

Lesbian, bisexual, and queer women's cultural practices of vaping

Ruby Grant

Julie Mooney-Somers

Jennifer Power

Amy Pennay

Ruth McNair

Jami Jones

David Moore

Adam Bourne



The Project

Sixty LBQ women and some non-binary people interviewed between May and July 2023 (wave 1 of a longitudinal qualitative cohort study)

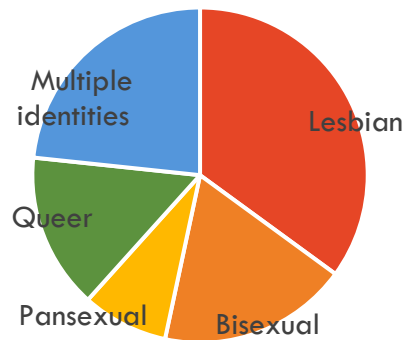
Research Questions:

- What is the role of alcohol and nicotine use in the social and cultural lives of Australian lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women over time?
- How do LBQ women understand, construct, and manage the potential risks and harms of alcohol and nicotine use?
- What are LBQ women's experiences and perceptions of smoking cessation and alcohol-related support services?

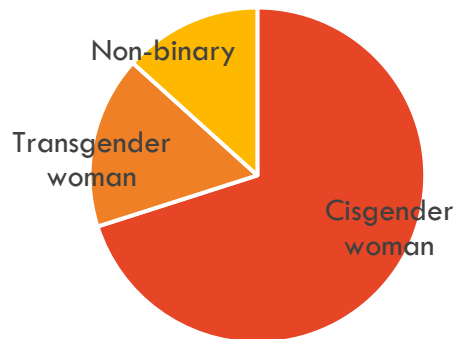


PARTICIPANTS

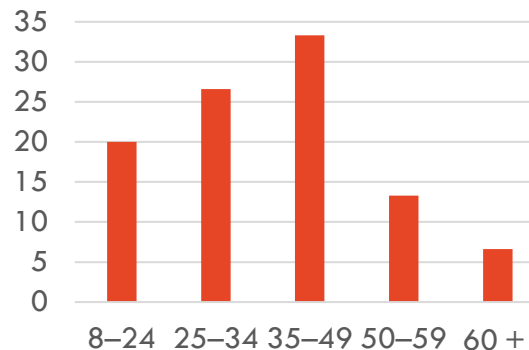
Sexuality



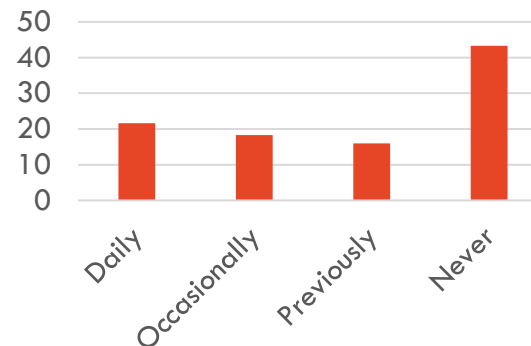
Gender



Age (%)



Vaping status (%)



More acceptable than smoking

Smoking definitely has more stigma [than vaping], like you say to someone now that you're a smoker and they go 'eww, why?' But you say that you're a vaper and they're like 'oh yeah, okay, cool, what flavour?' (29, white bisexual cisgender woman, previously smoked, vapes occasionally)

I think smoking's not really that acceptable anymore, but people don't seem to be bothered by vaping. Like even with my neighbours, there's a non-smoker who hates the smell [of cigarettes] and he's like 'this strawberry smell is so much better.' **So [vaping] seems to be more acceptable.** (38 year old, white bisexual/pansexual cisgender woman, previously smoked, vapes occasionally)



Smoking is serious, vaping is childish

I just feel that vaping is seen, and I see it like this as well, **as something that teenagers do and real grown-ups smoke cigarettes.** I almost wonder if [vaping] is seen as a little, **like I feel a bit pathetic smoking vapes** instead of cigarettes. It's like you need it tasting like a lolly because you can't handle the taste of a cigarette. (39 year old, white pansexual cisgender woman, previously smoked, vapes daily)

I think vaping is kind of like the cocktail versus cigarettes being like the beer or the whisky. **One is the more serious drink and the other one is like 'that's for women and children [...].** And then there's the flavours and stuff, like you'll get bubble gum, which makes it very entry level, not serious. **It's for the weaker demographic.** (26 year old, Indian pansexual/queer non-binary woman, vapes daily, smokes occasionally)



Is vaping even risky, compared to smoking?

Vaping for me, it doesn't count, it's just like eating chewing gum. I don't know from a medical perspective whether vaping is affecting people's health [like smoking]... But like, for me, **vaping is just like chewing gum**, it's not like as bad as smoking. (25 year old, Chinese cisgender lesbian, vapes and smokes daily)

I know it's stupid and I know it's also bad for you and I know it's also nicotine, **but I just don't view [vaping] the same [as smoking]**. I'm very against smoking, like I don't think I will ever try a cigarette, I have no desire to. But with a vape, I think it's also because it's like fruity flavoured and smells like nothing, so I perceive it as just like **so much less harmful**. (24 year old, Korean-Australian cisgender lesbian, vapes occasionally).



