

# Cannabis Use Among Gender and Sexual Minority College Students

Karla Mejia, Samantha DeGrandis, Madison James, & Whitney Brown, PhD  
Department of Psychology, SUNY Geneseo

## Background

- Substance use experimentation is commonly attributed to young adulthood.
- Sexual and gender minority (SGM) individuals have higher rates of substance use overall (Livingston et al., 2017).
- SGM youths have been observed to use marijuana at increased rates (Dunbar et al., 2022), possibly due to being exposed to higher rates of structural and interpersonal discrimination.
  - Hearing or experiencing microaggressions in relation to a sexual minority identity on college campuses has been found to significantly increase the risk for hazardous substance use (Wingber et al., 2019).
  - Sexual minority women and gender minority individuals who experience sexism may be at a higher risk for developing cannabis use disorder and lifetime cannabis use (Scheer et al., 2022).
- If the relationship between SGMs and increased substance use is mediated by minority stressors, cannabis use rates may be influenced by the need to manage stress or cope with negative emotions.

## Hypotheses

- Individuals identifying as SGMs will be more likely to use cannabis than their heterosexual or cisgender counterparts in terms of quantity, frequency, and motives.
- In comparison to their cisgender/heterosexual peers, sexual and gender minorities will have lower reported emotion regulation.

## Participants

- N=150 students attending a rural college in the northeast
- Predominantly White (90.7%, n = 136) and Female (81.2%, n=121), with an average age of 19.21 years (SD = 1.67).
- Recruited from introductory psychology and received course credit for participation.

## Methods & Measures

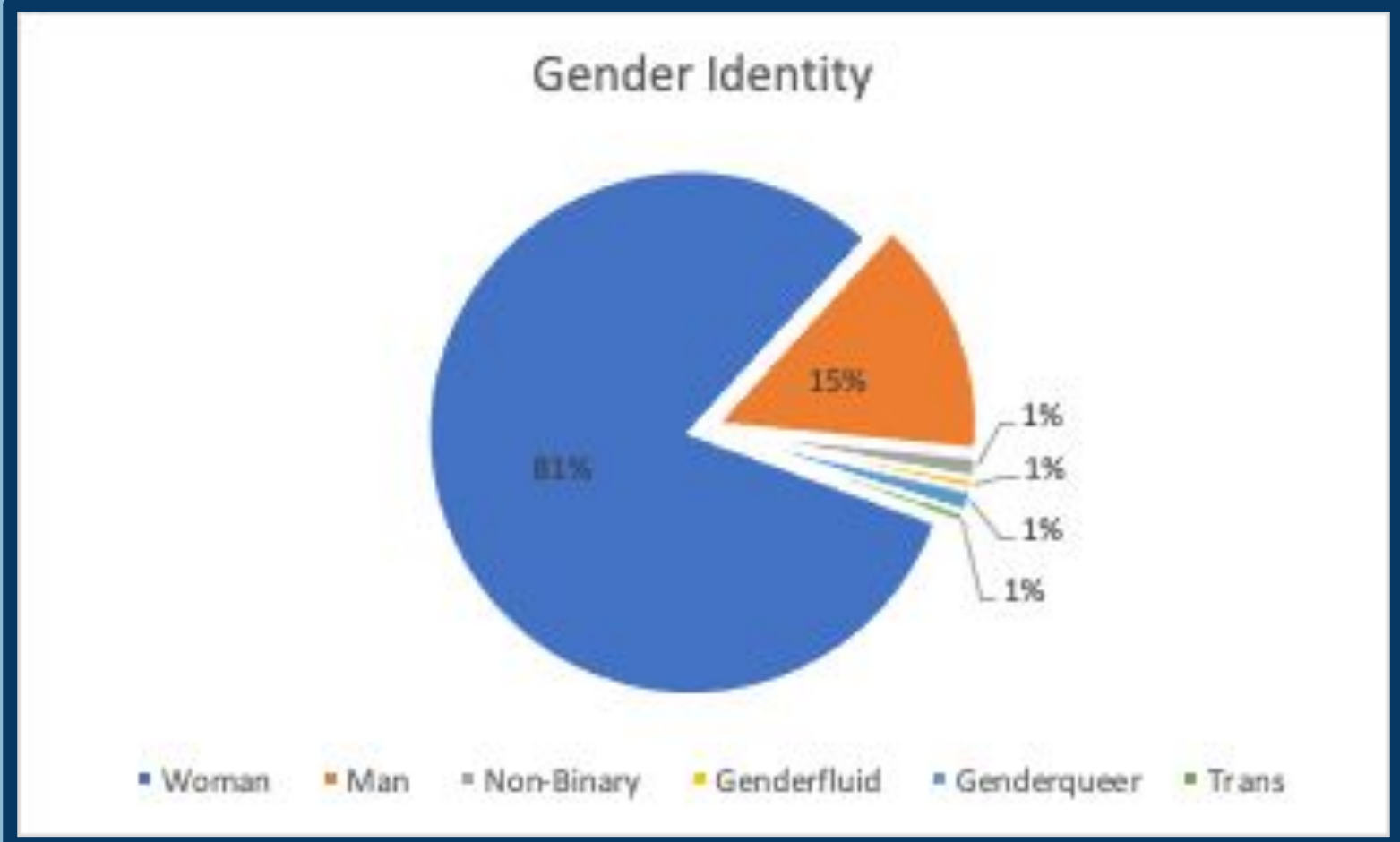
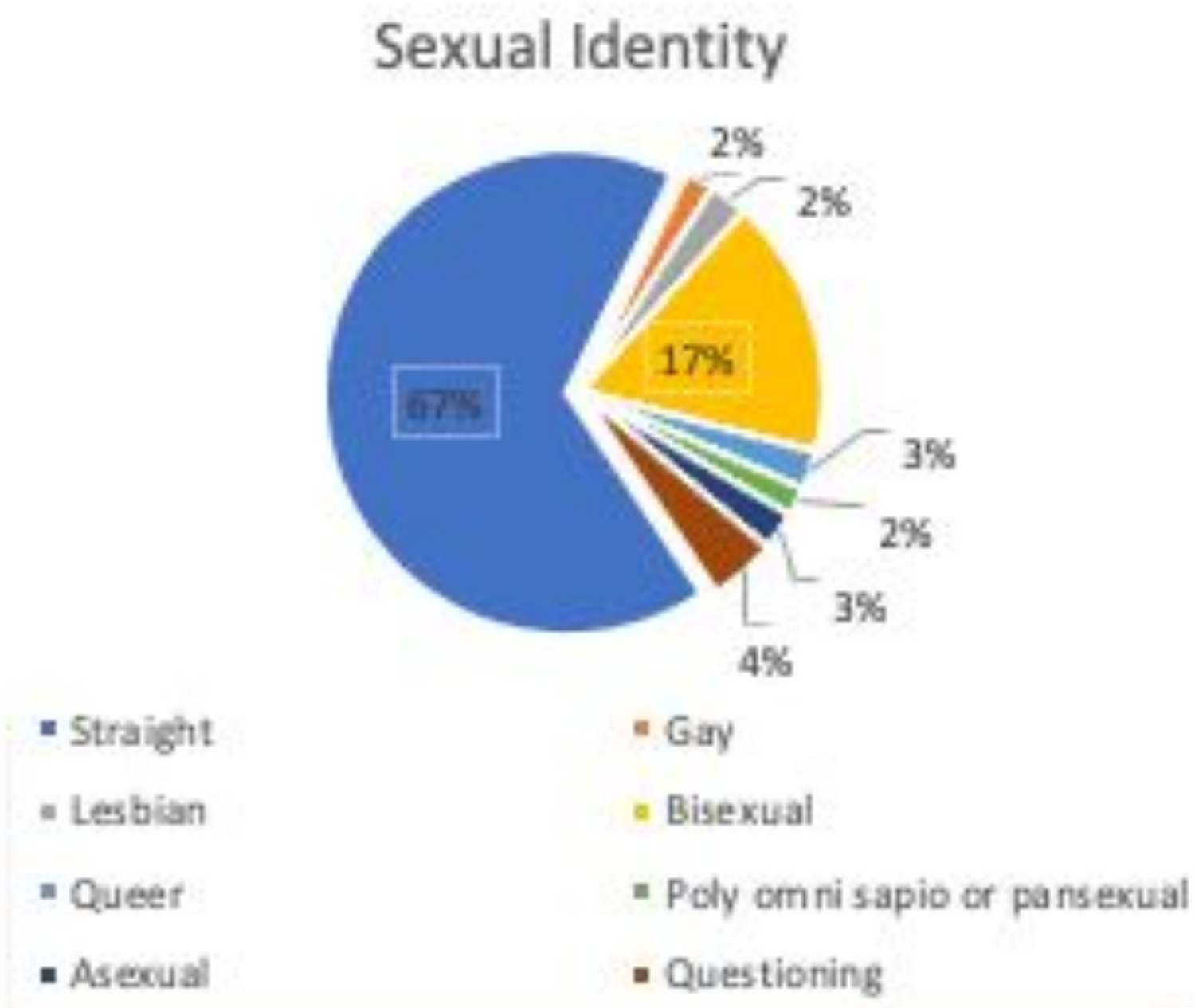
- Data collected using self-report measures uploaded to SONA System.
- Self-report measures:
  - Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Romer, 2004), the Daily Sessions, Frequency, Age of Onset, and Quantity of Cannabis Use Inventory (DFAQ-CU; Cuttler & Spradlin, 2017), and the Marijuana Motives Measure (MMM; Simons et al., 1998).
- Independent samples T-Test analysis using SPSS.

