

**Is She Being Friendly or Flirty?**  
**Exploring Attitudes Towards Female Genitalia, Vabbing, and Attraction Tactics Amongst**  
**Women of Queer Sexualities in Queer Courting**

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## **Exploring Attitudes Towards Female Genitalia, Vabbing, And Attraction Tactics Amongst Women Of Queer Sexualities In Queer Courting**

Vabbing, a fusion of the words “vagina” and “dabbing,” has recently become a buzzword on social media over the past two years due to its peculiar nature. It is described as the act of applying or “dabbing” one’s vaginal fluids on one’s neck and wrists similar to applying perfume to attract a potential partner. Vabbing is an example of an attraction tactic used in (human) female intrasexual competition. Female intrasexual competition is defined as females competing against each other in the hopes of finding a suitable male mate. Although floods of female internet users on the popular social media platform TikTok have claimed to use vabbing with varying degrees of success and failure, academia has not addressed this micro-trend. Therefore, academic papers and research concerning vabbing are not yet in existence; only documentation of some blog posts and tabloid magazines reacting to the sensation can be found. The discourse of vabbing is relevant to women romantically seeking other women because both parties have the ability to use their vaginal secretions to attract each other. This raises questions about if women of queer sexualities are perhaps more open to this trend due to their mutual attraction to and shared understanding of women’s genitalia. Exploring the intersection between vabbing and women who are attracted to women can allow for further investigation into their conceivably accepting attitudes towards the female body and what queer-specific and/or queer-modified attraction tactics these women use in queer courting. Scholarly research about vabbing is crucial to understanding societal attitudes towards women’s bodies, exploring how the pressure to be in a cisheteronormative relationship may affect mating behavior amongst women of queer sexualities, and identifying patterns or lack of patterns in queer attraction tactics.

Intrasexual competition is distinct from intersexual selection, which is where one sex, usually the female, chooses which members of the opposite sex, males, to mate with (Darwin, 1871). Women in intrasexual competition with other women use various self-promotional attraction tactics to raise their likelihood of being chosen by potential men usually by means of self-sexualization and beautification (DePriore et al., 2015; Smolak et al., 2014). In the context of women searching for fellow women in the dating world, this paper will examine what this competition for a female mate looks like, how the attraction techniques used to compete are chosen, and what it reveals about their physical perceptions of women. Although various studies have documented a strong correlation between olfaction and sexual desire (Li et al., 2022), this paper will explore the intersections between vabbing and queer courting amongst women of queer sexualities. This paper will thoroughly inspect if vabbing aggrandizes cisheteronormativity, if vabbing reinforces compulsory heterosexuality, and if vabbing upholds the idea of the unspoken presence of heterosexuality in gender (Ingraham, 2002; Seidman, 2014). Like heteronormativity, mating psychology in evolution has assumed women have wanted to attract men. Considering what we know about the attraction tactics heterosexual women use, the ways in which women of queer sexualities attract partners is an area open for exploration. Has heteronormativity played a part in what agreed-upon queer attraction tactics are used in queer courting such as creating queer-specific and/or queer-adapted attraction tactics? Has the anti-vagina messaging that is prevalent in heteronormative perspectives of female genitalia influenced how women of queer sexualities view and attract other women? This paper explores these questions by interviewing women of queer sexualities.

The majority of scholarship on female intrasexual competition is situated in a cisgender heteronormative context. Due to its historical association with human evolution, mating and

sexual selection are concepts tied to Darwinian evolution and thus reliant on heteronormative models of femaleness and maleness. Intrasexual competition occurs when males compete with one another for access to females or resources desired by females (Newman & Higham, 2019). It should be noted that hidden assumptions about male-centeredness remain embedded in cultural discourses, and male linguistic bias is present in the term and definition usage of the female gender-marking in female intrasexual competition and the assumed male-male competition in intrasexual competition (Bem, 1993). This absence of the male gender marking further corroborates the dominance of the male as norm, or MAN, principle (Motschenbacher, 2010). This note is used to acknowledge that women, let alone women of queer sexualities, have not been afforded the same amount of scholarly importance in mate selection research. This also speaks to the assumed heterosexuality present in gender which has historically influenced what attraction techniques have been and have not been explored in academic research.

## **Literature Review**

### **Vabbing**

To understand the nature of vabbing it is necessary to review its origins. Like most viral internet trends, its origin is difficult to pinpoint and highly contested. Petter (2022) explained that the farthest she was able to trace its first occurrence online was in a 2018 podcast episode of Secret Keepers Club where the hosts talked about using their vaginal fluids as a fragrance. A year later it appeared again in sexologist Shan Boodram's 2019 book, *The Game of Desire* where she described using copulins [chemicals secreted by the vagina] as a perfume to attract men. The technique entered the popular public consciousness to a much larger audience than previous online mentions through the video-sharing social media app TikTok in the summer of 2022. Under the hashtag #vabbing and #vanbbling, users could barely escape witnessing videos of

women recounting their success in attracting men via vabbing at the gym. However, these anecdotes were overthrown with an influx of videos responding to the trend with outspoken disgust and vitriol. This section will review what this repulsion to the trend revealed, research about the smell of desire, and similar scent-based dating trends.

### ***Vabbing Internet Reaction***

Petter (2022) argues that these negative reactions perpetuate damaging myths about women's health and further promote hateful shame-mongering about vaginas which in turn leads to women believing their vaginas are a problem that needs to be fixed. After consulting medical professionals, Petter (2022) states that it is healthy and normal for the vagina to have its own distinct scent. The repulsion surrounding vabbing on social media clearly exposes society's widespread disgust for women's bodies. TikTok videos responding to this trend often included vomit emojis, nauseated face emojis, flushed face emojis, and cry face emojis. Under the hashtags now, the majority of the videos found warn against vabbing on the basis of sheer disgust. The comment sections under these videos include sentiments such as "I shouldn't have looked up this one", "[vaginas] smell like tuna" and "\*has brown streak on neck\*". These reactions reveal how female genitalia is viewed as utterly repellent and inherently dirty. Petter's (2022) article offers one of the few analytical perspectives outlining the deeper societal reasons why vabbing was received as repugnant to many. This revulsion is attributed to society's deep-seated aversion to women's bodies since men's bodies have always been extolled and seen as the superior default sex.

### ***The Scent of Desire***

Back in 2016 before vabbing appeared anywhere in the online and public sphere, an online matchmaking service called Smell Dating was all the rage. According to their website,

their service is still open. This service matches people (primarily cisheterosexuals) based on body odor. It was created by two researchers at New York University (Brain et al., 2016). They send participants a plain white cotton t-shirt for them to wear for three days and three nights with no deodorant, though showers are allowed. Once they send their used shirt back to the researchers, the shirt is cut into strips. The strips are sealed in numbered sealed bags and sent to ten different potential suitors who are also participants. If two participants choose each other's bags as their favorite scent, the researchers will give those two participants each other's contact information. A writer for Time Magazine, Mandy Oaklander, wrote about her experience with the service. She weaves in perspectives from multiple academics who work in olfactory-related fields and their professional opinions regarding the relationship between smell and attraction. She discusses similar smell interventions in dating that were slowly gaining traction at the time such as the social network website SmellSpace where instead of posting photos of oneself, a person's ratings of different scents are posted (Oaklander, 2016). She also mentions the matchmaking service Pheromone Parties which is nearly identical to Smell Dating. The public's investment in the belief that romantic compatibility and body odor are interrelated has advanced services such as the aforementioned and countless other viral trends used to attract potential partners. However, a critique that pervades most viral dating trends is their reinforcement of heteronormative courtship, where the bulk of people participating in this trend were seeking cisheterosexual relationships. Expanding these mate-seeking social experiments to women of queer sexualities could have yielded compelling results. Perhaps, the "opposites attract" framework that seems to have been frequently used would have not worked on women seeking women due the potential of smelling similarly; or maybe it could have worked if some women like women who smell like them or perchance are attracted to a different body odor.

