

Using qualitative methods to explore experiences of gender in sociophonetics

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Binary gender as a quantitative tool

- Most sociophonetic research treats gender as a binary category
- Useful for consideration of macro-level differences between male and female speakers



But can binary categorisation capture everything?

Pearce 2019

- Creaky voice in group of transgender speakers

Transmasculine

Assigned female at birth, now
identifies as something else
(e.g. trans man, non-binary)
12 participants

Transfeminine

Assigned male at birth, now
identifies as something else
(e.g. trans woman, non-binary)
5 participants

Voice quality

Voice quality



Characteristic auditory colouring of a speaker's voice



(Abercrombie 1967, Laver 1980)

Laryngeal voice quality

Whispery voice

Whisper

Breathy voice

Harsh voice

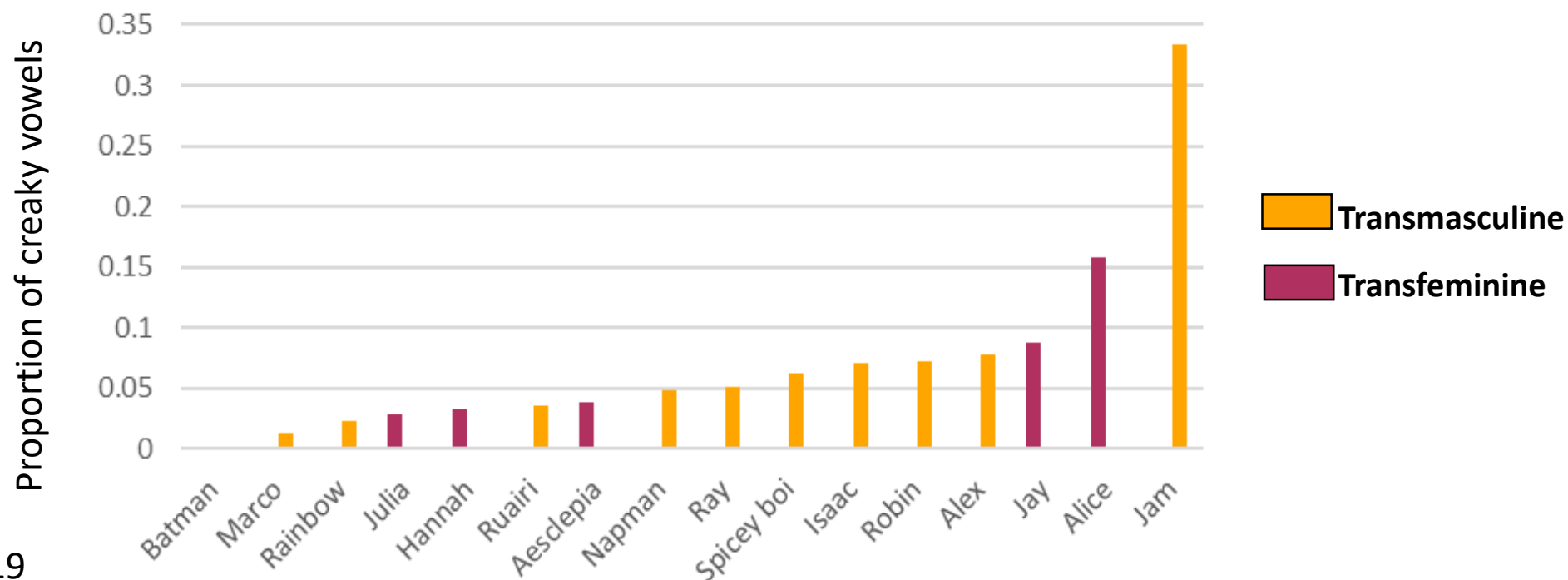


Creaky voice

Irregular vocal fold vibration & low pitch

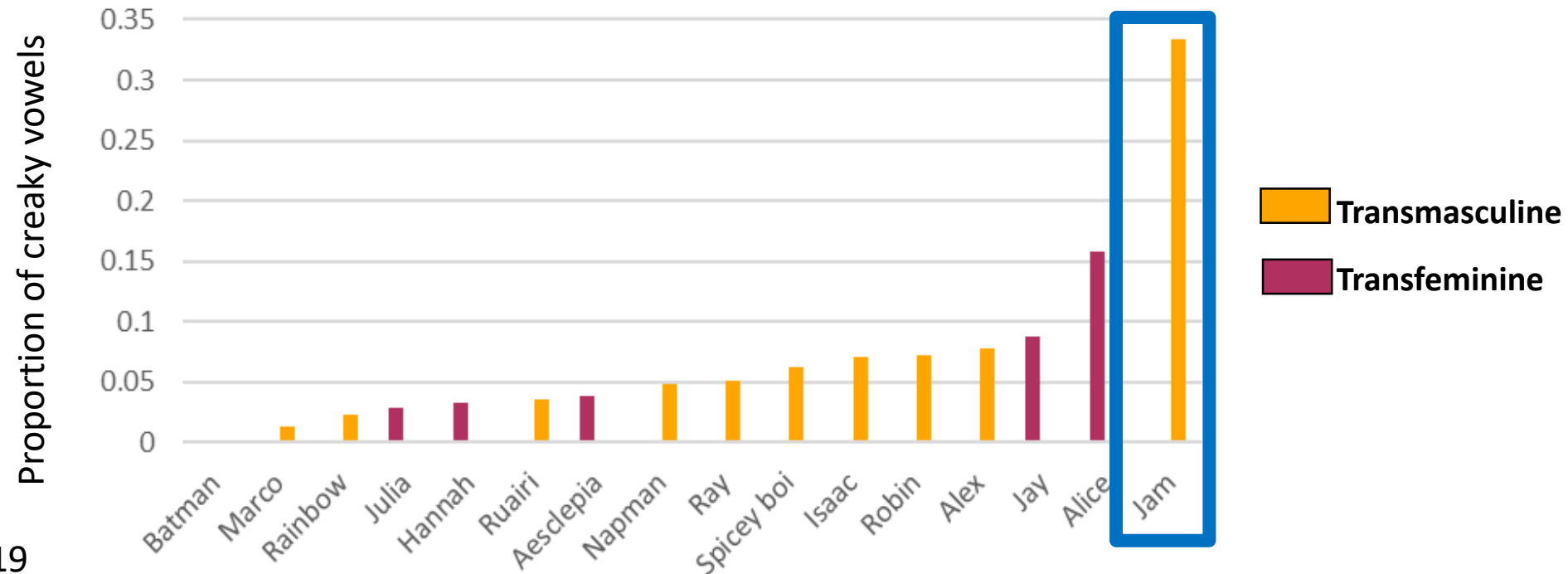
But can binary categorisation capture everything?

- Transmasculine/transfeminine groupings
 - Assumption of shared experience that does not exist
 - Not all participants identified with these terms



Qualitative data can help to explain outliers

- Jam – 33% vowels creaky
- Agency - Jam may be exploiting the low pitch of creak in an attempt to lower their voice



Further qualitative findings

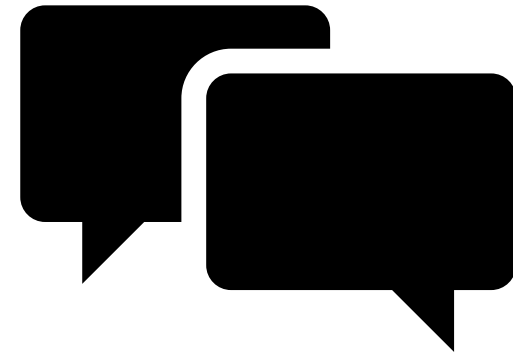
Qualitative component highlighted influence of:



Socialisation: Experiences in school and adolescence



Environment: Concerns for safety



Zimman 2021 - Multidimensional model

How can we account for the various dimensions of sex and gender in sociolinguistic research?