Experiencing vaping harms


[Vaping] **sort of makes me have trouble breathing.** It's not a good sign, I tend to overlook it, but sometimes I'm going to the gym and I'm not breathing properly. So that's when I'm like 'ok it's really not healthy for me.' So that's why recently **I was thinking I should probably quit and I want to quit, but at the same time it's so tasty, I don't want to quit.** (24 year old, pansexual/queer Chinese non-binary person, vapes daily, smokes occasionally)

I see my health getting worse because of it. I've started having to use a Ventolin again, which I haven't used in ages, but like **it's definitely detrimental to my health, there's zero benefits** except pretty much for stress relief and even then it's still causing stress, **but in the moment that stress relief wins out.** (29 year old, white cisgender bisexual woman, previously smoked, vapes occasionally)



Feeling out of control

That anxiety around not having it, or losing it. It's like when you're scurrying through your blankets, through your lounge, through your car. **There are times I've literally driven 20 minutes on the way to work and turned back because I'm like 'I'm not going to get through the day without it.'** (23, white lesbian/queer, cisgender woman, previously smoked and vaped)



It was just **getting out of hand**. I was just doing it too much and it creates this up and down of the nervous system, I think. **I just hated being so beholden to it**, you know like having to go and [vape] in the toilets because I'm at work, like **that's the level of control over me that [it has] and it feels just awful, like I've got to stop that, I'm a grown up**. But I would crave it and I couldn't think about anything else, and so I would have to stop what I was going and go and [vape]. (39 year old, white pansexual cisgender woman, previously smoked, vapes daily)

Feeling out of control

I was hitting the vape like once every hour or every two hours, I would get sick and yet I would still do it. So, I got stuck in that loop where I'm like okay I'm not actually even enjoying this, I'm embarrassed by this habit now. So, I'm hating myself and hating the fact that I'm doing it and addicted or dependent on it. And I noticed myself starting to break my own boundaries just because of the pull of the addiction. Like I'm literally doing it under my desk in my cubicle and I hate it. I even figured out a technique of vaping that wouldn't actually let out any vapour, like I'd kind of swallow it and it would disappear, which is really bad for you. I think its doing damage to my health, **I'm really afraid for my long term health now** that it's been two or three years of me using this almost daily, so I'm like oh my God, I'm going to get popcorn lung, like all these anxious thoughts. I just really want to quit. (26, Indian, pansexual/queer non-binary woman, vapes daily, smokes occasionally)



Discussion

Smoking has a very long history and is deeply ingrained in LBQ women's culture. Vaping comes to LBQ women, not with a blank slate, but through a smoking lens.

The closely-coupled relationship of smoking and vaping is a problem for health promotion.

Has it become smoking or vaping?

Vaping as teenage/fun/bubble-gum/not serious – the healthier choice.

Does this make it hard to talk about vaping harms.

How do we avoid the shame woman feel about their 'out of control' use? How do we support cessation/reduction?

Read More



Perceptions and Cultural Practices of Vaping Among Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Women in Australia

Ruby Grant¹  · Julie Mooney-Somers² · Jennifer Power¹ · Amy Pennay³ · Ruth McNair⁴ · Catherine Segan^{5,6} · Jami Jones¹ · Adam Bourne^{1,7}

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Abstract

Background The rising prevalence of vaping poses new challenges and opportunities for health policy and public health interventions. Given that, historically, smoking has been more prevalent among lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women than other women, this study explores LBQ women's perceptions and experiences of vaping.

Methods Sixty LBQ women and some non-binary people (aged 18–72) participated in in-depth qualitative interviews between May and July 2023, providing insights into the emerging prevalence and nature of vaping within LBQ women's communities. Thematic analysis techniques were employed to identify key themes, including (1) risk perceptions and social stigma, (2) gendered perceptions of vaping, and (3) experiences of vaping-related harms.

Results Results highlight gendered perceptions of vaping among LBQ women, with participants describing vaping as a feminine practice, influenced by flavour choices and the visual aesthetics of vape devices. Despite perceiving vaping as more socially acceptable than smoking, some participants expressed a sense of embarrassment about vaping, while others reported substantial challenges and health concerns.

Conclusion Concerns about vaping-related harms, addiction, and the evolving social dynamics of vaping contribute to LBQ women's engagement with this emerging practice. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing targeted harm reduction strategies and support services tailored to LBQ women's unique needs in the evolving landscape of vaping.

Policy Implications Health and social policy may require specific responses to address higher rates of vaping among LGBTQ populations, including LBQ women.

Keywords Gender · Vaping · Nicotine · Sexuality · Smoking · Women