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Gender Discrepancy in Asexual Identity

The Effect of Hegemonic Gender Norms on Asexual
Identification

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Thesis Advisor Dr. Sean Bruna

2018

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Chapter I: Introduction, Research Questions, Literature Review

The following is a research study conducted by Tori Bianchi as a thesis paper for the Western Washington University Honors Program. This project was advised by Dr. Sean Bruna in the Anthropology Department.

Introduction

Identifying Asexuality

To be asexual is to be “someone who experiences little or no sexual attraction” (Mardell 2016). It is an orientation largely unknown and ignored in society. Asexuality is also an uncommon identity, popularly cited to be only 1% of the population (Wellings 1994) but is reported as high as 4% for individuals aged 18-24 (GLAAD 2017). This is 1% higher than those reporting strictly gay or lesbian in the GLAAD study in the same age range. Asexual can also be used as an umbrella term to encompass many more specific sub-identities on the asexual spectrum¹.

There is a lot of diversity among those identifying as asexual, and it is important not to conflate notions of sexual action and sexual attraction. Attraction is not necessary for sexual actions or behaviors to occur. Asexuality is not a lack of libido or sex drive, only of sexual attraction. There are asexual individuals who choose to have sex for a number of reasons not related to sexual attraction to their sexual partner(s). Asexuality is not the same as celibacy. Celibacy is a choice to abstain from sex, while asexuality is an inherent sexual orientation.

Sexual attraction and romantic attraction are often considered related or dependent on each other. However, a second model is frequently used, especially when examining and describing individuals on the asexual spectrum. The Split Attraction Model, used and described by many in online queer communities, separates types of attraction. Most notably, it differentiates sexual attraction from

¹ When examining the asexual spectrum ‘sexual’ can be used as a root word to which prefixes are added. These prefixes often relate to the frequency or circumstances sexual attraction occurs, they may indicate confusion or uncertainty to whether or not the person experiences sexual attraction, and there are numerous other experiences that these prefixes can denote.

romantic attraction, and in some iterations, also works to define the limits of platonic, aesthetic, alterous, and sensual attraction as well.

Gender Distribution

Within the population of people who identify as asexual, there is a large inconsistency in gender identity as compared to the general population. It might be expected that approximately equal proportions of women/females and men/males would identify as asexual, with some percentage identifying as neither. However, this does not appear to be the case.

According to the 2016 *Asexual Census*, the largest survey of its kind, focusing on those aged 18 to 30 at the time of the study, those born between 1986 and 1998, 63% (n=4379) identified as "Woman/Female", 11% of those surveyed identified with "Man/Male" (n=731), 26% as "none of the above" (n=1822), with less than 1% (n=23) not reporting. Other studies have noted similar trends regarding the gender divisions among those identifying as asexual (Hinderliter 2009). Anthony Bogaert suggests that "women will be more likely than men to be asexual because they are, on average, less likely to have had conditioning experiences relevant to sexual orientation development" (Bogaert 2004).

Research Questions

This study investigates how the cultural and societal expectations of different genders, both assigned and actualized, affect the perception and performance of an individual's sexual identity. In particular it examines ideals of prescribed and hegemonic masculinity and femininity and how those ideals are upheld or broken by an asexual identity, and how those holding diverse gender identities feel their gender identity interacts with their asexual orientation.

Three sub-questions in particular are investigated: How do gender roles and expectations affect individuals identifying as asexual? Why do more women and genderqueer² people identify as asexual? What about masculine stereotypes dissuades individuals from identifying as asexual?

² For the purposes of this paper, "genderqueer" will be used to describe any gender identity outside of "woman" and "man". Genderqueer is often accepted as the furthest reaching gender umbrella term, however, some individuals choose not to use this label. The use of this term is not intended to erase other identities or those who do not identify with this term, but rather to simplify the language of this paper.

Literature Review

Gender Roles

Judith Butler presented the idea that gender is a performance, or a series of acts that together make up gender presentation and identity (Butler 1988). These acts are commonly divided into “masculine” and “feminine” in character. Certain performative acts are associated with certain genders, and there are expectations as to who is supposed to perform these acts according to their perceived gender.

Performing acts of masculinity is not a prerequisite of maleness, nor do acts of femininity qualify the performance of femaleness. Likewise, subverting stereotypical gender roles is not a requirement of being genderqueer. However, there are certain societal expectations associated with the performance of gender. Manhood is often defined by the performance of masculinity and womanhood is often defined by the performance of femininity. Genderqueer people are expected to either be both masculine and feminine or neither. These gender expectations are part of roles that individuals are expected to fill. Departure from these roles can cause socially inflicted penalties, punishing “deviant” behavior (Sanchez et al. 2012).

Masculinity and femininity are concepts in opposition. What masculinity is, femininity is the opposite. What femininity is, masculinity is not. These terms exist in a rigid, contrasting binary. There are few traits that are not prescribed to one side or the other. For this reason, only masculinity and femininity are being described. Androgynous might be an additional term that ascribes a set of traits to a third gender, but is not widely recognized or readily defined other than “not masculine or feminine”.

Sexual behavior is one of many defining characteristics for both masculinity and femininity, but in different ways. The sexually aggressive man and the sexually submissive woman are tropes that permeate culture, and have done so for a long time. Women and men are expected to play their prescribed roles, these roles extending into sexual behaviors. Those who do not conform break away from the masculine or feminine ideal (masculinity being ascribed to men and femininity to women).

Femininity

In the Victorian era, women were seen to have "little to no sexual appetite" (Lee 1996). Sexual desire was thought to be a trait exclusive to men, or to deviant and undesirable women. "Once a woman enjoyed sex she entered into the bottomless pit of sexuality; it was inevitable that she would become promiscuous and from this she probably would turn to prostitution, and suffer from a horrible death" (Bullough and Bullough 1989). Women were not supposed to want sex or even enjoy the act of sex. And if they did have sex, it would be with their husband. Those who enjoyed sex, or sought it out sometimes underwent "corrective" medical treatment that could go as far as the removal of the sex organs (Degler 1974). Women were thought to be devoid of sexual inclinations; instead, they were the object of men's desire and pleasure.

The idea of the chaste woman still permeates culture today, but a more dichotomous expectation for women has arisen. Both the seductress and the virgin (or ideally, the seductive virgin) epitomize ideal femininity (Barbosa et al. 2000; Garcia 1983). Despite this, it is acceptable for women to denounce sexual desire and attraction (at least until they find themselves in an acceptable relationship). This makes sense in light of abstinence only sexual education and of religions such as

Christianity where virginity until marriage is preached. A “good” woman is one that keeps herself “pure” until she enters an appropriate relationship and sexual intercourse is expected on the grounds of reproduction.

This assumption of females as sexless, and without sexual desire, may lead to a natural assumption of an inherent asexuality such as was assumed in the Victorian era. An asexual identity for women and feminine individuals may feel more aligned with societal expectations of femininity, with less social pressure to act in ways that would counter their sexual orientation.

Masculinity

Being masculine is intricately tied to being a man, in ways femininity isn’t tied to being a woman. Adages such as “be a man” or “man-up” are statements directed towards those who have somehow failed their masculine performance. If you are not masculine enough, you cannot be a man. Masculinity must be proven, and constantly reasserted, and heterosexuality is a cornerstone of masculinity.

It is generally perceived that between men and women, men will be the more promiscuous. Being a “player” is often seen as a positive trait. Men, in order to correctly perform masculinity are supposed to be (hetero)sexually available and active at all times, or else want to be having sex. At least, they have to say that is what they want. Flaunting heterosexuality and sexual prowess is a sure sign of masculinity (Pascoe 2012). Those who fail to “get the girl” and have sex with her are failures as men. It is pressure and an expectation that men will have had (heterosexual) sex by the end of high school (Connell 1992).

Perhaps the only exception to this flaunted sexuality is masculinity in the context of religious devotion. In this case, resisting temptation is a sign of maturity. Of course the feelings are still there, but not giving in to the body's lust and desire is a sign of self-mastery, which in itself is masculine (Pascoe 2012).

Asexuality is an orientation that directly conflicts with the sex equals masculinity formula. Lacking sexual attraction, asexual men lack a trait that is often tied closely with manhood and masculinity, and these individuals may feel social pressure to avoid identifying as asexual.

Breaking the Binary

There are many ways under which this binary division of gender roles can be broken or challenged. In fact, masculinity and femininity may be examined as a spectrum which identity and gender performance can exist within, and without. Anyone can be masculine or feminine to any degree they feel. After all, these concepts are ideas applied to stereotypical roles, and anyone can act out any part they choose. There is the expectation that men will be masculine and women will be feminine, with varying consequences for breaking this rule, some individuals are specifically expected to embody either both the masculine and the feminine, or neither.

Genderqueer, nonbinary, agender, and other identities outside of "man" and "woman" are expected to break the masculine and feminine stereotypes. In a similar vein, transgender people with a binary gender identity are expected to explicitly and exclusively perform gender roles assigned to their gender identity. People with genderqueer and transgender identities have to be performed just as much as, if not more than those in the socially accepted cis-binary (Gagné and Tewksbury 1998). An

individual assigned female at birth (AFAB), who presents femininely is assumed to be a woman, even if they identify as something else. They must outwardly prove their genderqueer identity, or else risk their identity being ignored by others. The same goes for genderqueer people assigned male at birth (AMAB). If they present as masculine, their gender identity is brought into question because of how they choose to look and act. AMAB binary transgender people who perform masculinity and AFAB binary transgender people who perform femininity may have their gender identity questioned and debated.

Queering Gender Roles (or Not)

Masculinity and femininity as they apply to genderqueer individuals have already been discussed, but there are many others experiencing the effects of these stereotypes who fall within the binary.

Heterosexuality is an assumption in both masculine and feminine norms, but of course, queer people may not conform to that standard. However, there are still assumptions and stereotypes regarding femininity and masculinity within queer identities, particularly those of gay men and women.

Women Loving Women

A question commonly posed to lesbian couples is: "Which one of you is the man?" or "Who wears the pants?" implying that even within same gender couples, heterosexual norms are imposed and expected. Queer women are often stereotyped as "butch"; more masculine than heterosexual women, but less masculine than heterosexual men. This assumed or perceived masculinity leads to the assumption that they must fill a masculine role. However, gay women perceive themselves as equally feminine as, but more masculine than heterosexual women (Blashill and Powlishta 2009).

A contradiction to this is that of the "lipstick lesbian". The feminine lesbian can serve to break down the butch stereotype, but is sometimes used as an example of reinforced heterosexual norms such as in butch-femme couples (Palmore 2010).

Lesbians are sometimes thought to be "man haters" or women who are unable to get dates with men, or are women who want to be men (Eliaison et al. 1992). These ideas play into a heteronormative

perspective where same-sex attraction is unacceptable and must be due to confusion or intentional violation of gender roles.

Female same-sex relationships have simultaneously been hyper-sexualized and desexualized. Most media portrayals of lesbian sex are essentially two women making out in a bed, and do not represent reality. These portrayals are also often criticized for being directed towards the “male gaze” of heterosexual male viewers rather than representing real couples (Jenkins 2005).

Men Loving Men

Homosexuality, or perhaps anything that is not heterosexuality, is perceived as an absence of masculinity. In fact, homophobia can be seen as a defining trait of masculinity (Connell 1992). But of course, gay and bisexual men can be masculine regardless of or perhaps despite perceptions of their sexual orientation.

Gay men are often stereotyped as having feminine characteristics such as a soft voice or display of emotions, but also as being hyper-sexual. Gay men are perceived have similar levels of masculinity as heterosexual women, but see themselves to be equally masculine as heterosexual men with feminine attributes as well (Blashill and Powlishta 2009).

There is the expectation for “men to act like men”. For men who love men this might take the form of being a “straight gay” (Connell 1992). To do so means to take on all other aspects of masculinity besides in the realm of attraction. This contradiction serves to emphasize the heterosexual

requirement of masculinity and the demands placed on queer men in order to be perceived as masculine.

Because of the stereotypes and associated treatment of queer, and specifically gay, men in society, many queer men are afraid of their sexuality. Not being heterosexual does not only affect who they are attracted to, but also how they are seen and treated publically. Being attracted to other men can cause feelings of shame and of failed masculinity. These feelings can prevent individuals from "coming out" to others, trigger depression, and is associated with suicide.

Perceptions of Asexuality

In general, self-identification as asexual might be avoided due to how it is perceived by society. Asexuality is not a widely known or understood sexual orientation. Some deny that it exists, suggesting that people identifying as asexual are lying, faking it, sick, abused, seeking attention, or any number of other "reasons". Sexual attraction is often perceived as an inherent and universal feature of being human.

The medicalization of asexuality may lead some to conclude that their lack of sexual attraction is due to a biological or psychological fault that might be cured. This conclusion may prevent individuals from accepting an asexual identity in a belief that their lack of sexual attraction might be "fixed". In romantic relationships, because sex is usually an expected part of the relationship, and sexual and romantic attraction are often seen as one and the same, identifying as asexual might be difficult. One partner identifying as asexual can stress the relationship, and so the identity might not be recognized or accepted. In media, characters portrayed as asexual are often not relatable. They are inhuman, socially deviant, or childish. In these characters, asexuality or a lack of interest in sex serves to isolate them and cast them as "other". These portrayals may keep asexual individuals from recognizing or accepting their shared traits with these characters because of how they might be perceived.

Medicalization

Homosexuality appeared in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) I and II, but was removed in 1973, officially accepted as a normal variant of human experience. Asexuality was initially included in the DSM-III as "Inhibited Sexual Desire", but was revised in 1987 to

“Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder” (HSDD) (Emens 2012). HSDD still exists in the DSM-V. While the current DSM notes that individuals must experience “distress or interpersonal difficulty”, these are also markers of having experiences with identity that is discordant with societal norms. The most recent edition of the DSM also states that those identifying as asexual will not be diagnosed with HSDD. However, the lack of recognition and visibility of the orientation causes an unknown but possibly large number of people to be diagnosed with HSDD, when they are in fact asexual. Many individuals are unaware of what asexuality is or are unable or unwilling to recognize it within themselves.

Beyond being named a mental disorder, asexuality has also been attributed to other factors including hormone imbalance, sexual abuse, and sexual repression. While there are asexual people who have hormone imbalances, or have experienced abuse, there is insistence that these are causes of asexuality, and that asexuality does not exist as a normal and healthy sexual orientation in and of itself.

This medicalization of asexuality can cause distress in those who do not experience sexual attraction. The assumption that there is something wrong and need treatment instead of promoting acceptance in their identity can be hugely damaging. Just as people have previously treated homosexuality as a medical disorder, and treated it as such, asexuality faces similar problems today.

Romantic Relationships

It is often assumed that asexual people are also aromantic. While asexual individuals may not experience sexual attraction, many do experience romantic attraction, and may choose to enter into romantic relationships. It is a societal expectation that individuals in such a relationship will have sex with their partner(s) at some point. Sexual abstinence is only accepted in the context of religion, and even then, only until marriage.

Asexual individuals sometimes have difficulty in romantic relationships because of their sexual orientation. Because sex and sexual attraction are a large part of many romantic relationships, there is a strong social perception that asexual individuals do not love their partner(s) enough. While those who identify as asexual may choose to have sex, and may like sex, others are sex adverse or sex repulsed and do not want to have sex at all.

Many asexual people feel pressured into having sex with their partner(s), whether directly by their partner(s), or indirectly by societal norms (Haefner 2011). There might be an ultimatum: sex, or the relationship ends. This coercion can force people into actions they are uncomfortable with, and may technically fall under rape or sexual assault (Struckman-Johnson et al. 2003). Some consider open relationships so that their partner(s) can have sex while not involving them. Others avoid romantic relationships entirely despite romantic attraction or desire for such a relationship because they feel they cannot meet the expectations of such a relationship (Haefner 2011).

For men and masculine individuals, a failure in sexual attraction, desire, or performance could be perceived as a failure in the performance of masculinity. For women and feminine individuals, not

experiencing sexual attraction may not conflict as harshly as society's ideas regarding femininity, and so these individuals may more easily accept an asexual identity for themselves.

Presentation in Media

Representation of asexuality in media is sparse at best. There are only a few canonically asexual characters in what might be considered "mainstream media", and a handful that are portrayed as such, or state in canon that they are uninterested in sex but do not use the word "asexual" (AVENwiki n.d.). Taken together, there are a few characteristics that might form the beginnings of an "asexual stereotype".

Asexual characters are often portrayed as childish or naive, lacking worldly experiences. This can be seen in both Todd Chavez from *Bojack Horseman* and Jughead Jones from the Archie comic book series (Zdarsky 2016). Both characters have been declared asexual in canon. Todd is lazy, immature, and the butt of many of the show's jokes (*Bojack Horseman* 2014) and Jughead shares many of these same traits.

Another common trait among asexual and assumed asexual characters is the inability to fully integrate and blend into society, to the point of sociopathy. Voodoo, a slightly morbid and unapproachable EMT on the television sitcom *Sirens*, Sherlock Holmes as he is portrayed in the original texts and many adaptations, and serial killer Dexter Morgan, the titular character in the hit TV show and in the novel origin of the show *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* (AVENwiki n.d.).

A last attribute, commonly ascribed to characters portrayed as asexual, is to not be a human. Non-human beings, such as aliens and robots are often characterized as asexual to create a sense of "otherness" and to differentiate them from human characters. Both Spock and Data from the *Star Trek* franchise are portrayed as asexual. The vampire Raphael, from the *City of Bones* TV adaptation is asexual, and many describe the Doctor (a humanoid, but ultimately alien being) from *Doctor Who* franchise to be asexual (AVENwiki n.d.).

These portrayals depict asexual people as less than functional in everyday society, or even as something other than human. Sex is so integrated into culture that to not want it, or to not feel sexual attraction is to be separate and different from society. Or to be like a child. Or not to be human. These trends can be damaging in the long run when there is little diversity in the depiction of asexuality. One portrayal of asexuality in the medical drama *House* even chalked up asexuality to a brain tumor and/or faking it. This can cause young people or people newly exposed to the idea of asexuality to equate the orientation with these ideas and cause them to assume this is true of all asexual people. Or, if the person watching is asexual, that there is something wrong with them, and that they are somehow broken.

Chapter II: Research Methodology

A mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) approach was taken to investigate the research questions of this study. IRB research approval was obtained through the Western Washington University Office of Research (application EX18-082) to conduct interviews and an online survey. Data were analyzed using a modified grounded theory approach.

The quantitative data were examined first in order to identify the scope of the distribution discrepancy and create context for the research questions. The qualitative data from interviews and online survey were then examined within the framework of the patterns found in the quantitative data to answer the research questions.

Quantitative

Quantitative data of gender identity in the asexual community was acquired from the *Asexual Census* (Asexual Census 2016). The *Asexual Census* is an annual online survey distributed and spread through websites and social media platforms with the goal to “obtain better information on the makeup of asexual communities, and to track any trends on those communities over time” (Asexual Census 2016). It is open for anyone to respond, but is designed to capture the identities and experiences of individuals on the asexual spectrum. After an open period from October through December, the survey is closed, and the surveying body begins analysis, eventually releasing results publicly.

The data are available to individuals interested in research (Asexual Census 2016), and come in Microsoft Excel files accompanied by other supporting documents. The data are in their raw form, save for the removal of suspect submissions that are obviously made in jest or in disdain. (See Appendix A for detailed description of the *Asexual Census* research process and methods).

This research focuses on those aged 18 to 30 at the time of the *Asexual Census*. This age bracket is also reflected in those participating in interviews. These data were modified accordingly using Microsoft Excel software. Data on gender identity and sex assigned at birth were examined for the purposes of this study in an attempt to find a pattern or correlation between gender, sex assigned at birth, and asexuality.

Qualitative

Individual experiences regarding respondent's asexual orientation, their history, and their identity were captured by conducting semi-structured interviews in addition to a focus group discussion. Interview subjects were obtained primarily through the Western Aces³ club on Western Washington University Campus. Subjects were also found at WWU Queer Con where several individuals were interested in participating in the research.

In twelve individual interviews lasting 15-45 minutes, and a focus group lasting an hour, (see Appendix B for interview guides) participants were asked questions related to their history, sexual orientation, and gender identity, as well as their relationships with masculinity and femininity. Subjects were also shown quantitative data relating asexuality, gender identity, and sex assigned at birth, and were asked for their hypotheses and explanations for the gender distribution exhibited in the data.

Interviews were recorded, then transcribed for analysis. Interview transcripts were coded by question and for recurring themes across the interviews using MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software (MAXQDA n.d.).

In addition, an internet survey lasting approximately 20 minutes was released online to capture more experiences than could be accomplished through interviews alone. The survey was initially sent out on platforms such as Facebook groups and internet sites such as asexuality.org where asexual

³ "Ace" is a commonly used abbreviation of asexual. "Ace" can be used as a replacement for "asexual" in most contexts. For example, "I am ace" is the same as saying "I am asexual". This is similar to how bi, pan, etc. can be used to replace bisexual, pansexual, etc..

individuals would be likely to encounter and interact with the survey. 661 surveys were returned, but was cut to 406 when the age bracket was narrowed to 18 to 30 years of age.

Survey responses were coded for recurring themes to supplement the interview data.

Chapter III: Findings

The relationships between gender identity, sex assigned at birth, and asexual orientation, as it applies to individuals in the age range of focus were examined. All respondents maintained in the *Asexual Census* data are on the asexual spectrum. Specifically, the proportions of individuals in each gender category, and each sex assigned at birth category were examined in order to find evidence that socialization and internalized ideals regarding masculinity and femininity are reflected in the distribution.

Figures 1 through 5 represent data collected in the most recent published data from 2016 survey. Data are also examined across the 2014, 2015, and 2016 *Asexual Census* (Figures 6-10) to confirm that the patterns found in the 2016 *Asexual Census* are consistent across years.

Interview transcripts were coded according to recurring themes in the interviews. These themes help provide possible explanations for the gender discrepancy observed in the quantitative data from the *Asexual Census*.

Quantitative

Figures

Across survey respondents to the *Asexual Census* aged 18 to 30 (n=6955) the majority identified as a woman or female. 11% identified as a man or male (n=731) and over a quarter (n=1822) identified as “none of the above” meaning neither a man nor a woman.

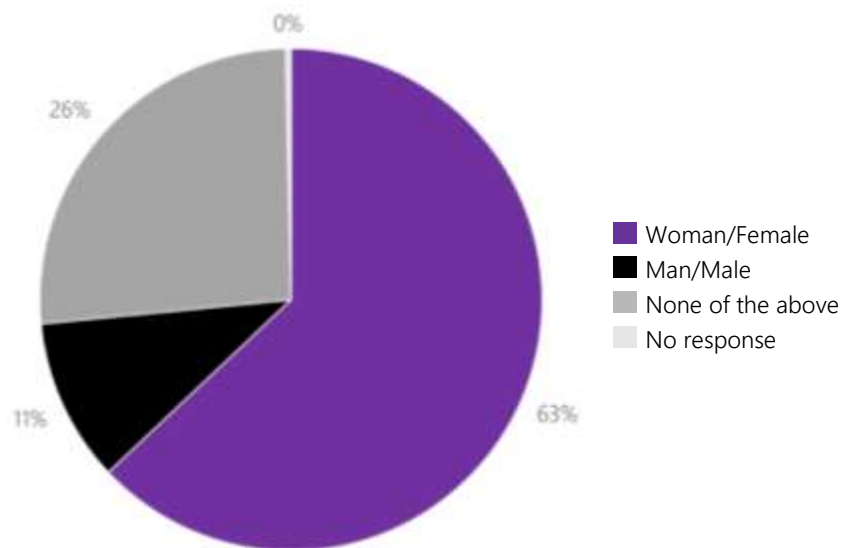


Figure 1. 63% (n=4379) of respondents to the 2016 Asexual Census, aged 18-30 identified as “Woman/Female”. 11% (n=731) identified as “Man/Male”, and 26% (n=1822) identified as neither woman/female nor man/male, choosing “None of the Above” (n=23). Less than 1% of respondents did not respond to the question.

Among those identifying as a woman or female the large majority (n=4308) were assigned female at birth. They currently identify with the gender they were assigned when they were born. Only 2% (n=65) were assigned male at birth.

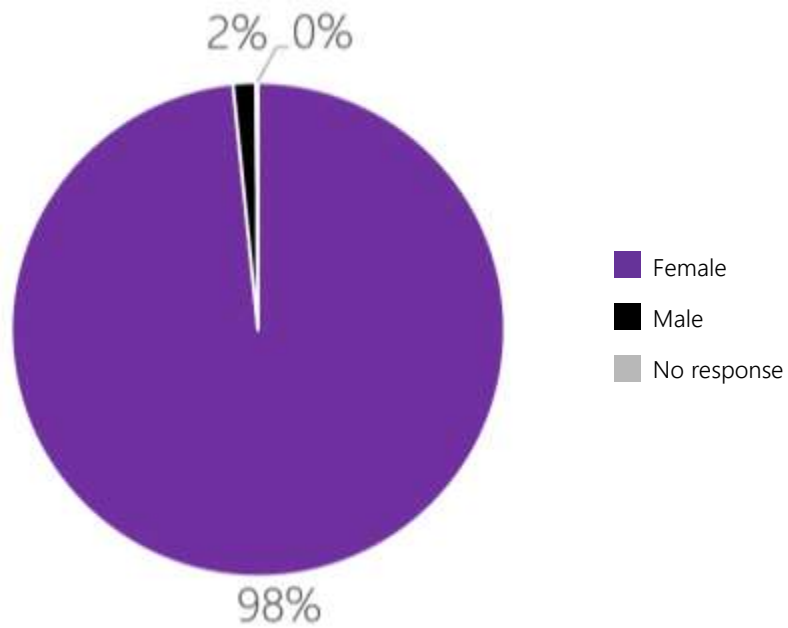


Figure 2. 98% (n=4308) of respondents to the 2016 Asexual Census, aged 18-30 identifying as "Woman/Female" were assigned female at birth. 2% (n=65) were assigned male at birth. Less than 1% (n=20) had no response.

Among those identifying as a man or male, the majority (n=496) were assigned male at birth. However, nearly one third (n=229) are transgender men who were assigned female at birth. This is a stark difference to the sex assigned at birth ratio represented in Figure 2.

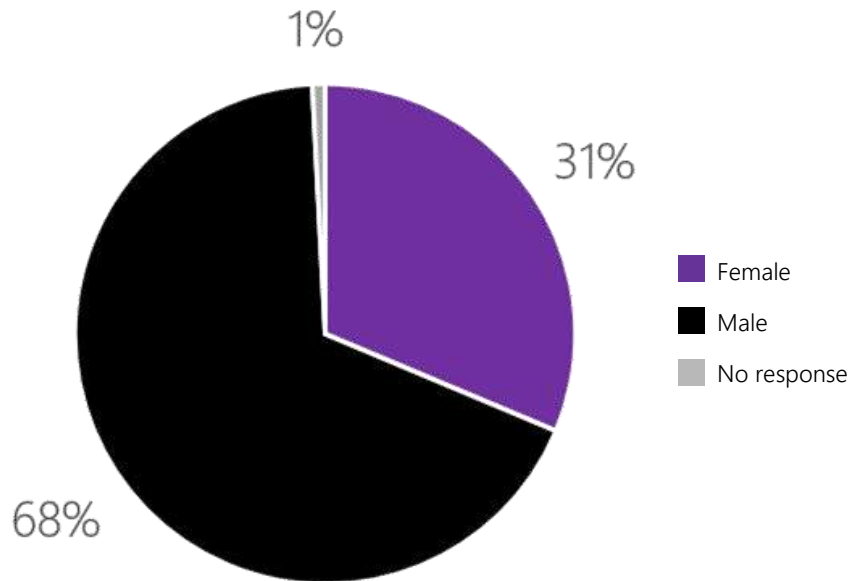


Figure 3. 31% (n=229) of respondents to the 2016 Asexual Census, aged 18-30 identifying as "Man/Male" were assigned female at birth. 68% (n=496) were assigned male at birth. 1% (n=3) did not respond to the question.

For those who selected “none of the above” and identify as neither a man nor a woman, the majority (n=1614) were assigned female at birth. A smaller percentage were assigned male at birth (n=159).