Although vabbing is a controversial topic, research supporting the connection between smell and desire has been conducted. Li, Hummel, and Zou (2022) explored if the importance of one's sense of smell, also known as olfaction, and body odor have any correlations to sexual desire in a cisheterosexual context. They distributed three separate questionnaires: one about the importance of olfaction, another about body odor sniffing, and finally a sexual desire inventory questionnaire. They concluded that people who placed more importance on the sense of smell or engaged in more body odor sniffing showed stronger sexual desire, consistent across different cultures and with both women and men (Li et al., 2022). Studies such as this demonstrate the importance of a person's smell in the context of sexual attraction. This knowledge was used as the rationale for vabbing by internet users who promoted the trend. This study was done through a heterosexual lens which presents a gap open for exploration into the significance of smell amongst queer populations. Proponents of vabbing used the well-known social importance we place on a person's scent to authenticate the male attraction vabbers claim to receive.

### **Sexual Minority Attraction in Women**

Women of queer sexualities' attraction to other women and their attitudes toward female bodies is an esoteric area of research. Women of queer sexualities are often represented by lesbian and bisexual women populations in studies. It has become commonplace in sex research to examine lesbian and bisexual women in comparison to straight women. Interestingly, lesbians in scholarly literature are sometimes also compared to heterosexual men due to the incorrect assumption that all lesbians follow male-typical sexual behavior. This section will analyze findings from studies about what women who date women are attracted to, what their bodily attitudes are, what their vaginal attitudes are, and what their attraction cues are.



### ***Body Preferences in Lesbian And Bisexual Women***

There is little research exploring the interconnection between physical attraction, sexual orientation, and mating preferences in non-heterosexual women. This fact makes Cohen and Tannenbaum's 2001 study all the more important in this area of sex research. Previous research had found that lesbian women's non-physical relationship preferences were similar in some areas and different in other areas in comparison to heterosexual men and women. This study instead examined physical preferences in mate attraction. By surveying lesbian and bisexual women to rate eight contour drawings of different female figures by the level of attractiveness, it was found that they strongly preferred a heavy figure with large breasts in a potential female mate (Cohen & Tannenbaum, 2001). These results strikingly contrasted heterosexual men's and women's preference for slim female bodies. Since this study explored what lesbian and bisexual women are physically attracted to only in comparison to heterosexual counterparts, further exploration into these women's preferences was unfortunately not included. This is a gap that Cohen & Tannenbaum's study strives to fill. Allowing examination of potential complexities in what women do to attract and what attracts them is essential to understanding their attitudes toward women's bodies. Given that the results of Cohen & Tannenbaum's study went against conventional thin female body standards, the results may be a predictor of women of queer sexualities being more likely to be receptive to the unconventional phenomenon of vabbing.

### ***Genital Self-Image***

Women's personal relationships with their genitals are complicated because of the paradox between society being obsessed with women's sexuality but also shrouding women's sexuality with shame and taboo. Women's vaginal self-images are often overwhelmingly negative, especially in a society that encourages pubic hair removal and female genital surgeries.

Fahs (2014) divides these attitudes towards female genitalia or what she calls “genital panics” into three distinct categories: pubic hair grooming, sex during menstruation, and genital/vaginal self-image. By asking women in qualitative interviews about their feelings towards the three categories, it was found that feelings of disgust, anxiety, excess, and need for control permeated the interviews. Interestingly, anti-vagina messaging in these genital panics was found to have been deeply internalized by lesbian and bisexual women in this study, even though prior research suggested this internalized misogyny would most likely not reach queer women due to the fact they are sexually attracted to women. Homophobic undertones were also found in the narratives of some interviewees where, for example, the perceived abnormality of not removing body hair was connected to sexually deviant lesbians. Considering this information, women who date women may also express the same feelings of disgust about vabbing seen in its online backlash. This anti-vagina messaging can translate into compulsory heterosexuality, with women of queer sexualities balancing between not “looking lesbian” by shaving their body hair to avoid homophobia but also wanting to signal to other women their queerness through the understood association of female queerness and body hair. Although these genital panics were not specifically used in a dating context in Fahs’s study, women’s partnered sexuality and its effect on vaginal self-image in queer dating is important and will be further explored in this project's interviews.

### ***Gaydar And Lesbian Signaling***

Due to the assumption of heterosexuality in the dating scene, figuring out if a woman is attracted to women before romantically pursuing them is an extra step women of queer sexualities and queer people in general take. This extra step is often used as a safety measure to avoid the risk of homophobic violence and being outed. This assessment of if a stranger has a

queer sexuality or not is colloquially referred to as using one's "gaydar". Barton (2015) explored what criteria trigger a lesbian's or a gay man's gaydar through a series of interviews. It was found that the presence of masculinity and absence of overt femininity in women's gender presentation, physical presentation, occupation, and conversational topics were associated with being a lesbian. Strong lingering eye contact was also cited as a signaling tactic. Intriguingly, it was found that besides presenting in a masculine manner, women who leaned androgynous in their appearances were assumed to be lesbian as well. Given that masculinity and androgyny are both associated with being a woman of queer sexuality, it will be interesting to investigate the frequency of interviewees using butchness and/or gender ambiguity as self-promotional techniques in courting in order to look for potential attraction tactic patterns or lack thereof. It should be noted that many of these lesbian cues are dependent on heteronormative standards of gender presentation and queer stereotypes (Pollitt et al., 2021) and results in femme erasure. This reliance can reinforce and continue the narratives of harmful generalizations against queer people. Nonetheless, queer signaling in the dating world is a tool women of queer sexualities can use for the purpose of finding a potential mate. Women can capitalize on these lesbian-associated traits by using them to signal their queerness and attract other women; turning these traits into queer attraction tactics. Exploring if vaginal self-images affect women of queer sexualities is key to understanding the tactics they choose to use.

### **Evolution vs. Feminism: Deconstructing Evolutionary Binaries**

Feminist scholars have expressed discontent when evolutionary concepts, which are largely based on animal behavior, are used to explain complex human behaviors like mate selection without attention to alternative contextual explanations (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Human evolution represents a binary way of thought dependent on male and female biology and their

innate attraction to each other. Feminism represents a way of thinking that has various definitions and adapts to the needs of a given period of time while championing equity and equal opportunity amongst all. In the context of vabbing, this binary comes into play with the trend promotion of heteronormative courtships which in turn aligns itself with stringent evolutionary principles of gender roles. This section will discuss female intrasexual competition, mating psychology, self-sexualization, and the fear of being single.

