine dependence. While these aspects are important, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach suggests that behavioral change is also a process of meaning that takes place through the life experiences of individuals. Studies on smoking cessation show that personal health experiences are often an important part of the journey to behavior change. Individuals who experience changes in health conditions or increased awareness of their bodies are more likely to consider quitting smoking (West & Brown, 2017). However, in this study, bodily experiences are not only understood as a reason to quit, but as an existential experience that changes the way individuals perceive themselves.

This approach also has implications for health promotion. It is not enough to just provide information about health risks, because knowledge does not always result in behavior change. Health interventions need to provide space for individuals to reflect on their own body experiences, understand the changes they are experiencing, and relate those experiences to the value of the life they want to build. Van Manen (2014) explained that the task of hermeneutic phenomenology is not to explain experience as an object, but to approach and understand the meaning contained in human life experience. In this context, quitting smoking can be understood as an experience when the body becomes the initial space for the emergence of consciousness, which then develops into a transformation of the way an individual understands himself and his life. Thus, the experience of quitting smoking is not only a journey to quit smoking, but a journey to re-understand the relationship between the body, self, and the world of life. The body is the first place where changes begin to be felt, interpreted, and finally open up possibilities for the formation of a new way of life.

2. Reinterpreting the Self: Understanding the Transformation from Identity as a Smoker to a Health-Oriented Way of Being

Quitting smoking presents an experience when a person not only distances himself from smoking behavior, but also reflects on who he or she is before and after the change occurs. For the participants, cigarettes were not previously present only as objects consumed, but rather have become an inherent part of their daily lives. Cigarettes are present in certain routines, social activities, as well as personal experiences that form a special relationship between individuals and smoking habits. Therefore, the experience of quitting smoking cannot be understood simply as a behavioral dismissal, but rather as a process when the individual begins to reinterpret his or her relationship with something that was previously part of his or her life.

In the perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology, human experience has always had an interpretive dimension. Humans do not only experience an event, but give meaning to that experience based on the history of life, values, and understanding that they have had before. Gadamer (2004) explained that human understanding takes place through the encounter between past experiences and new experiences faced in the present. The process of understanding is not the process of erasing previous experiences, but the process of expanding and changing the way a person understands himself through the experiences that have been lived.



In the context of the experience of quitting smoking, participants do not leave their past as smokers, but begin to reread the experience through a new understanding. The experience as a smoker that might have previously been understood as a normal part of life is beginning to be reinterpreted as part of a journey of self-transformation. Thus, identity as a smoker is not simply replaced by a new identity, but undergoes a transformation of meaning through a process of reflection on life experiences.

These changes can be understood as the process of reshaping self-understanding (*reinterpretation of self*). Before quitting smoking, individuals may understand themselves through attachment to cigarettes, either as part of their daily habits or as part of a way of interacting with the social world. After experiencing the process of quitting smoking, individuals begin to understand themselves through different values, such as the ability to control themselves, maintain health, and make more conscious life choices.

In Heidegger's (1962) thought, human beings are never as subjects separate from the world, but are always in connection with their world of life (*being-in-the-world*). The way a person understands himself is inseparable from the experiences that shape his or her existence. In the experience of quitting smoking, the change that the individual experiences is not just a change in a behavior, but a change in the way the individual presents and relates to himself or the world around him.

This understanding suggests that identity as a smoker is not just a behavioral label, but is part of the way an individual experiences his or her life. As the relationship with cigarettes changes, the way individuals understand themselves also shifts. A person who previously experienced himself as an individual who needed cigarettes began to understand himself as someone who had the ability to make choices and live a life without such dependence. This way of understanding identity change is close to the study of Vangeli and West (2012) regarding the transition to a *non-smoker identity*. They explain that quitting smoking involves changing the way an individual sees himself or herself after quitting smoking. However, from the perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology, these changes are not only understood as a move from one identity category to another, but as a process of meaning that takes place through the life experience of individuals.

