

## Passing When Asexual: Methods for Appearing Straight

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Before Bogaert's 2004 landmark study, asexuality was a relatively unexplored fringe area of sexual identity. Prior to Bogaert, the only work that had significantly acknowledged asexuality was the famed Kinsey Scale, which had labeled it as "no socio-sexual contacts or reactions" (Kinsey 1948). Asexuality is still a largely unknown and under-researched sexuality. In short, an asexual person is someone who does not experience sexual attraction to anyone. It is often confused with celibacy or chastity due to a lack of understanding, or incorrectly diagnosed by psychologists as hypoactive sexual desire disorder or HSDD (Bogaert 2015). For those reasons asexuality can be difficult to understand, even to those who identify with it, leaving researchers and participants alike with more questions than there are academic answers. Asexuality is a sexual identity in the same way that homosexuality, pansexuality, bisexuality, etc are and therefore exhibits similar trends and rituals. Such rituals include coming out, or the alternative – passing. Passing preserves the status quo of heterosexuality, but is often associated with uncertainty, disillusionment, and self-doubt on the part of the person passing (Chow and Cheng 2010). In a world so sexualized, from advertisements to TV shows and movies, the discovery and acceptance (or lack thereof) of one's asexuality is often shrouded with uncertainty. It is due to this uncertainty and lack of information that more research on asexuality be done and prompting the question, what passing methods are used by those in the asexual community? This question is answered using the testimonies of eight participants, as well as existing research on the topic, and the researcher's own power of implication.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Definition*

Bogaert (2015) states that there are many ways to define asexuality. However, he points to a main definition of it as someone who does not experience sexual attraction, and emphasizes the importance of self-identification in defining asexuality. Identification is a main factor in ascribing to asexual themes, and in fact is a crucial part of what separates it from definitions of HSDD found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (Bogaert 2015). He further expresses that celibacy and chastity are two misconceptions that are often perceived to be the same as asexuality, when in fact they are very different. Celibacy and chastity are choices in which the participating members often experience sexual desire, but choose to abstain from it. Further, in defining asexuality there is a difference between romantic and sexual desire. Romantic desires and sexual desires do not have to link up, for example, it is possible to be romantically attracted to men, but sexually attracted to women. Again, it is the emphasis and use of the word “sex” which holds the most importance in defining asexuality. This theme of self-identification is further supported by Pacho (2013). Pacho postulates that asexuality differs from other sexualities in that it denies and defies sex-normative institutions present in our society. Pacho argues that it is this defiance that defines the backbone of the asexual community (Pacho 2013). Bogaert’s research indicates that he would likely support this claim, as his article discusses that one of the main reasons that asexuality is an important field of study *is* that separation from the sex-normative world. Asexuality, he argues, provides a lens through which researchers can observe the interactions of people whose lives are not impacted by sexual desire; “asexual people stand in contrast to the heterosexual majority” (Bogaert 2015). Cerankowski and Milks (2010) state that asexuality can be explored in relation to other

theories. They specifically explore how asexuality interacts with feminist and queer theories, emphasizing that all of these fields are continuing to evolve, and noting that it is quite possible that asexuality may someday be a field of study all its own. Until then, though, Cerankowski and Milks describe that asexual studies interact with other theories. They state that asexual studies in many ways come in conflict with radical, pro-sex feminism that view a lack of sex as a repressive mechanism perpetuated by the patriarchy (Cerankowski and Milks 2010). In relation to queer theories, the authors raise an important point. Queer as a word generally stands for strange, or abnormal. The term “queer” has long been linked specifically to sexual deviance and, in reclamations of the word, a celebration of that sexuality (Cerankowski and Milks 2010). They also raise several questions regarding how the asexual community, one that celebrates a lack of sex, can fit into that definition of queer without distancing it from the defining aspect of sex. In defining the asexual identity, it is equally important to explore how actual people approach asexuality, and the experiences of those who identify with this orientation.

### *Identification*

Houdenrove, Gijs, and Enzlin (2015) describe the experiences of asexual women and identity development. Houdenrove et al. suggest that many people adopt identities in a series of steps. Initially, the person experiences exclusion from their peer group and became self-questioning, second, the person would form hypothetical solutions for their differences. Third, the individual tests those hypotheses, and fourth, the individual accepts and adopts the asexual community (Houdenrove et al. 2015). This creates feelings of self-acceptance that Cerankowski and Milks attribute to the strength of related online communities (Cerankowski and Milks 2010). Furthermore, of the 35 women in Houdenrove et al., 33 felt a deep connection to online asexual communities, and in 32 of those cases, the connection was to

AVEN. Houdenove et al. also explored why asexual women enter relationships, and how they feel after doing so. In one woman's testimony, she states that her lack of desire for sex has caused rifts with her sexual partner, who views their occasional sexual encounters as inadequate. Another woman stated that discovering that she was asexual made it a lot easier for her to approach men because she no longer viewed heterosexual interactions as an arena for impending sexual conduct. Houdenove et al. concluded that the wide array of responses about sex in the face of asexuality indicate that asexuality could be one of the most diverse sexual orientations (Houdenove et al. 2015).