### ***Intrasexual Competition***

Men's role in the mating system has been assumed to be active while women have been assumed to take a passive role. In their comprehensive chapter detailing the behaviors and strategies women use to attract potential male partners, Grøntvedt, et al. (2022) analyze women's intrasexual competition through three theoretical frameworks: parental investment theory, sexual conflict theory, and sexual strategies theory. They assert that individual differences predict the sexual attraction tactics employed, and these differences covary with each other. Therefore, it is important to consider how these features overlap with each other. Flirting, self-promotion, derogation, sexual harassment as competitor derogation, using dating apps, and mate poaching are all intrasexual tactics that are recognized in female mating behavior (Grøntvedt et al., 2022). Since these assertive behaviors are prevalent enough to be documented, the assumption of women being passive in mate selection is simply incorrect. However, in a queer dating scenario does this common assumption of passivity make mate selection amongst other women of queer sexualities more difficult? Does the concept of parental investment theory where women are choosier than men in mate selection also have an effect on the likelihood of finding a woman mate? Exploring this stalemate dilemma colloquially known as "lesbian sheep syndrome" is a valuable area of research that will most likely appear in this project's interviewee responses. In

short, the term comes from a study that describes the presence of homosexual behavior in male sheep but, a lack of same-sex behavior in female sheep, attributed to their signaling of sexual readiness by standing still, leading to a stalemate in any potential same-sex interactions (Roselli et al., 2004). Women using their vaginal fluid to attract partners is an applicable example of a female intrasexual tactic albeit on a smaller anecdotal scale. The idea that men are the sexual agents and women are the sexual gatekeepers in sexual encounters is the dominant framework: however, contrary to the image of women as being primarily coy, women actively compete against fellow women in various ways to attract potential partners. This active role has a high likelihood of being found amongst women trying to attract women or perhaps differences in sexual attraction styles can be found in women of queer sexualities according to the queer identity markers they may use such as stud or femme. It should be noted that stud, stem, and AG are all BIPOC specific queer identity markers, while terms like femme and butch transcend racial groups.

In female intrasexual competition, women who are perceived to be attractive are granted various privileges and are more likely to be sought after by men. Less attractive women do not have these privileges and thus are encouraged to enhance their appearance to stand a fighting chance against female competitors in the dating world. Competitive beautification is a self-promotional strategy used to attract potential male partners. DelPriore et al. (2015) explore the causes and consequences of this behavior. These self-beautifying strategies in competition include dieting, makeup, and cosmetic procedures. These stem from an evolutionary standpoint where women are believed to benefit the most from these efforts as a result of men placing a high premium on female physical attractiveness. Utilizing these strategies gives women advantages in the dating pool, but their competitive tactics simultaneously cause problems with

their fellow female rivals such as degrading each other and feeling envious of one another. It is important to address the consequences DelPriore et al. (2015) outlined in female intrasexual competition because engaging in this behavior can potentially be disempowering and exhausting. This perspective also allows for the further critique of the cisheteronormative standards that undergird these self-beautifying tactics and the evolutionary roots of these tactics. For women seeking a female partner, these strategies may not be applicable because they appeal to the male gaze. Besides exploring what female attraction tactics are, exploring if these sexual behaviors are diverse, uniform or a mix of both amongst queer women in the dating world is essential to understanding how women of queer sexualities handle scenarios where it may be hard to decipher which women are romantically competing against them and which women are attracted to them. Queer attraction tactics can be utilized to sort out these two groups when seeking a female mate. The importance of shared perceptions of the female body and female genitalia has the ability to establish common ground with competitors and potential female mates or perhaps can be divisive depending on what a given women's attitudes towards female physicality are.

Sexual strategies theory (Buss & Schmitt, 1993), a theory essential to the understanding of female intrasexual competition, describes the different adaptive problems men and women confront when pursuing short-term and long-term mating strategies which in turn creates (hetero)gender-specific attraction tactics. Since this theory is directly influenced by evolutionary psychology, feminist scholars have critiqued it. Smith & Konik (2011) reviewed prominent papers from the three dominant lines of research in the fields of feminism and evolutionary psychology. The first group of papers presents different theoretical explanations as an alternative to evolutionary psychology. The second group reinforces research on gender differences in mating strategies with the help of Sexual Strategies Theory and evolutionary psychology. In an

attempt to integrate feminism and evolutionary psychology, the final group uses empirical research and theory to do so (Smith & Konik, 2011). The debates surrounding the viability of the relationship between feminism and evolutionary psychology are ongoing however, new research, new theories, and new approaches have emerged. A particularly interesting new theory, Evolutionary Androgenic Theory, has emerged from these debates which introduces a framework for the predictors of numerous gender differences in cognition and behavior. This analysis once again demonstrates the binary evolutionary concepts present in mating strategies that are unforgiving of women of queer sexualities. One feminist critique is that gender is constantly in flux and has many definitions rendering it unstable (Maracek, 1995), and therefore the assumed heterosexuality of evolutionary perspectives of mating strategies cannot be applied. Another relevant critique is that evolutionary psychology has been used to justify power differences between men and women in sexual selection. Evolutionary theories see this power difference as evolved rather than what feminists argue as socially-constructed. Overall, evolutionary perspectives take on an essentialist stance based on procreative bias and feminist perspectives take on a constructionist stance based on social dynamics. This calls into question how vabbing and other attraction tactics have leaned into rigid propositions of heterosexual mate selection and how queer attraction tactics can challenge heteronormative understandings of sexual object choice.

### ***Mating Psychology***

Mating psychology encompasses all of the behavior humans engage in to find a partner. In an up-to-date summary, Davis & Arnocky (2022) overview completed research about mating psychology in homosexual ciswomen and cismen in comparison to their cisheterosexual counterparts. Nearly all research regarding sexual selection theory and attraction tactics are in a

cisheterosexual context, so a portion of this article was dedicated to examining the connection between mate selection and sexual orientation in a queer context. Conclusions of appearance enhancement tactics are mixed, however evidence indeed indicates that some mate attraction techniques are specific to different sexual orientations. For example, one study found that lesbian women and heterosexual men are both less likely than their respective counterparts to enhance (beautify) their appearance and bait their partners sexually (Davis & Arnocky, 2022). This is especially relevant to the present project because it examines key findings from the studies that followed Bailey's et al. (1994) pioneering study about mating psychology and behavior amongst gay and lesbian individuals in which she concluded that sexual interest differences were larger across sex (men vs. women) than across sexual orientation (heterosexual vs. homosexual). Some differences and similarities between self-promotion tactics homosexual women and men use versus heterosexual women and men were noted in the small subsection titled sexual orientation. One similarity mentioned was that gay and heterosexual men both placed importance on physical attractiveness and youth, while lesbian and heterosexual women place importance on personality traits. The differences lie in gender and the sexual atypicality found in mate preferences expressed by gay men and lesbians. It is necessary to consider these findings when examining how women of queer sexualities perceive utilizing typical feminine attributes, such as one's natural vaginal scent, to attract other women as well as investigating other ways women attract each other.

