

Embracing the Cloud: A Reflection of Vape Culture at SUNY Purchase

By

Molly Ormsbee

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Sponsor: Joseph Russo

Second Reader: Shaka McGlotten

*You bite your fingernails, without realizing it. The urge to get away creeps up on you. Everything seems to irritate you. The noise that surrounds you, the smells that torment you, and your heightened awareness of the tension between you and everyone else that occupies *your* space. A million things cross your mind and anxiety has your undivided attention. You can't seem to figure out what's wrong until you step outside and light your cigarette. Finally, you feel normal again.*

When it comes down to addiction, everyone has different experiences and it's hard to understand if you haven't been through it yourself. It's easy for someone like me, who has never smoked a cigarette to imagine quitting with ease, given that we have tools to help us like nicotine patches and gum. The truth is, it's not that easy. There's more to smoking addiction than nicotine. It's about the sensations that you crave. The familiar smells, tastes, and even the feeling of the cigarette between your fingers are what the smoker desires. They know smoking is bad for their health, and they have options for cessation, but a nicotine patch is useless to someone who's habit depends on more than just a drug.

These days, most smokers agree that the most effective form of cessation is vaping. However, not all vape users started out with cigarettes. The smoker and the vaper differ in many ways. The smoker has a definitive place in American society. *They are a nuisance, a weed in a garden of white picket fences and cookie-cutter families. Children hold their nose as they pass the stench that trails behind the smoker.* Vape users have many faces. Some vape because it is a less

harmful alternative to the sensations they crave from cigarettes. Some vape to relieve anxiety. Meanwhile, some vape for entertainment and for sport, but each face has a different story.

Vape culture differs in the technology itself, in the molecular makeup of e-juices, and in its reason for existence among each user, but I am curious to see where I can find diversity in the users. What does vape culture look like for different genders, races, age groups, and socioeconomic levels? These are the things I am aiming to highlight in this project. I want to examine the differences between each vape user and the things that make them unique within this obscure phenomenon.

They are one in their common habits but separate in their identities. I plan to showcase this through mixed media. A web page will host individual profiles, complete with images and audio interviews for each vape user, as well as reflective and critical writing on my findings throughout the project. The purpose of the project will be to examine vape culture while identifying the diversity of each user in their reasoning, personality, style, preferences, and demographic.

We all have addictions. Sex, drugs, and shopping are no exception. The difference is that some addictions are easier to hide. There is nothing morally wrong with the smoker, but few people try to understand how it feels to tear themselves away from the irreplaceable feeling they get from the consistency of a drag. This project is important because it examines the culture of vaping, without marginalizing the users themselves. It is a way of understanding vape culture without stigmas.

Cadillacs and Range Rovers crowd the streets in my hometown of Niskayuna. My community mainly consisted of upper-middle-class families and most of my peers had parents who were

lawyers, doctors, or most often, engineers for General Electric, whose Global Research Center was just a few miles from my high school. Even though I grew up in a middle-class household, I found myself at a lower socioeconomic status than many of my peers, but never embarrassed to be carrying an Eddie Baur backpack in the place of a Michael Kors tote bag. I never resented where I came from, in fact, I was proud of it. It felt good to work for what I had, to know I earned what I had. What I resented was the stereotype that would be associated with me because of the name of my school. There was little diversity at Niskayuna high school. Each district in the capital region had its own stereotypes, of course. *Niskayuna's reputation is not far from what one might expect from a suburb in upstate New York: rich, white kids, who buy drugs with their rich, white parents' money simply because they have nothing better to do.

Stereotypes don't emerge out of thin air. Even though they're generalizations, they often hold a little bit of truth. After all, the lacrosse team wasn't doing lines of coke on the weekend with money they made bagging groceries at ShopRite.* It wasn't a coincidence then and it isn't a coincidence now, as vape culture is emerging and we're seeing the same trend, but with expensive vape products instead of party drugs. Research shows that white people are four times more likely to start vaping and that number has been directly affected by socioeconomic status.

These days, it is more likely that the smoke trailing behind the POCs in the projects came from combustible cigarettes, not vapes. That technology won't even tempt them the way it will for their rich, white counterparts. Not because they can't be tempted by the appeal of e-cigarettes, but because the advertising for e-cigarettes won't even reach their neighborhoods. In low-income communities, cigarette retailers line the streets, advertising Marlboros, Newports, and Camels on every block. However, research also shows that higher socioeconomic status is

associated with greater e-cigarette advertising and in turn, greater e-cigarette use. This means that the tobacco industries have left cigarettes behind in the low-income neighborhoods, reserving the expensive, technological, “healthy alternative” to smoking for those with disposable income. According to a study published in *Preventative Medicine* journal, “In the US, the average cost of combustible cigarettes, disposable e-cigarettes, and rechargeable e-cigarettes are \$6.82, \$7.99 and \$9.99, respectively” (Simon, et al. 197). It is likely that people that live in higher-income communities are vaping more than those in low-income communities because the devices themselves are difficult to afford and continue to afford without a certain level of disposable income. It is also stated in the study that “high SES groups may be targeted because they are more likely than low SES groups to be early adopters of new technology or more likely to have the disposable income to buy new products” (Simon, et al. 194).

When you look at the vape user, can you see their status? As they take each hit from their Juul, a continuous cloud of smoke follows close behind, but are they aware of the cost, both literal and figurative? Another \$16 means nothing. Another \$16 is just cash. In this context, it carries more. It is the equivalent of four packs of cigarettes in the atmosphere, in your bedroom, in the hands of a child or worse yet, the lungs of a child. However, ease of access and normalization in high-income communities diminishes this meaning. It evaporates faster than the vape cloud. The truth is, no one thinks about the transaction that much. What’s another \$16 to those who can afford it?