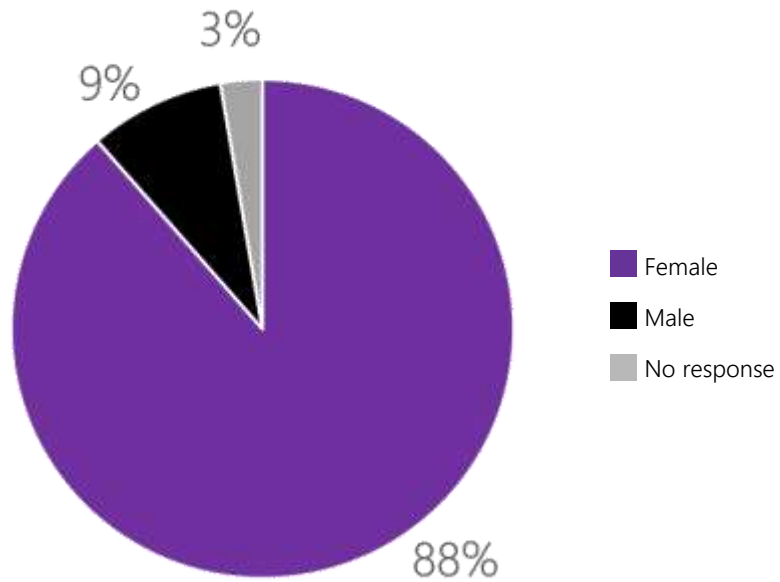


Figure 4. 88% (n=1614) of respondents to the 2016 Asexual Census, aged 18-30 selecting “None of the Above” were assigned female at birth. 9% (n=159) were assigned male at birth. 3% (n=49) did not respond to the question.

Across the *Asexual Census*, within the age range of focus, the majority of respondents (n=6171) were assigned female at birth, regardless of their gender identity. Only 10% (n=723) were assigned male at birth. Interesting, this distribution is similar to that represented in Figure 4.

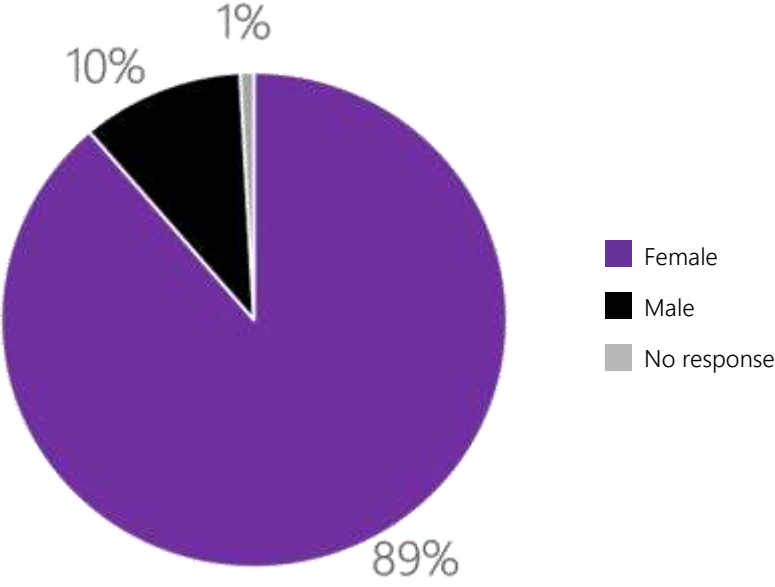


Figure 5. 89% (n=6171) of respondents to the 2016 Asexual Census, aged 18-30 were assigned female at birth. 10% (n=723) were assigned male at birth. 1% (n=61) had no response.

The gender distribution was also examined and compared across the 2014, 2015, and 2016 *Asexual Census*. The distribution seems to remain relatively consistent across all three years.

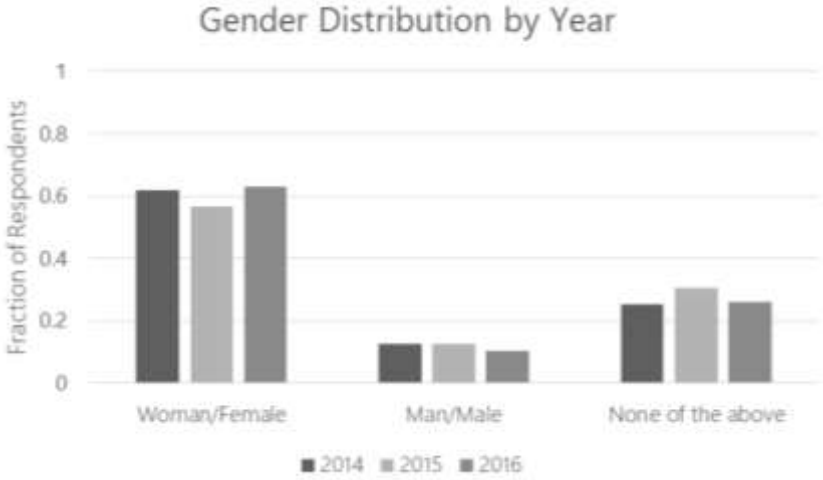


Figure 6. Gender distribution across the 2014, 2015, and 2016 *Asexual Census*.

The sex assigned at birth distributions for each identity category also have minimal fluctuation across survey years with the exception of the “Man/Male” category which does have some variation.

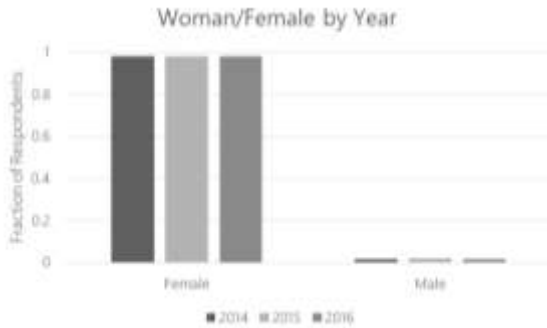


Figure 7. Distribution of sex assigned at birth for individuals identifying as a woman/female across the 2014, 2015, and 2016 Asexual Census.

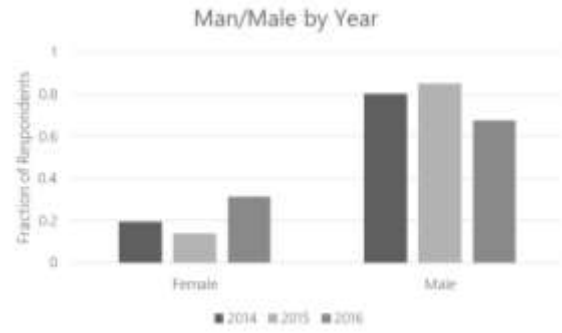


Figure 8. Distribution of sex assigned at birth for individuals identifying as a man/male across the 2014, 2015, and 2016 Asexual Census.

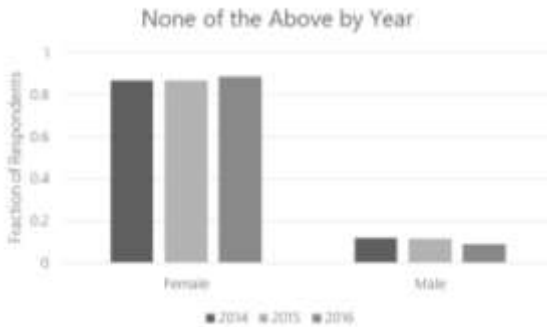


Figure 9. Distribution of sex assigned at birth for individuals selecting “none of the above” across the 2014, 2015, and 2016 Asexual Census.

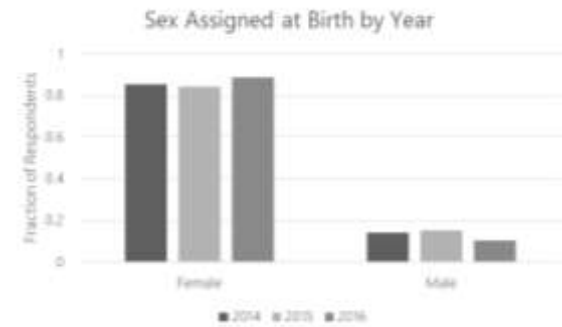


Figure 10. Distribution of sex assigned at birth for across the 2014, 2015, and 2016 Asexual Census.

Gender Identity

Well over half of the respondents to the 2016 *Asexual Census* reported being a “Woman/Female”, and over a quarter of respondents, more than double that identifying as a man/male, identified themselves as “None of the Above” or neither a man or a woman. This is more than double the 12% of the general population aged 18-34 that identifies as something other than cisgender (GLAAD 2017). Only a relatively small proportion of respondents identified as a “Man/Male”, and an insignificant percentage did not answer the question (Figure 1). These findings were consistent across the 2014, 2015, and 2016 *Asexual Census* surveys (Figure 6).

Among those identifying as a “Woman/Female” on the 2016 *Asexual Census*, almost all were assigned female at birth (Figure 2). In contrast, nearly a third of those identifying as a “Man/Male” have a gender identity that contrasts with the sex they were assigned at birth (Figure 3). In addition, the majority of those responding “None of the Above” were assigned female at birth (Figure 4). These findings are also consistent across the 2014, 2015, and 2016 surveys (Figures 7-9), though the proportion of transgender men had increased in the 2016 survey.

Sex Assigned at Birth

When looking specifically at the proportions related to sex assigned at birth, the large majority were assigned female at birth, regardless of their gender identity. Only approximately 1 in 10 respondents to the 2016 *Asexual Census* were assigned male at birth (Figure 5). This is a similar percentage to the number of individuals identifying as a man/male in the census. These findings are consistent across the 2014, 2015, and 2016 surveys (Figure 10).

Interviews and Survey

In this section, recurring themes from the interview transcripts and the survey are described using descriptive quotes from the interviews and survey responses (names have been changed to protect privacy).

From the interviews, five major themes emerged: asexuality and femininity, asexuality and masculinity, asexuality and religion, asexuality in relation to discomfort and dysphoria, and asexuality and gender non-conformity. These themes were also consistent within the survey responses and provided insight into how gender roles, norms, and pressures affect individuals identifying as asexual.

Asexuality and Femininity

Throughout the interviews and survey responses, there were several common themes relating to sexuality and femininity. Notably, a dichotomous standard came up repeatedly. Riley (21, nonbinary/trans, they/them) mentions the “virgin and the whore”.

There's the idea of like...the virgin and the whore, so it's like either you're asking for it and really want sex and you are sorta vilified in that sense, or you are a virgin and you are pure and innocent and you don't ever think about sex.

Similarly, Alex (22, genderqueer, she/they) discusses two opposing stereotypes often applied to women and feminine individuals and some of the negative connotations associated with each of those stereotypes.

If you are feminine or female, and you have sex a lot, it's considered that you're a slut, or you're easy, or you're-it devalues your femininity in a lot of ways. Um, but if you don't have sex at all, then you're a prude, and you're standoffish, and you're sometimes snobby, or you think you're better than everyone. So, uh, there's a very negative emotional stereotype against that as well. So, um, it's-it's really hard to find the balance in that, and I would say probably impossible to find the balance in that because it's an impossible dichotomy to begin with.

Within feminine sexuality, there exists a clear divide. Being sexually active outside of romantic relationships is considered slutty and often has negative connotations. Not having sex is seen as prudish, and also has negative connotations. Asexuality is most related to the latter concept. 86% (n=216) of respondents to the question on the research survey thought that sexual attraction and desire were not important aspects of femininity (as opposed to 74% (n=177) who thought the same for masculinity).

Although there is an archetypal framework within femininity for not having sex, the related stereotypes and connotations are rarely positive. There are also pressures on women and feminine individuals related to sex indirectly such as the expectation to have children that impact how they might perceive their own femininity.

There were also common ideas across the interviews and survey related to why women and feminine people have sex and how the reasons differ from those of men and masculine people. Henry (29, nonbinary, they/them) emphasized the stereotype of women desiring more emotional connection through sex than men.

Women are more emotionally driven than sexually driven, that's kind of a big stereotype that what they want out of a relationship is more on the emotional-intellectual side than the physical...um, affection side I guess, I don't know. Not that they don't want that, but just that the-that the primary gain they get out of it is emotional rather than physical.

Another stereotype, mentioned by Elizabeth (29, female/trans, she/her) is that women are more flexible in their sexuality.

I feel like there's the stereotype of women being more flexible in their sexuality. So whereas like...men are expected to be straight, but women are expected to, you know, oh, you can-you can fool around with someone in the same sex and you can-there's this expectation that although women are expected more so to be straight, that there's this period of one's life where you can experiment and kind of step out of those norms, and it's more acceptable. So I think...when I think about some of the feminine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality, then it's, um-that's what I think about, it's just the idea of flexibility and that idea that it's-it's acceptable for women to have an identity that is not just heterosexual.

This stereotype of flexible sexuality within femininity might make it more acceptable for women and feminine individuals to explore their sexuality than it is for men and masculine individuals. This

freedom of exploration might lead more feminine people to encounter the concept of asexuality, and accept it more readily than masculine people.

Asexuality and Masculinity

Masculinity was also discussed throughout the interviews and survey. In particular, the dependence of masculinity on heterosexuality. In her interview, Elizabeth mentions how her asexual friends are perceived differently depending on their identity.

I would say the concept of masculinity is very firmly rooted in...being this idea of a man's man and being like, straight...Friends who identify as masculine, who are also ace, get more flack for that than friends who identify as female and ace because there's this idea of like, men are supposed to be players and they're supposed to be sleeping with women regularly and that there's something deficient about them if they're not going through with those behaviors.

Jessica (20, gender-fluid/agender, she/her) also mentioned the sexual expectations of masculine individuals and how it intersects with a queer orientation.

If you're not wanting to have sex all the time and if you're not actively getting sex from some partner um, specifically if you are not getting sex from a female partner, you're often seen as not masculine. People say they are emasculated, like if they are not having sex, or, I know a lot of gay men are assigned the label of feminine just because they are not into women sexually or-and or romantically, and I think that's just-it makes it very apparent that sexual attraction and desire is important for the label of masculinity.

Xavier (20, genderqueer, questioning, he/they) recounts their experience being masculine and asexual.

I'm in this masculine society that I'm not engaging in sexual activity kind of sets me aside for other people and thus, and not necessarily in a good way. Um, and that's dealing with the other people and not others in the asexual spectrum...I didn't want to be further ostracized by my peers.

Being asexual and masculine goes against the grain of hegemonic masculinity. The most frequent assertion for why there are so few man/male identified as asexual in the survey was the social norms and pressures for masculine individuals to be sexual. One survey respondent states,

I think the "masculine persona" prevents people from expressing their own feelings, including about sexuality. This "persona" makes males less like to try to explore those feelings (or really lack thereof), and that's the trend you see [in the data]. This same "persona effect" is part of why I try so hard to outwardly act straight even when I am not.

Masculinity demands sexual conformity. Those who cannot conform, perform or risk being ostracized for not being masculine. This pressure to conform may cause masculine individuals to reject questioning their sexuality, even if they do not experience sexual attraction.

Asexuality and Religion

One recurring theme in many of the interviews was the gender norms and expectations prescribed by organized religion. Specifically Christianity and Catholicism. In one facet, sexual desire is considered sinful. Alex states their thoughts before discovering asexuality.

I must just be a really good Christian, like [laughs] not-not being attracted to things.

It is a common sentiment among religions that sexual intercourse should be held off until marriage and often restricted to purposes of reproduction. Sexuality is a taboo topic, and some individuals such as Sadie (23, cis-woman, she/her) did not even think to question feelings or lack thereof because of religious teachings.

My understanding of the world was more that like kind of demisexuality⁴, because that had-coming from like-growing up with a religious background, like what has sort of been taught to me was like, oh, you know, like you're supposed to like only be sexual within a relationship, and so I was sort of-my interpretation of that was, since I didn't experience sexual attraction myself was like, oh, like if you're in a relationship with somebody, then like-then you'll start experiencing like sexual attraction towards them kind of thing.

Within a religious context, sexual desire is something to be resisted, ignored or unfelt. Asexuality falls in line with this expectation in multiple ways. Much like Riley mentioned and was discussed in a previous section, there is the ideal of "the virgin woman" symbol in Christianity and Catholicism. This symbol does not have a masculine analogy, and is perhaps why religious pressures on sexuality are different for masculine and feminine people. In her interview, Sadie also discussed how religiously based pressures on sexuality can be unevenly distributed onto men and women.

⁴ Demisexuality: only experiences sexual attraction after a close emotional bond is formed.

Coming from a religious background like, with femininity, it was like the women were very much sort of like, oh, you have to-you have to wait until marriage. Like it was very much more pushed on the women of, you know, like waiting till marriage, that kind of thing than it was on the guys...you're pure, you know, and then you get married and then you have sex and that's a good-like sex in a relationship is holy and good and pure, but sex outside of a-of a married relationship that's dirty and awful and bad, you know, all that kind of stuff. Um, so I think with-but it seems more targeted towards women of just like, you are-you are supposed to be less-women are generally-society pushes sexuality a lot less on women until they are with a partner.

In addition to people's sex lives, religious community culture can reinforce certain expectations for individuals' life histories. Henry had much to say, so their comment is going to be broken down and unpacked a bit a time.

Um, when I first encountered [asexuality] I had kind of an instant knee jerk reaction of like, discomfort when my friends started identifying as it because of how um, steeped in my church's culture I was of like, there's a heavy expectation to eventually um, marry if you're-you're assigned to be a woman at birth, if-to marry a man and have children it's a very big part of that culture, and so I always assumed that eventually that would be my future as well, um, because I was very involved in the church and it was very important to me when I was younger, um, and it has like, long term consequences for your soul you know, kind of thing, your-your eternal destiny, so it kind of-I was very scared of-of not being normal I guess.

For Henry, their religious community had a structure that members were expected to build their lives around. Family and the church were the two primary aspects of this. Deviation, especially in terms of something like sexuality was not acceptable and would have spiritual consequences in addition to interpersonal ones. These consequences and fear of judgement caused Henry to deny their feelings and reject the concept of asexuality.

I'll just be like everybody else and I won't-I won't feel this dissonance uh, between what is expected of me and how I feel about myself. Um, and so-and uh-so it was-it kind of brought up a lot of-a lot of identity angst when I first heard the term because it was like, there was a lot that I did identify with but I didn't really want to yet because I was like no, I can't be anything other than normal because that would just be silly and that would be a bad thing for my long term, you know happiness, um, and so because you know the model of happiness in my life growing up was like, you find a really good person to marry, you have lots of kids, and you're part of this huge family community and church community where everybody is supporting each other and having families.

Henry was able to identify with asexuality, but found it hard to accept. Asexuality, and queerness in general is not "normal" and goes against prescribed expectations and life plans, especially those from religion, and that can be difficult to reconcile. Breaking from this prescribed plan can impact how the future is perceived and the expectations there in.

I did feel uncomfortable when I first encountered the term, and then when I accepted the term it was also kind of mixed feelings because I was really-I was really happy to finally accept the fact that I could be in love with someone of the same gender, um, but not want to have sex with them, and that it was like something that-it wasn't just that I was like broken, or-or weird, or something that I would have to like completely deny those feelings later and just like-and live a whole different life, um, but it also brought up a lot of questions of like, what do you-like and I'm gonna have to hide things from my family forever"

Religious doctrine is often unaccepting of queer identities, so even after the process of self-acceptance, there is still uncertainty around family and community.

The social rules outlined by religion can be strict. People who cannot conform to those expectations can find it difficult to accept the identity that keeps them from meeting those expectations. This is not specific to asexuality, but to many identities.

Asexuality and Gender Non-Conformity

Multiple individuals in both the survey and in the interviews commented on how asexuality influences their gender identity or gender presentation, or how their gender identity or presentation affects their asexuality. Some individuals such as this survey respondent, have consciously questioned the role that one identity might have on another.

What is the point of identifying as a certain gender when you are asexual? What function does the gender fill in an asexual person? Why would an asexual person want others to view them as a certain gender that might be sexualized by others?

Some survey respondents were able to draw a connection between their gender identity and their sexuality.

I think when you're asexual, your gender identity isn't guided by your sexual preferences. Without the need to portray yourself in a certain heteronormative way in order to attract a partner, you're left with far more options than male/female binary. It also lets you explore gender identities outside what is portrayed as "normal" by the media. If you don't have to use the codes or signs advertising and society tells us attract someone, then you have more room to explore your own preferences.

Personally, determining my asexuality was integral to determining my gender identity. I think generally, determining a lack of feeling about something as ambiguous as gender and sexuality is rather harder than determining feeling. Like most people I know who are gay had inklings of their sexuality from a young age, or 'always knew', whereas a lot of ace people didn't have any idea until they heard about asexuality. For me, I had some confidence saying "I don't really have a gender" after I was able to say "I don't feel sexual attraction".

Marlo (19, agender, they/them), in their interview, expressed that they feel that their gender and sexuality are tied up in each other and that their identities impact each other.

I think my sexuality and gender very much wrapped up in each other because um, you know I think that to an extent I don't like being seen as a sexual object because that means people are seeing me as female usually, um, and that repulses me, so I think that's part of it but also like, I don't like being seen as female because then people would see me as a sexual object, like it's tied up in itself, so I can't tell you which caused the other, but I think they're definitely very much conflated.

Other survey respondents were able to connect their gender presentation and performance to their asexuality.

Not having a sexual orientation does seem to be linked to not having a strong or defined gender identity in some cases (including mine), perhaps because you are not defining yourself in relation to others and therefore don't 'play along' with the gender performance so much.

A theory I have is that much of the experience of gender comes from who we feel attracted to, for instance, a heterosexual cisgender woman would experience her gender more strongly because she sees it as the opposite of those towards whom she is attracted. I have no scientific backup for this claim, it is merely a hypothesis based on the fact that many asexuals identify as non-binary, and many non-conforming sexual identities are considered to be reflected in gender expression (which is not the same as but not unrelated to gender identity).

Regardless of gender identity, across many of the interview respondents, there was a hesitancy to relate to masculinity and femininity, but masculinity in particular. Those who stated that they thought of themselves as feminine often qualified their statement, reflecting on their upbringing and relating to femininity as a default, or connecting femininity to their aesthetic presentation. Masculinity was widely rejected. When asked about masculinity, there were several comments focusing on finding a balance between masculinity and femininity rather than directing their comments towards masculinity itself.

In general, individual gender performance was not thought of in terms of masculinity or femininity, but simply as self-expression regardless of how those traits may be perceived.

Asexuality, Discomfort, and Dysphoria

One feature often present in non-heteronormative, non-cis-gender identities is discomfort and/or dysphoria. This can come from societal pressures to conform to norms which their identity breaks, or from having a body that does not match how they feel and view themselves. This can create challenges when it comes to relating to others, sexually or otherwise. This was something mentioned in survey responses as a theory as to why there were so many genderqueer and transgender individuals in the survey, and also by Elizabeth in her interview.

Folks who identify as uh, trans or nonbinary or, you know, people who exist outside of just masculine or feminine and male and female, um, that there many of those folks who can identify with being ace um, for multiple reasons. Like for myself, being trans and how sexual-anything that is um-anything that is sexual in nature, requires an intense amount of trust with someone, and how in many ways my experience with my own body has been traumatic in some senses of it. And so I can see how many people who would exist outside of male and female would...feel a part of themselves closed off identifying with being ace. So, you know, although I think of, you know, when I think of the ace community, I do think there's a lot of women, but I also see like a huge presence of people who, you know, fall anywhere under the transgender umbrella.

Elizabeth also mentions how life events, especially traumatic ones, might relate to and affect sexuality.

[There is] the idea one's sexuality can be partially impacted by the events of one's life that, you know. I know people who are ace that have also had significant trauma in their life, and so I think that there are many people who ... may be more asexual, partially because of other things which may impact their sexuality. Like I think that there's-there's definitely the potential for, you know, if you've been through a significant amount of trauma in your life related to sexuality, that...your brain can kind of shut itself off from that and that it-it can feel, um, very comforting to be able to identify with being ace, and so I think that there's a large segment, especially for women that have gone through a lot of trauma ... it makes me think that, you know, that's the reason why there are so many women who identify as ace because there is that like the-not only at the, at the societal level, but just the micro level and having

situations in one's life that can steer you towards picking up an identity that um, fits for one reason or another.

Trauma can affect anyone regardless of identity, but when related to sexuality it can create discordant feelings. Trauma may cause discomfort around sexuality, directing individuals to relate to asexuality and take on that identity.

There can be external factors that lead individuals to relate to and identify as asexual or on the asexual spectrum. These factors can be confounding influences on the identities of some individuals and asexuality is an identity that may be taken on in some cases where dysphoria and discomfort prevent individuals from experiencing sexual attraction.

Chapter IV: Discussion

Upon examining the data collected by the *Asexual Census*, an unequal gender distribution among those identifying as asexual or on the asexual spectrum is observed. Woman/female is by far the dominant gender identity, however, the percentage identifying as something other than man or woman is over double that identified among the general population in a similar age demographic (GLAAD 2017).

From the interviews and survey conducted for this study, the trends shown in the *Asexual Census* data seem to be, at least in part, due to pressure to conform to hegemonic ideas of masculinity and femininity, as well as how asexuality is perceived within gender norms.

Why do more women and genderqueer people identify as asexual?

A high percentage of respondents to the *Asexual Census* were assigned female at birth, even among those not identifying as a woman/female. There is perhaps evidence that socialization in childhood is more permissive of AFAB people to identify as asexual. Individuals assigned female at birth would have been most likely raised under feminine expectations and may have internalized some of those expectations.

Sexual attraction is a feature frequently minimized in hegemonic ideas of femininity. An asexual identity does not directly conflict with feminine ideals in some cases. Because of this, women and feminine individuals may not face the contradictory features within their gender identity and sexual orientation that men and masculine people might. In fact, historically women were expected to be primarily void of sexual attraction or even sexuality, and some of the same ideas persist today. This provides more freedom within sexual identification. Though there are stigmas attached to archetypes related to asexuality (such as the virgin) within femininity, the archetypes still exist, creating space for such an identity to exist.

Genderqueer individuals do not have a gender identity tied to explicit gender roles, though they were likely raised with some expectations, whether masculine or feminine. Without specific pressure to adhere to masculinity or femininity in order to correctly perform their gender identity, there is more freedom to identify as asexual or to break sexual expectations in general. Additionally, genderqueer people are already part of the queer community and may have a greater exposure to asexuality as a concept. This might help explain why such a large portion of asexual people (double

the reported percentage compared to general society aged 18-13), also identify as neither a woman/female nor a man/male.

Genderqueer and transgender individuals also may experience body or genital dysphoria, or have other trauma related to their bodies, which cis-gender individuals do not often experience, which may affect their ability to experience sexual attraction. This also may account for the high proportion of genderqueer and transgender individuals responding to the *Asexual Census*.

Do masculine stereotypes dissuade individuals from identifying as asexual?

Among those responding to the *Asexual Census*, few were assigned male at birth, even among those identifying as a man/male, over a third were assigned female at birth in the 2016 survey. This perhaps suggests that socialization and expectations placed on individuals throughout childhood is a factor in asexual identification, and that expectations of masculinity are inhibit masculine individuals from identifying as asexual.

Hegemonic masculinity demands that sex, sexual desire, and sexual attraction be part of the identity of men and masculine individuals. Asexuality in many ways is a contradiction to this idea. Just as being homosexual counters and is in defiance of masculine ideals, asexuality is in direct opposition to this cornerstone of masculinity, perhaps more so because sexual attraction is absent rather than redirected from the heteronormative standard.

Individuals wanting to appear masculine might avoid accepting or identifying themselves as asexual due to how the orientation would impact their gender performance. In not experiencing sexual attraction, asexual people inherently fail to correctly perform a key component of masculinity. This failure may impact how they seem themselves, and how they are perceived by others. Asexual masculine individuals may even perform heterosexuality in order to seem more masculine.

Men and masculine individuals also seem less likely to discuss feelings or identities. Especially those that contradict the heteronormative standard. This would lead to fewer masculine people knowing about asexuality, and thus unable to be

How do gender roles and expectations affect individuals identifying as asexual?

Hegemonic gender roles and gender norms have a huge effect on individuals, and on society as a whole. But how people are impacted by these expectations differs based on innumerable factors related to identity. Just as gender norms have impacted other queer identities, they must also have an effect on asexual individuals. Sex, sexual attraction, and sexual desire are pervasive and widespread demands in society that have powerful influence on social norms and expectations especially related to gender identity. Asexuality is an orientation in direct conflict with these ideals. There are pressures for people to behave and be a certain way as they exist and interact with others, and these pressures might cause people to avoid identifying with an orientation that conflicts, regardless of their reality.

Among individuals identifying as asexual, no matter what their gender identity, there seems to be a lack of connection to normative ideas of masculinity and femininity. Because asexuality as a sexual orientation already conflicts so heavily with gender norms, there is more freedom of expression stemming from a lessened pressure to conform to gendered standards.