### ***Self-Sexualization***

In this group of attraction tactics, women partake in certain behaviors to appeal to potential male mates in a sexual manner. Such behaviors include shaving their bodies, wearing a fragrance, and wearing "sexy" clothing. These gendered behaviors stem from gender roles and



normative beauty standards. It can be reasonably hypothesized that the adoption of these beauty standards may be complicated amongst women of queer sexualities due to their already unconventional positionality in the dominant heteronormative institution. Smolak et al. (2014) analyzed the gender differences and similarities in self-sexualization activities in heteronormative courtship. They administered three surveys to American college students measuring objectified body consciousness, sexualizing behavior, and the enjoyment of sexualization. They found that the self-sexualization activities women are expected to do to appear more desirable to men outnumber the few things men reported to do to appear desirable, thus revealing that self-sexualization was expected more from women than men (Smolak et al., 2014). This elucidates the gender gap present in appearance enhancement where women spend more time and effort on appearing desirable to cater to the male gaze. Amongst women of queer sexualities, the effects of both female parties putting forward this effort in appearing sexually enticing can yield varying results; or maybe this effort differential still occurs amongst women of different queer identity markers such as femme women or butch women. This begs the question, what do attraction tactics geared toward the female gaze look like? Are these self-sexualization behaviors queer-modified, or are they completely discarded in favor of queer-specific sexual attraction preferences?

### ***Fear Of Being Single***

Besides the social pressure from cisheteronormative gender expectations, to utilize certain attraction tactics, the competitive search for a male mate can stem from fear-induced internal pressure which is also rooted in cisheteronormative gender expectations. The fear of being unpartnered pervades the Western public consciousness, especially in a world that openly favors the coupled (Greitemeyer, 2009; Hertel et al., 2007; Morris et al., 2007). This fear is

arguably shared amongst women of queer sexualities but can stem from different reasons, such as the fear of being seen as queer if a woman is not out of the closet and therefore the absence of a male partner can raise suspicion. In the case of women of queer sexualities who are openly queer, this fear can still occur because the status of a being single woman is still questioned and fraught with stigma across sexualities. Although there are more single men than there are single women, single men are viewed as “bachelors” with freedom, and single women are pejoratively referred to as “old maids” or “spinsters”. With this gender bias in mind, Spielmann et al. (2013) surveyed women to examine if this fear impacted women's mate choices. They found that women with the fear of being single valued relationship status over relationship quality. They were found to settle with less responsive and less attractive partners and were more likely to stay in less satisfying relationships (Spielmann et al., 2013). The pressure placed on women to settle down with a husband can influence the creation of queer attraction tactics that drastically diverge from the tactics heterosexual women typically use. This can be due to the need to assert one's queerness and declare their disinterest in appealing to men. However queer yearning (a term recently gaining popularity on social media) and the desire to experience queer partnership, can still influence what attraction tactics women of queer sexualities chose to utilize to garner romantic attention. This is amplified by the Western belief that a romantic relationship is the most meaningful type of relationship you will have in your lifetime (Spielmann et al., 2013).

### **The Present Study**

In this study, I acquire perspectives from women on the spectrum of queer sexuality and their thoughts and possible experiences with vabbing in order to see if the vabbing discourse is empowering and what their attitudes are towards female genitalia. Interview questions about what attraction tactics besides vabbing participants report using or have seen used were vital in

exploring the role of women's bodies in self-promotion in the queer dating scene. Interview questions about what attraction tactics have successfully worked on the participants themselves were also included. This paper examines if the vabbing conversation is empowering or perhaps disempowering. I will explore the degrees of positivity and negativity in their attitudes towards female genitalia and where they may have stemmed from, and analyze to what extent the reasons why most women use self-promotion tactics reach, such as women's fear of being unmarried from societal pressure (Spielmann et al., 2013), societal disgust for women's unaltered bodies, and the impact of anti-vagina messaging on women of queer sexualities. To best answer these questions, I have examined existing literature about what women who date women find attractive, courting in a queer context, documented female attraction tactics, and subtexts associated with female genitalia, and conduct interviews with women of queer sexualities.

### **Method**

By interviewing women of queer sexualities, I explored their attitudes towards female genitalia, vabbing as an attraction tactic, and attraction tactics amongst women of queer sexualities. I was curious to find out what attraction tactics respondents report in queer courtship and if those tactics are uniform, diverse, or perhaps a varied mix. I was interested in what these attraction tactics reveal about the role of women's bodies in the queer dating scene and if the discourse of vabbing is empowering. Throughout this paper and interviewee recruitment, the phrase "women of queer sexualities" is purposefully used because it encompasses lesbians as well as pansexuals, bisexuals, sapphics and other sexualities that include women attracted to women. Attraction tactics used by heterosexual women are well-documented and are amply recognized in female intrasexual competition literature, therefore interviewing women of queer sexualities will offer new insight into our understanding of women seeking female mates.

Questions such as the following guided my analysis: What attraction tactics do queer women use? In what ways are they similar to straight women's tactics and can these similarities be linked to disgust for women's bodies? Or does their rejection of some appearance-based norms lead them to use different tactics? I inquired about what attraction tactics they use, what they have seen work in the dating world, and what attitudes they hold towards vabbing and female genitalia in the context of mate selection. I also asked what attraction tactics their female partners (past or present mates) successfully used on them, and I will analyze where vabbing fits in their dating worlds. Initially, I was going to interview women of queer sexualities and heterosexual women from a comparative perspective. However, interviewing those two groups of women for the sake of comparing them seemed limiting and would not allow for the exploration of potential diversity in attraction tactics used by women of queer sexualities. Although the traditional thinking used in female intrasexual competition is dependent on the assumed cisheteronormative dynamic of women being sexual gatekeepers and men being sexual agents in heterosexual courtship, similar power dynamics can be found in women who date women based on factors such as gender expression, sexual self-labels, and age. With these power dynamics in mind, I asked the interviewees to dive deeper and explain the reasons that undergird their responses. These reasons can possibly come from respondents' personal morals, their experiences, indoctrination, and their worldview of courting. Based on the information I received in the interviews, I will look for similarities, differences, and possible rarities between the attraction tactics respondents report.

## Data Collection

### Recruitment

After receiving approval from the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board, I started recruitment. To assemble a diverse sample for this research, I hung up flyers and shared a picture of my flyer on social media. My flyers featured an easily scannable QR code that led to an online interest form explaining my study more in depth followed by a few basic demographic questions so I can assess their eligibility. I also made sure to feature a shortened link of the interest form under the QR code just in case interested parties had technical difficulties scanning the QR code. I pinned my flyers to bulletin boards and taped them on walls of hallways with heavy foot traffic in several academic buildings across The University of Michigan to reach students passing by from classes. Recognizing the need for a broader reach for people who may not frequent the buildings I hung my flyers in, I shared a picture of my flyer on social media. I knew that sharing this flyer on social media would attract people from other institutions and possibly recent alumni which I was okay with because I was primarily looking for women of queer sexualities. The decision to employ a dual-pronged recruitment strategy stemmed from a thoughtful consideration of the unique demographics associated with my target audience—women of queer sexualities, which is recognized for its comparatively modest size within the broader population.

Upon the initial review of responses to the interest form, I made the decision to focus exclusively on individuals in their early to mid-twenties. The preliminary responses indicated a wide range of participants, with some individuals expressing a lack of dating experience, particularly among the freshman cohort. Due to the nature and objectives of this research, which sought to explore attraction tactics among women of queer sexualities within the context of

substantial dating experience, it became apparent that a refined selection criterion was necessary. This strategic choice ensured that my interview questions, which were already tailored to a cohort with a wealth of dating experiences, would foster a more in-depth exploration of the nuances associated with attraction tactics within the context of queer courting as adults.

After reviewing potential interviewees from the online form that fit the criteria, I emailed each of them individually thanking them for expressing interest and asking what days and times they would be available to do the interview on Zoom. I initially considered booking study rooms in academic buildings on campus to hold the interviews but it proved difficult to find any availability that would provide my interviewees with the appropriate privacy. The majority of the available spaces were in open communal areas with no privacy.