Matt Kraus is the director of the wellness center at SUNY Purchase and the man that was chosen to implement a tobacco-free policy on the campus. On a first impression, he seems like a

good fit to be promoting health and wellness. He is tall and slender and appears to be in a good state of health. It wasn't his idea to ban tobacco use, it was a mandate put in place by the SUNY system, which required all SUNY campuses to be tobacco-free by June of 2018. Kraus tries his best to be compassionate in regards to the smoker, making it clear to me that his personal intent isn't to marginalize. "There are other methods to getting nicotine to the body," he says. "We're trying our best to be helpful to offer them". Kraus tells me that when the tobacco-free policy was first introduced to this campus, they made efforts to supply the campus health center with nicotine patches, to help students make the adjustment, but there are still problems with this attempt to "fix" addiction.

There is something that Kraus doesn't understand about the smoker. While his attempt to help smokers curb their nicotine cravings is admirable, there is more to addiction than nicotine. A patch doesn't satisfy the desire to feel the cigarette between a smoker's fingers. It doesn't have the familiar taste of the smoker's favorite brand. You can't share a nicotine patch the way you might let your friend take a drag from your cigarette or a hit off your Juul. What Kraus is forgetting to consider is the sensation that comes with smoking and the peace of mind that comes with familiarity. How do you address these aspects of addiction?

What this campus lacks is consistency in their efforts to help. Health services ran out of nicotine patches in one semester, according to Kraus. He assures me that students can get free "quit kits" from the nyquits website, but they don't deliver these kits to PO boxes, so students will have to have them delivered to the health center. The biggest issue that stands out to me, though, is the fact that this is the first I'm hearing about any of it. Not once have I seen these cessation aids advertised on campus. Where would I have gotten access to this information, had I

not met with the director of the wellness center himself? Everywhere I turn on campus, the words are abundantly present, “Proud to be tobacco-free”. So where is the sign that will point them in the direction of their nicotine patch, when it feels like their only options are to suffer through it or take the risk and be punished because the SUNY system has taken away their choice?

According to the SUNY mandate, there are a number of obvious reasons to make campuses tobacco-free. These days, it is getting more difficult to tell whether or not the substances in vapes are legal. There is also limited research on the effects of vaping and second-hand exposure, so SUNY seems to be taking a “better safe than sorry” approach. However, these changes are raising questions about the fairness of the policy. It's undeniable that smoking is bad for you, but does that excuse SUNY campuses from revoking basic rights? In some ways, the tobacco-free policy takes away a person's control of their own body.

JC Papperman is incredibly shy and gentle. He apologizes to me repeatedly, for being just a few minutes late for our interview. After I assure him it's okay, I can sense that he feels more comfortable in my presence. JC seems to be a very kindhearted person. A pride flag is prominently displayed on his wall, opposite a collage of photos of his friends and family. JC tells me he is following in his relatives' footsteps to become a firefighter. *Every aspect of his life is enveloped by a fragrant and ominous fog.* JC began smoking cigarettes when he was just thirteen. Five years later, he switched to Juul after attempting to quit cold turkey. The smell of cigarettes on his clothes became too much for him to bear. However, I feel it is not the smell itself that gives JC distress, but the memories associated with that familiar aroma. It is the

temptation, guilt, and the memory that drives his desire for a cigarette as a coping mechanism that haunts him.

The tobacco-free policy has been difficult for JC. He tells me he definitely feels marginalized. “I understand not being able to smoke in specific places, like the dining halls or residence halls, but there should be spots that are at least available to be used by this large population on campus. It's not that I believe I have the right to smoke just because I like nicotine, but it's a civil liberty. You should be able to express yourself that way.” JC had successfully quit smoking for six months but picked it back up after being assaulted. Using his Juul helps him cope with anxiety and trauma from this experience.

JC takes a small hit off his vape every so often. *There is a subtlety in the way he lets the vapor slowly escape from his mouth. Then, the Juul vanishes as quickly as it emerged from his pocket.* He tells me he doesn't do it to show off or be obnoxious. JC wants people to know that he is not a monster. He is a supportive brother to three younger siblings and loves helping people, which is one of the reasons he is so passionate about his work as a firefighter. He is not proud of himself for vaping and hopes he will be able to quit someday. However, he feels he has nothing to be ashamed of. *When he is haunted by painful memories from his past, his Juul is his safety blanket. The vapor wraps him up and comforts him, like the security of a mother's arms that reassure you there is nothing to be afraid of. I can't help but feel sympathetic.*

Hannah Gordon is twenty years old and has been vaping for a short time. When I ask why vaping appeals to them, they tell me “Vaping provides you with a relaxing drug that doesn't inhibit your mental stability. You can still do things. You can take a hit and go back to class. You can take a hit *in* class if you're feeling ballsy.”

Hannah has also felt marginalized by the tobacco-free policy. By simply agreeing to do this interview, Hannah risks losing their job. Hannah is an RA on campus and often feels ashamed, given that the protocol is for them to turn in their residents if caught partaking in the same forbidden activities that they are also guilty of. The tobacco-free mandate makes Hannah feel like their vape use is something to be ashamed of and should be kept hidden. Sometimes, they will even hide in the bathroom, just to hit their vape in peace, but it is never truly peaceful.