#### *Diversity*

Research on asexuality has often been criticized for lacking diversity, however Decker (2014) postulates that there are social reasons that asexual men, as well as asexual people of color, are difficult to locate. Decker (2014) states that since men are expected to define themselves on the basis of sexual conquest, they are less likely to publicly identify as asexual due fears associated with the challenge of their masculinity (Decker 2014). Houdenove et al. (2015) indicates that toxic masculinity plays a large role in this lack of identification. Decker (2014) claims that, because the largest, most public asexual advocacy groups are fronted by white people and white voices, asexual people of color may feel uncomfortable entering those spaces, and if they do enter, may feel as if their voices would be erased (Decker 2014).

#### *Coming Out*

Research on coming out and passing has almost exclusively involved the homosexual and transsexual communities, with no known research on the coming out or passing processes of those in the asexual community. Despite this, it is important to understand existing research so that similarities and differences in asexual experiences can be observed.

Research on the coming out process of gay men highlights that it often begins with feelings of alienation stemming from the fact that their public education does not provide information about homosexuality. For example, Perrin-Wallqvist and Lindblom (2015) find that upon identifying as homosexual, their participants reported feelings of anxiety and uneasiness as they faced coming out to their families. Furthermore, Chow and Cheng (2010) explain that lesbians often came out to their friends before coming out to their families. This occurred largely because they felt as if their friends had chosen them, and would be more accepting than the family that hadn't chosen them (Perrin-Wallqvist and Lindblom 2015). Heatherington and Levner (2008) further state that a large reason for both of the aforementioned phenomena was that homosexual people felt as if they couldn't control the reactions of their family members, and the fear of estrangement from the family unit created within them an unwillingness to come out. Perrin-Wallqvist and Lindblom (2015) reported that this phenomenon occurred despite the fact that one participant stated, "deep down I knew they wouldn't love me less, but I had that feeling anyway. I still feared that that could happen" (2015: 474). After coming out, Perrin-Wallqvist and Lindblom (2015) reported that their participants experienced relief, and felt more comfortable in their personal identities. Furthermore, Chow and Cheng (2010) elaborate that parents of homosexuals expressed varying degrees of anger, disappointment, or relief. All of this culminated in overall feelings of relief for the homosexual person, and a feeling that they no longer had to devote stressful time and effort to hiding such an integral part of their identities (Perrin-Wallqvist and Lindblom, 2015).

### *Passing*

An identity that differs from the accepted norm can often come with negative reactions. Sexual deviance, in the form of homosexuality for example, can create divides in social and/or

familial relationships. In order to minimize these, those who identify with deviance will often engage in passing techniques. Passing describes a process by which one attempts to blend in with the majority (Heatherington and Levner, 2008). Borgeson and Valeri (2015) conducted research on gay skinheads, significantly discovering that the uber-masculinity of skinhead culture causes gay men within it to minimize their homosexuality as a means by which to fit in. Healy (1996) reminds that traditional skinhead culture was born of a desire to rebel against the effeminate. Borgeson and Valeri (2015) state that a passing technique used by gay skinheads is to react in an exaggerated manner toward anything perceived as effeminate. Anderson (1987) states that this negative reaction towards femininity likely stems from the perception that homosexuality is synonymous with femininity. Thus, when a gay man passes as straight, that can often take the form of distancing oneself from stereotypes of the gay community (Anderson 1987).

The literature review highlights the fact that there has been academic research done on the topic of asexuality. However, there are significant holes when it comes to passing methods and coming out experiences – two topics that are integral to communities of sexual minorities. My research begins to fill those holes.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Procedure*

I conducted this study in a qualitative manner because quantitative, statistical, research would fail to accurately represent the stigmatization felt and experienced by those in the asexual community. As everyone views stigma differently, it would also be difficult for a researcher to accurately report on the surveyed stigma when being knowledgeable of a variable of that scope. During the course of my research, 5 of the 8 participants stated that the personal discussion about stigma and identification were the parts of the interview they viewed to be the most important.

This trend indicates what has been previously stated – that this research required qualitative research because quantitative research would lack the personal component gained through one-on-one interviews (Tracy 4).