Throughout the duration of the recruitment phase, I would periodically visit the buildings where I placed my flyers to check if they were still there. These checks were undertaken to gauge the effectiveness of flyers in certain spaces and if I needed to add more flyers in different areas based on the number of online form responses I received and ensure the sustained visibility of my recruitment flyers within campus spaces. Regrettably, during these visits, it became apparent that a number of the flyers had been purposefully removed and replaced with promotional materials from religious student organizations and sororities/fraternities engaging in rush activities. This stark revelation served as a disconcerting reminder of the pervasive presence of homophobia and sexism, even within an academic environment that outwardly prides itself on its commitment to diversity and inclusion. The deliberate act of tearing down and replacing my flyers with materials promoting religious or traditional gender norms underscored the challenges faced by women of queer sexualities on campus. This unforeseen development served to inform

the broader context of this research, highlighting the ongoing need for gender and sexuality research and advocacy initiatives to combat instances of discrimination.

### **Interviewees**

I conducted a total of eight qualitative interviews. Remarkably, the sample of interviewees proved to be surprisingly diverse, offering a rich tapestry of perspectives from women of queer sexualities that added depth to this study's exploration of attraction techniques in the queer dating scene and attitudes towards female genitalia. In addition to their diverse demographic backgrounds, the interviews unfolded within a semi-structured interview framework with open-ended questions. Each participant was informed beforehand about the anticipated duration of the interview, ranging from 60 to 90 minutes. However, interviews consistently averaged around 60 minutes, creating a standardized yet flexible framework for the discussions. Prior to each interview, I gave a detailed introduction reiterating the objectives of the research, emphasizing the voluntary nature of the questions. In adherence to informed consent, interviewees were once more informed that I would be recording the Zoom call for transcription purposes and I assured them of the anonymization of their names to protect their privacy. I strictly only use their pseudonyms in this paper. This procedural overview set the stage for candid and authentic responses.

The interviews revealed unique nuances in each participant's lived experiences as women of queer sexualities in the queer dating world. My first interview was with Pilar, a pansexual Latina in her fifth year of undergraduate studies. She is from Chicago, IL, the third largest city in the US. She shared her experiences of recently exploring her pansexuality after recently exiting a long-term heterosexual relationship. Despite her sharing her lack of experience with dating women, Pilar was notably open and forthcoming.

Amelia, a queer-identifying woman of White and Mexican descent, is currently an undergraduate junior involved in the arts. She is from a small conservative town in Texas. As a student and former art major, my familiarity with general campus culture has provided insights into the socially known interconnectedness with the queer and art communities. This association is often celebrated, fostering an environment of outward queer pride. However, during Amelia's interview, she exhibited a discernible discomfort in response to many of my interview questions, which I noted. This elucidates how vital it is to acknowledge that individual responses to inquiries are nuanced and multifaceted, and while overarching trends may exist, there is inherent diversity within any given demographic. During the interview, Amelia, the only participant with her camera off, displayed a hesitancy to delve into personal questions, resulting in shorter and unsure responses.

Rachel is a White woman who uses both queer and lesbian to identify herself. She is in her final year of undergraduate studies and is from a very small liberal town in Michigan. She has a long-term queer partner of four years and works as a part-time docent on campus. Rachel's eagerness and detailed answers added depth to her interview responses.

AJ, 22-year-old White lesbian, is the only alumna I interviewed. Although the rest of my interviewees were full-time students, she graduated fairly recently in 2023 so her experiences were still relatively fresh in her mind. Due to her ability to self-reflect over the course of four complete years of college, she was able to provide more insights about her queer dating experiences thus far. She hails from an affluent suburb of Virginia and now works in the field of politics. During the interview, she was direct and thoughtful with her responses.

Nikki represents another unique demographic as they are the only genderqueer person and person from a different university among my interviewees. Due to the fact that they are



perceived as a lesbian woman, they are still treated as a woman. They are a 24-year-old White lesbian from a politically split small town in Michigan. She is currently in her fourth year of undergraduate studies at a small public university located near mid-Michigan. They work as a bartender. Nikki was forward with their responses and demonstrated vulnerability during the interview.

Esme is a full-time third-year student. She is of Mexican descent and identifies as a lesbian woman. She is from the big “motor city” of Detroit, MI. She comes from a traditional Hispanic household where topics surrounding sex and queerness are seen as taboo. Her upbringing played a role in her slightly anxious demeanor, which took some time to dissipate throughout the interview.

Lupe is a bisexual Latina in her third year of undergraduate studies. She is a full-time student and is from what she calls “the Republican capital of Michigan”. She is currently in a committed relationship with a bisexual man. Lupe's forthright and free-spirited nature brought a unique energy to her responses.

The last interview I conducted was with Maggie. She is the only interviewee in her late 20s and the only one in a doctoral program at the university. She is a bisexual white woman from a small affluent liberal suburb in Michigan. She was eager to participate in this study due to her interest in women’s studies. Therefore, Maggie's answers were thoughtful, open, and vulnerable, making her interview the longest among the participants. Notably, Maggie also presented a distinctive perspective as the sole polyamorous and married interviewee, contributing valuable insights into the intersection of polyamory and her experience as a bisexual woman.

Noteworthy in its implications, the participant cohort exhibited an unexpectedly diverse array of backgrounds and experiences, thereby contributing a multifaceted dimension to this

research. However, it's important to acknowledge a limitation: there were no Black or Middle Eastern participants, a factor particularly significant given the high prevalence of both of these communities in Michigan.

## Data Analysis

### Coding and Thematic Analysis

After saving all the Zoom transcriptions into their own respective documents and cleaning them, I began analyzing each transcript. I coded by hand and chose to inductively code in order to observe what themes and patterns were naturally emerging from the interviews. I was able to create a list of recurring themes by implementing this method of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

- 1) ***Attracting others using non-verbal queer signaling:*** Interviewees reported incorporating hints of masculinity in their clothing style, cuffing their clothes, dressing extremely feminine or extremely masculine, maintaining strong eye contact, keeping their nails short, and wearing accessories like rings, carabiners, piercings, accessories with the pride flag.
- 2) ***Attracting others using queer-coded verbal cues:*** The utilization of sexual compliments, compliments specific to the given romantic interest, changing the intonation of compliments to distinguish them from a friendly compliment, expressing interest in certain musicians, movies, and TV shows known to be coded as queer, checking with friends of a given romantic interest to ask if they are indeed queer before making romantic advances, and straightforwardly proposing a coffee date.

- 3) *Divergent views on vabbing*: Participants exhibited varying perspectives on the practice of vabbing, with some expressing disgust while others viewed it positively. Some expressed their belief in pheromones but none of the interviewees reported using vabbing.
- 4) *Varied attitudes toward female genitalia*: While the majority expressed positive attitudes towards female genitalia, a subset of interviewees exhibited either non-existent, avoidant, or negative relationships with their vulvas and vaginas.