They feel a physical and emotional strain from the same constant motion, as they look over their shoulder, anxiety peaking because they never know who could be around the corner. Their vape creates a paradox. It simultaneously causes and eases the tension, one of the many side effects of addiction.

Hannah describes themselves as a creative person. They enjoy performing and writing music. According to Hannah, vaping has become part of the creative “scene”, almost as a replacement to cigarettes. It serves the same purpose, but vapes are just more prominent these days, especially among young people. The buzz from the nicotine gives a person an instantaneous way to feel something, which is what makes it alluring for an artist like themselves. The art of hitting the vape is a practice in meditation. It brings the body to create a deep sensation in the lungs, filling them forcefully before the vapor is expelled and a cool sensation runs down the back of their throat. “Artists like to feel things”, they say. Hannah believes people are more likely to bond over a shared need than a shared interest. Friendships form between coworkers when they take breaks to vape together because it is something they both *need* in their day, therefore they can strongly relate to one another. I find this interesting in relation to laws and regulations that

restrict vape use, like the tobacco-free policy. These policies are bringing people together in the ways that they introduce them to communities with a shared need and in turn, a shared struggle.

Heads turn as the peacock spreads his colorful, boisterous feathers. He treats his entire way of being as a performance. If his action doesn't get him attention, then it has no point. His style was invented so he could stand out. He is a competitor and he has to be the best. According to sociologist Elaine Keane, "Deliberately exhibiting one's resources through appearance and behavior is social peacocking. In a Bourdieusian sense, it is a form of class-based 'distinction'. Investing in producing one's appearance in this way enables one to explicitly position oneself more highly." (Keane, 459). Peacocking can be seen in performance, style, and language. However, in the vape community, it is most obvious in performance. Some vape users (usually men) enjoy drawing attention to themselves, doing various tricks, and competing to see who can create the biggest clouds and who can perform the best. These performances are ostentatious, confident, and competitive.

Bronson is a peacock, practicing various smoke tricks as I take photos for his profile. Bronson grew up in a house full of smokers and he started out smoking cigarettes. He wants to make it clear to me that he thinks smoking is a disgusting habit and a part of him regrets ever getting involved with nicotine products. Bronson speaks as if his opinions are undeniable facts. I can tell in the way he talks down to me and interrupts my attempts to ask him questions, that he doesn't see me as much. To Bronson, I am a lamb (innocent, meek, unassuming). I have to give Bronson credit for being so shamelessly sure of himself. He explains to me the difference between those who take vaping seriously and those who are just "posers". "The posers buy disposable vapes or have Juuls. They don't refill, they waste all their money on pods. They don't know about PG and

VG or the difference between salt-based and regular. People who smoke strawberry milk or basic brands are posers. People that buy their vaping equipment from gas stations are posers. People who haven't been in the game as long as I have are posers," he says. In other words, anyone who doesn't fit Bronson's standard of vaping does not belong in the community. *They might as well be expelled along with the vapor they draw from their off-brand products.*

What amazes me the most about Bronson, however, is his strong opinion about the attractiveness of vaping. *It is at this point in the interview, that Bronson really flashes his bright, vociferous feathers.* He tells me that women find vaping attractive, some are even "in awe" when they see him blow a big cloud. According to Bronson, vaping after sex is highly satisfying and he also finds vaping in bed extremely sexy. He then proceeds to ask me for my opinion of vaping- do I think vaping is hot? As I try to think of a way to politely tell him what I know he doesn't want to hear, he blows a large cloud directly at me. *The vapor quickly blankets my face with a thin layer of smog and my immediate reaction is to waft it away, though I regret it because I want to appear unbothered. The sweetness in the aroma takes me back to the times I experimented with hookah. I'm brought back to a dark, cloudy pool hall in Yonkers where I smoked until I felt sick. All I can do is wait for the nauseating memory to pass*. As Bronson proceeds to boast about the sexiness of his habit, I change the subject to the group he identifies within the vape world: cloud chasers.

I ask him to define a cloud chaser, for those who might hear the interview and be confused by the term. "Cloud chasers are the ones who take it seriously. Cloud chasing is when you vape with a moderate ohm and high temperature. You have to have high vegetable glycerin and high heat. You have to have a modern high-end vaporizer to inhale and blow out a lot of smoke and do

tricks." In other words, a cloud chaser rigs their vaporizer to make bigger clouds, which allows them to do tricks. These are often the individuals you might see at competitions or vape conventions. In Bronson's mind, there are vape users who take their vaping seriously, like cloud chasers, and there are kids who buy disposable vapes because they think it looks cool (the posers). He tells me that he has a hard time picturing the "in-between", but he doesn't believe vaping has a face.

In terms of his vape use, Bronson describes himself as stressed, overworked, and a hedonist. He doesn't have strong opinions about the tobacco-free policy but also doesn't seem to understand that the policy applies to more than just cigarettes. When I ask him if he believes Purchase supplies people with effective solutions to quit, he tells me he "wouldn't know", which doesn't surprise me. Bronson is confident in his vape identity. Though he attempts to lecture me about the repugnant nature of vaping, I sense that he still takes a great deal of pride in his own performance. *He displays his feathers with satisfaction, leaving his mark with a thick cloud of smoke.*

Why is it that we see so many remarkable differences between the male smoker and the female smoker? *On January 28, 1905 a woman sits in her car and removes herself from the hectic surroundings of New York City. She ignores the buzzing of conversations, alarms, and busy feet shuffling by. In a brief moment of solitude, she lights a cigarette on 5th avenue. Little did she know, she did not have the right to do so. She is quickly arrested for smoking in public.* It wasn't until 1927 that this law was repealed and the tobacco industry saw new opportunities in the market of female smokers.