Chapter V: Conclusion

This study investigates how the cultural and societal expectations of different genders, both assigned and actualized, affect the perception and performance of gender in relation to an asexual orientation. Masculine and feminine ideals were examined, as well as how masculinity and femininity relate to and are opposed by asexuality.

There appears to be a discrepancy in the gender distribution among individuals identifying as asexual. There are far more women identifying as asexual than there are men. There is also a much higher proportion of individuals identifying as neither a man nor a woman and asexual than has been reported in the general population for a similar age range.

This discrepancy can be traced to gender norms and expectations related to hegemonic ideas of masculinity and femininity. There is room within certain feminine archetypes for asexuality to be accepted, though there are still negative connotations. There is no room for asexuality within masculinity where heterosexuality is often perceived as a requirement.

This creates pressure to reject asexuality or even the exploration of sexual identity in order to conform to hegemonic masculinity. Asexuality goes against gender norms. Individuals identifying as asexual are often comfortable opposing other norms because their sexual orientation already does so.

Future Work

A greater depth of experiences should be captured in future studies. Only twelve individuals in a narrow community were interviewed for this study. There is still much to learn from and about individuals with diverse identities and backgrounds that was not captured in this study.

It would also be potentially insightful to interview allosexual⁵ individuals and capture their perception of asexuality within the framework of gender norms. This would provide more diverse insight into how asexuality works within, and outside, masculinity and femininity without possible confounding bias stemming from only capturing perspectives from within the asexual community.

There were several possible influencing factors that were not within the scope of this research, and may be investigated in the future. In the interviews and survey, some individuals presented theories other than social and societal factors that could explain some of the gender discrepancy in the *Asexual Census* data on which this research was based. The primary theory was response bias. It was suggested that women and feminine individuals were more likely to respond to an online survey. This is supported by academic studies on factors influencing survey response (Saleh and Bista 2017). However, the discrepancy in the *Asexual Census* is extreme, and this theory does not account for the high number of transgender men responding in comparison to transgender women. There are also circumstantial accounts from interview and survey respondents indicating they know more asexual women and genderqueer people than asexual men.

⁵ Not asexual.

It was also suggested that biology and biochemistry could be an influencing factor. There is no data to support or deny this. However, biology and biochemistry, particularly the effects of certain hormones might affect *sex drive* and some may have difficulty differentiating sex drive and sexual attraction. It is also important to note that suggesting that a sexual orientation or gender identity can be reduced to simple biological factors is problematic at best and dangerous at worst. There is a place for biological factors to be addressed, but there is a tact that must be applied in doing so, especially when the current medicalization of asexuality within the DSM-5 is considered.

The breadth of this study was limited. Much can be done in the future, both to expand this study and to increase knowledge of asexuality in general. There are far more variables and intersections that contribute to identity. Race, home country, age, and other demographic factors are likely to play a role in identity. Gender and asexuality should also be looked at in those contexts.

Asexuality is underrepresented or unrepresented in work on sexuality. There is much to do in order to gain understanding and acceptance of this orientation both in academia and in the public sphere.

Author's Note

There is great diversity among those identifying as asexual, but this shared identity represents a common struggle. Asexuality opposes how many understand sexuality and societal norms. Many are even unaware of asexuality as an orientation until well after realizing how they feel is not "normal". And even after realization, it can be a struggle to accept asexuality because of how it opposes our heteronormative and amatonormative society. There are those who will say that it does not exist, that it is an illness, that someone saying they are asexual is lying to attract attention. Asexuality can be difficult to fit into our sex driven culture.

There are many sources of confrontation that asexual individuals must face, and these can be different depending on a number of factors not least of which is gender. It is my hope that this research can shed some light on the interplay between asexuality and gender and how gender norms affect people. I also hope this study can help increase the visibility of asexuality in both academia and the general population.

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Appendix A

AVEN Census Data Notes

Purpose

The AVEN Ace Community Census is intended as an ongoing annual survey with a core set of basic demographic questions and rotating sets of topical questions, in order to obtain better information on the makeup of asexual communities, and to track any trends on those communities over time. So far, there have been three surveys, one each year from 2014 to 2016.

Part of the mission of the AVEN Census is to give data access to researchers and trusted investigators such as yourself. However, some aspects of the data are not self-explanatory. This document contains the necessary information to understand it.

Contact

Tristan Miller, AVEN Survey team

E-mail: tristanmiller@gmail.com

Website: asexualcensus.wordpress.com

Survey Design

Sampling Method

The survey represents a convenience sample recruited via snowballing sampling techniques. Announcements containing a link to the survey were posted on several major asexual websites (AVEN, The Asexual Agenda, etc.), as well as in asexuality-themed groups on various popular social networking sites (Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, Reddit, Livejournal, etc.). Respondents were encouraged to share the link with any other asexual communities or individuals they knew. Although recruitment was focused on asexual spectrum respondents, non-ace respondents who encountered the survey were encouraged to take it as well, which provides the opportunity for some level of comparative data.

It is crucial to note that the asexual spectrum respondents do not represent asexual spectrum people in general, but rather, the people who have sufficient contact with the community in order to have found the survey. Furthermore, some ace communities are over- or under-represented because of differences in recruiting effectiveness. Lastly, the non-ace respondents do not represent the population as a whole, but rather, the kind of people who have contact with aces or ace communities.

Differences between years

Each year we base the survey design on the previous year, but there are many differences. We remove, add, and revise questions based on feedback. There are also some sections we rotate from year to year. Please refer to the text of the 2014 survey and the 2015 survey, both linked from our website. (The 2016 survey text is unavailable at time of writing, but may be available soon.) There are also minor differences in the way that the data was prepared from year to year, which will be described in the appropriate sections below.

Known issues with the survey text

If you are wondering about any particular question, please contact us for our opinion on whether there are any mistakes or interpretational difficulties related to that question. A few of the most significant issues are described below.

2014 survey

1. Religion: Due to an error, question 5 (what is your religious preference) was missing an option for "other religious". So be aware that answers to the religion question may be slightly off because of that omission.
2. Sexual history: There was some confusion from some subjects about whether the sexual history section was asking for consensual sex only, or any sexual encounters. Help text was added a few days in indicating that we are specifically interested in consensual sex only, but it should be noted that some participants (especially those who took the survey before the help text was added) may have included data from non-consensual encounters or encounters of dubious consensuality.
3. Suicidality: We are aware that the rates of suicidality reported are quite high, higher than the rates found in the literature (see Lucassen et al. Aust N Z J Psychiatry. 2011 May;45(5):376-83), but perhaps comparable to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey. It is possible that it is higher than the general population because of sampling. We advise caution when interpreting these data.

2015 survey

No significant issues.

2016 survey

1. Race: There was a typographical error in question 8 (“Do you identify with any of the following racial/ethnic categories?”). The checkbox “Black and/or of the African Diaspora” was replaced with the word “No”. This may have led some African Diaspora respondents to instead check off “Black: African”. The typo was corrected during the survey on Monday October 24th at 22:45 PDT, although some respondents may have been taking the survey while it was being corrected. We created a dummy variable called “raceTypo” which is “y” for all respondents that we believe were affected.

Data structure

Question titles

Each question is given a short and unique title, and the column headers are replaced with these titles. A separate csv file is provided which matches the questions to the question titles. However, we also recommend referencing the original survey text. There are additional details beyond the question itself, such as explanatory text, and the complete set of options.

Multiple choice vs checkboxes

There are essentially two different kinds of questions in the survey: multiple choice questions, and checkbox questions. Multiple choice questions allow respondents to select a single answer from a list, while checkbox questions allow respondents to check off any combination of answers.

Some questions allow respondents to also write in their own response. In the case of multiple choice questions, the write-in response takes the place of their answer, whereas in the checkbox questions, a write-in response can be given alongside any combination of other answers.

We have already done some processing of checkbox questions, creating dummy variables for each checkbox.

For example, the question about race in the USA is a checkbox question. We create additional columns titled “USRace1”, “USRace2”, “USRace3”, and so on. Each column corresponds to a checkbox, in the order provided in the survey. The values within these columns are “y”, “n”, or “NA”. “y” means that the respondent checked the corresponding box, while “n” indicates that they did not. “NA” indicates that none of the boxes were checked, and the respondent is presumed to have skipped the question. If there is a write-in response, that response is listed in the original column “USRace”.

There are a few differences between years in how we did this analysis:

- In 2014, the only way to determine which column corresponds to which checkbox is to look at the survey text. For instance, you know the column "USRace1" corresponds to the checkbox "White", because that is the first checkbox listed.
- In 2015, we decided that was too difficult. So in AVENCensus2015_questions.csv, we included the full text of each checkbox. So for instance, "USRace1" is now labeled "White".
- In 2016, we decided to make the dummy variable names more descriptive. So now, the column is called "USRaceWhite". In AVENCensus2016_questions.csv, it now says "USRace: White", which means it comes from question "USRace", and corresponds to the checkbox labeled "White"

Processing notes

Here we include additional (less important) details about data processing.

Removing problematic characters

Some characters don't seem to load properly into R. These are changed into more sensible characters. This step was unfortunately neglected in 2014, so you might find some weird characters scattered throughout.

Sorting data

The data is sorted by timestamp. Note that the unique IDs will be out of order, but that's okay.

Correcting years/ages

A common error in these surveys is for people to write down a year when we asked for an age, or vice versa. Here's the general procedure:

1. If anyone puts a birth year more than 100 years ago, remove it.
2. For each question asking for ages, do the following:
 - a. If the age is larger than their current age, treat it as a year. Infer the age by subtracting their birth year. (It's okay if the result is off by a few months.)
 - b. If the age is still larger than their current age, or is larger than 100, then remove it.
 - c. If the age is below a certain reasonable value, remove it. For example, I do not believe respondents who say they first identified as ace before they were 5. The cutoffs are subjective, but we always exclude people who write 0 (because sometimes they do this with the intention of skipping the question).
2. A similar process is repeated for questions asking for years.

Handling NAs

Some people answered questions by typing in "NA". This led to bugs further down the line, because R interprets them as NAs. These strings are changed to empty strings.

Some of the questions have integers for answers. When people leave these questions blank, they result in NAs. In 2014, I changed the NAs to -1s, whereas in later years I left them as NAs.

Interpreting Likerts

Some of the Likert questions are recorded as strings. These were changed to integers.

Removing feedback column

The feedback column is the one that is most likely to have identifying information. We remove this column before passing it on to researchers. In 2016 we also remove other long-form responses.

No write-in interpretation included

We do interpretation of write-in responses for our own analysis, but this is not shared with other researchers except by request.

Filtering Data

We exclude a number of responses for reasons listed below. For information about how many were excluded, contact us.

Duplicate responses

Sometimes the survey software creates duplicate responses, which must be removed. The duplicates always appear soon after the original response, so duplicates only need to be checked a few rows apart. We check for duplicates n rows apart, incrementing n until no further duplicates were found.

Under 13 responses

Usually we restrict the birth years such that people can't continue if they enter an age under 13. However, since the survey is taken at a particular month, we could theoretically get answers under 13. They are removed.

Mostly blank responses

We remove responses that were left mostly blank. We count up the number of blank responses on each survey, make a table, and then cut off people who are on the tail.

Some parts of the survey some respondents never see, so we don't count those questions as blank.

"Joke" responses

Some people clearly aren't taking the survey in good faith, and their responses are removed. The best way to spot them is during write-in interpretation, when people write things that are scornful of the survey or are intentionally silly. Sometimes it can be hard to distinguish intentional silliness from sincere but unusual answers. Luckily, people who take it in bad faith often write mocking answers to multiple write-in questions.

Appendix B

Interview Guides

Individual Interview Guide

Background:

What is your name?

What pronouns do you use?

How old are you?

What is your sexual and/or romantic orientation? (You may be as brief or elaborate as you like)

When did you start identifying as such?

Did you identify as anything before that time?

Are you "out"? To who?

When were you first aware of asexuality as a sexual orientation?

Did you identify as asexual soon after becoming aware of the orientation?

What is your gender identity? (You may be as brief or elaborate as you like)

When did you start identifying as such?

Did you identify as anything before that time?

Are you "out"? To who/in what settings?

Data:



Figure 2. 62% (n=5684) of respondents to The Asexual Census identified as "Woman/Female", 11% of those surveyed identified with "Man/Male" (n=997), 27% as "None of the Above" (n=2403), with <1% (n=30) not reporting.

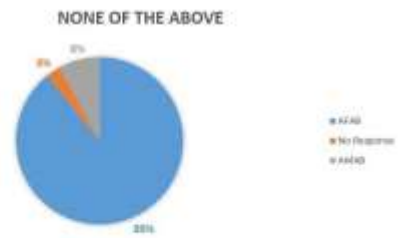


Figure 4. Among those who reported their gender identity as neither "Woman/Female" nor "Man/Male", 89% (n=2191) were assigned female at birth, 8% (n=197) were assigned male at birth, and 3% (n=67) selected "None of the Above", but did not respond to the question of sex assigned at birth.

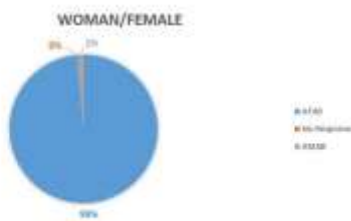


Figure 3. Among those who reported their gender identity as "Woman/Female", 99% (n=5680) were assigned female at birth, 1% (n=77) were assigned male at birth, and <1% (n=7) identified as a woman/female, but did not respond to the question of sex assigned at birth.

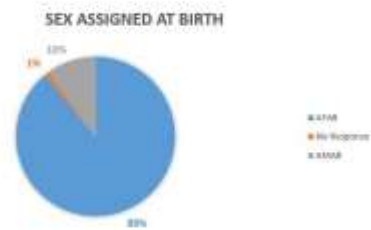


Figure 5. Of those responding to The Asexual Census, 89% (n=8134) were assigned female at birth, 10% (n=922) were assigned male at birth, and 1% (n=80) did not respond to the question of sex assigned at birth.

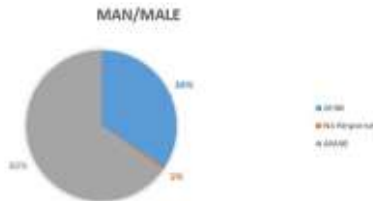


Figure 6. Among those who reported their gender identity as "Man/Male", 34% (n=143) were assigned female at birth, 63% (n=428) were assigned male at birth, and 1% (n=40) identified as a man/male, but did not respond to the question of sex assigned at birth.

Each year The Asexual Census collects information about the asexual community. Looking at those born 1983 and later, these graphs relate asexuality, gender identity, and sex assigned at birth. Can you provide any explanation(s) for the trends they exhibit?

Masculinity/Femininity:

What stereotypes do you associate with masculinity?

What are some masculine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

Is sexual attraction/desire an important characteristic of masculinity?

What stereotypes do you associate with femininity?

What are some masculine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

Is sexual attraction/desire an important characteristic of femininity?

Were you raised under specific expectations of masculinity or femininity? Please explain.

Do you still feel pressure to conform to those standards?

Do you think of yourself as masculine?

What is your relationship with masculinity?

Do you think of yourself as feminine?

What is your relationship with femininity?

Do you consciously oppose masculine and/or feminine norms?

Does asexuality align with masculinity, femininity, both, or neither? Why?

Do you feel asexuality (as an orientation) opposes masculine/feminine stereotypes?

Does your sexual orientation affect your relationship with your own masculinity/femininity?

Do you, or have you ever felt uncomfortable identifying as asexual?

Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

Focus Group Interview Guide

Background:

What is your name and what pronouns do you use?

Data:



Figure 2. 62% (n=5483) of respondents to The Asexual Census identified as "Woman/Female", 11% of those surveyed identified with "Man/Male" (n=927), 27% as "None of the Above" (n=2403), with <1% (n=20) not reporting.

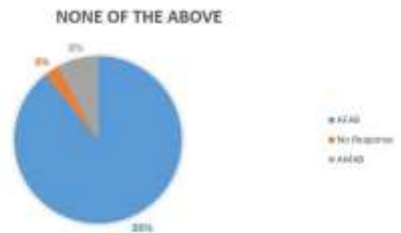


Figure 4. Among those who reported their gender identity as neither "Woman/Female" nor "Man/Male", 80% (n=2191) were assigned female at birth, 9% (n=147) were assigned male at birth, and 9% (n=67) selected "None of the Above", but did not respond to the question of sex assigned at birth.

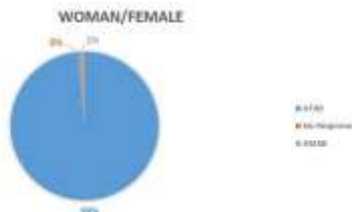


Figure 3. Among those who reported their gender identity as "Woman/Female", 99% (n=5480) were assigned female at birth, 1% (n=77) were assigned male at birth, and <1% (n=7) identified as a woman/female, but did not respond to the question of sex assigned at birth.

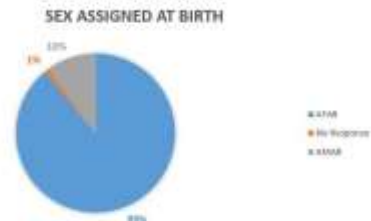


Figure 5. Of those responding to The Asexual Census, 99% (n=8134) were assigned female at birth, 1% (n=922) were assigned male at birth, and 1% (n=80) did not respond to the question of sex assigned at birth.

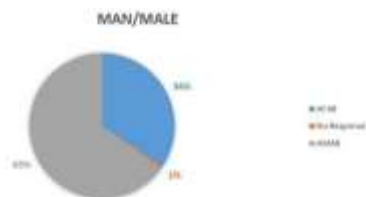


Figure 7. Among those who reported their gender identity as "Man/Male", 34% (n=543) were assigned female at birth, 65% (n=948) were assigned male at birth, and 1% (n=4) identified as a man/male, but did not respond to the question of sex assigned at birth.

Each year The Asexual Census collects information about the asexual community. Looking at those born 1983 and later, these graphs relate asexuality, gender identity, and sex assigned at birth. Can you provide any explanation(s) for the trends they exhibit?

Masculinity/Femininity:

What stereotypes do you associate with masculinity?

What are some masculine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

Is sexual attraction/desire an important characteristic of masculinity?

What stereotypes do you associate with femininity?

What are some masculine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

Is sexual attraction/desire an important characteristic of femininity?

Is there pressure to conform to masculine/feminine stereotypes? What form(s) does this pressure take?

Does asexuality align with masculinity, femininity, both, or neither? Why?

Do you feel that asexuality (as an orientation) opposes masculine or feminine stereotypes?

What might cause discomfort in terms of identifying as asexual?

Appendix C

Survey Questions

Welcome to the research study!

You are being asked to take part in a research study relating gender identity, sex assigned at birth, gender roles and norms, masculinity, and femininity. I am asking you to take part because you are part of an internet group centered on asexuality or have come across this survey by other means. Please read this form carefully and contact me with questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to correlate gender norms and expectations, gender identity, and sex assigned at birth with an asexual identity. You must be at least 18 and currently identify as asexual or on the asexual spectrum.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, you will be directed to an online survey. The survey will include questions related to you, your history, your sexual orientation, and your gender identity. You may answer all, some, or none of the questions. Your responses will be recorded for analysis.

Risks and benefits: There is the risk that you may find some of the questions uncomfortable, or bring up unpleasant feelings related to one or more of your identities. In general, I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

There are no benefits to you. However, in answering these questions, I hope to gain insight into how gender roles and gender norms affect individuals identifying as asexual.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. Your name is not collected. Research records will be kept on a password protected computer; only the researcher and research advisor will have access to the records.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Tori Bianchi. If you have any questions, you may contact Tori Bianchi at bianchv@wwu.edu. If you have any questions or

concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Western Washington University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at compliance@wwu.edu or (360) 650-2146.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

- I consent, begin the study (1)
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate (2)

What is your year of birth?

What is your sexual orientation?

- Asexual (1)
- Demisexual (2)
- Grey-Asexual (3)
- Other / More information (4) _____
- Prefer not to answer (5)

What is your sexual orientation?

Homo- (1)

Hetero- (2)

Bi- (3)

Pan- (4)

Other / More information (5) _____

None of the above (6)

Prefer not to answer (7)

What is your romantic orientation?

Aromantic (1)

Demiromantic (2)

Grey-Romantic (3)

Other / More information (4) _____

Prefer not to answer (5)

What is your romantic orientation?

Homo- (1)

Hetero- (2)

Bi- (3)

Pan- (4)

Other / More information (5) _____

None of the above (6)

Prefer not to answer (7)

At what age did you start identifying with these orientations?

Did you identify as anything before this? Explain.

Who are you "out" to about your sexual/romantic orientations?

Family (1)

Friends (2)

Online (3)

Acquaintances (4)

Romantic/Sexual partners (5)

No one (6)

Other / more information (7) _____

Prefer not to answer (8)

Can you remember when you first became aware of asexuality as an orientation? When was it?

Were you ever hesitant to identify as asexual / on the asexual spectrum? Why?

What is your gender identity? (Select as applicable)

Man (1)

Woman (2)

Male (3)

Female (4)

Transman (5)

Transwoman (6)

Transgender (7)

Genderqueer (includes agender, non-binary, etc.) (8)

Cisgender (9)

Other / more information (10) _____

Prefer not to answer (11)

At what age did you start identifying as such?

Did you identify as anything before that time? Explain.

Who are you "out" to about your gender identity? (if not cisgender)

Family (1)

Friends (2)

Online (3)

Acquaintances (4)

Romantic/Sexual partners (5)

No one (6)

Other / more information (7) _____

Prefer not to answer (8)

What was your sex assigned at birth?

Male (1)

Female (2)

Intersex/Ambiguous (3)

Prefer not to answer (4)



Figure 2. 62% (n=5884) of respondents to The Asexual Census identified as "Woman/Female", 11% of those surveyed identified with "Man/Male" (n=927), 27% as "None of the Above" (n=2493), with 1% (n=35) not reporting.

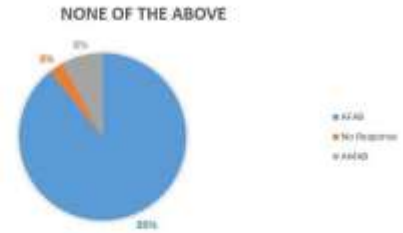


Figure 4. Among those who reported their gender identity as neither "Woman/Female" nor "Man/Male", 89% (n=2193) were assigned female at birth, 8% (n=197) were assigned male at birth, and 3% (n=67) selected "None of the Above", but did not respond to the question of sex assigned at birth.

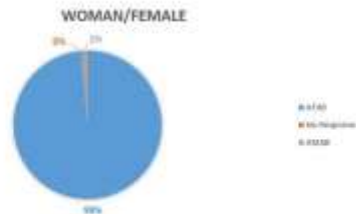


Figure 3. Among those who reported their gender identity as "Woman/Female", 98% (n=5688) were assigned female at birth, 1% (n=77) were assigned male at birth, and 1% (n=7) identified as a woman/female, but did not respond to the question of sex assigned at birth.

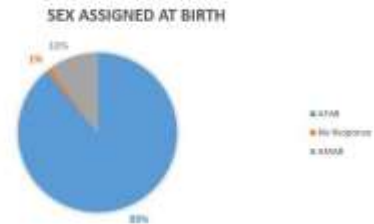


Figure 5. Of those responding to The Asexual Census, 89% (n=8134) were assigned female at birth, 10% (n=922) were assigned male at birth, and 1% (n=88) did not respond to the question of sex assigned at birth.

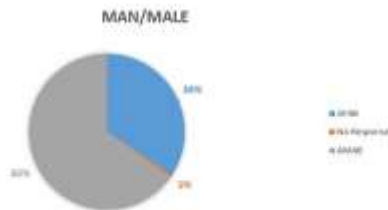


Figure 6. Among those who reported their gender identity as "Man/Male", 34% (n=143) were assigned female at birth, 65% (n=648) were assigned male at birth, and 1% (n=6) identified as a man/male, but did not respond to the question of sex assigned at birth.

Each year The Asexual Census collects information about the asexual community. Looking at those born 1983 and later, the graphs above relate asexuality, gender identity, and sex assigned at birth. Can you provide any explanation(s) for the trends they exhibit?

What stereotypes do you associate with masculinity?

Is sexual attraction/desire an important characteristic of masculinity?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- I don't know (3)

What stereotypes do you associate with femininity?

Is sexual attraction/desire an important characteristic of femininity?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- I don't know (3)

Were you raised under specific expectations of masculinity and/or femininity? Please explain.

Do you still feel pressure to conform to those standards? Please explain.

Do you think of yourself as masculine?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Sometimes (3)
- I don't know (4)

What is your relationship with masculinity?

Do you think of yourself as feminine?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Sometimes (3)
- I don't know (4)

What is your relationship with femininity?

Do you consciously oppose masculine and/or feminine norms? How?

Do you feel asexuality (as an orientation) opposes masculine/feminine stereotypes? How/why?

Does your sexual orientation affect your relationship with your own masculinity/femininity? How?

Do you, or have you ever felt uncomfortable identifying as asexual? Why?

Is there anything else you would like to mention or add?

Appendix D

Interview Transcripts

The following are transcripts of recorded interviews. Full transcripts are attached with the explicit permission of the subjects after the completion of the interviews. It is hoped that the addition of full transcripts will provide a greater depth of understanding of the identities and experiences of those interviewed than was captured in the quotes highlighted in chapter 3 alone. It is important to take account of all stories and experiences that were recorded, but not included or discussed in the main text of this paper.

Names have been changed according to IRB regulations. Interviewer's statements and questions are indicated by italic print.

Jessica (20, genderfluid/agender, she/her)

**The following is a transcript of a repeated interview. The first did not record properly and had to be redone.*

Okay. So I'm going to start with some background questions.

Okay.

What is your name?

Jessica.

And what pronouns do you use?

I use she-her-hers pronouns.

And how old are you?

I'm twenty.

What is your sexual and or romantic orientation? And you can be as brief or as elaborate as you like.

I identify as asexual panromantic.

Okay, and when did you start identifying as that?

Um, I think it was like junior year of high school. Um, and that was the first time I had heard of the term and then I-as soon as I heard it I realized that that was exactly how I felt, and I was kinda this kind of eureka moment of like this is me. It's perfect.

Very cool. And are you out, and to who?

Um, I am out to almost everyone except for kind of like more distant relatives, who are a little bit more conservative, and don't really see the point in telling them. Um, unless they were to ask, but...that's pretty much it. I'm out to my friends, my roommates, classmates, basically anyone who wants to talk about sexual orientation, I'm like, oh by the way, I'm asexual.

Um. You already said you were first aware of asexuality in high school, right? And you answered the second part of it there. What is your gender identity? And you can be as brief or as elaborate as you like.

So, um, I'm still figuring that out, but I'm kind of falling between the two identities of genderfluid and agender where I don't really have a strong connection to either side of the binary, so... I'm still trying to do some of my own research and read some experiences of other people who fell that way,

and what they've gone with and why, and it's going to be an ongoing process, but as or right now gender-fluid to agender.

And when did you start considering those different identities?

Uh, just this last summer, yeah. I um, I was living in a place where the people didn't know me as well so I had a little bit more flexibility with who-how I express myself as opposed to my roommates who have known me a while and would know if I was doing something weird, um or different. And that freedom to kind of start experimenting, like I cut off my hair, I bought some clothes that weren't necessarily as feminine as the ones I had in the past, and that's when it started to kind of dawn on me that maybe I'm not cis-gendered female.

Okay. And did you identify as anything in particular before then?

Uh, I identified as just female because I was raised by a conservative family. I didn't even know transgender people existed until like junior high, um, and I wasn't aware that there was anything other than the binary until almost my senior year of high school. So, uh, I went with female because that's what seemed easiest.

Okay. And are you out, and to who?

Uh, I'm out to my boyfriend, um, and my roommates, and I'll occasionally talk about it in conversations with other LGBT people, or genderqueer people, but I'm not really publicly out, because it is not something I have totally figured out yet, so I want to be certain when I tell people.

Okay. Um, I have some graphs for you from the asexual census, specifically the 2016 census, um...and it just looks at different distributions across the survey, so this one looks at gender and none of the above just means anyone who identifies as not a woman or not a man. And then looking specifically at the people who identified as a woman or female. This is the distribution of sex assigned at birth: AFAB and AMAB. And the same for those who identified as a man or male. None of the above. And the distribution of sex assigned at birth across the survey. So, each year the asexual census collects information about the asexual community. Looking at those born 1983 or later, because this is where the data tended to be most dense and to correspond with the GLAAD survey, these graphs relate asexuality, gender identity, and sex assigned at birth. Can you provide any explanations or hypotheses for the trends that they show?