## Findings

### Non-verbal queer attraction techniques

An emergent theme in the research interviews revolves around the utilization of non-verbal cues for signaling their queer sexuality as an attraction technique used to attract potential romantic partners. Interviewees consistently reported the incorporation of subtle, yet deliberate, elements in their non-verbal presentation. Rachel expressed that although she usually presents feminine outwardly, she likes to incorporate the “right touches” of masculinity in her style choices to signal her queerness. She explained that “I like [wearing] light jewelry to portray myself as queer. Sometimes having my keys hanging out of my pocket or attached to my waistband or things, I like a lot. Recently, a lot of like having boxers showing like right above like the head of my jeans.” Rachel explained she implements these fashion choices because she likes to “touch the barrier” between masculinity and femininity in terms of expressing her queerness to others which she said was distinct from her gender expression.

Nikki expressed using “queer flagging in how I dress, things I say, and how I act” as a way to display her queerness to potential romantic suitors. In terms of how they physically present themselves, they expressed how their mullet haircut is one aspect they use to display their

identity as a lesbian. She talked about her awareness of the common association between lesbians and finger rings and uses it to signal her identity saying “I always wear rings on my thumbs. Because I know that's a thing.” Similarly to Rachel, Nikki also hangs their keys on a carabiner as a deliberate act of attracting women of queer sexualities. More so than the rest of the interviewees, they expressed their adoption of multiple signifiers they indirectly use to queer-code themselves. Nikki said “I have like beaded pride bracelets that I've made myself with like the rainbow flag or the lesbian flag colors on there. My Converse, which I wear almost every day, at the bottom of them have beads strung on the laces. I also have platform Doc Martens, which I know are really big in the queer community. And on one shoe, I have the regular laces, on the other shoe I have pride laces. I cuff my pants because I know a lot of queer people cuff their pants. I own a lot of button-downs and a lot of plaid.”

An intriguing facet that emerged from the interviews pertains to the unintentional queer signaling within Lupe's wardrobe. Despite Lupe's self-professed lack of awareness regarding the queer connotations of her attire, her friends astutely associated her wardrobe choices with specific stereotypes, categorizing her as resembling either a stoner or someone identifying as bisexual. She expressed that she loves wearing Vans, which she believed to be one of the few queer-coded items in her closet and explained “I don't really wanna wear a purple, blue, and pink flag. I don't really feel the need.” Conversely, Maggie deliberately adopts a highly feminine visual aesthetic as a strategic means to attract other gay women. She draws inspiration from femme fashion influencers, resulting in a presentation characterized as “high femme” with what she states she does in a “girly way”. Importantly, Maggie nuances her approach by distinguishing it from the conventional girlish attire associated with heterosexual women. She expounds on this deliberate distinction as a conscious effort to “look super gay”. Maggie elucidates this

presentation as "dressing high femme out of intentional performance," thereby framing her stylistic choices as a form of "queering femininity".

Maggie, as well as Amelia, reported using "flirty eye contact" to attract potential partners. Pilar strategically incorporates her septum piercing as a visual cue aimed at signaling her queerness and attracting potential partners. Initially, Pilar, akin to Lupe, was unaware of the queer-coded connotations associated with her septum piercing. It was only until her friends pointed it out and identified the act of getting her septum pierced as her queer "canon event," that Pilar became cognizant of its significance within the queer dating world. After realizing this, Pilar now intentionally leverages her septum piercing as a distinctive element for signaling her queer identity, recognizing its potential in counteracting misperceptions of her sexual orientation, since she is often mistaken for being straight. Esme candidly conveyed challenges in effectively signaling her queerness to potential partners due to common queer attraction techniques "not fitting with her personal style or aesthetic". While she did acknowledge prevalent techniques such as wearing carabiners and other queer-coded accessories, Esme expressed that because they don't fit with her style, it makes her "feel weird wearing it." She attempted to utilize rainbow pins on her backpack to signal her lesbian identity but said "it just doesn't fit what I'm going for." This pattern of non-verbal queer signaling among the interviewees underscores the strategic deployment of non-verbal communication as a significant aspect of the multifaceted dynamics involved in queer-specific attraction techniques.

### **Queer attraction techniques via interaction**

An overarching theme that emerged from the research interviews revolves around the deliberate employment of queer-coded verbal cues as strategies for attracting potential romantic partners within the LGBTQ+ community. A few interviewees demonstrated a nuanced approach

to verbal communication, incorporating sexual compliments as well as compliments tailored specifically to the interests of their romantic targets. A significant aspect of this verbal strategy involved a deliberate modulation of intonation, distinguishing compliments of a romantic nature from those of a friendly disposition.

Maggie provided a detailed exposition on the nuanced distinctions in intonation, articulating that when she is complimenting a friend, she employs a “less specific” compliment, such as “you look cute,” characterized by a high-pitched tone. In contrast, when complimenting a woman she is romantically interested in, she employs a more specific compliment, such as “wow...you look gorgeous,” delivered with a serious, sincere, and low tone. Maggie underscored the significance of this intonational variance, noting the social commonality of giving compliments in female friendships. Intriguingly, this pitch differentiation has colloquially garnered the designation of “the lesbian accent”. Notably, scholars in queer linguistics have observed this phenomenon wherein lesbians exhibited a lower pitch in their speech and a direct communicative approach (Borsel et al., 2013). Amelia echoed this sentiment about the importance of tone.

Participants also engaged in the expression of interest in culturally significant elements, such as musicians, movies, and TV shows recognized within the community as queer-coded. Maggie articulated her perspective on the queerness inherent in specific musical tastes, identifying musicians such as PinkPantheress, Megan Thee Stallion, TiaCorine, Doja Cat, Audrey Nuna, and Aliyah’s Interlude as emblematic of a “super gay” musical taste due to their “90s early 2000s club kid y2k aesthetic” which she believes communicates queerness. She highlighted her active promotion of songs by these artists on her social media platforms, positing it as a deliberate strategy to attract women who date women. Similarly, Nikki expounded on their

engagement with queer-coded music as a tactical approach to discerning potential romantic interests. Nikki detailed the use of targeted questions about music and media preferences, specifically referencing inquiries such as "Do you listen to girl in red?" and "Do you know Fletcher?" These questions, as Nikki explained, serve as effective tools for gauging a woman's potential romantic interests and her identification within the queer spectrum. It is noteworthy that the question "Do you listen to girl in red?" has become a widely recognized phrase, originating from the sapphic community on TikTok. Among women of queer sexualities, this question is culturally used to indicate to each other their queer sexuality.

Importantly, Nikki's selection of artists, including Lauren Sanderson whom she mentioned later in the interview, who all identify as queer, contributes to the safe and nuanced assessment of a woman's queerness and potential romantic interest through shared musical preferences. Esme specifically noted that while she may not listen to artists recognized within the queer community, such as King Princess, Hayley Kiyoko, boygenius, and girl in red, when a woman asks her if she likes those musicians she intuitively "knows what they're asking". Additionally, Esme disclosed her technique of eliciting opinions on prominent lesbian-themed films, such as "But I'm a Cheerleader" and "Bottoms," during conversations with women, considering these discussions as a method to gauge the potential romantic interest's queer identity. Beyond individual self-disclosure, several interviewees demonstrated a proclivity for gathering information by checking with friends about their romantic interests to ascertain their queerness prior to initiating advances.

