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Gender Discrepancy in Asexual Identity: The Effect of Hegemonic Gender Norms on Asexual Identification

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Identifying Asexuality
- Asexual: “someone who experiences little or no sexual attraction” (Mardell 2016).
- Not to be confused with lack of romantic attraction.
- Can be an umbrella term for all identities on the asexual spectrum.
- Cited at 1% of the population (Wellings 1994), but reported high as 4% of individuals aged 18-24 (GLAAD 2017).

Methods
- Asexual Census data for gender distribution, sex assigned at birth.
- Twelve, 15-45 minute, semi-structured interviews.
- One hour focus-group discussion.
- Data analyzed using a modified grounded theory approach (Corbin and Strauss).
- MAXQDA to code data for recurring themes.

Gender Discrepancy

- Figure 1. 63% (n=4379) of respondents to the 2016 Asexual Census, aged 18-30 identified as “Woman/Female”, 11% (n=712) identified as “Man/Male”, and 26% (n=1820) 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.

Why do more women and genderqueer people identify as asexual?
- Lower stigma for not having sex, sometimes expectation that feminine people do not want/desire sex
- Greater communication/discussion of identity—more likely to be exposed to asexuality
- For genderqueer people: exposure to identities from queer community

Do masculine stereotypes dissuade individuals from identifying as asexual?
- Asexuality is often not considered compatible with masculinity
- Social pressure to be masculine—(hetero)sexually active
- Less communication about identity—less likely to learn about asexuality

How do gender expectations affect individuals identifying as asexual?
- Little attachment to gender norms, especially related to masculinity
- Do not want to be sexualized according to outward presentation
- Pressure to conform to sexual standards, especially before discovering asexuality

In Progress
- Further analysis of interviews
- Coding and analysis of 600+ collected surveys
- Completion of discussion and conclusion of honors thesis paper

Future Work
- Account for more variables such as race, country, age, etc.
- Greater depth of recording individual experiences
- Capture perceptions of non-asexual identifying people of how asexuality fits with gender norms.

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