Shortly after the woman suffrage movement, cigarette companies began marketing their products as a symbol of liberation and independence. The tactic was to use a woman's desire for equality to push their product and it would not be the last time the tobacco companies used the political climate to their advantage. During WWII, when Rosie the Riveter was saying, "We can do it!", Mora Schell, a war worker, was saying, "I smoke the fighting man's favorite—*Camels*" (Hirschfelder, 339). Implications of a woman's patriotic duty to leave the home and support war industries while men were fighting was common propaganda at the time. Tobacco industries saw opportunities to use that propaganda to their benefit. If you love your country and your fighting husband, you'll smoke Camels.

Companies even used the design of their cigarettes to capture a female audience. Marlboro was originally made to be a cigarette for women. Their cigarettes featured a red tip, to conceal stains from a woman's lipstick. It wasn't until 1954 that they created the Marlboro Man, in order to rebrand themselves and reach a larger population (Cordry, 89). However, the tobacco industry wasn't done encouraging women to smoke. The next craze in cigarette smoking would be Philip Morris' Virginia Slims.

1968 would be one of the most unforgettable years in American history. It brought the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr, the Apollo 8 orbit of the moon, Nixon's success in winning the presidency, and among other things, feminists protesting the Miss America Pageant. Feminism in the 1960s brought great opportunities for the tobacco industry. In 1968, Philip Morris launched the campaign for Virginia Slims with a slogan specifically designed for women who had been fighting oppression and inequality. "*You've come a long way, baby*", not only resonated with women, but with young women. The introduction of Virginia Slims sparked a rise

in smoking among adolescent women. Given their response to changing styles, desires, and political incentives, it is clear that the major differences we see today in the female and male smoker have long been under the influence of major cigarette companies. To this day there is an apparent quality in which a woman holds her cigarette, lights her cigarette, and uses caution in the ways she speaks about her habits. It would be obvious to say that women didn't share the same rights as men when smoking cigarettes became popular. However, what is truly unique in the case of women who smoke is the fact that for almost 100 years, the tobacco industry has used their desperation and their struggle for equality as a practice in manipulation for profit.

I can't help but compare each person that I've spoken to. I think of Bronson and his definition of a "poser". Many of the others that I interviewed fall into Bronson's definition of someone that can't be taken seriously in the vape community. On the other hand, subjects like one student, Lucky, have had biting descriptions of cloud chasers like Bronson. At this point in my project, I am seeing a divide between two subgroups in the community. Different kinds of vapes and the ways they are used can establish a status in the community and I can sense each group beginning to resent the other. It makes me question whether or not vaping is too broad a category to be established as a subculture on this campus. Cloud chasers could be a subculture of their own, but the rest don't seem to identify with a specific style or language.

Lucky is a non-binary student who came to Purchase from the Midwest to pursue set design. I could sense that Lucky was nervous to meet with me. I couldn't help but notice them bouncing their knee for the duration of the interview and they made it very clear to me that their vape use is a way of coping with anxiety. Lucky spread themselves too thin in June, working over 60 hours each week. They wondered if the anxiety would ever just suffocate them. This prompted

them to start vaping. They also tell me that vaping is common in their program here at Purchase. “It gets you through the all-nighters”, they say. They use a Smok vape (similar to Juul) and their preferred flavors are anything that is refreshing, but not too sweet. *The menthol opens them up like eucalyptus, while the fruitiness weighs them down with the remnants of an artificial aroma.* Technically speaking, Lucky would fall into Bronson’s definition of a “poser”. However, Lucky has their own opinions about cloud chasers, like Bronson.

When I ask how they picture vape culture, they give me the most prominent, if not the only stereotype I’ve noticed that gets associated with vaping- the white douchebag. Lucky tells me “getting into all the tricks and mods and stuff is white frat-guy culture”. I think back to Bronson, the cloud chaser with the box mod, who looked down on e-cig “posers”. Lucky doesn’t have this opinion towards all male vape users, just those who turn their use into a boastful performance. Lucky tells me in the beginning of the vape age, men were just using them for clout, but now they see more individuals using vapes for stress-relief across all genders. I imagine a battle between the “douchebag cloud-chasers” and the “pretentious posers”. It gives me an interesting sense of resentment within the community. Different individuals identify themselves as *better* based on the kind of vapes they use and the ways that they’re using them. There is a divide among these vape identities (those who use e-cigs and those who use mods). The society we live in will try to group these individuals together and marginalize them, but they each have unique identities that can’t be defined by a stigma.

An anti-vaping ad from the FDA reads, “If you don’t think vaping is addictive, it may have already altered your brain” (FDA Center for Tobacco Products, 2019). Vaping is a relatively new phenomenon and for that reason, there is not much solid evidence to draw a conclusion about its

long term effects. This lack of knowledge has sparked growing concerns in our society about the dangers of the habit, especially with so many young people picking up vapes without having smoked a cigarette. However, not all vape users start out this way.

Diana, who calls herself “Lil’ Wonder Woman”, is a media studies student at Purchase. She radiates confidence in her blunt, matter-of-fact manner of speaking. Diana smoked cigarettes for five years before picking up the Juul in an effort to quit. She was never ashamed of her habits or felt the need to hide. Members of her family have all been smokers, but she tells me that even if they weren’t, she wouldn’t feel the need to conceal her habits. “My choice to smoke or not is my business, not anyone else’s”, she says. Diana is a rare case in my research and she provides an important testimony for the experience of vaping that often gets overlooked. Vaping helped her quit.