Ethnographic research -> More useful quantitative categorisations

A multidimensional approach in practice

Becker, Khan & Zimman (2017)

Creaky voice



Gender assignment (Male-assigned or female-assigned)



Identity (Male, female, non-binary)



Laryngeal physiology (Exposure to testosterone)

-> No single dimension

Zimman (2021)

/s/



Gender assignment (Male-assigned or female-assigned)



Identity (Male, female, non-binary)

-> Return to qualitative



Qualitative approach can be useful for considering intersections of identity

- Need for greater engagement with intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) in language, gender & sexuality research highlighted by Zimman 2021, Bucholtz & miles-hercules 2021, Levon 2015
- Steele (2019) and Mendoza (2021) show that ethnographic approach is useful for considering intersections of race/ethnicity and gender

Centring a qualitative approach

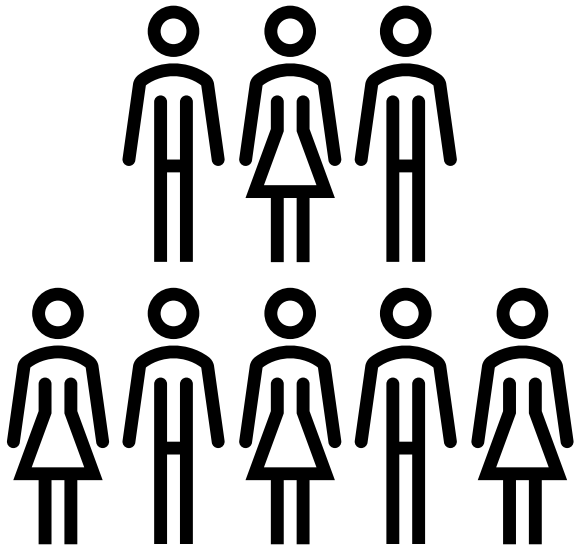
- Rich qualitative data collected in sociophonetic studies are often secondary to quantitative analysis of phonetic features



Current project

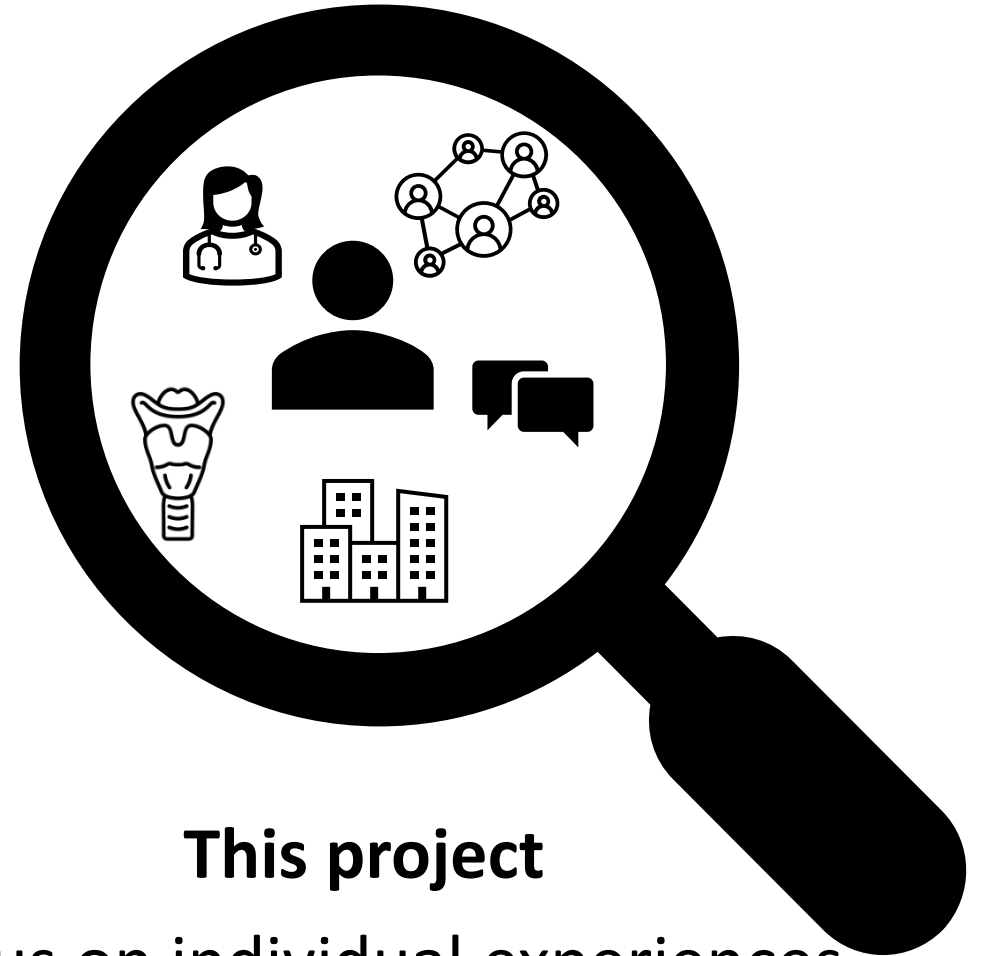
How do three transgender speakers from Glasgow, for whom voice change has been an important part of their transition, use **voice quality** to navigate different conversational situations in their lives?