Um, well luckily I've looked at these before so this was kind of a refresher, but definitely going towards the idea that um a lot of asexual people do identify as female whether that's what they were assigned at birth or a gender that they came into later on. Um...I...I'm sure that there are men that have the orientation of asexuality and just maybe haven't found the label, or aren't willing to put that label on themselves, um, so, I mean, I think it's probably more of an even distribution than what is shown here and there must be some sampling error, like with what people are willing to divulge and what information they've been privy to. But, at least here it's showing like, that the majority of people who identify as asexual are female and identify as female and that most people do identify with the

gender they were assigned at birth, which, good for them, they have it figured out early on. [Laughs]
A little jealous of that.

Um, moving away from the graphs a little bit, what are some stereotypes you associate with masculinity?

So, these are stereotypes that I was taught to associate with masculinity, um, not necessarily the ones I would like to associate with masculinity but um, in society I feel like masculinity is seen as strong, and cold, and unfeeling for the most part. Um, very sexually driven, um, just also having less control over their bodies. The argument that like-it's like seeing a female is like putting a steak in front of a dog and the dog wouldn't listen when you say no, and it's just like very degrading to men, but that's something that people attribute to masculinity is less control over themselves, which I think is really awful because it's-it's not true in my personal views. But yeah, just in general, sex-sexual ferocity and strength and independence.

Okay, and do you have more specific stereotypes related to masculine sex and sexuality?

Uh, just generally being more dominant, um, being the one to initiate and make the first move, uh whether that be romantically or sexually. There is definitely kind of an expectation of men to be the one to initiate everything. Um, which I feel bad about because that puts a lot of pressure on guys. Um, but in general just being the one to control the situation.

And is sexual attraction or desire an important characteristic of masculinity?

For sure. Um, a lot of society, like if you're not wanting to have sex all the time and if you're not actively getting sex from some partner um, specifically if you are not getting sex from a female partner, you're often seen as not masculine. People say they are emasculated, like if they are not having sex, or, I know a lot of gay men are assigned the label of feminine just because they are not into women sexually or-and or romantically, and I think that's just-it makes it very apparent that sexual attraction and desire is important for the label of masculinity.

Okay. And what are some stereotypes you associate with femininity?

Um, again same deal that I'm trying to pull myself away from these stereotypes and gender roles. But femininity definitely is associated with softness and submissiveness and being quiet and just allowing the other person to take the lead. Um, and just being more emotionally connected to themselves, but not so much physically. Um, yeah, just being more feel-y internally, being more emotional.

Uh, and what are some feminine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

Um, again just being very submissive, not making the first move, um, a lot of people I noticed seem to think the female orgasm doesn't even exist, which implies females don't get any pleasure out of intercourse and in that case it makes sense why they wouldn't lead, but I think that's just people trying to impose the idea that women shouldn't have any sort of sexual ferocity or sexual exploration of themselves, so that's not great. Yeah. [Laughs]

And then, is sexual attraction or desire an important characteristic of femininity?

Um, I think there something there, like people definitely do attribute, like if you are more feminine for example if you like want to have sex with men versus sex with women, like a lot of lesbians are seen as butch or masculine. Um, but I don't think in terms of female-male uh interaction, female sexual attraction or desire isn't as important as the man's, because she is expected to just go with whatever the man goes with. So, I think that's super toxic, most of these stereotypes are very toxic, but that's kinda where we're at right now as a-a culture.

Now some more questions about you. Were you raised under specific expectations of masculinity or femininity?

Um, I was definitely all the stereotypes I listed before. Definitely the ones I was raised to believe but as far as myself I was definitely raised with the expectation to act very feminine. My mom actually like started bullying me to wax my eyebrows at the age of fourteen because she said it would make me look more feminine, and she was very against me getting my hair cut ever. She wanted me to have long flowy hair and thin eyebrows, and like all that stuff. And they were very conservative so, they definitely wanted me to be this very stereotypical soft-spoken, but very pretty looking girl. Um, and I've kinda moved away from that now, but that was what I was raised as.

And do you still feel pressure to conform to that standard?

When I'm around my family I do. I can feel my behavior changing a little bit to adjust to the environment I'm in, but when I'm on my own and free to act like myself, um, I only do it to the extent that I feel comfortable so there's not really any pressure to uh. I've kinda cultivated a friend group um, that's very accepting of the fact that sometimes I am going to be like more embodying masculine stereotypes, like being rowdy and loud and not always super clean and pretty and things like that. Um, it's-sometimes I do conform to those standards but it's much more my choice and not so much outside pressure.

Do you think of yourself as masculine?

Occasionally, um, I definitely do act and feel more often feminine, but like I do think of myself as masculine in a lot of situations, but that's something I'm still learning about. It's something I didn't really start accepting about myself until this last summer when I realized I don't think I'm really as female as I thought, and I kinda allowed myself to explore that instead of just kind of like, pushing it away. Um, so I don't think of myself, like if I was a-to have to choose between masculine and feminine, I wouldn't say I'm only masculine, but I would say that masculinity is a part of my personality.

Okay. And do you have a specific relationship with masculinity?

Um, it's definitely a tentative relationship. Like I said, I haven't been exploring it for yet long, so I'm still not sure totally, like where I lay on the scale from not masculine to hyper masculine. Um, it's definitely a relationship that's going to grow as time goes on and I get to explore my expression more.

Right. Do you think of yourself as feminine?

I definitely do, um, and I think that just goes with how I was raised and some actions that are just very second nature to me or ones that my parents and grandparent taught me, so even though I...may not identify as super feminine, I still like, act very feminine and that does still translate into how I identify because, I don't know, yeah. Um, um, it is easier to consider myself feminine when I'm doing feminine things and vice versa with masculinity. Um, so, yes, I do think of myself as feminine.

Do you have a relationship with femininity?

It's definitely much more comfortable than my relationship with masculinity, um, just because I've been engaged in it for so much longer. I'm comfortable with how I should dress if I want to feel feminine, and all of the different, I don't know, avenues of expression I can go down, so it's definitely very comfortable for me, it's something I can kinda sink into without a lot of effort. Um, but sometimes it does feel kind of oppressive because I feel like if I'm not acting feminine people will think less of me, but I just have to remind myself that that's a left over fear from when I was in my family all the time, and now I'm in a much more accepting place so I need to kind of move on from that fear.

Okay. Do you consciously oppose masculine or feminine norms?

Um, I oppose them to the point where I don't act, or do these norms if I don't want to, but it's not like I hear about anything being feminine I instantly throw it out the window, or masculine and I throw it out the window, it's just kind of like, I'm going to do what I like and I don't care if it's considered masculine or feminine, like, I'm just going to do what I enjoy and do what feels comfortable.

Okay. Um, does asexuality align with masculinity, femininity, both, or neither?

Um, in terms of stereotypes we kind of mentioned earlier, I think asexuality does align more with femininity because it is a lack of sexual attraction, which as seen as not very masculine, um, but I think in terms of like, the ability of someone who's masculine or feminine to identify as asexual, I think that anyone can and it shouldn't determine your masculinity, or femininity, or like your gender expression, like I feel like anyone should be able to identify as asexual if that is how they feel.

Uh, do you feel that asexuality as an orientation opposes masculine or feminine stereotypes?

Um, just kinda the same as the last question, where like it doesn't really line up with the masculine stereotypes of being hyper sexual, and definitely I think a lot of men because asexuality doesn't really line up with masculine stereotypes they don't consider the prospect that they could be asexual, because...they know that men are expected to be hyper sexual and embrace those kind of- there's always the coming of age stories of like, guys having sex and doing different sexual acts, and it's something that's praised, so I feel in that way it does oppose masculine stereotypes.

Um, does your sexual orientation affect your relationship with your own masculinity or femininity?

I do think it does, just because with the pressure of needing to feel...sexually attractive not put on me I'm able to do what makes me happy and less of like, the posturing I would have to do to find someone who would be sexually attracted to me, like I can...really just do what I want and then the people who are...romantically attracted to me are attracted to me because of my personality and how I truly act, not what um, whatever...persona I put on to try and get a sexual partner. So it definitely allows me to act more masculine than I would if maybe I wasn't asexual, where I would want to kinda put off that vibe of being a sexually attractive female who's kind of embodying those stereotypes.

Do you, or have you ever felt uncomfortable identifying as asexual?

Um, I did for a little while in high school, like my junior and senior year, and then the first part of college just because, um, all of the people who I became romantically attracted to were not asexual, and they did want to do stuff with me, do sexual acts with me and I um, would sometimes try to pressure myself and be like you should-it's that super old argument like, how do you know you don't like it if you haven't tried? So I would kind of force myself to, um, or they would force me to. We're not going to get into that history. Um, and so at that point I did feel a little uncomfortable identifying as asexual, like I didn't doubt that I identified as asexual, but I felt uncomfortable telling people, because there is kind of that, um, there's the issue of corrective methods that people apply th-that are kind of violent. Um, so at that point I felt a little closeted, um and I stopped telling people, but I started vetting all the people I was going out on dates with romantically a little more to be sure that they weren't someone who was going to have an issue with my sexual orientation, and that's definitely helped.

Awesome. Well, that's the end of my specific questions, but is there anything you would like to mention or discuss?

Um...I wish asexuality was better well known, because I mentioned it in the last interview we did that didn't get recorded, but like the idea that a lot of asexual people feel broken before they know about the label of asexuality, they think there is something wrong with them and they need to force themselves to do things that they don't need to do, that they think like, everyone must feel the way I do and they can just keep doing it and so-so should I, so I think there needs to be like more awareness that it is a valid sexual orientation and you can identify as that and be whatever gender you identify as and express yourself however you want and you can be happy doing that, because that something that like seventh through tenth grade Jessica didn't really know that well. Anyway, I think that's it.

Alex (22, genderqueer, she/they)

**Interview was conducted over video-chat, and questions were not audible in the recording for precise transcription. Questions have supplemented according to the interview guide.*

What is your name?

Alex

What pronouns do you use?

She and they.

How old are you?

Uh, twenty two.

What is your sexual and/or romantic orientation? (You may be as brief or elaborate as you like)

Um, right now I'm going with grey-biromantic, possibly frayromantic⁶, and asexual.

When did you start identifying as such?

I identified with asexual in April of 2015? Because that was the spring of my freshman year of college, um I'd just figured out what asexuality was and it just like clicked. I'm just like oh yes! I am this thing! Um, so I was really excited about that. I identified as hetero-romantic for a while, just because that's kind of the default. Like that, growing up, that was my default too, like I don't really feel anything so I must be hetero. Um, but then I like discovered that like even romantic stuff was weird, like I had something, but like not...so the romantic thing is still an ongoing process that I'm still trying to work out, but I know I'm somewhere on the aro⁷ spectrum.

Right, yeah, so before like I was just saying to someone the other day that I feel like, asexual people, like it's really hard to find this identity because you know something is different or something is wrong, but because it is a lack of attraction you're not able to say like oh wow, I'm really attracted to-I'm a guy and I'm attracted to guys I must be gay, or I'm this and I'm attracted to this. We're-it's just like nothing, like the default even within the queer community, the default is seen as like, some attraction, and just having no attraction kind of...sucks in that sense, it just makes it kinda harder to find who you are. [Laughs]

Did you identify as anything before that time?

But yeah, I just went hetero, and being religious didn't help because then I was like oh yeah, I must just be a really good Christian, like [laughs] not-not being attracted to things. [Laughs]

⁶ Romantic attraction fades after initially meeting someone.

⁷ Aromantic. Not experiencing or rarely experiencing romantic attraction.

Are you "out"? To who?

Yeah, I'm pretty much out to...everybody. I kinda was from the beginning. Um, I don't know, I guess it's the type of thing where like if I'm in a queer space or if I know someone else is queer, like I'll totally bring it up, or I'll totally start talking about it, because it's so nice to connect with people that way, you know even if you don't share the same identity, just to like have a shared community is nice, but uh, yeah, even from the beginning I think, as soon as I found out about it I was like, have you heard the good news? [Laughs] Have you heard the good news about asexuality? Um, so yeah, I guess it's been my goal from the beginning just to make sure that-that people don't have to be confused or feel really broken like I did. So I'm happy to-to talk about it, and to be out about it.

When were you first aware of asexuality as a sexual orientation?

I guess it was just again, back in 2015 when I heard about it. Like I don't really remember hearing about it before then. But um, I was taking uh, like one of those stupid like uh, Kinsey scale questionnaire tests-questionnaire tests like um, on the internet or something. My friends and I were just passing it around, and-and I broke the scale and that's-that's how-and in the notes it was like an X instead of a number value, and um, I'm like, oh, can't even do that right, but uh, [laughs] it turned out that uh, in the notes it said like you might be asexual, and I'm like what is that thing? I thought, you know, like I guess I'd heard it in like coral or something, like plants or whatever, like, so I'm like, okay, this seems like something not human, so what is this? And I just kinda Googled it, looked it up a bit more and, and I'm like yeah, no, that's totally me.

Did you identify with asexuality soon after becoming aware of the orientation?

Oh yeah, like I just knew, like, I knew it fit me, like from the beginning. I was like this is what I have to be, like I just felt so alien before that I guess, but I finally felt like I had something to...I don't know, something to define me, something to like, add some clarity to my existence, to get a little intense there, but [laughs]...

What is your gender identity? (You may be as brief or as elaborate as you like)

...I don't know how brief or elaborate I can be because I-I-I don't know what it is [laughs] kinda still haven't got that figured out. Um, there definitely is a fluidity to it, um, I identify as genderqueer, which is super vague because my gender identity is kinda super vague, um even to me, uh, it won't tell me what I am, so that's fun, um, lately I've been feeling pretty masc⁸, um, but I do have femme⁹ days as well, and although...I s-huh...I don't know, it's an ongoing process still because I'm pretty much okay with she-her-hers pronouns, but a lot of days being referred to as a woman or being referred to in a feminine way kind of is really dysphoric to me in a way, so I-I guess I prefer to say somewhere in the middle. Um, I guess it would be fair to say that I'm nonbinary although I do have fe-I don't know. So yeah, still-still-still a thing. Definitely in the middle somewhere, not really exactly identifying with either or.

⁸ Masculine.

⁹ Feminine.

When did you start identifying as such?

I've always felt not feminine or not female exactly, but I've always just kind of ignored it. I think a lot of it had to do with my upbringing. Um, it's both good and bad, like being from a religious background and being from you know, like a rural background, um in some ways it can be-there's-there's a very limited amount of female empowerment there, uh because in some ways females are seen as equal because you know, on a ranch the work has to get done, you know, that kind of thing, so I think that kind of mentality has led into...into my identity somewhat in terms of like, I can do things that guys do, but at the same time the religious background and everything has so many barriers and so many conditionals to the identity of being female in the sense that you can do this, but you are still lesser, or you can do this but-so I kind of, I don't know, I kind of rejected the double standard and just tried to appear as masculine, like I always rejected anything that I thought was feminine or would make me be perceived as feminine, like I've always hated dresses, always hated the color pink you know, just because of what it represented to me, which was like...was a weakness or was a, you know, some sort of social negativity and something I thought was being forced on me because of my body or because of you know, how I was born. So I guess I always just kind of accepted that I was just not a girly girl, like I was just always a tom boy, um but I never really went beyond that, and I think mostly because I just hadn't heard of these identities, or if I had heard of them they were in like negative or derogatory ways, like anyone who doesn't fit within the binary is, I don't know, somehow a freak or something. So, I think my-my limited exposure to other identities like that definitely impeded my ability to discover my own identity, um and also just the confusion of the rest of my life kind of put that on the back burner for a long time, you know, like discovering asexuality was like my in, you know, my in into the queer community and uh [laughs] that was really great. It was really liberating in a lot of ways, you know, even though there are problems, like within the community even, um, it's just been really nice to be able to explore my identity more, and to have that freedom...like um-I mean like there are like one or two people that like aren't welcoming or are pretty limiting or exclusionary, but for the most part uh, a big part of the community is the ability to discover yourself, and um to try on a label and see if it fits, and that's kind of how I've been um exploring my gender identity lately is just throwing stuff at a wall and seeing what sticks you know, like [laughs] do I feel this way? Do I feel this way today? You know and it's okay to not know but...it's...also okay to want to know, you know, to like want to figure out what is going on with me and I guess I'm still in-in-not in transition, because I'm always going to be in the middle somewhere, you know, but just in the process of figuring that out...I don't even know if I stuck with the question with that one, sorry.

Did you identify as anything before that time?

Yeah. I mean just female, same with ase-same with like, assuming that I was hetero, like just assuming I was female, like just always-assuming I was female, but like not feeling quite right about it. That was pretty much...how that went. And then, like-like looking back on it, I even can like notice like certain things like uh, I don't know, something that sticks out in my brain like I was uh, in like high school learning Chinese and um, we were doing like if-if statements like if I was this, it would be great, or if I had a dog it would be fun, or like whatever, I don't know. But like I asked-I asked uh, lǎoshī, that's teacher, I'm making your study cultured now. [Laughs] I asked the teacher, um, how do

you say, like I tried to say like if I were a boy that would be good, and she was like, why would you want that? Like why would you want to be a boy? Like-like just completely confused with like why I would ever want to like not be the gender that I'm perceived as or the gender that I am or whatever. And that kind of as soon as I said it and like I thought about it and I was like, you know, that wouldn't be so bad, but then again, like I was like, no because I don't want to be completely boy, but I don't want to be what I am, like so, I don't know. My whole life I've just been having this confusion and then it hasn't been helped...by my surroundings because people are just-especially like I was saying, being from like a rural background, the tomboy thing, it's just enforced. Like there are so many girls that are just tomboys that like to be rough or whatever, that like to-like to-like in-in their thinking, in the social thinking, pretend to be like boys, you know, or whatever. That was just accepted that I was not a girly girl, accepted that I was like not wanting to like wear pink or something, I don't know, but uh, that made it very difficult for me to figure out my identity when I felt like they were just brushing off my feelings or not taking them as seriously as I thought they should be.

Are you "out"? To who/in what settings?

I'm not as out about my gender just because I don't know it yet, so I don't want to like shout it from the rooftops, you know, when I'm still figuring it out. That's like-that's like giving an answer to a math question before you've finished calculating it. You know, you could be right, maybe, but you're also going to maybe be wrong, so it's good to figure it out. Um, but I would say that I'm more out with people of the queer community because they understand the journey of finding yourself, so I can be like, this is what I am now. And they're like, yeah, totally, and it's totally fine if you change it, you know, that's like I was saying, one of the-one of the strengths, one of the things that I love most about the community is the acceptance and openness. Um, so, I'm out, let's see, I just-I just technically came out to uh, one of my classmates a couple days ago, um, because he was making some sort of like feminist joke, like uh, like he's totally a feminist, so it was like, I know it was all tongue in cheek, but he was saying-oh, what was he saying? I don't know. Something against like, I don't know, like the wage gap or something, just-just as a joke, like ha ha, this is-this is against your gender or something stupid. And then I was like, but it isn't though, like, I'd be like, but-but I'm nonbinary, so checkmate kinda, you know, and it was just funny. And then he was like laughing and I'm like, oh, what if he thinks that I was being like uh, derogatory towards like genderqueer people, I better like him that I'm like actually genderqueer so he doesn't just make a joke of it, you know. And I'm like, so, but actually I am genderqueer. And he's like, oh, okay. [Laughs] So I like, accidentally came out, but I was also okay with it because I knew that it was like-nothing bad was going to happen because of that, but uh, he maybe wouldn't a hundred percent understand, but he's like at least sympathetic to the community, so like, I don't know. But yeah, um, I've talked to my mom about it. She's...accepting for the most part. Um, if I were to change my pronouns, that would probably confuse her a lot. But she would try. Um, right now, like I said, it's she or they. I'm kind of exploring they pronouns uh, for days that I feel like, especially not femme, because there are some days that even she is a bit much, but uh, yeah, I dunno, so still figuring out. So just close friends and my mom pretty much. I've tried to explain it to my grandma and she doesn't really get it. I think my grandpa would probably think I was like possessed by a demon or something, so, I don't even know if I want to go there, but whatever.

Each year the Asexual Census collects information about the asexual community. Looking at those born 1983 and later, these graphs relate asexuality, gender identity, and sex assigned at birth. Can you provide any explanation(s) for the trends they exhibit?

Um, social acceptance of gender roles? I would say more-more females will discover they're asexual or will come out as asexual than males just because of some sort of weird sexual double standard that we seem to have in our society. Like, ugh, I don't even know. It's almost like a triple standard...because women aren't meant to be promiscuous, but if they don't want sex they are seen as prudish. Whereas men, I mean there are certain standards at play there in terms of like-but there aren't as many, like you can pretty much do what you want. Like if you don't have sex then you're seen as-as mostly good because you're like waiting until marriage, or it's like seen as noble, but then if you do have sex as a man, like that's a conquest, so in a lot of circles that also is praised. So I would say that there's more of a social pressure on women to put out in a way or to have these attachments. It's seen as more feminine to show emotion or to have...I don't know-like obviously that's the stereotype of a-of a sexuality as well as aromanticism, like they can still have fulfilling relationships that sometimes include sex, but I think it's just because of this social pressure or the social understanding of it, like if a relationship doesn't manifest in exactly the way that society thinks it should, then it's-it's somehow wrong. So I think that that pressure would fall a lot on females. That's my interpretation of that anyway.

What stereotypes do you associate with masculinity?

It's like...blood, and sweat, and muscles, and dirt, and flexing, and [laughs]. Masculinity, uh, masculinity or, as some people view it, anti-femininity. Um, so like I was saying like-like not as emotional, not as like forming attachments. I guess...uh, a lot of people I guess view them as negatives of each other, where-like, especially because I'm like somewhere in the middle, I just like don't, like they're complimentary in a lot of ways. But yeah, masculinity in-according to I guess the general populous, like I guess the US understanding anyway, it would be um, someone that has like a lot of testosterone, someone that is very muscular, um, and like I said, there's like the two basic stereotypes of like the macho player and then the like knight in shining armor basically it would be the other one. So it's either someone who is strong and looks out for the weak, and the weak often is seen as femininity, or it's someone that is uh, forceful and someone that, um, is very confident and gets what they want and through some sort of like cunning or manipulation or something. That's what I would consider...the masculinity portrayed in-in media or in our society.

What are some masculine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

Yeah. So...people that are masculine are sexually desired according to other people, and so they would get a lot of girls, and it's always girls, it seems to be-seems to be a heteropatriarchy, this-this masculinity beast, um, I guess they would just be seen as uh, strong in both like physical and mental, like they would be able to convince people to do things or they would be able to lead people, and convince people that they are good leaders, and I guess it's mostly through either like strength and protection or um, or providing that protection and in an effective way. They-they would have be-they would have to be like the top of the food chain. So in that sense, there's a lot of pressure placed on men to uphold this ridiculous stereotype.

Is sexual attraction/desire an important characteristic of masculinity?

Yeah. I guess...in our society that's just an important aspect in-in life, according to other people, like you're only successful if you're-if you're sexually desired or success is sexually desired...like if you-if you are successful than you will be sexually desired, I suppose [laughs] as well. Um, but success is different things to different people, so it's-it's kind of hard to place. But yeah, I would say that confidence and strength of character in a lot of ways is-is the projection of masculinity, and that is seen as-as a very sexy quality, I suppose. So, however-however, the two are related, they seem to be dependent on each other.

What stereotypes do you associate with femininity?

Um, there's the stereotype of uh, weakness, subservience, um, being the nurturer, the care-r, the mother figure, they would be the ones that would take care of the kids. Um, while the masculine protector would be the one that would be providing in a-in a distant and monetary sense I suppose. Um, but yeah, the feminine-the feminine would be lesser to some degree, they wouldn't be able to exist in the same spaces really, you know, in terms of the backlash of the working mom, in I want to say like the sixties. People-people create these boxes, and then force people to stay inside them, and I think it's ridiculous because those boxes didn't even need to be created in the first place.

What are some feminine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

Um, so if you are feminine or female, and you have sex a lot, it's considered that you're a slut, or you're easy, or you're-it devalues your femininity in a lot of ways. Um, but if you don't have sex at all, then you're a prude, and you're standoffish, and you're sometimes snobby, or you think you're better than everyone. So, uh, there's a very negative emotional stereotype against that as well. So, um, it's-it's really hard to find the balance in that, and I would say probably impossible to find the balance in that because it's an impossible dichotomy to begin with.

Is sexual attraction/desire an important characteristic of femininity?

It is a very complicated relationship because it's important for females to have sexual attraction, but if they are to display sexual desire then they are often seen as like being too confident, or too strong in their...beings I suppose. It's-it's difficult-it's difficult to describe because I mean, again, it is such a double standard. I-I really don't know what to make of it. It's never something I've been able to understand, which is probably just on account of me being violently asexual. Violently asexual. Yup. That's the phrase, that's the one. Would you rather emphatically asexual?

Were you raised under specific expectation of masculinity or femininity? Please explain.

Yeah. Um, so girls...get married and have kids, that's-I mean they have jobs, but then like once they get married and have kids, like then kids are supposed to be important, or the husband is supposed to be important and I dunno, that's the social expectation that I was definitely raised with. Um, the personal expectation I guess was a little bit different because I was raised in a bit of a like, matriarchy or some sort of pseudo matriarchy in the sense that um, although my-my grandfather like tried to

be the figurehead, like because his religion dictated that um, grandmother and my mother ended up being I think the strongest voices in my upbringing. So I was-I was fortunate enough to at least have like my own little bubble of something that would disrupt the social standard, but at the same time, I don't know, it was always expected that I would at least have a boyfriend or something. I was judged negatively throughout school for-for not just picking a random dude and letting him shove his tongue down my throat...I could've been like all the other girls, damn.

Do you still feel pressure to conform to those standards?

To some extent I do. Um, I think a lot of it has to do with my romantic confusion as well uh, because sometimes I feel like I do actually want to adhere to some of those standards, or at least my version of those standards. Like a lot of it has to do, I think with companionship and with the-the desire to be desired. I feel like that's a pretty human thing, you know, whether it's on a romantic or sexual or an emotional level. Um, but that often backfires because of my inexperience in relationships um, so all I have to fall back on are these, you know, these stereotypes, these standards and I feel pressure to perform what I believe is, you know, a relationship um, when really I should just be focusing on what it is to me, you know, or me and my partner or something. So that kind of has bit me in the ass a couple of times. Um, but yeah, it's-it's all just very confusing.

Do you think of yourself as masculine?

I would say some aspects of myself very masculine. Um, I can-I can see definitely both masculinity and femininity um, like traits or behaviors or just desires like that would be considered masculine or feminine in-in myself. And I would say that they pretty much exists in everyone. I would say that there are elements of masculinity and femininity in pretty much every human, but we're just trained to amplify certain elements of that depending on what our perceived genders are. Um, I think that's too bad, I think it's kind of a trap [laughs] because I think that in order to have a balance, like you need to recognize both of those aspects of yourself. But maybe someday.

What is your relationship with masculinity?

Confusing. Sometimes we like, play computer games and sometimes we just like don't talk to each other. Sometimes-sometimes they say really mean things to me like, and I didn't say anything at all, like it was not my fault. Why are they taking it out on me? But you know, overall- [laughs] this going to be fun for you to transcribe. Um [laughs] I'm not trying to sabotage your project. You can just cut this out. But uh, [laughs] oh, I don't know. It's complicated, I mean that's, I guess the answer to most of these questions. Like there's just-I try to embrace it, I try to um-things that I would normally like just ignore or like shove down in myself, I try to explore, you know, like have out in the open, like um, right now I have like really short hair and that would be considered hella masculine in the sense that I look pretty androgynous now. People would see that as a negative in a lot of ways if I-if I did wish to be female or be feminine, this would be against that I would say because the feminine standard, is long hair, so that's one aspect of masculinity that I'm trying to embrace and to explore my view on it. Um, so far I really love short hair. It's pretty cool. You don't have to take as long in the shower, don't clog the drain as much, like there are only benefits here.

Do you think of yourself as feminine?

Um, there were some aspects of me that are still feminine and uh, always will be, you know, just uh, inherent in my being. Um...I...I don't know. I uh, put on a dress the other day. It was okay. I had to wear leggings with it though, and it was actually really warm out, so I was like, maybe not. Um, I'm trying to think of feminine qualities because what comes to mind to me is-is the like emotional, caring, nurturing, quality, and I think it's really unfair to consider that feminine because I think that people that are masculine, or people that identify as male also have those qualities and it's really unfair to consider that a purely female or feminine quality. So I'm not sure if I can think of anything in particular that makes me feminine that would be distinguished from masculine. Um, I just try to ride that line you know, in the middle. I would say that I'm-I'm a mixture to the point where it's not easy to distinguish anymore and I'm okay with that.

