Asexuality is an emerging sexual orientation and identity

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1. TYPES OF ATTRACTION

Asexuality is a sexual orientation characterized by the lack of sexual attraction or desire for sexual activity. By this definition, studies have found that about 1% to 3.5% of the population is asexual. Asexuality promises to change the way sexuality is conceptualized. Asexuality only refers to the lack of sexual attraction. There are multiple types of attraction—sexual, romantic, sensual, and aesthetic—that are all separate. Asexuals often have identifiers for multiple types of attraction.

2. COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

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3. ATTRACTION VS BEHAVIOR

Asexuality is very different than abstinence/celibacy, which is a purposeful choice to abstain from sexual behavior motivated by some personal belief. Less than 12% of asexuals also identify as celibate; most asexuals aren’t actively avoiding sex so they don’t consider themselves celibate. The lack of sexual attraction is not a choice nor is it indicative of a health problem.

While the majority of asexuals aren’t sexually active, some choose to engage in sexual behavior. The most common reasons are for a partner, curiosity, societal expectations, and enjoyment in order of frequency. Also, over 3/4ths of asexuals engage in masturbation, indicating a present sexual drive.

Thus, asexuality can be conceptualized by combining the spectrums of sexual attraction and sexual drive. The below model shows this relationship and demonstrates how sexual drive is not dependent on sexual attraction.

4. CORRELATIONS

There are many medical conditions where low or absent interest in sexual activity is a symptom. However, while those people could choose to identify as asexual, asexuality is not indicative of a medical or psychological problem. The cause of asexuality can only be theorized. Yet certain correlations have emerged:

One important identifier in the asexual population is gender. Some attribute the gender disparity to the difference in sexual patterns between males and females; others attribute it to gender norms. The large number of asexuals who identify outside of the gender binary (denoted as ‘other’ in the pie chart) demonstrates how gender and sexuality are intertwined.

While conservative behaviors about sex are normally seen as religious, almost 50% of asexuals identify as atheists or agnostics. Also, the overwhelming majority of asexuals involved in research are from Westernized societies and young, the median age was 21.

5. ASEXUALITY IN LGBTQ+

The LGBTQ+ acronym is a symbolic legitimation of a collective identity. Basically, an identity gains recognition once it has been added to the acronym, as the inclusion of Bi, Trans, and Queer identities demonstrates. There are longer acronyms for the LGBTQ+ community that include an A but is it often for allies. Should the A stand for asexual?

Asexuals are creating their own collective identity, in part through the online community Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) which was founded in 2001. Some asexuals identify as grey-asexual and some as demisexual. Grey-asexuals experience attraction very infrequently and demisexuals experience attraction only after a deep emotional bond has formed. All of these individuals who are part of the asexual spectrum are often referred to as aces.

The asexual pride flag symbolizes this spectrum of (a)sexual attraction:
- black = asexuality
- grey = grey/demisexuality
- white = sexuality
- purple = community

Due to lack of sexual attraction, romantic attraction becomes a major identifier within the asexual community. Some asexuals still engage in romantic relationships and romantic identity is used to clarify preferred partners. Even asexuals can still have successful relationships despite the lack of sexual and romantic attraction.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In conclusion, although asexuality is defined by a lack of sexual attraction or desire to engage in sexual activities, collective identity and behavior are also very important dimensions of asexuality. Asexuality is important in helping to understand the interaction between different types of attraction, and studying asexuality can improve our conceptualization of other sexualities.

Asexuality is a very recent collective identity. As such, there has been very little research done on this population. Thus, there are many questions that need to be explored to increase understanding and visibility of asexuality.

- What are the true causes of the correlations between asexuality and gender, religion, nationality, and age?
- How do cultural factors impact the visibility and acceptance of asexuality?
- Why has asexual movement emerged primarily among young people, and how will it impact older asexuals?
- What factors determine whether someone chooses to identify as asexual?
- How do the media representation of asexuality impact society and asexuals?
- How does our hypersexualized, Western culture affect the identities, relationships, and social status of asexuals?

For more information about the asexual community, visit www.asexuality.org, www.asexualannounces.wordpress.com, or the LGBTQ+ Resource Center on campus.

References
[6] Tlachac and Peter Hart-Brinson

Acknowledgments
- Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, UW-Eau Claire
- Blugold Fellowship scholarship