Choosing a qualitative approach



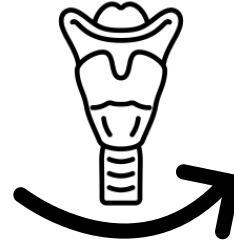
Ethnographic approach

Useful for looking at a
community level



This project

Focus on individual experiences



of a phenomenon – a major life experience

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

How someone makes sense

Approach to conducting
interviews and analysing
qualitative data

Qualitative aims and questions

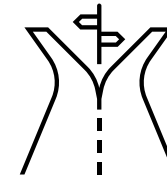
How do these speakers **understand their experience** of vocal change and how they make use of their voices?

Qualitative data collection

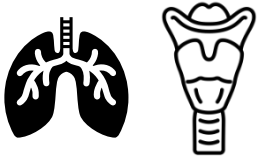
- Semi-structured, open-ended questions, on topics such as:



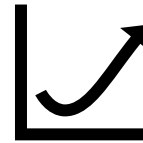
Accessing transition-
related vocal health
care



Intersections of gender
experience and other
identities



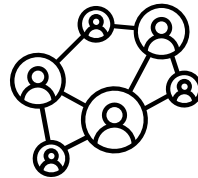
Physical experience
of voice change



Experiences with their
voice changing



Individual instances
of style-shifting



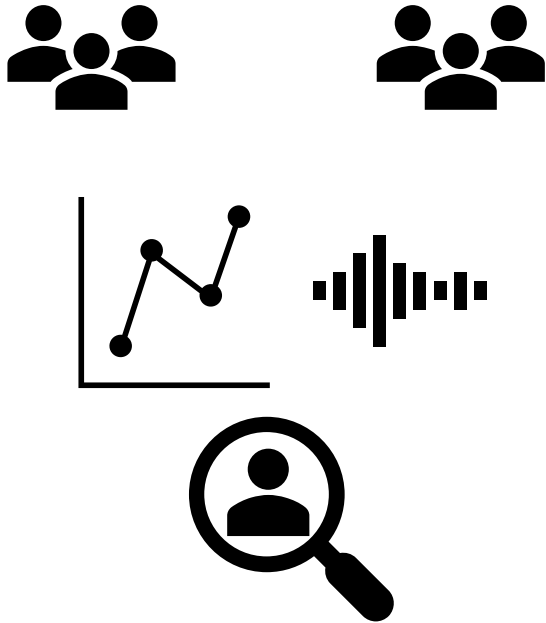
Voice & interpersonal
relationships



Being trans in Glasgow,
at this point in time

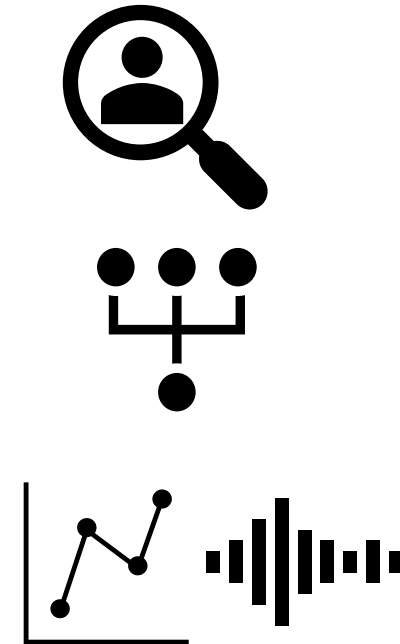
Linking qualitative data analysis and phonetic analysis

My previous attempt



Looking to qualitative data to help explain quantitative results

My next attempt



Using qualitative findings to guide quantitative research process

Conclusion

Taking a qualitative approach can help us centre participants' experiences throughout the research process

Thank you for listening!

- Thanks to Hannah Hedegard and Marie-Anne Morand for organising the panel
- I welcome questions as well as any feedback on plans for my upcoming research

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Bibliography

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