The same thing is also explained by Meijer et al. (2020), that the process of quitting smoking involves an ever-evolving identity dynamic. Individuals need to build a fit between new behaviors and new understandings of themselves. In the context of this study, the experience of quitting smoking is understood as a process in which individuals slowly build a new way of understanding who they are and how they want to live their lives after they are no longer dependent on cigarettes. Van Manen (2014) explained that hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to understand the hidden meanings in human life experience through the process of reflection and interpretation. Therefore, the experience of quitting smoking does not stop at the question of how one can quit smoking, but moves deeper into the question of how the experience changes the way one understands oneself.

In the participant's interpretation, quitting smoking is an experience related to the formation of a more conscious self towards health and life. The new identity that emerges is not just an identity as a non-smoking individual, but as someone who understands himself to have the ability to change, control himself, and take responsibility for his or her life. Thus, the experience of quitting smoking can be understood as a *process of becoming*, which is the journey of becoming a new self through the interpretation of life experiences. Individuals are not simply moving away from cigarettes, but moving towards a new understanding of themselves. In the process, the past as a smoker is not erased, but rather reinterpreted as part of a journey that shapes a new way of an individual understanding his or her health, self, and life.

3. Transforming the World of Life: Understanding the Experience of Quitting Smoking through Social Relations and Daily Experiences

The experience of quitting smoking in this study is understood as a change that takes place in an individual's *lifeworld*, which is an experiential space where a person experiences relationships with themselves, others, and the surrounding environment. Quitting smoking is not only about personal decisions to stop smoking, but also involves changing the way individuals experience and interpret daily life after they are no longer attached to the habit. In the participants' experiences, cigarettes were not previously present as stand-alone behaviors, but rather inherent in the context of a particular social life. Smoking activities are related to friendships, gathering habits, work environments, and daily situations that provide space for the existence of cigarettes. Thus, an individual's relationship with cigarettes is formed through experiences that take place in his or her social world, not solely through individual decisions.

This understanding is in line with the perspective of Heidegger's (1962) hermeneutic phenomenology which views humans as *being-in-the-world*. Man does not experience life as a subject separate from the environment, but always understands himself through engagement with the world in which he belongs. In the context of the experience of quitting smoking, changes occur not only in the individual's behavior, but also in the way the individual is in and

relates to his or her social world. Before quitting smoking, cigarettes can be part of the way individuals participate in social life. Smoking is often present as part of certain togetherness, conversations, and routines. Therefore, when an individual quits smoking, he or she not only abandons a particular substance or habit, but also undergoes changes to patterns of social engagement that previously had a certain meaning.

In the framework of Gadamer's (2004) hermeneutics, human experience is always understood through the historical context that shapes the way a person sees the world. Individuals never begin understanding from a blank state, but bring past experiences that are then reinterpreted through new experiences. In this study, the experience of being a smoker was not abolished after the individual quit smoking, but was reinterpreted as part of a life journey that shaped a new understanding of health, social relationships, and self. This process shows that changes in smoking cessation behavior are a change in the horizon of understanding (*fusion of horizons*). Individuals who previously understood cigarettes as part of daily life begin to look back at the habit through a new perspective after experiencing the change. The social world that was previously associated with cigarettes began to acquire a different meaning when the individual began to live a life as someone who no longer smoked.

This understanding is strengthened by the concept of *lived relation* in the phenomenology of Van Manen (2014), who explains that human experience always has a relational dimension. Humans do not only experience life through the body (*lived body*) or space (*lived space*), but also through relationships with others. Therefore, the experience of quitting smoking is inseparable from the changes in social relationships that accompany the process. Studies on smoking cessation show that the social environment has an important role in maintaining or inhibiting behavior change. Social support from family, partner, and the surrounding environment is associated with an individual's success in maintaining smoking cessation, while exposure to an environment that supports smoking behavior may increase the risk of returning to smoking (West & Brown, 2017; Stead et al., 2017). However, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach provides a deeper understanding that the social environment is not just an external factor that influences behavior, but rather a part of the world of life that gives meaning to individual experiences.