Lastly, a direct and straightforward approach emerged as a tactic used by all of the interviewees, usually by proposing dates as a means of expressing romantic interest and telling them they like them. For AJ, she described a sequence involving initial light banter in order to

get acquainted with her romantic interest. She then explicitly tells them she likes them and asks them out on a coffee date or drinks at a bar. AJ asserted that “as quickly as I understand where I’m at myself I just kind of express interest.” She believes people appreciate her directness because “it feels good to be told like, hey, I like you.” She added that she also “will kiss people and then find out that way.” Both Nikki and Maggie vulnerably explained the hesitation that comes with expressing romantic interest directly. They both recounted similar instances of asking women out only to be rejected because the woman they confessed their feelings to were straight. For Nikki, she expressed that she does not let that risk deter her from trying while Maggie said that risk was the very reason why she switched to online dating. Lupe stated that she immediately expresses interest only in short-term relationships like hookups. For long-term relationships, her partner is usually the one who directly confesses their feelings about her. Esme is also a proponent for directness but for a different reason. She explained that she would rather not invest her time in deciphering subtle signals, recognizing the potential for misinterpretation wherein what may appear as mere friendliness could, in fact, be indicative of someone seeking romantic attention. Esme further explained her preference for direct communication by recounting an instance where a woman made her a playlist and Esme’s friend said that was because she liked her. Since it was just a playlist and not an explicit declaration of her telling Esme she liked her, Esme did not perceive this as a romantic gesture but rather a friendly gesture because she makes playlists for friends too. This theme underscores the intricate interplay of language, cultural references, and interpersonal dynamics in the pursuit of romantic connections within the sapphic community.



## **Divergent Views on Vabbing**

A thematic divergence emerged regarding the practice of vabbing, elucidating participants' contrasting viewpoints. Notably, individuals presented a spectrum of attitudes, ranging from aversion to endorsement. Pilar, although indifferent, conveyed a non-judgmental stance, asserting conditional acceptance based on hygienic practices. In contrast, Amelia's sparse responses reflected surprise and bewilderment, attributing the phenomenon to a perception of it being associated with the heterosexual community's fascination with pheromone science, calling it a “straight people thing”. Rachel, familiar with vabbing, showcased a unique contradiction—comfort with others' vaginal smells but discomfort with her own vulva's scent, contributing to her aversion to the practice. AJ, viewing vabbing as primal, would be confused if a partner engaged in it. Nikki, vaguely recalling vabbing from TikTok, would scientifically inquire about its effects if a partner practiced it. Esme, also vaguely familiar with vabbing, would feel suspicious and off-put if a partner confessed to vabbing, linking her discomfort to internalized shame about vulvas, an observation she made on her own. Lupe, unfamiliar with vabbing, expressed strong repulsion and disgust at the mere mention of the practice due to sensitivity to smell. In contrast, Maggie, unaware of vabbing, expressed a positive attitude, finding the idea attractive, awesome, and liberating. Despite the varied perspectives, none of the interviewees reported incorporating vabbing into their real-life interpersonal dynamics. This nuanced exploration highlights the complex and diverse range of attitudes within the sapphic community towards unconventional strategies associated with attraction, underscoring a notable disjunction between theoretical considerations and practical application within the sample population.

## **Varied Attitudes Toward Female Genitalia**

My interviews unveiled a thematic pattern that encapsulated divergent attitudes towards female genitalia within the sapphic community. Predominantly, the majority of participants expressed positive sentiments, perceiving the female body and its anatomy as beautiful. Pilar, for instance, conveyed her respect for the female body, appreciating artwork celebrating female genitalia, and advocated for the normalization of natural vaginal scents. Amelia, in contrast, presented a more neutral stance, describing female genitalia as "normal" without particular associations. However, within this cohort, a subset of interviewees exhibited attitudes marked by non-existent, avoidant, or negative relationships with their own vulvas. Rachel, while expressing generally positive attitudes towards other women's genitalia, revealed discomfort and negative perceptions regarding her own. She expressed a hope for reverence towards female genitalia in general but acknowledged the societal challenge in achieving this. AJ, despite having very positive associations with female genitalia, acknowledged feeling awkward discussing it and disliking discourse portraying it as unclean. Nikki stood out for her very positive view of female genitalia, even displaying paintings of vulvas in her living space. She highlighted the societal discomfort surrounding discussions on female genitalia, emphasizing the need for openness, especially in queer spaces where such discussions are more accepted. Esme, influenced by a traditional upbringing where discussions about sex and women's bodies were taboo, demonstrated an accepting view of others but admitted feeling uncomfortable about her own genitalia in dating scenarios. Lupe, akin to her attitudes towards vabbing, expressed outright disgust towards vaginal fluids and smells, adopting measures to counteract perceived unpleasantness such as reapplying deodorant and perfume frequently. Conversely, Maggie conveyed unequivocally positive views, expressing attraction and love for all aspects of the

vagina and vulva. This nuanced exploration underscores the complexity and diversity of attitudes within the LGBTQ+ community towards female genitalia, revealing a spectrum ranging from affirming and positive to ambivalent or negative perceptions.

### **Conclusion**

Besides finding interesting patterns in the queer-specific attraction tactics employed by women of queer sexualities and their attitudes toward vabbing and female genitalia, other smaller themes emerged as well. The environments in which they were situated also played a large role in their willingness to signal to others their queerness and romantic availability. Women who presented masculinely reported being often pursued, while their femme-presenting counterparts expressed challenges in initiating romantic interest, frequently being perceived as heterosexual. Moreover, the presence of discussions on lesbian flirting in media and portrayals in porn emerged as intriguing aspects that warrant further exploration. This unexpected finding suggests a potential influence of media and cultural representations on the understanding and practice of attraction tactics used by women of queer sexualities. Another significant theme highlighted the impact of queer identity on beauty standards. A subset of participants expressed a sense of liberation from heteronormative beauty standards upon coming out, attributing this shift to the perceived acceptance of diverse body types and styles within the sapphic community.

My research findings echo a societal inclination towards a negative perception of vabbing, as evidenced by some interviewees expressing explicit aversion to its utilization as a means of attracting potential mates. My study also contributes to the existing body of literature on body preferences among lesbian and bisexual women by highlighting the significance of shared interests and hobbies over physical attributes. Furthermore, my findings align with previous research indicating the internalization of anti-vagina and anti-vulva sentiments among

lesbian and bisexual women, as a subset of interviewees conveyed adverse sentiments towards their genitalia. Additionally, my research corroborates and enhances understanding of lesbian signaling and gaydar, offering nuanced insights into specific manifestations of these phenomena. Contrary to prevailing notions of intrasexual competition among women, my study reveals variability in romantic approaches based on perceptions of masculinity and femininity among interviewees. For example, while overt derogation was absent, flirtation emerged as a prevalent tactic for attracting potential partners, showcasing queer-adapted tactics specific to women of queer sexualities. Furthermore, this project's findings underscore the prioritization of personality and interests over physical appearance, which previous literature indicated. My research challenges prevailing narratives surrounding the fear of being single, as participants exhibited a preference for relationship quality over status, thereby deviating from established trends in this area.

In the broader context, the interviews highlighted that attracting potential queer partners involved first displaying one's queerness. Direct communication of romantic interest was universally emphasized as crucial to avoid confusion. Paradoxically, the interviews collectively indicated a shared difficulty in distinguishing between flirty and friendly behaviors within the queer community. These nuances, alongside patterns in queer-specific attraction tactics, attitudes toward vabbing, and perceptions of female genitalia, contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted landscape of queer courtship among women of queer sexualities.

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## Appendix A: Flyer

UM-IRB HUM00243020

# Research interviewees needed!

Are you part of the cisgender sapphic community such as lesbians, female bisexuals, or female pansexuals? Would you like to share your experiences and opinions about sapphic dating behavior as an undergraduate? Scan the QR code for more info!



