



Butch and Proud: A Qualitative Study Into The Lived Experiences Of Butch Lesbians

Margo Allnutt & Skye Slade
Oberlin College Psychology Department



Introduction

Purpose

- Personal
- Exploration

Butch Identity

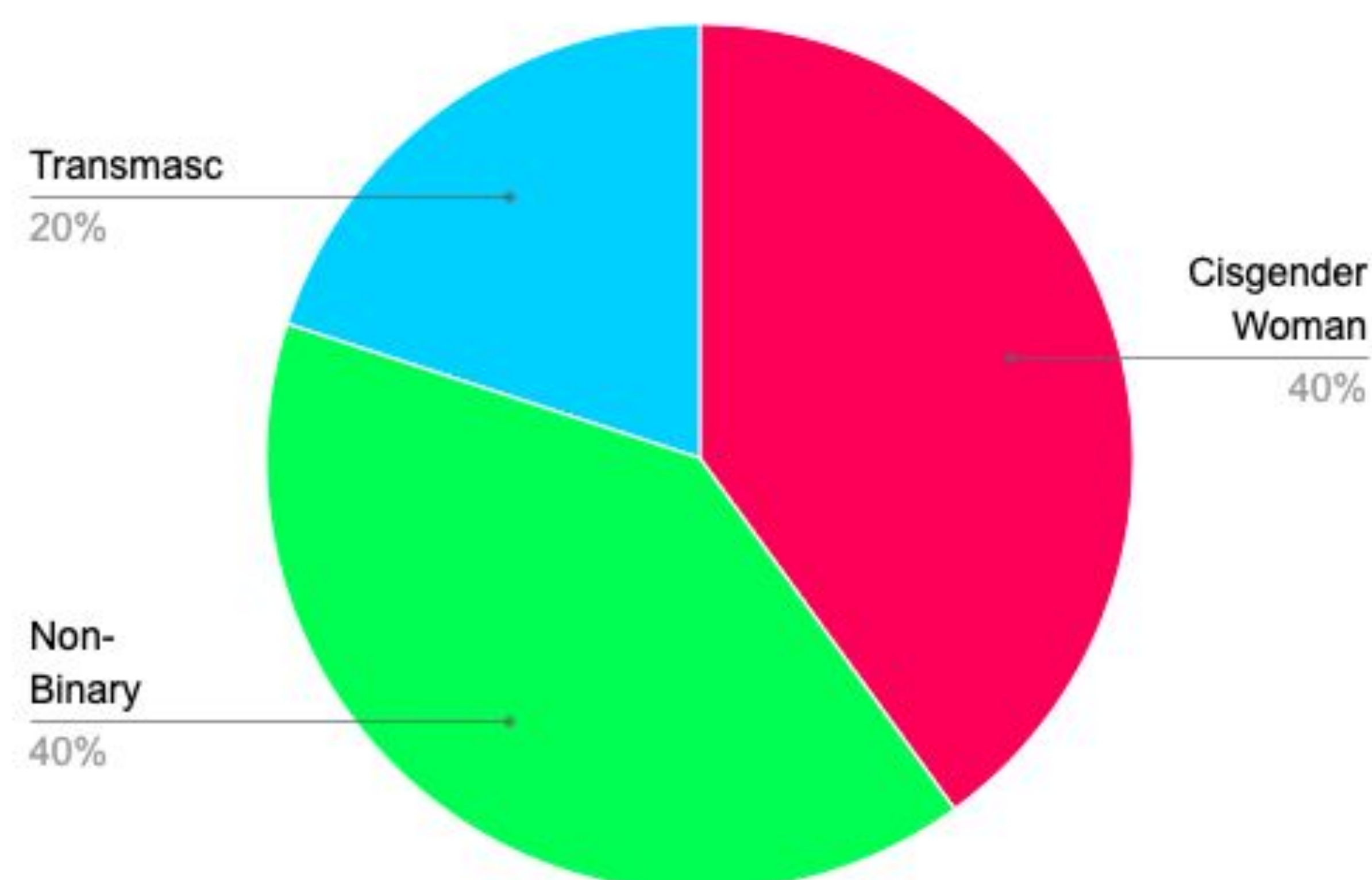
- Differences and commonalities between Butch childhoods

- Stigma

Positionality

- **Margo**
 - white, genderqueer, butch, lesbian
 - This study matters to me as someone who identifies as a Butch lesbian.
- **Skye**
 - white, nonbinary, pansexual
 - I am interested in this research to learn more about the butch lesbian community and to support and explore queer experiences in a way that I have not had the opportunity to in the past.