In the context of quitting smoking, changes in the social environment not only mean reducing exposure to cigarettes, but also creating opportunities for individuals to live a new form of existence. Individuals begin to build new ways of interacting, going about their daily activities, and understanding themselves in relationships with others. Thus, the social world undergoes a transformation along with the transformation of the individual's self. This understanding has a close affinity with the research of Vangeli and West (2012) who explain that the transition to a non-smoking identity is not only related to the cessation of smoking behavior, but also a change in the way an individual positions himself or herself in social life. Identity as a non-smoking individual needs to be strengthened through daily experiences in order to become a stable part of self-understanding.

In addition, Meijer et al. (2020) show that the process of identity in quitting smoking takes place dynamically and involves negotiations between the old identity as a smoker and the new identity that is being constructed. In the perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology, the process can be understood as an experience when the individual continues to reinterpret himself or herself in relation to the changing world. Understanding this experience has important implications for health promotion. Smoking cessation programs often focus on an individual's ability to control the desire to smoke, but participants' experiences show that sustained change also has to do with the individual's ability to build a new life in different social contexts. Therefore, smoking cessation interventions need to consider the individual's world of life, including social relationships, the everyday environment, and the spaces in which the habit previously developed.

Thus, the experience of quitting smoking can be understood as a transformation of *lifeworld*. Individuals are not only moving away from cigarettes as a habit, but are experiencing changes in the way they understand social relationships, live their daily lives, and place themselves in the world. Quitting smoking becomes an interpretive experience when a person builds a new way of being with others and living his or her life without dependence on cigarettes.

4. Becoming the New Self: Quitting Smoking as an Existential Transformation

The experience in this study is understood as a journey of self-transformation, when individuals not only experience changes in a behavior, but also experience changes in the way they understand their existence. Quitting smoking is not just a move from a "smoking" to a "non-smoking" state, but a process of becoming (*becoming*) when individuals build a new way of relating to their body, themselves, others, and the life they lead. Through the participants' life experiences, quitting smoking does not emerge as a stand-alone event, but as a series of processes of meaning. The experience of the body is the beginning of the emergence of consciousness, reflective experience forms a new understanding of the self, and changes in social relationships allow individuals to live life with a different



orientation. The whole process shows that smoking cessation behavior change has a broader dimension than just quitting the habit.

In the perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology, human experience is not only understood based on what happens, but how the experience is interpreted by the individual who experiences it. Van Manen (2014) explained that hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to understand the meaning contained in human life experience through the process of reflection and interpretation. Therefore, the experience of quitting smoking in this study is understood as a transformational experience that changes the way an individual understands himself and his life. The process of becoming a new self does not mean that the past identity as a smoker is completely lost. Instead, those past experiences remain part of an individual's life journey that then acquires new meaning. The individual does not erase the fact that he or she has been a smoker, but places the experience in a different life narrative. The experience as a smoker is part of the process that forms awareness about health, self-limitations, the ability to change, and responsibility for life.

This understanding is in line with Gadamer's (2004) thought that humans always understand themselves through a process of interpretation that takes place historically. A person brings past experiences into the process of understanding his or her present. In the context of quitting smoking, change does not occur through a rejection of the past, but through a process of dialogue between old experiences and new understandings that develop after the change has occurred. Thus, a new identity after quitting smoking is not just an identity as a "non-smoker". This identity is deeper, which is a new way of understanding individuals as someone who has the ability to choose, control themselves, and live a life based on the health values they believe in. These changes indicate a shift from dependence to independence, from habit to awareness, and from past experiences to a new orientation to life.