What is your relationship with femininity?

Sometimes I like to punch it in the face just because it exists, um, and sometimes I just feel like baking cookies because-because you know, its had a hard day. That's uh, yeah. Um, I think that reconciling myself with femininity and being female when that was what I was perceived and what I saw as a burden, and a trap, and you know, something that was suppressing myself, I think that I have a more complicated relationship with femininity because of that, because I'm still trying to explore where I lay-where I am on this spectrum. Um, so it's still something that I'm-I'm training myself to love in a way. Like I'm training myself to love those aspects of myself that I-I would in the past consider like, too feminine or I would consider like a weakness or something, Um, because in a way, toxic masculinity has damaged my presumption of gender, um, in the sense that if I don't want to be seen as female, I must be seen as masculine and therefore I must not perform female-you know, female to t-tasks or female, like things that could be considered feminine. So yeah, still-still healing. Um, I bought them a cool-a cold compress and a couple of bandages and now we're talking it out. That's, uh, that's pretty much all I got for that [laughs].

Do you consciously oppose masculine and/or feminine norms?

Like what, do something just because it could fuck with someone that is into the binary or what? Um, I don't know, I mean, I guess I do like, I kinda just do stuff because I want to do them. Like, I don't do stuff because I want to fuck with anybody. Like I'm not about that. I'm just-I'm just trying to make it through my own day, you know, I don't need to go confusing and other people if I don't have to, but like [laughs]. At the same time, I'm not going to not do something just because someone might be upset with it. Like, I dunno, like I guess the short hair thing, it's okay to be a female and have short hair, so people would maybe not be bothered by that, but they could be like questioning why I would want to, but I'm not going to like, let somebody stop me from cutting my hair short just because they might think it's weird or think it makes me look like a dude. Like, so what if it does? Maybe I want to look like dude. Screw you Karen. Yeah. So anyway.

Does asexuality align with masculinity, femininity, both, or neither? Why?

E-all of the above. Asexuality-I don't know. I would almost say it's like an absence of masculinity or like an absence of gender in a-in a way, like people of any gender can be asexual. Um, and I guess that's not the case for some other LGBTQ um, identities. Like I guess in that sense, homosexuality or being gay specifically...Huh? I never had to think about this before, because I always-just because I feel somewhere in the middle, I've always just taken it for granted that asexuality is also somewhere in the middle, but I could see how that could be disrupting of someone's identity-gender identity to have to come to terms with this. That's really interesting. Hmm. I don't know, I guess don't have a completely clear answer on that because I can only speak from my own perspective and it's a really limited one, but I definitely see how people that identify as masculine could feel emasculated by it, or someone that identifies as feminine could feel less feminine because of it, um, just due to society standards being rejecting of the asexual identity in general because it doesn't fit with the path they've laid out. It just doesn't belong like in society's rigid, like amatonormative¹⁰, weird relationship rules. But yeah. So yeah, so everything, all at once.

Do you feel asexuality (as an orientation) opposes masculine/feminine stereotypes?

Yeah, I mean dudes don't automatically just have to bang a bunch of chicks. Girls don't have to put out or worry about not putting out to be considered either a slut or a prude, like it kinda just checkmates all that stupid, weird, like sex shit. Like you can-you-you can still have sex if you want to, but there's not that attraction level there. It's-it's just on your own terms I guess, you know, like, I think in that sense it can be kind of freeing because like, if you don't want to have se-have sex, you never have to have sex and like, that should be true for everybody honestly. But I think the asexual identity helps people to realize that, and I think-I hope takes a lot of that pressure off, you know, a lot of that social pressure that they feel like, oh God, I don't really want to have sex, but society tells me that I have to. Like I've-I've heard that from people before that they're like, I feel so much better now, like knowing that like-like I don't have to have sex with someone, or that feeling like this is okay and I still can have sex with people. Like, yeah, it's-I don't know, I think it's-in a sense it's shattering a lot of the current ideas, and I hope that it continues to break shit because, you know, asexual is the-we're the-we're the OG-OG anarchy of the LGBTQ [laughs] we're-we're making them-making them think about themselves, we're making them-um, in a lot of ways I think that there is some sort of like, thought about gender as well because a lot of the um, I would say the multi-sexualities like bi and pan and ace are all considered multi-sexualities or poly, no, not poly, but like basically attracted to multiple people or not attracted to multiple people. So like where heterosexual or homosexual, it would be like a certain gender um, bi, pan, and ace are just kind of like whoever, in a sense [laughs]. Um, and I think that those identities in general are super important to the gender identity discussion because like what is gender anyway? Like, I think even bisexuality has progressed a lot in the last couple of years where before it was uh, two genders, my gender and different gender. Like that was just like the-the, like rigid explanation of it. But now it's like, but like what is gender? Does it have to be this gender? Like does it have to be, you know, and I think that it's-it's helping us loosen up a bit on like knowing what gender is or on this, like rigid definition of it. Like gender can

¹⁰ "Assumptions that a central, exclusive, amorous relationship is normal for humans, in that it is a universally shared goal, and that such a relationship is normative, in that it should be aimed at in preference to other relationship types" (Brake 2012).

be a lot of things and it can change and that's okay. And so yeah, so orientations like asexuality, that aren't about just a certain gender I think can be really helpful in that.

Does your sexual orientation affect your relationship with your own masculinity/femininity?

I mean like...I don't feel like my sexuality...to some extent I feel like my sexuality is how I am able to come to terms with my gender identity. But at the same time like...I don't know, it's hard to say. It's impossible to say if I would be like the same person or if I would have the same orientation if I was like-we're just talking about like weird alternate universe shit now. Um, but I think because I am in this middle ground, because I do feel like I'm somewhere in between, um, that it's really hard for me to answer that question because I don't know. Like I feel like everything and nothing in my life is affected by masculinity and femininity, so it's really hard to call out like certain situations because I feel like it's kind of just everything in my life, in a sense. It's just always being, but both of these things.

Do you, or have you ever felt uncomfortable identifying as asexual?

Nope.

Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

Uh, nope. That's it.

Ryan (20, cisgender man, he/him)

So I'm going to start with some background questions.

Okay.

So, what is your name?

Ryan.

And what pronouns do you use?

He-him-his.

And how old are you?

Twenty. Yes.

Um, and what is your sexual and or romantic orientation? You can be as brief or as expansive as you want.

Okay. Aromantic asexual.

Okay. And when did you start identifying as that?

Uh, last spring. April, May, I joined that server, April third? About April third.

That is way more specific than most people are able to get. And did you identify as anything before that?

Um, hetero, maybe bi. That was like my guess.

And are you out, and to who?

Um, yeah. Let's see here. Um, made a post on a Discord server with all my friends, I've definitely posted about it on Facebook, and I have a t-shirt, and then I just got that pin with my D&D character on it with an ace flag, so if people pay attention, then they should know.

So you are pretty open about it?

Mm-hum.

And when were you first aware of asexuality as an orientation?

Um, I think the first time I would have heard of it would have been the Stuff You Should Know podcast that came out in like, they did an episode on, in 2011, so probably sometime around then, but I didn't really pay too much attention to it.

So the next question is, did you identify as asexual as soon as becoming aware of it?

Nope.

What is your gender identity?

Male.

Cisgender, transgender?

Uh, cis.

Did you identify as anything before that?

No, just what I am still.

I have some graphs to show you with some data from the Asexual Census.

Mm-hum.

So, this is from the asexual census, specifically the 2016 census. And this is looking at the gender distribution of respondents: woman-female, man-male, and then people who identify as neither of those.

Mm-hum.

And the next one, is this one. So these are people who identify as a woman or female, and whether they were assigned female at birth, or male at birth, or no response.

Mm-hum.

And then we have the same information for the people who identify as a man or male. And for people who responded none of the above. And this is the sex assigned at birth distribution.

Mm-hum.

Um, so, each year the Asexual Census gathers information about the asexual community. Looking at those born 1983 or later, to correlate with the GLAAD study, these graphs relate asexuality, gender identity, and sex assigned at birth. Can you provide any explanations for the trends they exhibit?

Um, hmm, I definitely think it's interesting. Uh... nothing really, I don't know if there's anything that I'd pin it on exactly. Um, yeah, it's definitely interesting that there is that big gap. I remember hearing about that relatively early on. Strange. I don't know why that would be. Definitely wondering about it.

Part of the purpose of this study is kinda to explore what might be going on and cause these kind of trends.

Yeah.

I'm going to move away from the graphs a little bit. Um, what stereotypes do you associate with masculinity?

Um, kind of strong, um, works out, dude-bros, or occasionally nerds. Um... yeah that's pretty much it.

Okay. And what are some masculine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

Um, men generally are considered to desire sex more. Like, want it more, do it more, kind of.

Is sexual attraction or desire an important characteristic of masculinity?

Um, for some people, yeah.

And then, what stereotypes do you associate with femininity?

Um... mmm, I guess kind of- kind of the opposite more or less, in general.

Okay. Anything specific?

Um, eh? I would definitely hear desire, um uh sometimes desire it less, but not really as much, kind of.

Can you think of any feminine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

Uh, oh, uh, butch and femme, it that right even? It's one of the two.

Butch and femme tend to be more related to appearance. Sex and sexuality is usually perceived a little bit differently.

Uh, hmm, uh, lesbian sexuality, I think that more uh connotations like strength sometimes.

Do you think sexual attraction or desire is an important characteristic of femininity?

I think it's generally minimized more in society than masculinity.

Okay. And moving back to questions about you. Were you raised under specific expectations of masculinity or femininity?

Um, I mean... kind of I guess. Like cartoons and stuff, like they always... they show like boys generally, guys and stuff. So kind of, yeah.

And do you feel pressure to conform to those standards, even now?

Occasionally, yeah.

Do you think of yourself as masculine?

Yeah, in gen-yeah. Yeah.

And what is your relationship with that masculinity?

Yeah. Kind of like it's eh? Like sometimes it's okay, but sometimes I don't really think that what is associated with masculinity should be or that necessary to be masculine. So sometimes I kinda like fight that, but yeah.

Do you ever think of yourself as feminine?

Um, not really.

No? Do you have any specific relationship with femininity in your life?

Hmm, eh, not really. Not a whole lot. Like general, societal stereotypes and stuff, but it's mostly...

Do you ever consciously oppose masculine or feminine norms?

Um, I would say in the sense of like having to be like strong weight lifting guys, and yeah, to wear nerdy t-shirts and stuff.

Okay. And do you think asexuality aligns with masculinity, femininity, both, or neither? In general.

I would say in general, at least societally it would be more associated with, uh, femininity. Like uh, sometimes people say that women aren't supposed to desire sex, which is kind of silly. But, eh-eh, I'm not sure that necessarily goes with one side or the other. Or-or it should at least.

Right. Do you feel asexuality as an orientation opposes masculine or feminine stereotypes?

Um, definitely masculine stereotypes, like, uh, because men have to kind of desire sex sometimes, like, kinda societally is like is pressure to do that, so.

Does your sexual orientation affect your relationship with your own masculinity?

Um, hmm, maybe? I don't really think about it that much, like the relationship. Yeah. So probably a little bit, but-or maybe like it's a thing that masculinity shouldn't really be what it is, so pushing back against that is kinda nice.

Right. Do you or have you ever felt uncomfortable identifying as asexual?

Uh, yeah? Yeah. I remember when I first got my t-shirt, because I got this shit that says nobody knows I'm asexual to be funny to come out to my parents, so, since I've been wearing video game t-shirts for years I figured, well, seems like kind of the same thing. It's an identity that I can shout out. It's a very different experience wearing that out there walking around with the video game t-shirts, like yeah, awesome, then asexuality, was like this isn't the same because I find myself like rushing around trying to hide it, you know, wearing this giant shit that says yeah, I'm ace. It was definitely an interesting kind of experience. Like a lesson that was good to learn.

And that is the end of my specific questions, but is there anything else you would like to add or discuss?

Uh, hmm, not that I can think of right now. I think I am pretty good for now.

Riley (21, nonbinary/trans, they/them)

Alright, so I'm going to start with some background questions.

Okay.

What is your name?

My name is Riley.

And what pronouns do you use?

They-them.

And how old are you?

I am twenty one.

What is your sexual and or romantic orientation? And you can be as brief or as elaborate as you want.

Uh, yeah. So, I identify primarily as queer, and under that umbrella, sort of, I identify with, like, biromantic I would say and also asexual or grey-ace. Yeah.

And when did you start identifying with those identities?

I started identifying as like bisexual when I was in ninth grade and came out, and that was a thing for a while. And then, I think sort of my senior year or high school, but mostly like when I came to college I started thinking about um, being ace, and that was a thing that really resonated with me, and I was like, okay, I guess I can maybe use this label even though I sorta didn't feel qualified, but...um, yeah. So around the time I started college.

Did you identify as anything in particular before then?

Um, not really. It was, bi was my label in high school, and apart from that, no.

Are you out, and then, who are you out to about those various different aspects?

Um, so for the most part I would say that I'm out. I definitely don't really try to hide any part of my identity, like, I'm pretty open about talking about it. Um, I'm out to my family, and to pretty much all of my friends, and um...I think that this mostly comes up in regard to my gender identity because of my pronouns and I identify as nonbinary, and so I, that's one of categories I tend not to bring much, and be a little bit more careful about because I don't know really how people are going to perceive

that. But in terms of like sexual and romantic identity I am totally fine talking about those things to pretty much anyone.

Um, cool. And then, when were you first aware of asexuality as a sexual orientation?

I would say, probably around like tenth grade, because I had an online friend who identified as ace and that is when I got involved with, uh, learning about it.

And then did you identify as ace or asexual pretty soon after discovering that, or did it take you a while?

Yeah, well it's, it's kinda interesting because I think that there was, there were several years where I sort of heard that term and something in me resonated with that, but I really didn't like, start using it or thinking of myself as asexual until I came to college. So it was kind of probably one of the like, circles of identity that I had the hardest time reconciling myself with, because the other gender identity and sexual orientation, romantic orientation, whatever, that was like easier to kinda work through in a more upfront way with myself, so I think for whatever reason asexuality was a little harder for me to come to terms with or recognize within myself.

Mm-hmm. And then, what is your gender identity? Same deal, you can be as brief or as elaborate as you want.

Yeah, so I identify as nonbinary, trans, and um, I don't tend to use the term genderqueer, but like, I could sort of relate to that, and sometimes it's easier just to use that term because people understand it more, but yeah.

And then, um, when did you start identifying with those labels?

I...yeah, again it's like senior year of high school because I started learning about different gender identities and started thinking, okay, well I don't really want to be associated with whatever culture defines as female, and from there it was kind of a deeper exploration of that.

And then, did you identify as anything in particular before then?

Um... I guess I mostly identified as female by default, just because that is what I had been told I was, so yeah.

And you have already kind of mentioned it, but is there anything you want to add to who you are out to about this?

Yeah, I would say that um, in most like personal situations it's pretty easy for me to come out to people, but um like I struggle most in the work place, like I'm at a job right now where I'm not out, and it's like again a thing where I don't try to hide it, like I come to work, I have my water bottle with

my pronouns, but no one like sees it, or understands it or choose to ignore it and I don't feel comfortable bringing it up, so... yeah.

Alright, um, I have some graphs to show you now with some interesting data from the asexual census. I'm not sure if you are aware of it, it's a survey that goes out every year, it has about ten thousand respondents.

Yeah.

This is the gender distribution from the 2016 census.

Okay.

And none of the above means that they didn't identify as a woman or female or man or male.

Right.

Um... and then of the people who identified as a woman or female, we have AFAB, AMAB, and no response. And... the same for the people who identified as a man or male. And... none of the above. And um, across the board here is the sex assigned at birth.

Okay.

So, each year the asexual census collects data about the asexual community, and these graphs look specifically the 1983, those born 1983 or later to correlate and correspond with the GLAAD study the same year. Can you provide any hypotheses or ideas about why these ideas about why these distributions are the way they are?

Yeah, I mean I think like when I saw those graphs I was thinking, okay, that makes sense, but I don't really know like why, but I think I've certainly noticed in the ace communities that I've been a part of it seems certainly to be that there are a lot less AMAB people. Um, and a lot more like female identifying people or genderqueer or something. I mean if I had to guess maybe it has something to do with like masculinity and how that's so like pervasive in our society that people who um... that people who are assigned male at birth are less likely to be able to really step outside of that, or it's harder for them. On the other side people who are like assigned female at birth or identify as female um...they...are used to being kind of like subjugated in a way, so they might identify more with exploring more id-queer identities maybe, but...I don't know if that make sense at all, but...

It definitely make sense. There is no right or wrong answer, and that is kinda the purpose of this study-to explore the different ideas.

Yeah, that's cool.

Now moving away from the graphs a little bit, um... what are some stereotypes you associate with masculinity, or that you are aware of?

Um, I mean, there's obviously like the quote unquote toxic masculinity of like very um, have to be very strong and like um... how do I even put it, just...dominant? I guess, and like exerting power in a variety of ways and not as- and not generally associating with um... being... in touch with their emotions I guess.

Um, and then what are some masculine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

I mean... I think it's just kinda a think that like men want sex all the time and... a lot of them are straight and like to... objectify women I guess. Yeah.

And do you think sexual attraction or desire is an important characteristic of masculinity?

I would say so, yeah. It seems like certainly something that they talk a lot, just like sexual exploits and that kind of thing.

And what kinds of stereotypes do you associate with femininity?

Um...pretty much the opposite the opposite of masculinity, so you would say like, more emotional or um not as strong or um, or like submissive I guess.

Okay. And what are some feminine stereotypes related to uh sex and sexuality?

Um... I think there's, well there's the idea of like... the virgin and the whore, so it's like either you're asking for it and really want sex and you are sorta vilified in that sense, or you are a virgin and you are pure and innocent and you don't ever think about sex, and yeah.

Right. So, kind of related to that, is sexual attraction or desire an important characteristic of femininity?

I think it is, but in a very different way because like, because I think in general people who identify as feminine or assigned female at birth are more likely to be like- their desires are policed by society and they're only supposed to express them in specific um sanctioned ways.

Alright, um, so more about you. Um, were you raised under specific expectations of masculinity or femininity?

Um, I mean I think like in a cultural sense that was something I was definitely was surrounded by and it affected me, but in terms of like, my specific family situation I feel like I was pretty lucky in that my family is very open minded about gender and ideas about what men and women can do and can't do, and I was never raised with the idea that I couldn't do certain things because I was assigned female at birth. So, yeah.

Were you ever, or did you ever feel pressure to conform to particular masculine or feminine standards?

Um... not directly, but I think it was something that did affect me and is still affecting me, especially in terms of body image standards that are all over the media, and it's really hard to get away from those expectations and feeling like you have to look a certain way.

Right. Um, do you ever think of yourself as masculine?

Yeah, sometimes. I think because I am nonbinary and because I kinda am situated in the middle of male and female I have some days I feel more masculine than others or when I feel like I am able to express my masculinity sort of.

And do you have a specific relationship with masculinity? Or how you feel when you are feeling masculine?

I think most of the time when I'm like, oh yeah, I'm feeling masculine today, like it's usually in a good way because, especially with being trans and having a lot of dysphoria and that kind of thing it can be really hard, um, to get in touch with that side of my gender and to like, feel validated in that, and so when I have days that I'm like, oh, I look like a boy today, this is really great, it's like a mood lifting thing.

Mm-hum. And then do you think of yourself as feminine ever?

Yeah, I think like in-in different ways because there's obviously the fact that I was assigned female at birth, so there's always a part of me that's like, oh, people are thinking of me as feminine, and sometimes I want to push back against that, um, especially when I was starting to identify as trans and figuring out my gender identity, I really wanted to distance myself from everything that was feminine, and it's only been recently that I've been letting myself ease back into that, and some days I can feel a little bit feminine, and that's fine, and there are parts of me that are more femme and like that's okay, and that's-that still makes my identity like valid. So, yeah.

You kinda answered the second part there, uh, do you ever consciously oppose masculine or feminine norms?

Yeah, I mean mostly I would say feminine norms, like I don't ever wear dresses and it's not necessarily because I don't like dresses, it's just like I don't want to be associated with that. Um, similarly sometimes I wear binders or clothes that look more masculine because I want to be perceived as at least not feminine. Um, and in terms of masculinity I would like to say that I oppose like, toxic masculinity, and like those types of damaging um views of masculinity, and um, so I try to not like associate with that I guess.

Cool. Um, and then, do you think asexuality aligns with masculinity, femininity, both, neither, or kinda in different ways?

I think it really depends on the person. It's a personal thing and because sexual orientation is separate from gender, although they can sometimes overlap, like it's-it can't really be conflated with a particular gender.

Right. Do you think asexuality as an orientation opposes masculine or feminine stereotypes?

Yeah, I think in a way like because-because we were talking about like stereotypes of sexuality and I think in that way it does because the idea that men always have to want sex, or the idea that women can only express sexuality in a specific way. Um yeah, I think it-it does and it opposes that binary, just the fact that it's one or the other, so, yeah.

Um, does your sexual orientation affect your relationship with your own masculinity or femininity?

Hmm... I mean probably, but it's kinda one of those invisible elephant situations, where I feel like I can't really say what my gender would be like if I were not asexual. I think it-I would say it-maybe the reverse is true, or like my relationship to my gender influences how I experience asexuality, and sometimes I wonder you know, that if I didn't have so much dysphoria, if I were just cis, then like maybe I wouldn't be... I wouldn't identify as asexual, but then that's like changing a whole part of who I am, so it's like kinda defeats the question, but yeah, so I don't know, it's hard to explain.

Right, yeah. Um, do you, or have you ever felt uncomfortable identifying as asexual?

Mmm, I think, yeah, I think especially towards the beginning because I was saying how it took me a while to kinda accept that I was ace, or at least on the spectrum because I-there is such a cultural bias against it and the idea that you should be sexual and the way we talk about sex positivity, and like gender stuff, and like this idea that like, you know it's okay to like sex, and that's great, but it's also like, but what about-what is I like don't want that, like when it's like it's normal, everybody does it and It's like where do I stand with that, and yeah.

Cool. Is there anything you would like to add, or discuss?

Mmm, I don't think so. I'm really interested to hear the results of this because you have some really good questions.

Val (21, nonbinary, they/them)

So I'm going to start with some background questions.

Alright.

What is your name?

Uh, my birth name is Allie, but I go and use a preferred name of Val.

Okay, and what pronouns do you use?

They-them.

And how old are you?

I am 21 turning 22 next month.

Very cool, and what is your sexual and or romantic orientation? You can be as brief or as long as you like.

Okay, so my sexual is I'm asexual but I'm a pan-romantic polyamorous individual and uh, I see that I have more questions or when I star-I-I started identifying as asexual I believe 2 to 3 years ago, and with pan-romantic being probably, happening around the same time.

And are you out and to who?

I am out to a lot of my-my personal close like circle of friends. I had a bit of a coming out scare with my mom, but like I'm not officially out to anyone in my family.

And when were you were first aware of the sexuality as a sexual orientation?

I think it was like senior year of high school.

And so you didn't identify as asexual when you first became aware of it?

No when back, back when I came across it I honest to god was like under the impression that I was heterosexual, like cis, like AFAB, and now I'm just like I'm AFAB yeah, but I'm not-I'm not cis or straight.

Okay. And what is your gender identity? And you can be as brief or-

I'm not binary. I'm a nonbinary femme presenting individual.

And when did you start identifying as that?

See, nonbinary was actually this last summer. Umm, femme has just been my entire thing the entire- all my life uh, with some like hits of gender dysphoria which I didn't realize it was dysphoria until last summer. And before then, I was you know, cis.

Right. And then there were you out to about that?

So nonbinary status friends now, it took me a couple of months for everyone on this campus-like everyone I care about on this campus is you know, while a lot of other individuals mostly people that I knew online an online only knew that I was umm nonbinary umm. No one at home knows because...I haven't spoken to them about this kind of thing, and because, just, I as an individual pres-still present so femininely, like eighty percent of the time, that even when my family does come over it's not like a big thing that they can see physically.

Right, and I have some graphs for you. Do you know what the asexual census is?

I know what census are, I don't know about the asexual census not- this might be the first time I've actually heard of it.

So every year there's a big survey put out online. It just kind of tries to get demographic information from asexual people, and it gets about ten thousand respondents.

Ten thousand!

So I have some grafts that I've made up, umm, from some of that information.

Alright.

So this is the gender distribution for people who responded to it. None of the above just means they didn't respond to either women or female or man or male.

Okay.

Of the people identified as a woman or female of this is the sex assigned at birth distribution.

Okay.

And same goes for man-male.

Oh that's so there's a lot more uh AFAB for the man-male, that's interesting.

And the none of the above. And this is this sex assigned at birth distribution across the survey.

Well that's interesting there's a lot of umm assigned at birth of females and than the more males.

Yeah. So this from the 2016 survey.

Okay. Huh.

Each year the asexual census collects information about the asexual community. Looking at those born 1983 or later because that's where the data focuses, and it also-I set up to correspond to the GLAAD survey. These graphs relate to asexuality, gender identity, and sex assigned at birth. Can you provide any possible explanations or hypotheses for the trends that they exhibit?

For like...just being in the sex assigned at birth kind of thing? Any correlation between uh whatever the person was assigned?

Yeah, there's certain patterns happening here and possible ideas about why it looks the way it does.

Okay. Well female- uh you know those who tend to identify as female are kind of more likely to participate in surveys in general. Umm, and I suppose with a sexuality this just to focus in on it, umm woman can kind of get away more with saying that they're ace as opposed to men, just within the stereotype that a man isn't considered a man if they don't feel certain sexual urges, which is kind of bullshit. Oh, are we allowed to swear through the interviews? [Laughs]

I think you are.

Okay cool. So, uh, yeah, so there's that stereotype with men having to, and the very least outwardly project the fact that they are sexual beings while women are tended to be more like, forced to be a bit more quiet about it, which kind of helps...when they're not allowed to specifically really even explore their own sexuality up until a certain point, even then it's kinda stigmatized.

Okay, so moving away from the graphs a bit. What stereotypes do you associate with masculinity?

It's a lot more, umm...see my gender lines have been blurred so much lately that trying to think of, like those specific stereotypes has become a bit difficult. I guess uh, with like men, I suppose it's uh supposed-uh but they're but like more physically stronger, they are to present themselves as to be a little bit more emotionally vacant, but like-mostly vacant, physically strong, uh, not as caring about other people's-especially other men's opinions on what they themselves do I suppose.

Okay. And then what are some masculine stereotypes related specifically to sex sexuality?

Oh, like you know like I've mentioned before, it's a lot more of the whole like they're supposed to be sexual beings, they're supposed to go after and be all uh, into the idea of sex and uh chasing after whoever they want to-to have sex with.

Okay, and then a sexual attraction and desire important characteristic of masculinity?

I'm not quite sure sexual attraction is like, an important aspect of masculinity like...there probably are other stereotypes that come more into a person's mind when they think of masculinity. Umm...yeah I don't-I don't-I don't think it's the most important thing, personally I don't think it's....not at this point anyway at least.

And then, what stereotypes do you associate with femininity?

Well, I uh, with femininity I suppose it's a person-like physical attributes wise, uh, one who is feminine is automatically seen more as like, pretty. We usually associate the words pretty and beautiful a lot more with femininity, while handsome and rugged with more masculinity, so something a bit more of the flowery language is I guess with-with femininity. Uh, because most people think like, oh, like girls with femininity in like, being in-more like into...physically making themselves prettier to be put on like a pedestal aesthetically as something to be obtained is to, like that kind of thing.

And what about non-physical attributes?

Non-physical attributes are supposed to be like, I like guess more kind, patient, a bit more diminutive, kind of, like, more seen as a background character to things than someone who's put-like a go-getter, someone who has a lot of drive, and uh...is actively pursuing whatever their goal is.

Okay. And what are some feminine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

They're diminutive, they're, quiet, they don't-they're like of just, like bringing my own self into it, like, I am Asian, so the stereotype is for Asian woman-is to be like-like the soft shy flower kind of, like flower girl type, it's-it's that or we're like the dragon lady who's like empowered by like, through our sexuality, but that's like more-seen as like morally wrong, and like, if a woman is called like a sex demon it's like, oh that's like an automatic like negative connotation, but if a guy is called a sex demon like, he's put on like, a societal pedestal of like this-this is what we want all men to be, well and like the lady is just kind of more like, oh like uh Marilyn Monroe-y kind of, like hiding like they're like the wind up the skirt kind of, like shy thing, it's a little-it's a little-it's a little silly but that's, I think that's what the stereotype is for that.