## Results

Table 1:

		t	df	p	CI (lower)	CI (upper)
Sexuality	Frequency of Use	-1.797	148	0.074	-0.56597	0.02691
	Quantity of Use	-1.94	15.989	0.07	-1.35924	0.06028
	Coping Motives (MMM)	-2.239	107	0.014	-4.54755	-0.27632
	DERS-18 Scores	-2.988	148	0.003	-10.3922	-2.11802
Gender						
	DERS-18 Scores	2.607	148	0.01	3.14699	22.8669

- T-statistic analysis showed statistically significant differences in quantity of cannabis use and coping motives for sexual minorities and DERS-18 scores for SGM groups (see Table 1).
- No statistically significant differences in frequency of use reported for SGM groups, as well as no significant difference in quantity of use and coping motives for gender minority individuals.



## Discussion

- Findings suggest that sexual minorities are using higher quantities of cannabis than their heterosexual counterparts.
- DERS-18 scores for SGMs were significantly higher than their heterosexual and cisgender peers, highlighting the association of increased cannabis use as a means to cope with negative emotions, although MMM scores are only representative of sexual minorities.
- Limitations:
  - Small sample size of individuals endorsing a minority status
  - Not enough data to compare cannabis use frequency, quantity, and motives for the gender minority group.
    - Only 1 gender minority individual reported using cannabis.
  - Unable to tell whether substance use is a direct result of endorsing a SGM status.
- Future Directions:
  - Modeling these variables together in a regression analysis would make for interesting results.
  - Longitudinal studies could help us better understand the association between substance use and endorsing a SGM status.
  - Focusing more on the forms of intersectionality within minority stressors can help us comprehend how to better support SGM and their minority status.
    - Supportive relationships can potentially help buffer the effects of stressors on SGM youth's rates of substance use (Mereish & Watson, 2023)