Study led by  
naylav@umich.edu

<http://tinyurl.com/SapphicDating>



## Appendix B: Interest Form

Are you part of the cisgender sapphic community such as lesbians, female bisexuals, or female pansexuals? Would you like to share your experiences and opinions about sapphic dating behavior as an undergraduate?

Welcome! My name is Nayla Vasquez and I am a senior here at U of M conducting interviews on campus as part of my honors thesis in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies. I am interviewing women of queer sexualities to order to explore their attitudes towards female genitalia, "vabbing" as an attraction tactic (i.e., a way/method of connecting with sapphic partners), and other attraction tactics (such as the "gayze", wearing something with a rainbow, romantic compliments, wearing a thumb ring, etc) amongst women of queer sexualities in the queer dating world. Essentially, I am piecing together queer-specific attraction techniques and how sapphic women indicate their sexuality and romantic interest to other sapphic women in a dating world dominated by heteronormativity.

- The interview is for academic purposes and the answers will be kept confidential.
- The duration of the interview should be approximately 90 minutes.
- The questions are open-ended and are voluntary; you don't need to answer all of the questions in the interview.
- I will audio record so that I can focus on what you are saying and not be taking notes during the conversation. Afterward, I will write down everything we are saying, but nobody else will hear the recording or know anything about what you say in the interview.
- I will give you a different name and anonymize identifiable information in order to protect your privacy.
- This interview is a judgment-free zone; I want to hear your authentic responses.

This survey has been found exempt by the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (HUM00243020). To ask questions or to learn more about the study, please email [naylav@umich.edu](mailto:naylav@umich.edu).

Thank you and please feel free to share my email ([naylav@umich.edu](mailto:naylav@umich.edu)) and this form to pass on to others who may be interested.

Would you like to be interviewed? Yes/No

Name -

Email -

Age and year in undergrad -

Major (and minor if applicable) -

Pronouns -

Gender -

Sexuality -

Race/ethnicity -

Relationship status -

Occupation (if applicable) -

Hometown -

Questions? Comments? -

## Appendix C: Interviewee Demographics

**Table 1**

*Interviewee Demographics*

Name	Pronouns	Sexuality	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Age	Year in school	Relationship Status	Hometown	Occupation
Pilar	She/her	Pansexual	Latina	Woman	22	5 <sup>th</sup> year undergraduate	Single	Chicago, IL	N/A
Amelia	She/her	Queer	White & Mexican	Female	21	3 <sup>rd</sup> year undergraduate	Single	Katy, TX	Gallery Assistant
Rachel	She/her	Queer/Lesbian	White	Woman	20	4 <sup>th</sup> year undergraduate	Partnered	Plymouth, MI	Part-time docent
AJ	She/her	Lesbian	White	Woman	22	Alumni, Class of 2023	Partnered	McLean, VA	Campaign Associate
Nikki	They/she	Lesbian	White	Genderqueer	24	4 <sup>th</sup> year undergraduate	Single	Oxford, MI	Budtender
Esme	She/her	Lesbian	Mexican	Woman	20	3 <sup>rd</sup> year undergraduate	Single	Detroit, MI	N/A
Lupe	She/her	Bisexual	Latina	Female	20	3 <sup>rd</sup> year undergraduate	Partnered	Midland, MI	N/A
Maggie	She/her	Bisexual	White	Woman	27	2 <sup>nd</sup> year PhD	Married	Birmingham, MI	N/A

## **Appendix D: Interview Guide**

### Intro

My name is Nayla Vasquez and I am a senior here at U of M conducting interviews on campus as part of my honors thesis in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies.

I am interviewing women of queer sexualities to order to explore their attitudes towards female genitalia, “vabbing” as an attraction tactic (i.e., a way/method of connecting with sapphic partners), and other attraction tactics (such as the “gayze”, wearing something with a rainbow, romantic compliments, wearing a thumb ring, etc) amongst women of queer sexualities in the queer dating world. Essentially, I am piecing together queer-specific attraction techniques and how sapphic women indicate their sexuality and romantic interest to other sapphic women in a dating world dominated by heteronormativity.

- The interview is for academic purposes and the answers will be kept confidential.
- The duration of the interview should be approximately 90 minutes.
- The questions are open-ended and are voluntary; you don't need to answer all of the questions in the interview.
- I will audio record so that I can focus on what you are saying and not be taking notes during the conversation. Afterward, I will write down everything we are saying, but nobody else will hear the recording or know anything about what you say in the interview.
- I will give you a different name and anonymize identifiable information in order to protect your privacy.
- This interview is a judgment-free zone; I want to hear your authentic responses.

### Queer Dating Scene

- What has your experience been navigating the queer dating scene?
- How does the environment or space you are in affect how you attract potential partners?
- What are you currently looking for in potential partners?
- How would you describe your approach to pursuing potential queer partners and attracting queer partners? How does your approach change depending on the kind of relationship you're seeking?
- How do you showcase or signal your queerness in the dating scene?
- What do you consider the most effective ways to communicate interest or attraction to someone you are interested in?
- What are some queer-specific strategies or techniques that you have observed in the queer dating world? What are some queer-specific strategies or techniques you use to attract potential partners? What are some queer-specific strategies or techniques that people have used on you in the queer dating world?
- Have you ever changed aspects of yourself to appeal to a potential partner? If so, what kind of impact did that make?
- How have your strategies differed, if at all, from before you were out versus being out?

### Attitudes towards vabbing and female genitalia

- People have all sorts of thoughts and feelings about the vulva and other such genitalia - how do you perceive female genitalia? How do you think the sapphic community overall perceives female genitalia?
- How do you think perceptions of female genitalia manifest in sapphic individuals and in the queer dating world?
- How do you think societal attitudes towards female genitalia impact the experiences of sapphic individuals in the dating world?
- In your experience, what role does understanding and embracing female anatomy play in navigating the queer dating scene?
- What are your thoughts on the representation of female genitalia in media and popular culture, and how do you think it influences the perceptions of queer dating?
- What are some common misconceptions or stereotypes you have encountered concerning female genitalia within the sapphic community, and how do you address them?
- Are you familiar with the slang term vabbing? (If not it's using vaginal fluid as a perfume/cologne to attract potential partners)
- What are your opinions and thoughts about vabbing? How does it make you feel?
- How would you feel if a potential partner expressed that they “vabbed”?
- Have you noticed any particular romantic strategies (example: wearing rose or fresh scented perfume) that stem from your attitudes towards female genitalia when interacting with potential partners? If so, how do you manage these dynamics?
- How do your personal attitudes towards female genitalia influence the way you approach and express attraction to potential partners in the queer dating world?
- How do you think societal perceptions of female genitalia impact the attraction tactics and strategies used by sapphic individuals in the queer dating world?

### Bonus Questions

- How do you think your perceived gender expression and perceived sexuality affect your dating life?
- How do heteronormative beauty standards affect how you navigate dating?
- What appearance-based norms do you think are present in the queer dating world?
- Do you think your relationship status has any effect on people who romantically approach you? Is there any way you signal your romantic availability?
- What does appealing to the female gaze mean to you? (skip this question if the interview is over time)
- How do you differentiate between flirting and friendliness?
- 

### Conclusion

- Is there anything we haven't covered yet that you'd like to share?
- Do you have any questions for me?