PID Gender



Methodology

Methods

- 1-on-1 semi structured interviews
 - ($n = 5$, *Range* = 22-40 mins , $M = 30$ mins)
- AI-Assisted Transcription and Thematic Analysis
- Constructivist Grounded Theory

Demographics

- 4 White Oberlin College students
- 1 Hispanic Oberlin College student
- All identify as Butch Lesbian
- 3 gender queer
- 2 cisgender female

Results

Themes

- Experiences with coming out
 - a. Caregiver influence on comfortability coming out
 - i. *"My mom was like 'well, we always told you, you could like girls,' and 'girls don't have to wear that, like girls can wear anything'. But it was never like, that was never an option that was directly offered to me. I was just told like this is a thing some people do with the unspoken rule that normal girls don't act like this."* (PID 4)
- Experiences with acceptance and discrimination
 - a. More experiences of discrimination among female peers
 - i. *"Rumors started going around that I was like, gay or whatever. And girls started like avoiding me and they were already like doing that before but like yeah, like people would be like, weird in the locker rooms or whatever. And like, not want to like change with me because they thought I was gay."* (PID 3)
 - b. Feeling more included among male peers
 - i. *"I was friends with pretty much all guys to the fact to the point that they would say like she's, 'she's an honorary boy.'" (PID 4)*

Results Cont.

- Body image and Butch identity
 - a. Comments on body type and connections to gender expression
 - i. *"My mom like got into this like headspace of like 'No, you have to wear dresses because they're the only thing that fit your body type.'" (PID 2)*
 - ii. *"When I got this haircut, I was telling my mom I was going to the gym and I was like, oh like I feel so good going to the gym. Like I don't feel like I'm not like masculine enough or anything like that. And she was like, you know with that butt of yours, [PID 5]... that's like the most feminine thing about you."* (PID 5)
 - b. Smaller body size tied to femininity and fitting in
 - i. *"the whole like, thing with me being anorexic was was another like, extension of me trying to make it like easier for me to be a woman and like fit in with other women and just like not feel so alienated..." (PID 3)*
- "Toxic" masculinity tendencies in the Butch community
 - a. Physical strength and disability
 - i. *"To me, part of that performance is being the caretaker and being, like, kind of in charge of people. But that is like a role that was like, really heavily instilled in me by my family, but I felt like I couldn't be as strong as they wanted me to be because of my disability."* (PID 2)
 - b. Definitions of masculinity
 - i. *"I never really felt like I was allowed to identify with that label. Because I was like, I'm legally not allowed to call myself a Butch if I wear eyeliner sometimes."* (PID 4)
- Gender identity journeys
 - a. *"You're gonna be hearing this from everyone...but eventually, I just went to a barber shop and it was like buzz it all of it... And so that just felt really good. And like walking out of the barber shop, and seeing I don't know, just, I don't know if people actually look looked at me differently. But just feeling like I've now designated myself as a different type of person."* (PID 1)
 - b. *"I was really interested in going on testosterone for a while, and I eventually decided that wasn't the right path for me on but I feel like like being Butch and being a trans man are really like tightly interwoven things."* (PID 1)

Discussion

Conclusion

- Reaction of caregivers to queerness impacted feelings of safety regarding coming out
- More discrimination was experienced more in the hands of female peers than male peers
- Body image tied to gender expression by self and others
- Narrow societal views on masculinity impacted self comfortability and feelings of belonging in the Butch community
- Confusions between gender non-conforming female and transgender male identities

Limitations

- Lack of generalizability due to convenience sample
 - Predominantly White Institution (PWI)
 - Time
- Personal Bias

Further Research

- Same study in a different location
- Interviews on "toxic" masculinity in the Butch community



Acknowledgements

We would like thank our participants for their willingness to be vulnerable in sharing their personal experiences with us.