

## Abstract

E-cigarettes – which are battery-powered devices that transform heated liquid into inhalable aerosol – have made the contemporary nicotine and tobacco landscape more complex. The use of e-cigarettes, vaping, was initially promoted to smokers as a cleaner way to inhale nicotine compared to combustible cigarettes. Vaping, however, is currently also associated with alternative user motives, attractiveness to young people, risk controversies and divergent legislation. In this dissertation, the vaping phenomenon is studied with an analytical focus on the culture of vaping and social meaning of e-cigarettes in Norway. Based on three sources of data – personal interviews with adult vapers, repeated interviews with adolescents and related longitudinal survey data, the thesis shows various processes of meaning making and user patterns which reflect the groups in focus. Adult vapers on one side have experienced the shifting status of smoking in society, while today's adolescents grow up in the post-smoking era. A multiple-lens perspective is undertaken to highlight various dimensions within the data and key findings are presented in four articles in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

The first article uses subculture theory, and concepts of identity and stigma to highlight an identified variation within the sample of adult vapers, and the emergence of a subculture within the vaper culture. As an analytical tool to show the range in practices and cultural positions, two ideal types of vaper are constructed. The “cloud chaser” type was associated with the subculture. They were dedicated vapers, many involved in vaping communities in which vaping occurred as a hobby, involving tricks, customizing devices and self-advocacy. The “substitute” type was associated with the more mainstream vaping culture. They were ex-smokers turned pragmatic vapers who used e-cigarettes to stay off combustible cigarettes. These vapers described more mixed feelings of stigma, pleasure and addiction relating to their use.

The second article highlights the similarities within the same adult sample through a focus on risk perceptions and negotiation of e-cigarette controversies. In terms of risk, e-cigarettes were perceived as a harm reduction tool in relation to conventional cigarettes. Following this view, the present Norwegian vaping regulation, which prohibits nicotine, was framed as increasing risk by limiting current smokers' availability to a safer alternative. In addition, the risk information on e-cigarettes from health authorities and media was decoded as predominantly anti-vaping. The sum of the identified divergence between vapers' risk perceptions and how they experienced the public risk communication and regulation, contributed to diminish this group's trust in authority-provided e-cigarette information. Subsequently, the split-risk approach increased their preference for lay expertise, typically available online, and occurred for some as a driver for engaging in vaping-advocacy.

Article three present a comparison of findings from repeated interviews with adolescents over a four-year period, and thereby identifies a systematic pattern in which adolescents account for vaping as a time-limited trend. The gradual and collective change in vaping practices and the social meaning of e-cigarettes occur in three phases: In the beginning of middle school, few had tried vaping, but several were curious because of the flavours and perceived novelty; Midway in, one in three pupils reported personal use – however, mostly for flavours and without nicotine. Vaping was described as harmless, cool and oppositional; By the end of middle school and in upper secondary school, vaping had lost its status. E-cigarettes were labelled childish, unpopular, and were compared with trend-sensitive toys such as the fidget-spinner. These findings highlight the important mechanism between peer negotiated social meanings and adolescents' substance use practices.

Based on longitudinal questionnaire data, the final article provides further information on adolescents' vaping patterns and their use of e-cigarettes with and without nicotine. In contrast to the expressed concern that vaping may lead to nicotine addiction among new generations, most of the adolescents who reported vaping in this sample, used e-cigarettes without nicotine. Moreover, most ever-users quit vaping – both with and without nicotine – during the observation period. Despite the fact that use of e-cigarettes was temporary for most youth, findings indicate that nicotine vapers still differed from both non-nicotine vapers and non-users in terms of personal characteristics. Nicotine vapers were more likely to use other tobacco products, report more conduct problems and symptoms of depression. Thus, monitoring use of nicotine e-cigarettes among adolescents may also serve to highlight youth who have other internal and external problems.

In sum, the thesis provides new insight into the vaping phenomenon, as well as nuance to current understandings of e-cigarette use in adolescence. The thesis shed light on the co-occurrence of various social meanings and shows that the current culture of vaping in Norway is fragmented. Among the co-existing vaping cultures are a distinct vaper subculture, a more mainstream culture associated with ex-smokers' substitute use, and an independent youth vaper culture marked by experimentation and temporal vaping patterns. These cultural expressions reflect how adult vapers and adolescents draw on different experiences and repertoires of available meanings. While the adult vapers, through comparison of differences and similarities, intrinsically linked vaping to smoking; Adolescents framed e-cigarettes as a trend-sensitive consumer product and emphasized this by highlighting features such as their novelty, flavours or sleek design. Findings illustrate the importance of avoiding a conformist understanding of the meaning of e-cigarettes, and of acknowledging intra-vaper and intra-cultural differences in empirical studies of use. The thesis also provides support for undertaking a multiple theoretical lens approach when investigating novel phenomena in order to illuminate a broad spectrum of dimensions.