And is sexual attraction or attraction an important characteristic of femininity?

I think it's almost just not mentioned. I, like, I think more like romantic desire more so than sexual desire, are to like very different things.

Back to more questions about you. Were you raised under specific expectations of masculinity or femininity?

Oh yes! Oh I very much was, umm, I'm the eldest daughter in my family and so like the expectation is that at a certain point in my adult life preferably before I'm twenty five, I find someone to get married to, preferably a man because they want me to like get married to a handsome man with a

stable job, and like of a couple of kids or two within like the year of me being married and I have to be, umm-take-I have the expectations of taking care of my umm parents in laws, like, my in laws when-w-when they're old and they can't take care of themselves. That's the expectation that I was put under-was to be very pretty, to keep my mouth shut more often than not, my opinions were kind of like brushed under the like rug, but umm, and to be very respectful towards adults, and umm, yeah. That was the kind of pressure-is really to be pretty and skinny and uh put-like always have a smile on my face and be this like positive sunshine being.

And do you still feel pressure to conform to those standards?

With my family yeah. Whenever my parents visit, especially when my mom visits, I definitely change my physical appearance a lot more, while when I'm with my friends, uh I don't care as much as what I dress, I usually wear like-I just wear whatever I feel comfortable in. When my mom comes over I tend to dress myself up a little bit, and I downplay my make-up, regardless of even though that I identify as nonbinary I'm still very feminine with putting on my make-up. I use it to make myself look more feminine or look more masculine, and that's all of conquering and brows, but it with my mom I usually do a lot more softer, uh natural looking makeup to make her feel better because she always comments on my looks every time she does visit, regardless of how...more feminine or pretty I look I guess.

Do you ever think of yourself as masculine?

Sometimes, like umm, I think of myself as...uh...I think of myself as like nothing, really, like I just kind of put on my clothes and do my make-up and then it's just like oh, this is just too I am, I'm Val, more so than like me thinking of, oh, I look more masculine, or I feel or f-uh not look-I feel more masculine, or I feel more feminine today. I've kind of been a lot-I felt-been feeling more neutral about what my gender is within myself, but I physically am presenting myself like, uh, I'd say like eighty five percent of the time, I'm like feminine and then the rest is like, I guess I'm a little bit more like masculine that day. I usually just-even when I put on like my chest binder, I always put on like a full face of make-up and that's....and like eyeliner and everything, it's-it's nothing too different.

Do you have any specific relationship with masculinity?

Umm...I can't really think of any kind of relationship with masculinity. I might have-do have any examples of that?

Umm, like...how you might interact with people when you are looking more masculine or feeling more masculine.

Okay, okay, so interaction wise.

Interaction, or kind of how you feel-

I suppose when I feel more masculine, when I feel it, it's a lot more like I have a bit more like swagger, it's like there's quotes around that, I swagger around like in my steps. Umm, I'm a lot more umm, I guess I'm a bit more aggressive when it comes to of putting out my opinion when it comes to talking about-like having like discussion in certain classes is when I feel-when I have that chest binder on and I have my hair back in a certain way, it's-that's when I feel more like it. When it's around like, friends, I think I've well-I'm already like a very like, charismatic person. I'm loud, and I get louder when I have drinks in me. Umm, and I don't tend to even think about it at that point so... In a work setting I think it's more...yeah, I think it's like work and school I am far more aggressive in my approach to certain topics and certain umm conversations with people.

Okay. And do you think of yourself as feminine?

Uh...kind of I guess like, yeah-yeah like I said, I'm a femme presenting nonbinary. Femininity is uh something that I've grown up with my entire life so it's kind of harder to really like let that part of myself go, but the fuck is gender anyways?

Well these questions are not supposed to focus so much on gender and more on the abstract concepts of masculinity and femininity. And what is your relationship with it?

It's something that I've-I guess I've kind of grown to embrace it a bit more. When I was younger, because of those expectations that was placed on me I was a lot more like-I kind of pushed it away for a little bit when I was in elementary school. I wore overalls. I kind of like, stayed away from frills, and like, umm, pinks, and now I'm over here like, I want to add more pink to my uh, closet because like pink is so cute, it's a cute color and like, the fact that colors are even like associated with masculinity or femininity is like-it's a little silly it's-it's a little dated, and up until like-if you go back to what was it, like the fifties or sixties, pink was like, actually like, assigned for like boys or whatever. There's certain things like flip flopped over the years historically, so it's just kinda like...assigning colors, assigning certain clothes to be labeled as masculine and feminine is just kind of-it's just silly. But, yeah I guess. So, me thinking about being feminine than my relationship with it is like-it's just something that I don't think about it more [laughs] because it's just who I am, is just what I do.

Do you consciously oppose masculine or feminine norms?

I think I used to. Like, uh, during my more umm, like intenser opinionated times, like I think I was like si-uh through that like seventeen to like...nineteen? I was a bit more like, against-like I fought my parents a lot more about those kinds of norms because my mom was-uh, didn't understand why I was uh, wearing my dad's clothing more often than her clothes like when I used to, when-like earlier on in the year, or um, yeah me specifically going out and picking more clothes that are labeled more masculine, and that was when I would fight like my mom about that kind of thing, umm...uh..but I don't oppose anything feminine, other than like, TERFs, being kind of gate-keepy about who can-who signed-who says that they're femme-like, female or not but that's-that's-that's totally different that's-that's a totally different conversation. Umm, but I think my only conscious of opposition to

those kinds of norms is me dressing in a certain fashion, that's really honestly about it. I put on a chest binder, I wear certain clothes, and that's me-that's me opposing the norm.

Okay. Does asexuality align with masculinity, femininity, both, or neither?

I don't think sexuality has anything to do with anyone's gender identity. It shouldn't, not uh with the record that-just with the people that I know, there has been a more of a correlation between people who identify as nonbinary with asexuality, there's a lot, but umm...other than that, I don't think it really aligns itself with...like the spectrum. It just kind of is a sexuality. Everything is-everything is a slide, it's a slide-y scale for both.

Okay. Do you feel that asexuality as an orientation opposes masculine or feminine stereotypes?

I guess it kind of-it kind of goes against some masculine stereotypes, well with some feminine stereotypes it kind of enforces the asexuality. With like Asian asexual like, that's just always been like a stereotype placed on people like that, and people like me, so I never felt the need to really come out to my parents about my asexuality because they'll just be like oh, no that's just my-my daughter being like a good girl not going out of her way to have sex. And I'm like, that's just something that's, and that's how they'll see it. So, and that just fits the stereotype. So I don't think it oppose-it doesn't really oppose feminine stereotypes, but it definitely opposes some of the masculine.

Does your sexual orientation affect your relationship with your own masculinity or femininity?

Not really, it's just kind of [laughs] literally all that I am is just a huge like meh. I'm the-I'm the physical embodiment of like, the hand just kind of like wiggling with like the eehhh kind of sound, is how I feel my orientation affects that. It's just kind of what are you? Uh, I don't really know.

Okay. Do you, or have you ever felt uncomfortable identifying as asexual?

Uh, personally? No. Umm, like when I think about it, like when I reflect upon it myself and how it affects certain like-some of my relationships, it doesn't really like-I'm not-I'm not uncomfortable with that. It becomes uncomfortable with the idea of certain romantic prospects where the idea of having success-successful romantic relationship is affiliated with having a healthy sex life, and I'm over here. That's-that's where I'm like, that's where I kind of toe the line of liken uh, yeah, no, I don't think that's how that works.

That's the end of my specific questions but is there anything else you'd like to add or discuss?

Uh...uh not really, I think...sexuality spectrum, as is the gender and gender norms are kind of odd in this world, but it's a societal construct, and that's just kind of happens with society. Yeah that's about it.

Marlo (19, agender, they/them)

I'm going to start with some background questions. What is your name?

Uh, Marlo. Did you want my full name, or...

Whichever. What pronouns do you use?

They-them.

And how old are you?

...Nineteen.

Good.

[Laughs] I know how old I am.

What is your sexual and or romantic orientation? And you can be as brief or elaborate as you like.

Uh, so aro-ace, so aromantic asexual. Um, sometimes I identify as quoi-romantic, but I've moved off of that and more just onto aromantic.

When did you start identifying as those?

Um, I think around sophomore or junior year of high school, so at what? 16-17?-is I think when I started identifying as ace, um, but I didn't identify as aro until like halfway through last year...um, yeah.

And did you identify as anything before that?

Yeah. So before I knew asexuality was like a thing, I thought I was straight. Um, [laughs] which was a mistake. And then I identified as like a romantic ace for a while because I wasn't sure if just like romance was a thing that would happen to me eventually but I just didn't feel like now, but I've kind of decided screw that, whatever, I'm aro now. Um and the first time I heard of asexual, I also was like oh, well, I don't know, I might just be straight and not have ever felt anything for anyone ever...yet and then after like a month or two, I was like yeah, I'm ace.

Okay. Are you out, and to who?

Uh, yeah. So, my immediate family I'm out to, I think I'm out to like some of my extended family, but I'm not entirely sure who because I can't super remember who I've told and who I haven't, which is kind of strange in some conversation. But I'm not in the closet about the ace part, and usually I don't

specify that I'm aro because people don't know what I'm talking about, but I will readily admit to being aro if asked so does that mean you're not going to date people? Ah, I'm out to most of my friends, there's some friends who don't know, but it's more because they haven't asked and it hasn't come up, like I didn't make it a point to sit down with each of my friends say, so I'm ace... But it comes up so, most people know I think.

And when were you first aware of asexuality as a sexual orientation?

So my friend start identifying as ace in my sophomore year of high school, which is when I learned that ace was a thing, and then pretty much I started identifying as ace. [Laughs]

So you identified with ace pretty soon after you found out what it was?

Yeah. It took a bit but not that long.

What is your gender identity? And again you can be as brief or elaborate as you like.

Uh, so identify as agender, which is a nonbinary identity, and to me that pretty much means like, I don't have a gender-gender doesn't apply to me, but I know some people identify as agender and say I have a gender just not my life you know.

And when did you start identifying with that?

I think slightly after I started identifying as ace, um, it was mostly around the same time. Um...I didn't come out to people for a long time after that though.

Did you identify as anything in particular before then?

Yeah, I thought it was cis. That was wrong.

And are you out, and to who?

Yeah, so I'm out to my immediate family but not any of my extended family, although I am to my grandmother, I don't think she's ever gets that though. And um, I'm out to like all my gay friends, but then my queer-my like my straight friends probably mostly don't know. Um, I'm definitely out to fewer people gender wise than I am sexuality wise because I feel like I'm not really going to get much push back when I say an ace, but I might when I say I'm agender, so like when I say I'm ace people are like, what's that? And when I say I'm agender, uh, and then I'll specify it's like a nonbinary trans identity, and they'll be like, oh you're one of those kids these days like...I don't know I'm super careful about who I tell about gender, so I don't actually know if they say that because I haven't told anyone I wasn't one hundred percent sure would be fine with it. Yeah.

I have graphs for you from the Asexual Census.

Legit.

So they get about ten thousand respondents each year, and this is the reported gender distribution, and none of the above is just anyone who didn't pick women-female or man-male. Um, across people who identified as a woman or female, the sex assigned at birth, AFAB and AMAB.

Man, that's such a huge disparity.

And for the people who identified as a men or male. And the people who chose none of the above. And then across the survey this was the distribution of sex assigned at birth. So each year the asexual census collects information about the asexual community. Looking at those born 1983 or later, because that's where the majority of the data is and because that corresponds with the GLAAD survey of the same year. These graphs relate asexuality, gender identity, and sex assigned at birth. Can you provide any possible explanations or hypotheses for the trends they show?

So I think there's a few reasons. One is that I think more AFAB people are like aware asexuality is a thing. Um...more because I think it-for in some cases like asexuality like among people who don't know much about it is more accepted in people who are AFAB than AMAB because um, society kind of conflates masculinity um, with like, being allo. Like, there's a lot of like, oh yeah men are super attracted all the time to people and think about sex all the time, so I think for a lot of AFA-AMAB people there may be some sort of like a shame in admitting that they're ace, um, and I think that both affects people identifying that way and also like, the spread of information, like I know that I started identifying with ace because my friend identified as ace, and that's where I learned about it, so I know a lot of people who learned about ace from me who are my friends, so uh, I think that if you're more like-if you feel accepted in your identity you're more likely to tell people about it, so more people learn about it, and therefore if they do feel that way they can identify that way, so I think that's definitely a part.

I think part of it is um, like the community online, um, which is mostly where this survey was. I remember it was going around Tumblr, and it was on AVEN too. I don't know where else it was, I know like a lot of the community on Tumblr is AFAB, not necessarily female but AFAB-um, in terms of-just a lot of the circles that I'm in, in Tumblr, um, which is a lot where I saw that going around. Um, so that might have been definitely a factor. Um, it might have been a factor, in terms of like, people who wanted to talk about it, I don't know if that's true or not. Um, I don't personally think that there is a difference in the amount of a AFAB and AMAB people who, like do not experience sexual attraction towards others, I think there's a difference both in who responded to the survey and in like, who identifies as ace and who knows the word ace exists. Um, yeah.

Moving away from the graphs a little bit, what stereotypes do you associate with masculinity?

In terms of what I think masculinity is or what do I think are the stereotypes that are associated?

Just what stereotypes exist about masculinity.

Um, there's kind of like an aggressive-like, in all the connotations of like, um, kind of defensive when you try to argue with people or um, like, confident-self-confident or like-um, like, has a lot of drive and goes for their goals. I feel like there's a lot of aggressiveness that's associated with it. And sometimes like an arrogance. And that's what I personally associate with masculinity, which is probably what I associate with like, toxic masculinity, but yeah.

Okay, and what are some masculine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

There's definitely a stereotype that like, um, men are aggressively sexual, um, and I think that's both because there's a lot of like-um, like sexual harassment um, towards-perpetrated by men in our society, and uh, so I think that there are a lot of people who think that all men feel a lot of sexual attraction all the time towards literally everything they see that has boobs. Um, that's definitely a st- there's also a stereotype with like gay men being less masculine, um, so masculinity therefore would be like, also associated with like, attraction to women. Um, yeah.

And is sexual attraction or desire an important characteristic of masculinity?

I don't think it's important but I think a lot of people do think it's important.

Okay. What stereotypes do you associate with femininity?

Um, with femininity I think there's a lot of, stereotype wise, um, like...I don't know there's like a stereotype that like women like are beautiful, and like work a lot in order to improve their appearance, and also how they're perceived by people and spend a lot of time thinking about how they're perceived by people, I don't know what the word for that is, but like, more social? I think is the way that-I don't know, it's a stereotype I associate. Yeah.

What are some feminine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

Um, there's definitely a stereotype that like women don't talk about sex. Um, like they do feel it, but they don't talk about it. I think what women think women are attracted to in men, and what men think women are attracted to men are pretty different, but I don't actually know what either of those things super are [laughs] because I'm not attracted to men um [laughs], nor am I a man um, yeah. Um, I think there-there is kind of, um, like I feel that women who are attracted to women are not considered less feminine, but men who are attracted to men are considered less masculine. Like, in general.

Is sexual attraction or desire an important characteristic of femininity?

I don't think-I mean I don't think it is to any sort of gender, but I don't think it's as considered important as it is masculinity.

Okay. Back to some questions about you. Were you raised under specific expectations of masculinity or femininity?

I think to an extent. Like I know my parents definitely were like, yeah whatever you want to do is fine, but there was also like uh, until I was like fourteen and put my foot down, like if there was a fancy event I had to wear a dress even though I'd s-many times said that I did not want to, like there was no other option kind of thing. Um, eh, and there were things like...I don't know I feel like it was more in school or other socializations than my parents, but there was definitely a girls are into horses, and pink, and dolls, and this kind of thing, and boys are into this kind of thing, uh, and that when I was in elementary school certainly the world seems super segregated to those two genders, um, and so when I was in elementary school I was considered like a boy a kind of, um, because all my friends were boys, and I was hanging out with the boys, and I remember like this one point which like-there was kind of like a leader of our little group, and he told me that um, I-wasn't like other girls because he'd never seen me cry except for the time that I was cutting onions or something like that, um, and I was like super proud of that-the fact that he did not consider me like other girls. So he's like you basically don't count as a girl, I'm like wow I'm super happy you think of me that way. Um, so I think there is definitely an association with like girls being weak, um, but also not interested in cool things like Pokémon, uh, which I was into and like fantasy and stuff. Um...and then in middle school there was definitely an expectation that like, boys were more sexual, which is, I think the point in time in which I stopped hanging out with boys was in middle school, because suddenly all the boys were super interested in bodies and not people, and kind of disgusting me, so I then started hanging out with people who I thought were girls at that point, but we all turned out to be queer later, so. Um, yeah so, there was kind of-I think that there might have been a connection somehow there, because I know that um, I probably would have identified as like a trans boy in elementary school if I had known that was a thing. Um, I didn't-I did, I didn't know it could apply to me, because someone's dad was trans and I was very confused. Um, but...um, then when I went to middle school suddenly all the boys were-saw me as a girl instead of a person like they had in elementary school, like they'd seen kind of as a boy, and then they suddenly start seeing me as a girl because they were like sexually attracted to things. I don't know if they actually were, or if they just made bad jokes all the time, but that was sixth grade, and it sucked, and um, [laughs] so then I kind of flipped-started identifying kind of as a girl, which I didn't really before, which is interesting. Yeah it's weird. It was weird, middle school was weird. I don't have anything else to say on that.

Do you still feel pressure to conform to specific gender standards?

Um...to an extent. Like uh, I don't wear skirts because I don't perceive-be perceived as female, not because I don't like skirts. Um...so in that sense yes, and sometimes like...I know that there's probably like a lot of things that are considered feminine-that the reason why I don't like them is probably because they're feminine and not because I dislike them inherently. Um...so I know there's probably a lot of things, like I don't wear any make-up, but I don't know if that's because I'm just not interested or if because when I was little associated that with femininity and therefore I'm not interested. Like, I

know that's why I don't like horses, [laughs] it's because girls liked horses, that was like a thing for a while. Um, but I don't like horses now because I just don't like them, but I'm pretty sure that's where it comes from, so in that sense kind of, like I feel pressure not to conform to feminine stereotypes, which sometimes limits the like things that I actually like doing. Um, but I-I don't super feel a pressure to like conform to masculine stereotypes if that makes sense.

Do you think of yourself as masculine?

Not really.

Okay. Do you have any specific relationship with masculinity?

I think most of my relationship-like the way I think of masculinity, is toxic masculinity which I don't like, that's why there's toxic in the title. Um, and...normally I would consider asking to be like an insult, unless I was like talking to a trans guy, in which case they wouldn't consider that way so, I wouldn't consider it that way towards them, but...mostly I associate masculinity with toxic masculinity. So, I would say that I have a negative relationship I think kind of. I don't like it in other people.

And do you think of yourself as feminine?

No.

Do you have a specific relationship with femininity?

I'm not really sure what femininity is. Like, with toxic masculinity I have like a specific things-set of things, but I'm not sure what masculinity and femininity are aside from that. I think they're really just how people express their gender, but like everyone expresses it differently, so I'm not actually sure what it would be. So I don't feel like I have much of a relationship with femininity. Except maybe avoiding what I think would be perceived as feminine.

Do you consciously oppose masculine and feminine norms?

Yeah, I try not to seem feminine.

Okay. Does asexuality align with masculinity, femininity, both, or neither?

I feel like asexuality doesn't have anything to do with ei-either of them, um, but I can... definitely imagine like people thinking that it aligns with femininity, and that people would think like lesser of a man maybe because he's ace, like I can definitely picture people saying that, like I don't think it's true...but I'm sure it's something some people think.

Do you feel that asexuality as an orientation that opposes masculine or feminine stereotypes?

To a certain extent I think both genders are very much-like the cis genders, are wrapped up in also being straight, and so I do think that asexuality kind of, like, I wouldn't say you can't be masculine and ace or feminine and ace but I would also say like, if you're ace I think that definitely gives you um...kind of a view of masculine and feminine that other people maybe don't have because it's less-like a lot of masculinity and femininity I think is performative for the sake of attracting people to have sex with, and I think if you're ace since you're not necessarily trying to attract people to have sex with, like you may want a romantic relationship, or I mean you may want to have sex but not be sexually attracted to people, um, but like you're more doing it no, I'm-I'm like performing these things for myself, so I think it's more authentic in a way.

Does your sexual orientation affect your relationship with your own masculinity or femininity?

I think so, I think my sexuality and gender very much wrapped up in each other because um, you know I think that to an extent I don't like being seen as a sexual object because that means people are seeing me as female usually, um, and that repulses me, so I think that's part of it but also like, I don't like being seen as female because then people would see me as a sexual object, like it's tied up in itself, so I can't tell you which caused the other, but I think they're definitely very much conflated. Um, I know that like, the re-like I don't like being perceived as feminine because I think that, you know if people perceive me as a girl there's a higher chance that like a cis guy is then going to like want to have sex with me. And I don't want to have sex with people, especially cis guys. [Laughs] So, I-yeah, I definitely think they're related.

Do you or have you ever felt uncomfortable identifying as asexual?

Mmm, not as ace, no.

That's the end of my specific questions, but is there anything you'd like to add or discuss?

Uh, not really.

Xander (20, genderqueer/questioning, he/they)

Let's start with some background questions. What is your name?

Xander.

What pronouns do you use?

I use he-him or they-them.

And how old are you?

I am twenty.

Right. Um, what is your sexual and or romantic orientation? And you can be as brief or elaborate as you'd like.

Romantic? I still have no clue. I'm still figuring that out. I think I'm aromantic but it's sort of up in the air, uh sexual, I'm asexual. Um, I don't know if I'm-yeah, I'm definitely asexual that's like baseline. Yeah.

Okay, and when did you start identifying as that?

Uh must have been-I think it was during junior year of high school, so seventeen-sixteen-seventeen...sixteen. Umm, yeah, it was, uh [laughs]-I'd been in a relationship for about a year and I had felt no, uh, a sexual attraction, so I was like-and one of my friends was asexual, so it made sense to me.

And did you identify as anything before that?

I thought I was the quote unquote normal being, you know, a cis straight and all that, but [laughs] times have changed.

And are you out, and to who?

Uh, I'm out to my parents, um, that went-that went fine. I was...pleasantly surprised. Um, and...my family in general I'm pretty open about it. Um, but yeah, I don't think I have any, like I-I'm not-I don't necessarily feel closeted about it or anything.

When were you first aware of asexuality as a sexual orientation?

I think I was about sixteen, fifteen or sixteen was when I first heard about it and it was through one of my friends who is also asexual, and yeah, that's when I first heard about it.

And did you identify as asexual pretty soon after hearing about it?

It took some time. Uh, within a year-within a year it started to make some more-more and more sense.

Do you know why you were hesitant or didn't click with immediately?

Um...because I was already-because I was already dealing with, you know,-I guess I exactly socially click with everybody at school, so I didn't even need even more reasons to be ostracized. So, I just didn't really want it. I kind of just pushed out in my mind.

And then what is your gender identity? And again you can be as brief or as elaborate as you like.

Well, I-I sorta just stopped like-I don't know-I don't really feel completely attached to the...I-I don't-I don't feel comfortable with calling myself a man. Um, I definitely know I-I uh, have more masculine features and maybe even behavioral patterns, but I don't necessarily identify as a man. Um, so it's just sort of genderqueer? Questioning? I'm not exactly sure, but it's not-it's not one hundred percent within the binary.

Okay, great. Um, and when did you start identifying as, or start recognizing that you're not cis?

Um, well, I think it must have been within the last year. Uh...I never really...you know-it must have been within the last year. Uh, um, I sort of had a period in that time that I was like, yeah, just push it aside and was like, I don't-I don't think I really meet this criterion. But um, yeah, more-more recently, like in the last couple of weeks I've just been like, you know, I don't really see it. So it's-yeah, it's been a thing.

And um, did you ever identify as anything particular before this?

Yeah, I identified with man-male because, yeah, that was just easier-it's easier to....I mean I still-I still will do that because it's easier to explain this and it's, you know, [laughs] like that's really easy.

Um, and are you out and who? And like in what settings?

I'm out to, well, pretty much you, and a-a couple of friends that have online but other than that not really anyone.

Um, so next I have some graphs, if my computer will cooperate, from the 2016 asexual census. Um, are you aware of that census?

I'm not actually, I probably should be.

So it's a big census that goes out every year. It gets about 10,000 respondents each year based on this data and looking at it, um, in particular, this is from the 2016 survey. And so this is the gender distribution.

Um, I see no response.

I got no response, no response just means not answered the question. None of the above means not women-female or man-male. Um, and then these are sex assigned at birth for the people who identified as a woman or female. And the same for man and male.

Oh wow, a bit of a difference in that one.

And um, none of the above...And sex assigned at birth for, um, the entire survey.

Alright.

So each year the asexual census collects information about the asexual community. Looking at those born 1983 or later, and I'm using that date because that's where the majority of the data is focused in because it would-it better corresponds with the GLAAD survey. Um, these graphs relate asexuality, gender identity, and sex assigned at birth. Can you provide any explanations or hypotheses about the trends they exhibit?

Um...this is all hypothetical of course.

Yes, it's all hypothetical.

I think that-I mean if you look at gender roles and what's-you know, what's expected of various genders and sexes in society today, um, while both, uh, binary genders are expected to, you know, put out quote-unquote and engage in sex, that doesn't necessarily mean that, uh, I guess that everybody feels the attraction and thus...I think it's-I think it's less common for men because for people-those assigned male at birth because of the, I guess... actually I can't speculate on that really that well because I think like there's a lot of expectations on those assigned male at birth to, you know, engage in sexual activity. So a lot of people might just put it out of their mind, you know, attraction and just go for it. So they might not be exposed to this, this thus, they wouldn't be in this study. Um, those that you know...I don't know. It makes sense, but I don't necessarily have the words to explain it.

That's fine. Um, so I'm going to move away from the graphs. And so what stereotypes do you associate with masculinity?

Masculinity is uh, all about assertiveness and being tough. Uh, kind of it's-kind of without a lot of times, without thought. Yeah. I think it's-it's passion before ponderance.

Um, what are some masculine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

A lot of those also carry over, um, the masculine stereotypes. Yeah. Very gung-ho and um, forward a ma-you know, those are traits that go with uh masculinity and sex and sexuality, um, would be interesting is identifying the masculine stereotypes associated with say homosexuality uh, and seeing how that plays into effect, but I don't necessarily have-I guess they don't have a lot of insight into that either. Um, so I'm just going off of stereotypes that are necessarily what I, what I've seen in pop culture and in my own experiences with other people. Um, I had a friend in high school who, uh, told me that he-no, he asked me if I ever had this feeling that I wanted to go and quote unquote fuck every girl at school, and I just could not relate. And I was-I-I thought that that was fucked up and that was just-I don't know if that's necessarily the thought of all masc-you know, all AMAB people but, or you know, AMAB, cisgender uh...allosexuals, but... [laughs]. So yeah, I think that really has to do with it. It's, you know. Yeah.

Do you think sexual attraction or desire is an important characteristic of masculinity?

Maybe as a stereotype. Um, I don't think it necessarily-it has to be implicit, but, um, I think that in the social norms that we have today it is. Uh, even if it's not attraction, I think, I think more so desire-it's more so desire, um, and the ability to develop a record or you know, to be able to, you know, make claims to be able to, you know, oh, I did this and this. I think that's definitely more in the, uh, criteria to be an acceptable masculine person.

What stereotypes do you associate with femininity?

Femininity...it's different-it's different, um, based on just again, stereotype, like instead of it being pure passions, it's more ponderance, more thinking. Um, I'm not saying that's, you know, of course it's stereotypes, so it's not a complete generalization, but I think that's at least what I've been taught, um, I don't necessarily agree with it. Um, but, yeah femininity is...it's weird because then you can-let me contrast femininity, stereotypes and social norms with say feminism. And it creates an interesting uh, contrast and juxtaposition um, while the social you know, the gender roles of uh, AFAB cis folk, uh, would be maybe submissiveness you see a lot of movements where uh, I mean people are trying to, uh, rise and find a sense of equality, which is good. But yeah, that's sort of what I don't know. There's a lot of thought that goes into that. Yeah.