After five years of smoking cigarettes, Diana knew she wanted to quit. She tried different methods and different vapes, but the Juul worked the best for her. She tells me "when PAX came out with the Juul, I knew it was going to help me quit". Diana used her vape for less than a year before she successfully stopped smoking and vaping altogether. She assures me that she has now been "straight" for two years. According to Diana, there are a few benefits to vaping: there's no bad smell, less harmful chemicals, and it provides a more gradual and realistic approach to quitting. She admits to me that there is temptation in the context of social smoking, so she carries her Juul just in case she starts craving a cigarette, but she's never felt the need to use it.

Diana is a strong believer in the effectiveness of vaping as a method of cessation. So much so, that she encourages her friends and family to make the switch to help them quit smoking as well. When I ask her about her opinions about new regulations and the tobacco-free policy, she tells

me it shouldn't be eliminated because it could help others the same way it's helped her. I notice a change in Diana's voice when she addresses underage vaping. Frustration builds as she tells me about her friends who have started vaping to fit a certain image. Diana is firm in her belief that young people shouldn't vape as a hobby. However, she believes vaping can help smokers make a positive change in their habits, so these attempts to eliminate the products not only marginalize but take away the most successful method of smoking cessation. What I find most admirable about Diana is her pride. Her mannerisms are so natural, yet I am stunned by her confidence and the passion behind her words. She was never ashamed of herself as a smoker but recognized her ability to make a choice. She quit because she wanted to, not because someone made her feel like she should. She never let cigarettes define her and she never let vaping change her sense of individuality. So often, we allow people to decide who we are based on stigmas, but Diana ignores judgement and exercises her right to be exactly who she wants to be.

The vape god is a white man in his mid-twenties. He lingers outside his favorite shop, where he knows all the employees by name. He has a thick beard and he's almost always rocking a snapback and a Bape hoodie. When he's not blowing thick clouds into the air, he's lecturing anyone who will listen about the superiority of his set-up over others. The vape god tells his friends he's "only into girls who take vaping seriously". He's obnoxious and his personality is fabricated around his vape use.

This is the person most of us imagine when we think of "vape culture". It's unfortunate because he only represents a small subculture within the community. Not all vape users are the douchey white cloud chaser that Lucky described to me. In fact, very few fit this stereotype. At SUNY Purchase, your average vape user could be anyone. They could be male, female, or

nonbinary. They could be a student or a professor. They could be a creative type looking to feel something, an overworked academic looking to manage their stress, and more often than one might think, they are a smoker who is looking for a realistic method to help them quit. Therefore, when you picture the vape god, your bias is only allowing you to see a small fraction of a relatively diverse group of people.

*We roll our eyes when we step on empty Juul pods and imagine the young people who vape to fit an image. We wonder, “how could anyone be so obnoxious, so unaware, so *stupid*”. We assume their personality must match the toxicity of the substances they ingest.* Many of them do start smoking at a young age and many of them are addicted. That much is true. As time goes on and the media continues to warn us, our opinions change and evolve, but one thing remains the same. It is a choice. It is *their choice* and while vaping may have an effect on their bodies, it does not transform them into a stigma. Not all vapers are the vape god and even after they pick up a Juul or a Smok, or the newest box mod, their core identity will remain intact.

*In the beginning, you couldn't get enough of him. You loved the way you looked together. He made you feel sexy. He had you wrapped around his finger, wishing you could linger just a little longer as you breathe him in. He knows he has a hold on you and he has no problem taking advantage of it. Suddenly, you're immobilized by toxicity. Each of your friends has an opinion about him. Some are sympathetic because they've been in poisonous relationships and they share your struggle. You build unity with these people through a common feeling of pain and dependence. Others are more judgmental. They think you're fabricating an image to get attention, you're posing as something you're not.

He demands your undivided attention and panic takes over your entire body as you question what would happen if you didn't give in. Suddenly, you're a ghost. You feel as though your identity is built around him and you're not sure who you are when he's not around. You're filled with insecurity at the thought of losing the familiarity of your relationship. It's the ultimate inner conflict. "Do I leave him or do I let him control me because it's easier than putting up a fight?"

Your mother notices the power he has over you and you're ashamed to see her so worried. Your conscience is begging you to save yourself, so you leave him. After you finally build the strength to move on, he still finds ways into your life. He will use your insecurities to try to get close to you again. His goal is to tempt and control you. He knows if you smell that familiar aroma and feel his warm touch interlaced with your fingers, all the memories will come flooding back. Remember, if you have a moment of weakness, it's nothing to be ashamed of. It's something you'll grow from. No matter how many times he crawls back into your life, trying to manipulate you, he does not define your identity. He can't possess you. No matter what the rest of the world tries to tell you, relapse won't revoke your individuality.*

The purpose of this project was to develop an understanding of vape culture on my campus without stigmatizing the individuals who took part in my research process. As vaping becomes more prominent among young adults and the habit is creating more controversy in the media, stigmas are beginning to emerge. While the purpose of my project is to examine the users, in some ways, I've also found myself advocating for them and their right to make this choice.

As I previously mentioned in my project, the history of cigarettes and the ways they've been advertised has created toxic stereotypes and gender roles in the world of tobacco products.

