



An Exploratory Qualitative Study of Undergraduate Experiences of Asexuality and Mental Health in the UK

By Jasmine Crosbie (1). Supervised by Elisabeth Sandler (2).

(1) University of Cambridge, Department of Psychological and Behavioural Sciences. (2) University of Cambridge, Department of Sociology

Background

Asexual: an umbrella term describing sexual identities characterised by feeling infrequent to no sexual attraction to others. Can be shortened to "ace".

Asexual people are a part of the LGBTQIA community and make up roughly 1% of the population, however the label lacks recognition and representation.

As a topic asexuality is becoming popular in research however not much has been done specifically into mental health experiences within this marginalised population.

Method

My methods for doing this research involved:

- Interviews: I did 7 in person semi-structured interviews with asexual identifying undergraduates at the University of Cambridge.
- Object elicitation: Participants were invited to bring objects related to their experiences to lead the conversation.
- Transcription and analysis: I transcribed my interviews and analysed them thematically.

Preliminary Findings

I identified 3 broad preliminary themes:

Asexuality - "what's that"

Covers how a lack of available information on asexuality impacts ace experiences, including:

- lack of awareness from others
- need for own research
- pressure to educate others about the identity

Denying Ace Identities "No you're not"

Describes asexual peoples' experiences of dismissal, including:

- self-denial of their identity particularly before coming out
- others denying their identity directly or trying to "explain it away"
- medicalisation of ace identities

Navigating Space and Normative expectations

This looked at ace peoples experiences navigating normative life expectations and within ace and queer spaces, as well as the feelings which originate from these. I focused on this theme in my write up.

Some felt like they were "on the outskirts" of the LGBTQIA community.

Participants often "struggled" to find in person ace spaces and felt like they had "less room" to share experiences.

Normative life expectations meant participants reported feelings of "projected future loneliness".

Some felt they were "missing out" on types of support associated with romantic relationships.

Friendships were important forms of support in reducing loneliness.

Participant Quotes

"...It's more projected loneliness in the future. So I expect that I won't kind of have some kind of partner. I expect I won't have the same kind of support system other people do..."

"If our society viewed platonic and romantic relationships as equal, I wouldn't have this problem."

"...There are probably more spaces that I'm involved in for like trans non-binary people versus like asexual spaces... especially like in person"

"...The queer community is supposed to like... embrace and celebrate all the people that don't fit in. And then it feels like we don't even fit in there.."



Conclusion and Further Suggestions

- This study highlights the need for an increased awareness and education about ace identities, which would be facilitated via more easily available information.
- This would aid in reducing negative stereotypes and stigma around the label.
- Reducing allonormative societal expectations of people to "settle down" would also benefit non-asexual people by lessening pressure on them.
- Further research is needed into experiences of asexuality and mental health. Doing this will platform ace voices in research on queer mental health.

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank my participants for taking the time to share their stories and co-create this research with me.

AVEN "Overview | The Asexual Visibility and Education Network | Asexuality.Org." Accessed August 31, 2023. <https://asexuality.org/?q=overview.html>.
Bogaert, Anthony F. "Asexuality: What It Is and Why It Matters." The Journal of Sex Research 52, no. 4 (May 4, 2015): 362-79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2015.1015713>.
Chan, Randolph C. H., and Janice Sin Yu Leung. "Experiences of Minority Stress and Their Impact on Suicidality among Asexual Individuals." Journal of Affective Disorders 325 (March 15, 2023): 794-803. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2023.01.025>.
Kelleher, Sinéad, and Mike Murphy. "Asexual Identity Development and Internalisation: A Thematic Analysis." Sexual and Relationship Therapy 0, no. 0 (June 22, 2022): 1-29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2022.2091127>.