Um, and what are some feminine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

Uh, stereotypes and gender roles makes me think of women being the, again, submissive type to, uh, be always available for sex. Um...uh, I think, uh, um, yeah [laughs] I don't really have a...I know that for uh-from what I've heard a lot of the time for woman and uh, yeah, it's-it's not necessarily

like in a heterosexual relationship, it's not necessarily about their own passion, but that's because the man in that situation doesn't necessarily care. So, I don't know. I think sorta society has rigged it so that people are supposed to do their quote unquote duty in that aspect and it's messed up.

Um, and is sexual attraction or desire and important characteristic of femininity?

I'm of the mindset that a sexuality and asexuality that matter isn't necessarily something that is masculine or feminine. So I think that in the social strata...maybe? Uh, I know that a lot of, uh-there's a lot of shunning that goes on for women, uh, or uh, feminine people that, um, are overly quote unquote overly sexually active. Um, so desire is not necessarily something that's a popular, uh characteristic of femininity but perhaps attraction. Um, uh, yeah, I don't know, I don't think it's necessarily the same, but I think it's what's accepted in society, is what is-is what it boils down to, not entirely sure.

Um, so more questions about you, uh, were you raised under are specific expectations of masculinity?

Yeah. [Laughs] Yeah. I mean, I think I mentioned it before, you know, what I grew up with in school and at home, my dad-my dad is definitely the masculine type, um, but my mom really, sort of um, had a lot of influence over my concepts of what femininity is and sort of challenging this uh social norm um, and just the concept of gender roles. So, uh, yeah, I would say that I was raised under expectations, of predominantly masculinity. Um, it was a kind of annoying, not always being able to live up to those.

Um, did you or do you still feel pressure to conform to those standards?

Not so much now. Now that I'm away from home in a place like this, um, it doesn't feel like I'm nearly-nearly as pressured to conform to that, and that's nice. Yeah.

Do you think of yourself as masculine?

In a lot of ways yes. Not completely.

Um, and then the next question I see there, what is your relationship to masculinity? Um, I think that it's...I don't necessarily-there are a lot of elements of masculinity, a common perception of masculinity or at least that I don't like, I don't want to ascribe to and I don't feel like I can ascribe to. Um, but it-yeah, I don't view myself as a-I guess I don't-I don't see myself as a man, but I don't necessarily fall in any specific category. Um, yeah. Masculine relationship with masculinity and so far as I can blend in society.

Do you ever think of yourself as feminine?

In some ways.

OK. Do you have a particular relationship or experience with that?

Um, sort of in a way that I want to...I guess dichotomize myself with masculinity. I want to separate from it a bit. It's-I don't see myself as a man, I don't see myself as a woman. I definitely see that in the areas of not necessarily masculine I have some feminine traits, but I don't know that I necessarily have the words to describe them very well.

OK. Do you ever consciously oppose masculine or feminine norms?

Often. Um, I try to. I...I need these-I feel like there's a lot of these norms that are um-they foster inequalities in society and um, wrong doings. Um, I think that-I try to sort of stay away from that kind of dogma and yeah. I try not to play with that too much.

Um, does asexuality align with masculinity, femininity, both, neither, some combination?

Yes. [Laughs] I think that it's ah-I think-um-I think it concurs, but not necessarily-like you're going to-like with the charts you see that there are people in every group that I identify as asexual. I think that...I don't necessarily think it aligns. I think that it just goes along with. It's kind of a rejection of social norms and thus is an outlier, but that doesn't necessarily mean it's-it shouldn't be otherized.

So it doesn't really work with any either masculinity or femininity in a particular way?

Um...not really. I think that it's-I don't think it necessarily completely rebukes it, but I don't necessarily think that it's- I'm not sure that it has much of a factor. Yeah.

Um, do you feel about asexuality as orientation opposes masculine or feminine stereotypes?

Some definitely. I mean, as we've seen in the charts perhaps more feminine stereotypes, but as somebody who's grown up with masculine surroundings, I think it also definitely, um-I don't even know if I can say that I was gonna say maybe the sexual desire aspect of it, uh, maybe asexuality uh opposes masculine sexual dis- um, no...attraction but not necessarily desire. And I think it's the desire that is the more pressing factor for the masculine side. So I think that it's not as much ma-I don't think it necessarily opposes as masculine stereotypes as much. That's a societal thing.

Um, and does your sexual orientation affects your relationship with your own masculinity or femininity?

Uh, yeah. Uh, because I don't necessarily have an attraction, I don't really want to do anything sexual and thus, so-so the attraction in this case nips the desire and so that I'm not the-you know, I'm-I'm in this masculine society that I'm not engaging in sexual activity kind of sets me aside for other people and thus, and not necessarily in a good way. Um, and that's dealing with the other people and not others in the asexual spectrum. Um, yeah.

Um, and then do you ever, have you ever felt uncomfortable identifying as asexual?

For myself, no. I'm aware of the-or at least, you know, after I started identifying with it, no. Before I was, like I said I didn't want to be further ostracized by my peers, but after that, um, no, I haven't really ever felt like anything was necessarily like, wrong with me for it. I just-for myself, i- um, I don't feel uncomfortable, but it can be, like I said, it can make issue-it can present issues with my peers um, that aren't asexual. Yeah, I think that's about it.

Yeah. That's the end of my specific questions, but if there's anything else you'd like to mention or discuss.

Not that I can think of.

Henry (29, nonbinary, they/them)

I'm going to start with some background information. What is your name?

Um, Hannah. Some of my friends call me Henry.

Okay, and what pronouns do you use?

Um, most of the time I use she-her just because I'm not out to a lot of people about it being gender-whatever, and um, but sometimes my-a few of my close friends will use they-them.

How old are you?

I'm actually 29.

What is your sexual and or romantic orientation? You can be as brief or as elaborate as you want.

Okay. I'm definitely asexual, um, romantic orientation is a little harder, I've identified as pan-romantic, demi-romantic, aromantic, quoi-romantic, th-I'm trying-you know it's just kind of one of those things is a little harder for me to define but um, I think whatever I've got re-most recently is that I have the potential possibly to maybe it be romantically attracted to people who have a similar gender to mine, um, but it takes usually being friends with them first, so kind of like a demi-homo-romantic I guess [laughs] I don't know.

When did you start identifying specifically as asexual, but also with your romantic orientation?

Okay, um, asexual I first really um, adopted that label for myself in 2011. Um, and then, but as far as romantic orientation-like the one that I most recently arrived at has just been kind of like this year, um and then you know that I first started exploring it around the same time as when I identified as asexual.

Did you identify as anything before then?

Um, I-I thought I was straight [laughs] because that was the default, so I-I wasn't sure-I don't know, that's just what I would have told people until then, so.

And are you out about your sexual and romantic orientation, and to who?

Um, I am out as ace to my family and most of my close friends, um, I don't really talk about it most of the time to other people like at work or anything, I'm not-I don't really talk about it at work. Um, but-and-and like on the internet I'll talk about it, but as far as in like face to face conversations unless

somebody else is um, introducing themselves to me in like a queer friendly fashion sometimes I will- sometimes I will come out to them, but mostly just my family and close friends.

When were you first aware of asexuality at sexual orientation?

Uh, I think it was like 2006 or 2007, one of my friends discovered the term on the internet and started identifying as ace but I wasn't sure yet, um, because I didn't have a full understanding of like you can be ace but still like want to have a relationship possibly, or you know-I didn't understand like, how romantic and sexual orientation are different so.

So you didn't identify as asexual soon after discovering what it was.

No, it took me awhile um, to kind of learn more about it and um, stop being in denial about certain things [laughs] so.

What is your gender identity? Again you can be as brief or as elaborate as you like.

Um, probably the most accurate would just be nonbinary. I-I don't know, I'm still exploring more of what that means for me, um, to what extent I'm nonbinary I guess. I don't-I just kind of...don't identify with any specific gender and would rather that gender wasn't a thing [laughs], so that's kind of where I am with that.

When did you start identifying with that?

I think it was 2012 or 2013, um, yeah. That was about when I first started um, exploring that and thinking about it.

And did you identify as anything in particular before that?

Just a-a girl, or a tomboy I guess.

And are you out and to who?

Um, I am out to my family and a couple of my close friends.

Next I have some graphs from the asexual census, I'm not sure if you are aware of what that is, but it's a big survey. They get about ten thousand respondents, and so these are some graphs I've put together from the 2016 data. This is the gender distribution across the survey, and none of the above means not woman-female or man-male.

Uh-huh.

And then across the people who identified as a woman-female, this is the sex assigned at birth, AFAB, AMAB.

Oh.

For people who identified as a man or male, the same thing. The people who chose none of the above, and for the sex assigned at birth across the survey.

Okay.

Each year the asexual census collects information about the asexual community. Looking at those born 1983 later, uh, because that's where most of the data was, and it corresponds with the GLAAD survey. These graphs relate asexuality, gender identity, and sex assigned at birth. Can you provide any possible explanations or hypotheses as to why they show what they do?

[Laughs] Well, I mean, I-I can't speak for the whole community of course but I thought about this a lot as far as-like I-I often wonder how many um, males assigned at birth people out there who could be ace...don't identify as such-or come to understand that about themselves because of how heavily um, men and boys are socialized into um, being, you know like sexual I guess-like being-um, that's such a part of-of them like-men are encouraged to be-to have like sexual relationships and to be more sexually active than women in our culture, so I think that might be part of why there are fewer of male assigned at birth people on this-currently identifying as asexual, I don't know if there's any kind of biological component to it or not. It would be really hard to dis-to distinguish that at this point from from cultural um influences because of how different on men and women are socialized in our society, because women aren't always encouraged in the same ways to express their sexuality, um, or they are kind of, I don't know, like the-the time frame for when they are expected to start showing signs of sexual attraction is a little bit different too, so it's kind of-and the-the ways in which they-they are expected to express sexual attraction is also different. So I think that could have something to do with why most of the people currently identifying as asexual are female assigned at birth. And as far as the high percentage of...people saying neither male nor female on the survey, um, when I was first trying to think about whether or not I identified as nonbinary, I was wondering how much of it was influenced by being ace, and growing up um, not wanting to be seen as conventionally attractive to men-not wanting to be seen as sexually available I guess because of my asexuality um, kind of led to a little bit-I mean it could-could have I don't know you know, it's kind of like a chicken and egg question um, could have led to divorcing myself more from that-those conventional femininity rolls and-and feelings um, I didn't identify with a lot female protagonists because a lot of their-in media-because a lot of their um, stories are revolve around you know falling in love with a man and-and um, having children. And not that-that aces don't-don't want to have children or fall in love with men possibly, but it's just kind of-a lot of-a lot of those stereotypes of femininity were also interrupted by my asexuality so, it's kind of one of the things that is very enmeshed in my identity between asexuality and nonbinary-ness, I don't always know how much one influences the other. Um, being nonbinary could've also been part of why I didn't want attention from men because it made me feel more like I was being seen primarily as a woman rather than as a person, um, so it kind of feeds into each other so I-I-I would guess that a lot of people kind of have the same dynamic at work when they answered that way in the survey, so.

I'm going to move away from the graphs a little bit.

Okay.

What are some stereotypes you associate with masculinity?

Um, I guess...being...being more, I don't know, let me think about this [laughs]. Uh, being I guess- you know it sounds really bad but being like phys-more physically active or strong, um being louder and more assertive, being-being more geared toward-just action rather than thought or feeling, which, you know that all the sounds really terrible but it is kind of the stereotypes we're raised with are, and um, you know as far as like interests there's interest in sports or-or sciences and math or-or um, you know, building or like engineering or um, you know working on cars or guns or you know different things like that, like those are all things that you would expect more to see from a-a boy I guess.

Okay, and what are some masculine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

Um, I guess like I said before that men are more um, more sexually assertive I guess. They're more-it's more-it's seen as like a good thing when a man is the one who is being more um, like making the first move in a relationship, or being more sexually expressive or dominant even, so. Um, and wanting sex more often than women, so it's just one of-you know I don't-that might not be true, but that's what the stereotype is [laughs].

And then the last part of that is, is sexual attraction or desire an important characteristic of masculinity?

I would say definitely, our society sees it as such.

What's stereotypes do you associate with femininity?

Um, being nurturing, being um, emotionally intelligent and reflective, um, having self-control, being um, you know, responsible and care takers and being able to-to kind of patiently deal with anything that life throws at you, is what I associate most with womanhood and femininity. Um, there's also you know, kind of-and you know, more of an appreciation for aesthetics and beauty and um, being...more...I don't know, like, a little bit less reserve-or a little bit more reserved in um, expressing desires to-that, like, expressing sexual desires, but also like being assertive in relationships and stuff.

What are some feminine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

Um, that women are more emotionally driven than sexually driven, that's kind of a big stereotype that what they want out of a relationship is more on the emotional-intellectual side than the physical...um, affection side I guess, I don't know. Not that they don't want that, but just that the- that the primary gain they get out of it is emotional rather than physical, so.

And is sexual attraction or desire an important characteristic femininity?

Uh, that's a trick-that's an interesting question because obviously it-it would need to be there for a sexual relationship to work, but it seems like it's expected to be more passive and receptive rather than... Um, and-and sometimes I guess when women are sometimes seen as...it's-it's just like a different style of sexual attraction and desire, it kind of feels like the stereotype is that women want to be wanted rather than want to, I don't know, like want to be-I don't know, it's just interesting but the whole thing of like pleasing another person and-and being um...how to word that, I don't know, but I would say it's-it's seen as something that is important but not on as large of a scale. It's supposed to be a little bit more restrained I guess, in stereo-stereotypically, but-but I-I think that as far as a more healthy view femininity than a lot of people. A lot of the women that I know um, take ownership of that as a core part of their femininity which is really interesting. Um, different trend in society lately I feel like.

Uh, back to more questions about you.

Okay.

Were you raised under specific expectations of masculinity or femininity?

Uh, well, I-my parents, they tried not to force like, more general society gender expectations on us, like they didn't-they didn't try to get us to only play with girl toys or boy toys you know kind of thing, like whatever we were interested in personally as far as hobbies and stuff was totally supported and okay, like um, if the boys wanted to do music or art or something um, and the girls wanted to do-to try out a sport then my parents were really like supportive of that and they didn't ever say no, you know it's kind of like a boy thing right? Or that's kind of like a girl thing. They didn't really-they didn't really segregate um interests that way, as far as gender-gendering them, so that was really good and um-but there were definitely cultural influences from the church that I grew up in, where you know like if we go to church on Sunday we're expected-girls are expected to wear dresses and boys are expected to wear ties, and um, you know like white shirts and ties and um-and there were different roles in that-in the church for men and women, and um-and there were also a little bit different expectations in terms of the modesty of dress for men and women or course, because that's kind of just like how it is in all American society, but-but especially in the church. Um, and so there was that influence, that was a little bit balanced by my parents being a little bit more accepting of just like whatever you're into doing, like as far as what you're doing in your-with your time and what you are excited about, um, then that's it, it wasn't gendered when I was growing up, so.

And do you still feel any pressure to conform to standards you might have been raised under?

Um...I-I am not in that church anymore, so not really. Um, there-and as far as like...internalized...um, let me think about this, because there was also the influence of-of like motherhood and-and child rearing being set-a very integral part of my family culture when I was growing up, because I had um-

my mom had a lot of kids, and she was also a midwife, and so there was a lot of like feminine spirituality around that, that I was kind of like, close to growing up I guess because I really admired my mom, and I really-you know I can see that the, kind of sacredness I guess of-of being able to nurture and give life to other people, which I still see as-as an important thing, but I also see it as an important thing for everybody to appreciate, whether they were born or assigned male or female, um, and that not just people with like wombs [laughs] can do that, so I would say I don't conform to th-I don't feel as much pressure to conf-I don't feel like external pressure to conform to any of those standards from um, people close to me, you know of course there's society at large like if I was to go for a job interview, I think about like how-how I'm presenting myself professionally, there's certain ways I could dress that communicate different things, and a lot of professional dress is very gendered, so that's one of those things that I would feel a little bit pressure to be like, will it threaten my chances if I am dressing like, more neutral, would it be seen as unprofessional because I'm not being like strictly-this is a man's formal dress, and this is a woman's formal dress, but um, as far just how I live my life day to day I don't feel as much pressure-I don't feel the pressure to conform to like who I am um-who-who other people think that I should be as far as masculine or feminine. This is kind of a long answer, sorry.

Do you think of yourself as masculine?

Um...I don't know, it's like I-I appreciate when I am-when I am perceived as more toward the masculine end of things, because it brings me closer to that neutral ground which feels more core to who I am, like more inclusive of all the parts of me. Um, I wouldn't I-I don't know if that-if I would say I identify more with being masculine than with being feminine, um, it's more of just like a-I w-I want to incorporate different aspects of both.

Do you have any specific relationship with masculinity?

Um, I-I guess my relationship with it is that I-I want to be able to adopt kind of the confidence of masculinity-that I see in masculine people as far as existing and taking up space in society, um and-and it-it's interesting thinking about the ways that masculine perceived people are taken more seriously on certain topics. Um, so I guess-and I notice that when I dress more in a way that is-or present myself in a way that-that society sees more masculine, I do feel more confident which is really interesting, um, and what it says about-about how we see masculine versus feminine and-and in America but um, so I guess my relationship with masculinity is that I-I want to disassociate it from being all about the negative um, you know, being like the-like overly domineering, or overly like you know, and not being sensitive, and not being um nurturing. I guess I just-I like to kind of deconstruct it, but also take the pieces that I-that I feel like make me more of a complete person I guess.

Do you think of yourself as feminine?

Um, I know that a lot of the aspects of my personality are very feminine coded, I am definitely a nurturer, and um-I am-I am very-I have been very emotionally driven in my life, so it's kind of-and a

little-and-and trying to unlearn being super passive about things, so um, I guess, I know that there are feminine parts of me and I accept those parts of me, but I also don't want them to be all that I am, because um-or to limit me. I don't want to feel limited by my femininity, so.

Right. You touched on it, but do you have a specific relationship with femininity?

Yeah um, it's-I guess...I-I-I want to embrace the core-the-the parts of femininity that I feel are really important um, to...building a healthy society I guess, because-and then to balance out the fact that-that the-the people with more power in our society are-are the ones that are raised with stereotypically masculine um, traits and-and so I-I don't want to abandon everything feminine about myself because that would be counterproductive and wouldn't be true to who I am, and what I feel like um, is uh, just a good way to live, but I also don't want to be seen strictly as the stereotypes of femininity, like I don't want to be treated a certain way because of my femininity, like I don't want people to say oh you are a woman and so I-and so I have this idea of what a woman is, and I'm going to treat you accordingly, I'm going to assume that you are not as interested in certain things, or you are um, just naturally more capable of certain tasks than a man would be, um, or just more naturally suited to um, certain roles because that's restrictive and I don't-so-so it's-it's-it's like I-I want to embrace inside of me the parts that I see as positives from femininity, but I also don't want to be restricted from other people perceive me.

Do you consciously oppose masculine or feminine norms?

Um, yeah I would say that in some ways I do, like especially the really overt um, like segregating things vers-based on gender. Like I work with young children and I am always watching for those little beginnings of them try-starting to-to internalize what society is telling them is for boys and for girls. I am always watching to see if they're taking in messages that might be restrictive or destructive to them later in figuring out who they are, so like one example is the other day there-there was a couple of little boys on the bus playing with Spiderman toys and one of the little girls is like, can I see your toys and they said no, this is just for boys. And I said no, su-superheroes are for everybody, and they're like but all the superheroes are boys, and I was like, no first of all, there are all-there are all these female super heroes, and-but also girls can like spider man too. I know a lot of girls who like Spiderman, and Batman, and Superman, and all these different super heroes, and so eventually the little boy said oh, yeah, I guess you can see Spiderman, and they were playing with the Spiderman toys together. And on the flip side, one of the little girls was saying on another day, like, pink nail polish is only for girls, and I said no, I know a lot of-a lot of boys who like to wear pink, I know a lot of um, boys who like to paint their nails, and so I oppose like, a lot of the really out-I actively oppose a lot of that really you know visible um, this is for boys and this is for both girls kind of like, presentation sort of things, or like interest based sort of things. I'm always like no, that can be for everybody. Um, but I also-and I also just, especially with masculinity I am always trying to get people to think about um...how masculinity can be less restrictive because I feel like of the two, um...ends of the spectrum I guess, um, masculine id-like people who are seen as masculine are-have more restrictions on their behavior and their emotional processing, which is really sad so I'm always trying

to get people to think about that when I'm talking to them and they bring something up because it really bothers me that little boys, when they get to a certain age or even before they get to a certain age, it's like all of a sudden they can't be a whole person, they can't have all the feelings that they have, they can't have all the-all the appreciation for the more uh, sensitive and emotional things in life, and-and their-their-their orientation toward kindness is kind of, a little bit discouraged even I feel like as they grow up, so um, I would definitely say that I consciously oppose masculine norms and feminine norms as far as like, being more submissive or being more um like-especially in relationships, like romantic relationships if I hear one of my female friends or-or women identified friends being like, well this is just the way it has to be, because you know that's just how it works and in-in like straight relationships or whatever you know, then I'm like no, that doesn't have to be how it is [laughs], you can-you can speak up or you can-you can make some decisions for yourself and things like that so. I give really long answers, I'm sorry.

More is always good.

Oh, okay. Good.

Uh, is asexuality aligned with masculinity, femininity, both, or neither?

Um, I would say that people who um-I would say that masculine people are probably punished more for being asexual in the-in terms of if they show any sign of being-of having like no sexual attraction, I feel like masculinity, um like the-the stereotypes of masculinity um, punish that more in society because it's like, you know like, oh, you know, you're a wuss or something if you aren't interested in doing any of that. It's like what's wrong with you, you know, whereas women or femininity, it's like, there's a little bit more leeway there of like well, you're just you know, you're just shy, or you're just like um careful, you know, because there's also that aspect of it, of like you know women have to be careful you know [laughs] about like who they have sex or like when they have sex, and so um, I would say that as far as like, if we-if we were in a perfect society, then asexuality would not necessarily be gendered, but um, I think people give it little bit more room with femininity, like it has a little bit more room to exist within femininity without being um, im-im-immediately discarded as a-a possibility you know, or-or punished or anything, so.

Do you feel that asexuality as an orientation opposes masculine or feminine stereotypes?

Um, I would say that it opposes masculine stereotypes more than feminine um, just because of what I said before with-with um masculinity being more associated with uh, sexual expression. Um, especially assertive sexual expression. Uh...I don't know, I think it opposes the feminine stereotype of...of being a people pleaser I guess, and like because if you're-if you do own your asexuality as a feminine person, you are taking space back to yourself and agency back to yourself, I would say, um, and that is something that does oppose a feminine stereotype of like, giving-uh, like being more um, geared toward what other people need and what other people want, um, so.

Does your sexual orientation affect your relationship with your own masculinity or femininity?

Um...yeah I think so, I don't know. Um, like-like what I said about identifying as nonbinary, I think that um, not wanting to be a part of the whole dynamic of sexual attraction in the first place kind of also affects how much um, I want-I am involved in the dynamics of stereotypical masculinity and femininity because I feel like a lot of the way people present themselves, especially feminine people, the way they present themselves, whether they want it to or not is also um, associated by other people with their-as like a form of sexual expression, or like-or being attractive to someone else. Um, like how you dress and how you behave, a lot of people see-like they judge whether like-who you're interested in, and what you're interested in doing with them and how receptive you are to um, sexual advances I guess is-is judged a lot on how you present yourself, um, and how-and a lot of that is very gendered, of like women who dress in more-in clothes that make them look more curvy, or more you know just like-or have like show more skin or whatever you know like, or are more feminine in other ways, like having a certain kind of make-up on, or-or uh, longer hair or shorter hair you know, um, or their hair's done up, or as loose or-you know just all those things like that sends a message whether like-that other people can interpret in different ways of course, like other people might interpret it differently along the spectrum, but there's kind of a-kind of a mainstream interpretation of like, that person looks like a regular woman who probably is interested in men and-and may or may not you know, want to-want to have sex [laughs], so it's just kind of like-or might be looking for some-some kind of sexual partners so uh, yeah.

Um, the last question is do you or have you ever felt uncomfortable identifying as asexual?

Um, when I first encountered the term, I it was-I had kind of an instant knee jerk reaction of like, discomfort when my friends started identifying as it because of how um, steeped in my church's culture I was of like, there's a heavy expectation to eventually um, marry if you're-you're assigned to be a woman at birth, if-to marry a man and have children it's a very big part of that culture, and so I always assumed that eventually that would be my future as well, um, because I was very involved in the church and it was very important to me when I was younger, um, and it has like, long term consequences for your soul you know, kind of thing, your-your eternal destiny, so it kind of-I was very scared of-of not being normal I guess. Um, and you know I-I was like no, if I identify with this it's just you know, this is just a phase because I'm young and I'm a late bloomer you know, like eventually if I meet the right person and fall in love, then I want to-I-I would you know, I'll just be like everybody else and I won't-I won't feel this dissonance uh, between what is expected of me and how I feel about myself. Um, and so-and uh-so it was-it kind of brought up a lot of-a lot of identity angst when I first heard the term because it was like, there was a lot that I did identify with but I didn't really want to yet because I was like no, I can't be anything other than normal because that would just be silly and that would be a bad thing for my long term, you know happiness, um, and so because you know the model of happiness in my life growing up was like, you find a really good person to marry, you have lots of kids, and you're part of this huge family community and church community where everybody is supporting each other and having families. And um, so-so I did feel

uncomfortable when I first encountered the term, and then when I accepted the term it was also kind of mixed feelings because I was really-I was really happy to finally accept the fact that I could be in love with someone of the same gender, um, but not want to have sex with them, and that it was like something that-it wasn't just that I was like broken, or-or weird, or something that I would have to like completely deny those feelings later and just like-and live a whole different life, um, but it also brought up a lot of questions of like, what do you-like and I'm gonna have to hide things from my family forever and the person that I was in love with was no longer in love with me, so just kind of like-it was-it was a difficult time, but it was also really, really felt good to acknowledge that about myself and to own it, and so even though I was really sad about different-about other things, I was really-it was a big relief to finally accept that about myself and be like, I don't have to force myself to want to have a sexual relationship with somebody in the future. It's not going to completely preclude me from having a happy life, like there are other people out there who are making their own lives that are happy and-and they aren't having to try and convince themselves to be a different way, and they really feel, and so um, being able to kind of bring myself to be like okay, I can go back to square one and think about like what kind of life do I want outside of what I've always expected happiness to look like, and so that was actually really exciting. Even if there were parts of it that way scary. So, yeah.

Well that's the end of my specific questions, but is there anything else you'd like to add or discuss?

Um, I don't know. Uh, I think I've pretty much said everything I could about it, but without further prompting I don't know. There's always more I'm sure, but I can't think of anything.

Henry later requested that I add this statement to go along with their transcript for clarification.

"Even though I ended up talking a lot about stereotypes of femininity and masculinity, because that's how the interview was worded and structured, my concept of my own gender doesn't have that much to do with those stereotypes, and I have a hard time understanding what it is that gender actually IS apart from arbitrary grouping of personality traits and preferences, so that's a big part of why I identify as nonbinary. The more I get caught up in thinking about masculine versus feminine the more frustrated and disconnected from myself I feel, and so I feel most like "my gender" when I think about myself as separate from those concepts. But I do think my ideal body for myself would be more toward what people consider masculine in that it would have a flat chest and more male-like muscle/fat distribution, but I don't remember if physical transition stuff was covered in the interview. Anyway those are just some clarifying points because I feel like I ended up following the interview questions in ways that paint an overall picture that's missing the main point of how I see my gender."

Sadie (23, cisgender woman, she/her)

I'm going to start with some background questions. What is your name?

My name is Sadie.

What pronouns do you use?

She, her and hers.

And how old are you?

Twenty three.

What is your sexual and or romantic orientation? You can be as brief or as elaborate as you like.

I am asexual, and gray-pan-romantic.

Okay. And when did you start identifying as such?