Therefore, I took it upon myself to repurpose some of these advertisements to promote my subjects as they truly are: unique individuals who vape. While I draw inspiration from the old themes, I put a twist on their messages to empower the users and reinforce my claim, that most vape users do not fit the emerging stigmas and they are not defined by their use.

Note that an asterisk “” indicates portions of my writing that shift to a more poetic tone. The rest of my work should be considered ethnographic research and analysis.*

Subject Gallery



There are times when Rivers has an urge to hit her JUUL. This is not an act of pride, but something she finds therapeutic and satisfying. Rivers is also interested in music production, art, and creative collaborations. Her use is her choice and it doesn't define her.

When I'm sharing it with my friends



Whenever I feel like it



When I'm stressed

EMPATHY · AMBITION
RESILIENCE



JC is a firefighter and caring brother. He started vaping in an effort to stop smoking cigarettes. JC isn't proud of his vape use, but he believes he has a right to vape if he chooses to. He wants you to know he is not a monster. Vaping hasn't changed his values.



JC Volunteers his time with his local fire department. He says he's passionate about helping others.



"My right to vape is a civil liberty"

JC Papperman

**Be Sure
to Be**

MINDFUL

Vape use doesn't measure *character*

THEN

HE WAS A SMOKER

Bronson Cooke

Rigged his box vape to produce bigger clouds in order to do tricks. He takes his vaping very seriously. Bronson believes disposable vapes are for 'fakes'.



NOW

HE'S A CLOUD CHASER

"People who haven't been in the game as long as I have are posers."

-Bronson Cooke
Prominent Cloud Chaser, NY

Subcultures WITHIN The Community

How do box mods and disposables establish **divisiveness** among the users?

Vape for
pleasure *today*

"VAPING GETS
ME THROUGH
THE
ALL-NIGHTERS"



Feel No
Guilt *tomorrow*

Remember: Using a vape does not automatically make a person rude or obnoxious. Lucky is dependent on a tobacco product, but their choice to vape is not a negative reflection of them as an *individual*.

*Call
For*

LESS STIGMAS

NEW DIANA



AFTER FIVE YEARS OF SMOKING CIGARETTES, Diana decided it was time to quit. She tried vaping as a method of cessation and in less than a year, she was successful. Diana has now been off tobacco products altogether for two years. Her story, like many others who quit, is an important one, but it often gets left out in conversations about vaping.

Diana encourages her friends and family to follow in her footsteps and switch to vaping in their efforts to quit smoking cigarettes.

Vaping can actually be a successful method of cessation for smokers

The following images should be used as a guide, showing the ads that inspired the images I made for each individual:



Please visit www.mollyormsbee.com to see this project, complete with images, audio interviews, and writing in the webpage format.

Annotated Bibliography

1. Hebdige, Dick. "The Function of Subculture". *Subculture the Meaning of Style*. London ; Routledge, 1979. Print.

Hebdige's book provides a deeper understanding of subcultures and the ways that they are established and maintained. More specifically, in the fifth chapter, Hebdige focuses on the formation of subculture among youth and different races. He also studies ethics within these subcultures and the rules that are put in place to establish who belongs and who does not.

Hebdige draws from ethnographies and case studies to explore the ways subcultures distort and handle raw social norms. He takes inspiration from Stuart Hall's *Resistance Through Rituals* to provide a better understanding of the context of his research for the reader, specifically the subcultural response to the mainstream. Hebdige also uses this chapter to explore the ways media defines subculture through press, television, and film.

This chapter could be used when thinking about the research for vape culture. To think about the vape community as a subculture, it could be very useful to consider the theories expressed in this chapter. Hebdige addresses regulations among subcultures, distortion of social norms among subcultures, and the ways media influences subculture. All of these themes would be important to look for in research surrounding vape culture and its existence on this campus.

2. R.Camengab, Deepa, et al. "Socioeconomic Status and Adolescent e-Cigarette Use: The Mediating Role of e-Cigarette Advertisement Exposure." *Preventive Medicine*, Academic Press, 17 Apr. 2018, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0091743518301300>.

This study examines exposure to e-cigarette advertising among high school age students, based on socioeconomic status. A group of students in Connecticut were asked to answer a series of survey questions, some of which were used to assess household income and some were used to assess vape use/exposure to vaping. The results showed that students at a higher SES had more exposure to e-cigarette advertising, and in turn, used e-cigarettes more frequently. However, students at a lower SES had more exposure to regular cigarette/tobacco advertising.

This writing was very dense and informational. It includes what they were looking for in the study, the results of the survey, and the conclusions they were able to draw. The study also included questions about how the groups of students encountered these advertisements (TV, vape shops, magazines, etc.). Overall, the writing is informative and the survey produced results that are useful when evaluating SES in relation to vaping.

This text could be used to provide a structure for discussion about vape use and socioeconomic status. The study includes evidence that vaping is more common among students of a higher SES, most likely because advertising for e-cigarettes is being geared towards this demographic, while advertising for combustible cigarettes remains in low-income communities. This information is very useful for research about vape culture in relation to different socio-economic demographics.

3. Farrimond, Hannah. "A Typology of Vaping: Identifying Differing Beliefs, Motivations for Use, Identity and Political Interest amongst e-Cigarette Users." *International Journal of Drug Policy*, Elsevier, 12 Aug. 2017, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S095539591730213X>.

Hannah Farrimond uses this study to explore the different identities of vape users. She uses a survey method to examine their reasons for vaping, whether they believe vaping is a healthy alternative, their political values in relation to vaping, etc. She collected seventy statements about e-cigarette use and asked her subjects to agree/disagree with each statement.