In Heidegger's (1962) thought, this kind of change is related to the change in the way humans are in the world (*being-in-the-world*). Humans not only experience the world passively, but continuously understand and shape its existence through lived experiences. When a person quits smoking, the changes that occur are not only in the actions that are seen, but in the way the individual places himself or herself in his or her life. From this perspective, quitting smoking can be understood as a *transformation of being*. Individuals no longer live their lives with cigarettes as a defining part of their daily lives, but begin to build new relationships with their bodies, health, activities, and future. The transformation suggests that changes in health behavior can be existential experiences that affect the way a person understands themselves.

This understanding expands the study of smoking cessation which has so far focused on the mechanisms of behavior change, motivation, nicotine dependence, and factors that support successful quitting. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach provides space to understand a deeper dimension, namely how a person experiences these changes as part of his or her life journey. The study of Vangeli and West (2012) shows that the success of quitting smoking is related to the formation of an identity as an individual who no longer smokes (*non-smoker identity*). This study expands this understanding by showing that the new identity does not arise simply because a person stops smoking, but through a process of interpretation of life experiences that changes the way individuals understand themselves.

In line with that, Meijer et al. (2020) explain that identity change in the process of quitting smoking is a dynamic process and takes place through negotiations between old identities and new identities. In this study, the process is understood as a hermeneutic journey when individuals constantly reread their life experiences and build a new understanding of who they are. The implication of this understanding for health promotion is that smoking cessation programs need to see the individual not just as someone who has risky behaviors, but as a human being who is undergoing a process of self-transformation. Effective interventions not only help individuals stop cigarette consumption, but also support the process of forming a new life that has meaning for the individual.

An *experience-oriented approach* can be an alternative in health promotion because it provides space for individuals to reflect on their own journey of change. By understanding how a person interprets their body, identity, and life after quitting smoking, health interventions can become more personalized and appropriate to the context of an individual's life. In the end, the experience of quitting smoking can be understood as the process of becoming a *new self*. Individuals are not only moving away from cigarettes, but moving towards a new understanding of themselves as human beings who have a healthier awareness, the ability to choose, and the orientation of a healthier life. In the perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology, such changes are not just changes in behavior, but changes in the way a person understands his or her existence in the world.

5. CONCLUSION

This research provides an understanding that the experience of quitting smoking is not solely a process of quitting a health behavior, but a journey of self-transformation that involves changing the way individuals experience their bodies, understand themselves, and live their lives in the social world. Through a hermeneutic phenomenological



approach, the experience of quitting smoking is understood as a process of meaning that takes place gradually. The body becomes the starting space when individuals begin to notice changes in their relationship with cigarettes. The experience then develops into a process of reinterpretation of the self, when the individual begins to understand himself no longer as someone who is dependent on cigarettes, but as an individual who has the ability to choose and control his or her life.

The experience of quitting smoking also shows that behavior change does not take place in isolation from the individual's world of life. Social relationships, the environment, and everyday experiences are part of the process when individuals build a new way of life. Thus, quitting smoking can be understood as a *process of becoming*, which is the journey of becoming a new self through a change in the way of understanding one's body, self, and existence in life. Overall, the deepest meaning of the smoking cessation experience in this study lies in changing the way individuals perceive themselves. Individuals not only quit cigarettes, but undergo a transformation in the way they see their health, self-abilities, and life direction. Quitting smoking becomes an existential experience that allows a person to build a new relationship with himself and the world around him.

6. IMPLICATIONS

The understanding of the experience of quitting smoking in this study shows that the process of behavior change is not only related to the individual's ability to stop smoking cigarettes, but also to how the individual interprets these changes in his or her life. For health promotion practices, the results of this interpretation show the importance of a more *person-centered approach*, namely by paying attention to the body experience, self-identity, and social environment that accompanies the process of quitting smoking. Efforts to quit smoking are not enough to provide information about health risks, but also to support individuals in building new ways of life without smoking. For further research, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach can be developed to understand the experience of smoking cessation in different groups and life contexts so that the understanding of the process of health behavior change becomes broader.

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