Asexual I started identifying my uh-part way through my freshman year of college when I saw that term used very briefly um, on the Internet and did some googling because I saw it and was like, oh, I, you know, um, I know enough about like Latin roots to be like a-sexual, not-that sounds really familiar to me. Um, did some googling and was like, Holy Shit, everything makes sense now. Oh, also I'm queer surprise! Okay. Um, that kind of makes sense. Um, so-and it wasn't until I learned that like, being asexual was like not just me being something wrong with me kind of thing, that then I was able to understand like the difference between asexual and romantic attraction and then be able to sort out like, oh, okay, so gray-like first I was like, oh, well I'm probably aromantic too, and then like as I thought more about it, um, gray- aromantic, and with the appending to gray aromantic would be pan-romantic because when I do experience romantic attraction, um, it's-gender has nothing to do with it really. It's just sort of, very rarely it happens and what it does, gender is really not a factor at all. So the term pan, I really identify with that. Um, but the gray part is really also important because it's pretty rare, the number of crushes I've had over my life is about five roughly. And a couple of those when I was younger was-a lot of it was probably just kind of heteronormativity of like, oh, there's this person that's like super, super cool, and he's a guy, and if I think he's super cool and like want to hang out with him, that must mean that I have a crush on him and just with my limited you know, understanding of orientation and gender and all that kind of stuff it was-that was my sort of assumption back in high school. Um, I've never been in a romantic relationship with anyone though, It's always been sort of a case where I'm too nervous to talk about it, um, which I think is just, you know, me as a person rather than having to do with my identity, it's yeah. Um, I'm just kind of

awkward about that. Um, but yeah, so I'm not entirely sure when I started identifying as gray-pan-romantic, um...because it was-it was a very-that was a very fluid transition, whereas asexual was like boom, there's this whole thing that I now have words for and I know it's not just me being weird kind of thing. Um, yeah. But, so that was freshman year of college, which I was 18, it was late 2012 probably. Yeah.

Did you identify as anything in particular before then?

No, I-I never really thought about it before then, like I knew that I did not find anyone attractive, um, I like in that context, like I could definitely like have an aesthetic appreciation for people, um, but it was not a-like I never-I honestly thought that people were being um, like, sar-not sarcastic, but um, they were exaggerating when they were like, oh yeah, like I totally like, I want to bang that person so hard, like I thought it was on the same level as like, oh, I'm so angry I'm gonna kill them, you know, like it was, that had the same level of logic to me of just like I didn't-I didn't think that people actually like, experience the attraction kind of thing. I thought that it was just sort of like more of like a physical thing. I didn't realize that sexual attraction is a real thing. Um, and actually, um, when I was in high school, um, one of my kind of like, um, like sort of-sort of a friend, more of an acquaintance kind of thing. Somebody who hung out with a friend group that I was also part of, but I didn't really know very well. Um, he actually, at one point, he was talking about asexuality and saying that he was asexual and I was like, oh, don't be ridiculous, Erik, people don't actually experience sexual attraction. Like,, because this-this kid, he-he had a tendency to like-he's one of the people who like believes that vaccines cause autism and stuff like that, so like he-I was used to crazy shit coming out of his mouth, um, and so when he was just like, oh yeah, I don't experience sexual attraction, and I was like, well that's-that's not a thing, like nobody actually-like nobody like looks at somebody and wants to have sex with them, like that's-my understanding of the world was more that like kind of demi-sexuality, because that had-coming from like-growing up with a religious background, like what has sort of been taught to me was like, oh, you know, like you're supposed to like only be sexual within a relationship, and so I was sort of-my interpretation of that was, since I didn't experience sexual attraction myself was like, oh, like if you're in a relationship with somebody, then like-then you'll start experiencing like sexual attraction towards them kind of thing. So, um-and he'd given me a very bad description of asexuality, and it was like mixed with aromantic as well and he-because he was still full of shit even though he was talking about a real thing, but, um, I completely forgot about it until college when I saw it used in a more rational context um, than coming from him because I just generally didn't believe anything he told me. Um, and yeah, I-I didn't really identify-I hadn't thought about it. Um, partially just because of coming from a religious background, I hadn't thought about sexual orientation really, like I was, uh-I was, uh-really at, at the Catholic school that I was at-I was at, I was a really like, vocal ally towards the queer community. Um, I didn't really, I...I didn't, I-I guess I thought I was straight, but I didn't-I knew that that wasn't right, I knew that it was something else, um, but I didn't have any kind of identif-identity to call myself other than just like, oh, I'm just not attracted to anybody and I'm gonna like argue with teachers when they're saying homophobic stuff in class because I'm a contrary person. So yeah.

Um, and are you out, and to who about your sexual and or romantic orientation?

Yeah, so I first came out online on the, like the social media that I use that's not attached to my real life identity kind of stuff because that's where I also discovered that asexuality is a thing. Um, and so the few friends that were familiar with me, that do know those um, usernames and stuff like that, like they were aware of it and like I talk to them about it. Um, and then I started coming out to some of my other friends who don't know me online, um, I-at this point, I'm out to the majority of my friends, um, like on Facebook I basically just have a filter set up where I have a, um, a subsection-like a Facebook group list that's-I just call-it's labeled no queer for you. Um, and whenever I'm going to post about something queer related, I just tap that filter and then like the few cousins and stuff that I'm friends with on Facebook, and a few other people who are like family friends that I don't want to talk about this with just because I'm-there-there's a lot of family members that I don't want to talk to this about, because I know like any kind of queer identity with them is going to be a big drama because it is a pretty Catholic family, um, so I just, you know, I-I do my best to keep it away from them, um, I know that's not going to be how it is forever. Um, I was outed to my mom um, through this event that we're actually at today, Queer Con um, last year when I was directing it, um, I set up the Gmail account for it and I put my personal Hotmail as the recovery email because I figured that would, you know, I'm not-it's very unlikely that I would lose access to my main email account, so this is a good, you know, it's a good recovery email. Um, and as it turns out that when a Gmail user interacts with a Hotmail account, they-that is the recovery email for a Google account, um, Google shows them the profile picture associated with that Google account that they are the recovery email for. So my mom emailed me from her-she's a teacher and she emailed from her work email-school email, um, which is run through Gmail. It's not a Gmail account, but it is run by Gmail. Um, she doesn't usually email me from your school account, but she did for-she was forwarding me a job application for a friend of mine who's graduated with a teaching degree recently, and at the end of that she was just like, so why is your profile picture on this a logo for WWU Queer Con? At which I was just sort of like, well shit, I can't lie my way out of this one, um, so I talked to her about it and she's definitely not happy about it, but she didn't like throw me out either, so that's great. Um, we haven't really talked about it a whole-like stuff has come up since then and she's always really uncomfortable with it, um, so we haven't ever like sat down and talked about it, it's been more of a thing of just like, I bring up something like, oh yeah, like I'm going to go do this thing that's associated with queer stuff and she's kind of grumbly about it. Um, because of that I have not come out to any other family members, um, just because drama and chaos and unpleasant conversations. Um, but yeah, I'm-I'm pretty-I'm out in the spheres that I can be, where my family is not closely-like directly related. Yeah.

And you already kind of mentioned this, but when were you first aware of asexuality?

Yeah, I um, saw a post on Tumblr that was kind of a like-talking about stereotypes, um, and it was like, you know, like hey, like, you know, like bisexual people are not slutty, you know, like, um, and you know, it was going through the list, you know, I've just sort of like-because there's a lot of stereotypes about all sorts of orientations and one was like ase-like being asexual is not just being a

prude. Um, and I was like, oh, that's-the context here of this word, this makes sense to me, and that's-that's where I first was aware of it, and did some googling, and had my mind blown. Yeah.

So you identified with that pretty soon after finding it.

Yeah, basically as soon as I looked at-I googled it and found a couple-I don't remember if I came across AVEN first, or if I came across some other website. I came across something that had the definition of not experiencing sexual attraction, and I was like-there was no question in my mind, it was like, yeah, that's-that's been my experience my whole life, and people actually do experience sexual attraction? This is-this is foreign to me kind of thing. Yeah. Yeah.

And what is your gender identity? And again, as brief or elaborate as you like.

Yeah, um, I identify as a cis-woman. Um, there-when I was a teenager, um, I experienced pretty strong body dysphoria um, when I hit puberty and my breasts started to develop. I was really, really, really uncomfortable with that. Um, but there's no like, associated gender dysphoria it and I'm pretty chill with it now when I'm having a bad time mental health wise, sometimes I just don't like them, but like it's not-it's complicated. Um, it's-it's in term-like in terms of like body dysphoria, like that was definitely like a huge thing. Like I was probably giving myself heat stroke one summer, um, because I was just wearing a sweatshirt everywhere even though it was really hot because I was just uncomfortable with the shape of my body. Um, I feel like that...it could be more related to my asexual orientation than any sort of gender thing, um, since I don't really experience the gender part of the dysphoria, it's just the body part and it's-it kinda went away, I just sort of learned to deal with it kind of thing um, because like I knew, you know, in our society, like breasts or very sexualized and I was not comfortable being sexualized like that. Um, yeah, I-in terms of my gender identity, I'm not like-I probably fit the definition of demi-girl, honestly. Um, I just don't really identify with it because gender is such a kind of-it's just not really important to me personally. I do understand why it's very important to other people. Um, I certainly don't identify as male. Um, I just kind of don't really-like most-most of my gender identity as a woman or female or whatever uh, comes from having grown up with a lot of like, quote unquote boy interests, um, being really interested in science and engineering and math and that kind of stuff as well as like, I was really into dinosaurs and hot wheels and you know, space and stuff like that, so, and that was something that like I did encounter some pushback when I was little of, you know, like, oh, like, you know, like, um-like I remember one time when I was, you know, Christmas-around Christmas, you know, like it's like, you know, you go and you sit on Santa's lap and Santa is like, I bet you want a Barbie doll, and I was like, no! I want a microscope and hot wheels, you know, like, it's just and like, Santa was kind of like, oh, are you sure you don't want a Barbie? And it's like, no, I don't want a Barbie. Like I also had Barbies but my Barbies rode dinosaurs because-as you do, um, because, you know, believe it or not, small children don't really care about gender norms. Um, and so because a lot of my interests were more-society said that they were more of a male thing, it became-like the part of my identity that I'm really attached to with being female is because I've had to carve out a space for myself this whole time, of being like no, like I'm a girl

and I'm here at science camp and like I'm one of five girls and so the five girls, we're all going to band together as the five girls science camp because that's how you have a good time, is because sometimes the boys can be kind of weird sort of thing, so a lot of my attachment to my gender comes from being kind of minority among my interests, um, other than that, like, in terms of like gender expression, sometimes I like to, you know, present more femininely, like you know, wear dresses and stuff like that, um, I really like having long hair, um, none of those things are actually attached to gender, it's just attached to how society sees gender, um, but most of the time I'm pretty comfortable being-like in terms of like my clothes being fairly androgynous, like I'm not really, like-I really like just jeans and t-shirts, like I'm not a huge fan of like skirts or dresses for daily wear, that's more of a thing of like either it's really hot out and I want to have like airflow, um, or like I'm going to something fancy or if I'm going to something that I like, you know, like something where I'll be dancing so I want to like swish around, because skirts are great for swishing. Um, but yeah, it's-my gender identity I haven't really figured out yet, other than that, like, you know, I'd probably fall into the category of demi-girl, but I have so little attachment to my gender identity that I'm just sort of like, eh. Yeah.

You have any specific other responses to those three questions?

What did I start iden-yeah, I don't really identify-I pretty much just still identify this as a cis-woman because that's the easiest. Um, yeah, I-in terms of like who you out too, um, I've talked to a few of my non-binary friends about like-because it was really intense dysphoria in middle school to the point where like if I had known that like binders existed, I absolutely would have been like all over that, like I would have gotten a binder for sure. Um, I've kinda thought about getting a binder just to try sometime. Um, I've thought about kind of exploring it through, since I'm really into costumes, like exploring it with like doing a male character so that I had like a quote unquote, a reason to get a binder, um, and just sort of see if that, like doing that costume, being that character, like if that would help me figure things out. Um, with the non-binary friends I talk to and the trans friends-and the other trans friends that I talk to, trans guys, they were like, yeah, that's how it started for me. I'm just sort of like, well shit, um, I guess part of it is like I don't-part of me doesn't want to go down that road because I know it's so complicated and difficult, and like I'm not unhappy right now identifying as a cis woman, and I really don't want to open the worm-like the can of worms that is all of the trans stuff because I-it seems like a lot, like it's already a lot with my family-like I'm afraid to really have conversations with them about how like hey, so like I'm never going to get married and have kids that are my own biological kids. Like I might get married to somebody, maybe, I might adopt a kid or a couple of kids with or without being married to somebody. I really don't want to start in on the gender stuff with them because I know it would just not be a great conversation. Um, yeah. So, but yeah, I've, I'm out too, I guess about like talking about dysphoria things to a few tran-other trans friends and other-other queer friends as well. Yeah.

I now have some graphs for you, if my computer will wake up. Um, so these are from the asexual census, the 2016 census. Looking at the gender distribution across the survey, um, and none of the above is just not man-male or woman-female.

Okay.

And for the people who identify as a woman or female, this is the sex assigned at birth...and for the man-male...people who selected none of the above. And this is the sex assigned at birth across the survey. So each year the asexual census collects information about the asexual community, looking at those born 1983 or later because that's where most of the data is, and then it corresponds with the GLAAD survey. These graphs relate asexuality, gender identity, and sex assigned at birth. Can you provide any possible explanations or hypotheses for the trends they show?

Yeah, so there's-the-there's definitely a trend for most people seem to be assigned female at birth, who identify as asexual. Um, I don't know for sure, but I'm pretty sure it's the same for bisexuality, that it is primarily people who identify as bisexual and respond to surveys, um, tend to also be primarily people who are assigned female at birth. Um, and I think that that's probably a cultural thing. Um, you know, it's like-it could very well be that there are-there is a trend that there's more people assigned, female at birth who are a-spec, um, than people who are assigned male at birth. Um, but I do think a lot of it has to do with how our society really pushes men to be more um, hypersexualized and like always, you know-like sex is a big deal with masculinity. Um, the other thing I think is also just like, these are primarily internet surveys, um, and the majority of, just in general, the majority of queer people I know who are very involved with queer stuff on the online sphere-sphere tend to be women or people assigned female at birth. Um, that just seems to be like a cultural thing that the-the male population in the queer community and the assigned male population in the queer community tends to spend less time on the Internet where these surveys happen. Uh, this is where, you know-like so originally there were supposed to be like, queer questions on the next census, and then that got removed, and I'm really sad about that because-although it is kind of sketchy that the government would then know who's queer, um, but that would be something that would be- there'd be less um, bias in who is being asked, um, just because I feel like, you know, there's not-I think there is an inherent bias just in how these surveys are done, um, because these are people who are-they-they have to be people who are somewhat at least somewhat active within online queer spaces. Um, yeah...Um, and yeah, I-I know-I know a couple guys um, that I've met through the Internet assigned male at birth, men, um, who identify-like they-they know they're asexual and they are really afraid to like come out at all about it or like even like-even on the Internet, they're afraid to really like interact within the asexual community, um, just because there's so much stuff with toxic masculinity, um, and I think-I think a lot of it has to do-like between those two cultural things, um, one, you know, just who's on the Internet, who's taking these polls, um, and then just in general, how our society is so focused on you know, masculinity equals sex kind of thing. Um, yeah, I think that's probably it, and there might also be a trend of more AFAB people being asexual, but I do think that it is over exaggerated by these surveys because of those two biases. Yeah.

Kind of wading into that a little bit, what stereotypes do you associate with masculinity?

Yeah, I mean it's-our society puts on men, um, and a lot of expectation of, you know, like oh, like, you know, like you're not emotional and to just-men are supposed to be like really tough and not, you know, that-that sort of stuff. And then it's also just like, oh, like guys are supposed to always want sex, and you see this when there are male victims of rape and sexual assault, like there'll be-you'll see a case where like, you know, a teacher is convicted of raping one of her students, like a male student, and like you like-the comments on it are just like, oh, you know, like what a lucky kid, you know, like, I wish I could have banged my teacher when I was thirteen and it's like, this is rape. Like this is not-this is not something that you should be saying as like, anything positive about. Um, but our society is just like, oh yeah, you know, like that thirteen year old boy must have totally wanted to have sex with the teacher, and it's like, that's not-that's not okay at all. That's really gross. Um, yeah, yeah.

Specifically are there masculine stereotypes related to sex and sexuality?

Yeah, that's what it was, the-yeah. I kind of went into that one. Yeah, um, I think it is really just a thing that like, our society has, and other-other like-this is, it's not just western society, I know it's a thing in other cultures as well. I do wonder if there are any-you know I'm not an anthropologist so I don't know, but I do wonder if there are any societies anywhere in the world where it's less like there's- there is less of a difference in gender in terms of what you like, what-what is pushed on people. I wonder if they're already societies where, like, there isn't really a stereotype of men being really sexual-much more sexual than women kind of thing. Yeah.

Is sexual attraction or desire an important characteristic of masculinity?

I think for a lot of men it is, and I think from what our society pushes on them it is, um, like there's often-with a discussion of like, you know, like body image kind of stuff, it's usually focused on women, um, but there is-I know that it is something that affects a lot of men as well, um, of like whether or not, you know, like their society sees them as attractive and it's something that's not really talked about. Um, and...yeah, it's, I-I think a lot of-a lot of what society, like within pop culture, a lot of what pop culture and society pushes on guys is that like, they're like, the cool guys are the ones who are attractive, that are seen by society as being sexually attractive and sexually active, that kind of thing. Yeah.

Um, and what are some stereotypes you associate with femininity?

Um, yeah, so society kind of stereotypes femininity as being softer, more emotional, um nurturing, um, and when I talked about like coming from a religious background like, with femininity, it was like the women were very much sort of like, oh, you have to-you have to wait until marriage. Like it was very much more pushed on the women of, you know, like waiting till marriage, that kind of thing

than it was on the guys. Um, and, there was um, going on too, like, you know, like stereotypes with sex and sexuality, like it was-it was sort of implied that like, oh, you know, like the um-it was-it was strange because like on one hand they were lecturing us of like, you know, like basically, um, you know, like don't have sex, you're going to get pregnant and die like that kind of lecture. But then it was also sort of just like, oh, well, you know, like-I guess it's not too contradictory because they were saying like, you know, like don't do this, and they were like, the ideal is that like, you know, you-you're-you're-you're pure, you know, and then you get married and then you have sex and that's a good-like sex in a relationship is holy and good and pure, but sex outside of a-of a married relationship that's dirty and awful and bad, you know, all that kind of stuff. Um, so I think with-but it seems more targeted towards women of just like...you are-you are supposed to be less-women are generally-society pushes sexuality a lot less on women until they are with a partner. Once they're with a partner, then it becomes a thing of like, oh well, like, you know, if-I've, um-some of my other friends who are asexual, like they've been told, even by other people in the queer community, that just like, oh well, you know, like he, like, he's, you know, he does all these nice things for you, like he bought you this really expensive thing, like how dare you not have sex with him. Like, and it's just like um, nobody owes anyone sex, even if they're in a relationship and their partner has, you know, done nice things for them, um, so, it's a very weird thing like with-I see with like masculinity-sex kind of pushed on masculinity all the time, whereas with femininity, sex is this really convoluted thing of like you can't, you can't win. Like it's like, oh, you know, if you have-it's the, I'm pretty sure it's from Mean Girls, the quote about, you know, like, oh, if you don't have-if you have sex, you're a slut and if you don't then you're a prude and a virgin and all this stuff, and it's-there-there is really no winning for femininity. It doesn't matter if you have sex or not. Society is going to judge you for it. Yeah.

Is sexual attraction or desire an important characteristic of femininity?

Yeah, I mean like on the topic of like body image kind of stuff, like there is a lot of pressure in society, especially today uh, to look a certain way to be attractive. Um...and it's um...it's very convoluted though, because if it's too much then you're like quote unquote asking for it, but like it has to also-like you still have to present...as desirable, but there's that line that nobody knows where it is, or then society is going to come at, you of just like, oh, you know, look at her, like she's dressed like a slut kind of thing. So yeah, it's-it's a mess. Our society is a hot mess. Yeah.

So I have some more questions about you, you kind of touched on this. Were you raised under specific expectations of masculinity or femininity?

Yeah, um, so despite having kind of a religious upbringing, gender was not really a big deal with it. My parents-my parents never had an issue with me having more like quote unquote, you know, male interests kind of thing. Um, that was never a problem. Um, my-my parents were both raised by single moms one due to-but my-my grandma-my maternal grandfather died in a work related accident, so my mom was raised by my grandmother in like the forties and fifties with her and her brother, it was just, you know, just her mom was the sole breadwinner for the family. And with my dad, my grandma-

my paternal grandmother actually divorced my grandfather for being drunk all the time, um, and so that was when the kids were a bit older, so it was a bit easier for her, but like in both cases-both of my parents were-how to-raised the majority of their lives by a single mom, um, and so there wasn't-they've both grown up with uh, just out of necessity having very um-not having a lot of gender roles be a thing because if you're in a single parent household, like everyone's going to be doing all of the chores kind of thing because that's just how it has to be, um, because, you know, in addition to like the laundry for your own family, my maternal grandmother, like she was doing-she was doing like a laundry service for people, so both-both my mom and my uncle, you know, like they were helping her do that. So, you know, like there wasn't really any sort of like, oh, you know, like women do housework and men do outdoor work uh, kind of thing. It was everybody does everything because that's the only way we're gonna survive kind of thing. Um, so yeah, I wasn't really raised-there was-when I was in elementary school, um, I really liked-there was this like mud patch, um, and I really liked playing in it, so, with my friends we like dug out a little stream and stuff and we were doing the normal kid thing. Um, and because of that I didn't want to wear dresses, because dresses would get dirty really easily, like you can't really crouch down-like if you're wearing pants you can crouch down without getting completely filthy, if you're wearing a dress you can't crouch down and like, you know, get your hands dirty without also getting the skirt of your dress dirty. So I didn't want to wear a skirt-a dress or a skirt, and um, I remember my mom was really upset by that um, and it was just like, well, do you like, like I don't want to-I don't want to wreck my clothes. Like, you know, it's like I still like to wear these dresses when I'm not playing in the mud, I just don't ever want to wear them to school because I want to play in the mud every day because it's Washington, so it's raining everyday so there's mud every day and I liked the mud so I'm going to go play in it, it kind of thing. Um, so there was some pressure to conform with that, but that was pretty much it. My mom figured out pretty quick that it was a losing battle. Um, yeah, I didn't ever really have much pressure to conform to those standards. I did experience that elsewhere in the world since I did have those interests that are, you know, less-seen less as being quote unquote, like appropriate interests were a girl kind of thing. Um, so I, you know, I-I felt pressure there, but I was always just, like I said, kind of contrary, um, so it was something that didn't really bother me, it just mostly just pissed me off, and then I get upset about it, and then I'd just be even more inclined to be like, no, I'm here, I'm a girl and I'm going to go to science camp kind of thing. Yeah.

Do you still feel any pressure to conform to masculine or feminine standards?

Um, I do at work, now that I have like a-like a-like an office job that is like pretty...um...I-I feel the need to like, dress up for work kind of thing. I wear professional clothing, um, and it's really a lot of professional clothing, as like I consider myself a woman and like I present whether it's the-the options that I have for work appropriate clothing are a bit more feminine than I really like. I don't really feel un-well I do feel uncomfortable in them because they're not- they're not comfortable clothes because women's clothing sucks [laughs], which is why I usually just wear t-shirts, because they're pretty, you know, they're not a big-they're pretty standard. Um, but yeah, I do-I do kind of feel

pressure to present a lot more femininely than I usually do just because in the like-dressing up requires that kind of thing. Yeah.

And do you ever think of yourself as masculine?

Not especially, um, it's more-when I like varying from feminine, it's more of a neutral thing than a masculine thing. Yeah.

Do you have any specific relationship with masculinity?

Not especially.

Okay. Do you think of yourself as feminine?

Kind of by default. Yeah-yeah. And like some-some days, you know, some days I really do want to put on like, a pretty dress and swoosh around and it kind of thing, but that's fairly uncommon? Yeah.

Do you have a specific relationship with femininity?

It's there. [Laughs] It's a thing. Sometimes I follow it, sometimes I don't.

Do you ever consciously opposed masculine and or feminine norms?

I, sort of, like, especially when I was younger and there was sort of that fight of just like, no, like I'm a girl and I can still like hot wheels or whatever. Um, it's become less of a problem now, um, the world has advanced past the point where it's just like, oh, you know, like girls shouldn't like rocks, you know, like it's, we're-we're past that point at least within t-to some degree within my field. Like, you know, there is still a lot of issues with like sexual harassment, and like sexist harassment in the field that I'm in, um, but there's not usually-it's very rare to encounter a like, oh, you know, like girls shouldn't do geology or like girls shouldn't do space science kind of stuff, it's more of just like a...like demeaning behavior kind of thing where like you talk to somebody and you're just like, they are not taking me seriously because I'm a woman, like I see how they talk to one of my colleagues who we're at the same kind of level and he's a guy and I'm a girl and they obviously have way more respect for that guy than they do for me kind of thing. Um, but yeah, I mean it's-I guess it is consciously opposing, but it's also just sort of like it's who I am and what I'm interested in, so I'm here and you're going to have to deal with it sort of thing.

Um, do you think asexuality aligns with masculinity, femininity, both or neither?

Um, I'd say neither or both. Um, I don't think that any sexual orientation really aligns with any gender, um, yeah. I think it's just what it is. It's they're-separate. Yeah.

Uh, do you feel that asexuality as an orientation opposes masculine or feminine stereotypes?

Yeah, I think it actually opposes both of them in different ways. With masculine stereotypes since a lot of culture pushes men to be very sexual, that like as a whole it opposes it. And then within feminine stereotypes, um, since there does seem to be this, you know, you're, well, you know, like you're not supposed to have sex until you're married, you know, it's supposed to want sex, you blah, blah, blah, that kind of stuff um, until you're married or with a partner, but then once you have a partner then it's like, oh, you know, if you're like withholding sex from a relationship that's abusive kind of stuff, so it gets a lot more complicated with feminine stereotypes, but I think yeah, it opposes-it opposes a lot of our cultural norms, including gender norms. Yeah.

Does your sexual orientation affected your relationship with your own masculinity or femininity?

Um, as I talked about before with like the body dysphoria, kind of stuff, I feel like it was, um-because there is-there is also a hypersexualization of women, um, in certain circumstances and just like, you know, like parts-really body parts of women, like breasts are really hypersexualized in our culture, um, which a lot of other cultures I know make fun of us for because in, I think it's even like in Europe, like it's-breasts are not really seen as a big huge deal the way that they are over here. Um, and...yeah, I, because of not wanting to be sexualized, um, there are certain types of femininity like certain dress or whatever that even if you know, if it's really hot out, like, you know, it would be nice to be able to just like walk around in a sports bra and shorts because it's so hot out, um, but I would never want to do that because I know that that would be-like I would be getting like cat called or whatever else, you know, because that's just how our society treats women who are showing a lot of skin kind of thing. Um, and I think that that kind of-because I am so-and not the people who aren't asexual enjoy cat calling and stuff like that, but it's just um, like I am-I am so opposed to it like, and it's like I'm opposed to being sexualized and pretty much any context at all, um, that it's-it's a messy, complicated thing. Yeah.

Do you or have you ever felt uncomfortable identifying as asexual?

I have because of not-not on a, like-not that I am uncomfortable with it as myself, like internally, but because of exterior people and their judgment and discrimination and prejudice, et cetera. Um, both within and without of like both inside and outside the queer community, um, straight people kind of don't really know what to do with us, and there's a lot of, um, like issues with like trying to correct asexual behaviors, um, like, there's things like corrective rape and corrective sexual assault and just even like corrective sexual harassment kind of thing. Um, and so that makes it-I-there's certain people that I'm not out to because I don't trust what their response to that would be. Um, and then within the queer community, there's issues where there is, you know, there is that exclusionist movement and it is kind of uncomfortable um, when I am I haven't encountered this in person but online when I've been, you know, like involved with the organization of queer things online and then something related to that, like, you know, I'll-I'll be doing that on a group account sort of thing I'll be running it

through a group account and then like on my personal account, like I'll post something, asexual related for that broad spectrum queer thing and have someone come on to that post and be like, you know, like how dare you bring like-like, you-you don't belong here. And it's just like, bitch, I'm running this event, like you really want to fight me on this? Like um, so like that's always uncomfortable when it's-it's-it's not uncomfortable as much as just like it's just depressing, you know, when it's like I've been one of the leaders organizing something online, you know, like an event sort of thing, and then someone's just like, hey, like you're asexual, you're not welcome to be part of this. And it's like, well it probably wouldn't exist without me because I've been the main one running it, so maybe back off? Um, yeah, so that is really uncomfortable as like being asexual, I often feel like I don't belong with either the straight cis community or the queer community um, because even though I id-identify as queer and like, you know, I really see asexuality and aromantic orientations as being part of the queer community since they're not always welcomed that way, it is-it's hard. Yeah.