While the writing is strictly informational, it is well-organized. Farrimond separates the participants into three groups. Group one, is individuals that vape for pleasure, group two vapes as medical treatment/smoking cessation, and group three has mixed feelings about their vape use. This separation and the responses from each group make the conclusion of the study abundantly clear. The e-cigarette users all differed in their reasoning, political beliefs, and identities. In other words, they were not homogenous.

This study is useful because it suggests that there is not one "face" of vaping. It is possible that smaller subcultures exist within the vaping community, but not all vape users identify with a group. This study shows that some don't want to be considered "vapers" at all. In my research, I am questioning whether vape culture can even be defined. This study is very useful to draw upon as I think about how I conduct my own research on this campus.

4. Stern, Lesley. *The Smoking Book*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Lesley Stern uses *The Smoking Book* not only to provide a history of smoking and the tobacco trade, but also the cultural deconstruction of smoking and what comes with it: desire, addiction, and ritual. This writing provides a broad spectrum of genres to not only give criticism but also a personal account of what it means to be connected to smoking.

Stern writes in a way that is personal and intimate, but also informative. Some parts of the book are poetic personal accounts, while some reflect the history of smoking and the tobacco trade. The writing provides information about the cultural role of smoking in film and media as well as a more intimate look at smoking in relation to relationships, desire, and vulnerability.

The Smoking Book can be used as an informative source as well as inspiration for my own reflection of my research. Stern examines the history of tobacco and the cultural significance of smoking while including her own personal experience. The history of smoking is important to look at for research on vaping, but it is also useful to consider a personal connection to the research and this creative writing style as I think about my own vaping project.

5. Nichter, Mimi. *Lighting up: the Rise of Social Smoking on College Campuses*. New York Univ. Press, 2015.

In this chapter of *Lighting Up: The Rise of Social Smoking on College Campuses*, Mimi Nichter examines the "acceptability" of women smoking and the different standards that we hold genders to in regard to smoking. Nichter gathers information by interviewing subjects on college campuses. In this chapter, questions are mostly based on an

individual's opinion of a woman smoking, when women feel pressured to follow certain gender roles in college, and how advertising affects women's' smoking habits.

This writing is both informational and conversational. Nichter provides personal accounts from different college students (male and female) to give an insight into how they feel about smoking in relation to gender and what patterns they notice on their campus. Nichter also includes images of cigarette advertisements to support the information in the chapter. For example, many of the women interviewed expressed that they only smoke at parties. Nichter helps the reader make sense of this by providing advertisements from Newport and Camel that portray women as "social smokers".

This chapter can be used to make sense of students' motivations for vaping as well as the ways that gender plays a role in the vape community. When conducting research about vape culture on this campus, it will be important to consider the frequency of use among different demographics and the general opinions about gendered vaping. In other words, are women who vape held to a different standard than men who vape? Looking at smoking in a social context could help provide some insight into research in the vape community (how are smoking and vaping similar or different in a social context).

6. Pagano, Anna, et al. "Differences in Tobacco Use Prevalence, Behaviors, and Cessation Services by Race/ethnicity: A Survey of Persons in Addiction Treatment." *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 94 (2018): n. pag. Web.

In this study of tobacco use and cessation among different ethnicities, surveys were taken from 24 addiction treatment programs. The surveys were taken in order to collect information on the patterns of smoking behaviors, quitting tendencies, and reception of

nicotine replacement therapy among different races/ethnicities. The results of the study showed that non-hispanic whites were more likely than the other groups to be daily smokers, use smokeless tobacco, and use e-cigarettes. The study also showed that non-hispanic whites were more likely to receive nicotine replacement therapy and more likely to receive advice from a physician to quit smoking.

Overall, this study is purely scientific and informative. There is a bit of a background from previous studies that have been done, but most of the information communicated came from the surveys that were put in place for the purpose of this journal. Though the subject is scientific, the language used is still fairly universal and easy to understand.

This study is useful for my project mainly in the decolonization aspects. It provides useful information about the differences in vape use among different races/ethnicities and also provides statistics that suggest possible reasons for these differences. The information gathered in this study will help me to think critically about the racial inequalities in the marketing, advertising, and production of the tobacco industry as well as the inequalities in medical treatment for smoking cessation among different races/ethnicities.

7. Keane, Elaine. "Distancing to Self-Protect: The Perpetuation of Inequality in Higher Education through Socio-Relational Dis/Engagement." *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 10 June 2010, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/01425692.2011.559343?scroll=top&needAccess=true>.

Elaine Keane published this piece in the *British Journal of Sociology and Education* as an exploration of the different behaviors among social classes. There is a specific section in the writing where Keane focuses on "social peacocking". She describes it as an exhibit of what you have in order to appear "better" than your peers in terms of money, style, and popularity. According to the article, someone might position themselves in this provocative way to position themselves higher in their social status.

This writing style is more academic and less creative, but still useful for my research. Keane observes students and their behaviors to make an argument about behavior in relation to social class. The writing is clear, concise, and informational. However, the writing only benefits me in one specific section (where she addresses social peacocking).

This section of Keane's writing is beneficial to my project in the areas where I address peacocking in the vape community/how men use vaping to peacock. In order to determine whether or not this is plausible, it's important to be able to define social peacocking and see if it applies to my own research. This article has been especially helpful for me in order to understand this social performance and the ways it relates to my project.

8. "White and Higher-Income Smokers More Likely to Switch to Vaping: SPH: Boston University." *School of Public Health*, 3 Aug. 2018, <https://www.bu.edu/sph/2018/08/03/white-and-higher-income-smokers-more-likely-to-switch-to-vaping/>.

This article, published by Boston University, examines likelihood to vape in relation to race and income level. They took data from the Population Assessment of Tobacco and

Health and determined that white smokers were almost four times more likely to switch exclusively to vape products. They also determined that high income smokers were twice as likely to make the switch from combustible cigarettes to electronic cigarettes.

The writing in this article is scientific, informational, and data heavy. However, the language used is fairly simple and the data is expressed with a good level of clarity.

Although there are a lot of statistics used in the writing, the results of the study are easy to follow and convey the argument without a lot of complexity. The information is also very useful for someone who is looking for differences among different racial and socioeconomic groups in relation to e-cigarette use.

This article is beneficial for my project in its subject matter and the clear results from the data that was used. Not only am I looking for differences in vape use among different levels of socioeconomic status, but I am also looking for reasons why most vape users are white. This study looks at racial demographics, likelihood of switching to e-cigarettes, reasons for using e-cigarettes, and attitudes towards vaping among these different groups. This information is very useful for the ideas I am exploring around diversity in my project.

9. Browne, Matthew, and Todd, Daniel G. "Then and Now: Consumption and Dependence in e-Cigarette Users Who Formerly Smoked Cigarettes." *Addictive Behaviors* 76 (2018): 113–121. Web.

This study was conducted in order to evaluate the level of nicotine dependence among vape users who previously smoked cigarettes. The information provided in the study shows differences in consumption among smokers who are looking for a healthy

alternative and smokers who are looking to quit. The data showed that nicotine dependence is reduced after smokers make the switch to vaping and it is suggested that smokers are more driven by positive reinforcement factors than nicotine delivery.

This study is dense and full of information. There is data for different genders, reasons for use, motivations to quit, and preference in the level of nicotine. This study explores several different aspects of vape use, but the most important information to take away from it is the patterns seen in smokers who made the switch to vaping as an attempt to quit smoking cigarettes or reduce their use.

This is an important aspect of vaping that needs to be addressed in my project. Many of the students I've spoken to smoked cigarettes before they started vaping and made the switch to vaping for various reasons (the most prominent being the motivation to quit). It is also important to address this aspect of vaping because it was the original advertisement for e-cigarettes. Vapes were introduced as a cessation aid and although vape use has introduced new stigmas in our society, it is more common than one might think for a vape user to be partaking as a method of smoking cessation.

10. Notley, Caitlin, and Rory Collins. "Redefining Smoking Relapse as Recovered Social Identity – Secondary Qualitative Analysis of Relapse Narratives." *Taylor & Francis, Journal of Substance Abuse*, 2 July 2018, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14659891.2018.1489009>.

This article was written based on a study conducted to observe smoking relapse. The information collected looks at reasons for relapse among smokers in terms of their identity. According to the study, smokers form social groups and identities around their

smoking. Although nicotine plays a role in smoking relapse, there is also a social and emotional aspect that can be addressed. When smokers quit, they can experience a disruption in their social identity and relapse is a way for them to try to “reclaim” this identity.

Although this writing is more scientific, it provides a deeper insight into the psychological and emotional drive of the smoker that I was missing in some of the writing I looked at previously. This article gives a unique perspective of addiction and reasons for relapse in social communities of smokers. There is data about the smokers themselves as well as outside influences and societal stigmatization of the actions of the smoker.

This writing is useful for my project in the ways that it provides a unique insight into why the smoker is addicted/experiences difficulty quitting. Humanizing the smoker and removing stigmas is a large part of my project, so it is important that I have this context of difficulty quitting in relation to the emotional aspects of smoking. It is also helpful to have a study that can address the guilt and marginalization the smoker feels in their efforts to quit.

11. Cordry, Harold V. Tobacco : A Reference Handbook . Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2001. Print.

This book gives a general background on the history of tobacco, it's influence on American culture, it's place in our society, and the ways that our perceptions of it have changed. The book provides an entire timeline of the influence of tobacco in this country

from the time it began taking over the market up to the scientific studies and doctor warnings that proved the harm smoking could potentially cause.

This writing is mainly informative. It provides a background on the history of tobacco and the role it has played in our politics, our economy, and our patriarchy. This tobacco handbook gives an insight into the tactics and marketing schemes used by the tobacco industries to encourage specific groups of people to start smoking.

This writing is useful for my project in the ways that it provides information about the specific people who were targeted by cigarette advertising and the tactics used in different historical moments and political climates. It shows why women have become the most targeted group for cigarette advertising, which also provides a unique insight into the way gender plays a role in smoking culture. This is a very important source of information for me to use when I address the aspects of gender in my project.

12. Hirschfelder, Arlene B. *Encyclopedia of Smoking and Tobacco*. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1999. Print.

This book gives a wide range of information on the history, impact, and development of tobacco. The book focuses on tobacco generally in terms of its growth in the United States, the role it played for men and women, and the advertising techniques and legal challenges that were taken on by the big tobacco industry.

This writing is mainly informative. It provides a general background on tobacco as a product. It is useful in its descriptiveness and thorough research. However, I have found only a few specific sections that are applicable to my own project.

This writing is useful because it gives great detail about the formation and development of tobacco products and advertising. It also has a specific section dedicated to the female target audience for cigarette advertising and the history of gendered smoking. When I address the histories of smoking in my project, most of this information is focused on the ways that gender has played a role. Therefore, while this book is very informative, the section about women and tobacco is most useful for my work.