The interviews were conducted in person or via Skype or FaceTime. Each interview lasted between 25 and 45 minutes, and often required some deviation from or manipulation of the Interview Guide. This was an adaptation that I had to make in order for the interviews to flow smoothly. I discovered that face-to-face interviews yielded the best conversation and results, as the occasional faulty internet connection could lead to a missed nonverbal queue. The interviews evolved slowly. A lot of this was due to a learning curve on my end, during which I developed better conversation skills within the context of interviews. Further, after an interview with an MTF (male-to-female) transgender woman, I added a question about pronoun preference to my closing questions (Appendix A). This decision was applauded by several participants, one of whom remarked that no one had ever asked her about her pronoun preference before (Emily 2017). After the interviews took place, they were transcribed, and coded. The coding criteria involved categories for the following: difference, connection, lack of time, family, supportive, medical, phase, invisibility, community, unnecessary, avoidance, censor, confusing, personal, happy. These were further added to larger themes: Discovering ID, Views of Asexuality, Coming Out Reasons, Coming Out Reactions, Asexual Connections, Passing Reasons. A more thorough breakdown is available (Appendix B). After coding was completed, I analyzed the interviews by applying drawing connections between the themes in each of them. I started seeing trends, such as the prevalence of avoidance as a passing technique. These observations allowed me to draw appropriate conclusions.

### *Participants*

My research project uses personal qualitative interviews. Participants for the project were found by snowball sampling, in which I posted advertisements on asexual community Facebook pages, as well as my own personal Facebook page. I was also able to use convenience sampling to reach out to several asexual people who I already knew and request to interview them (Tracy 135). Once I had found the participant, I made contact to determine level of interest, and scheduled an interview date and location. I provided them with a copy of the consent form (Appendix C), which they signed and returned to be at the time of the interview or before. I permitted electronic signatures when necessary. There were 8 participants in this study, between 20 and 45 years of age, female, and predominantly white. The lack of men in the participant group can be blamed on toxic masculinity, and the lack of racial diversity on marginalization of communities of color (Decker 2014).

#### *Justification*

This research was necessary because of the lack of existing research on the topic. Passing techniques have long been viewed only through the lenses of homosexuality or transsexuality. However, the evidence gathered in my literature review as well as through my research proves that asexual people use passing techniques as well. There needs to be more research done in this area. Asexuality is an under-researched sexuality in academia. The majority of what exists for consumption is Tumblr blogs, or personal anecdotes on websites such as The Odyssey and BuzzFeed.

#### FINDINGS

In my research, I discovered how and why asexual people identify, view the community, come out, and pass. Several of the participants expressed desires that more people do this type of



research, highlighting existing research suggesting that an abundance of resources can make self-identification an easier process (Heatherington and Levner 2008).

### *Discovering Identity*

Imagine that every time you walked into a room, people were talking about their experiences with aliens as if there was nothing abnormal about it. In fact, it was the norm. This is how Anne, a 37-year-old MTF (male to female) transgender woman, felt every day throughout her school years. Anne didn't discover her asexuality quickly. Unlike homosexuality, which is a household term, asexuality is rarely recognized as a legitimate sexuality. Anne states that, while she would engage in "locker room talk" with the boys in her class for fear of being singled out if she didn't, she never truly understood or related to the content. Karen, a 21-year-old college student in St. Louis, stated that "I didn't even know that that [asexuality] was a thing until college." Emily, a 22-year-old teacher in Southern Illinois, tells a similar story. She and Elayne, 21, both describe having mis-identified as demisexual (sexual attraction only occurs when a strong emotional bond has been formed) before realizing that they were truly asexual (Decker 2014). Despite the fact that the four women discovered their identities at vastly different times in their lives, their stories of self-discovery reveal similarities. All women in this study recall feeling "different" throughout their teen years. However, unlike Karen, Elayne, and Emily, who were able to Google the term once they learned it, Anne didn't have the Internet in the mid-90's when she was facing several identity crises related to being transgender, intersex, as well as asexual. "It was a rough time," she recalls. All respondents cited feeling relieved once they discovered asexuality. Toni, a 20-year-old pursuing her associates degree, refers to 'asexual' as "the word," stating that hearing it "was a eureka moment." Karen recalls a similar experience, stating that hearing the word was a relief after feeling different and distant from her friends and

colleagues for so long. Compellingly, all respondents found security in self-definition and reported fewer instances of feeling left out once they began identifying (Theresa Interview). "It was like finding out a secret about myself. I no longer had to hide from myself," Sam reported.

#### *Views of Asexuality*

An interesting facet of my research was the revelation that asexuals themselves had thoughts about asexuality. These ideas and feelings did not necessarily fit into the other categories, and are therefore deserving of their own.

Overwhelmingly, respondents view asexuality as a confusing sexual minority. Karen states that, "it's like a spectrum in and of itself... it's confusing." Even once they have fully identified as asexual, respondents such as Emily and Karen recall times when they have questioned themselves, and have wondered at the accuracy of their identification. "Asexuality is different from other orientations – it is a spectrum, and it encompasses romantic orientations within it," Anne says, referring to the fact that an asexual person can have romantic feelings for the same sex and thus identify as homoromantic. Emily, for example, identifies as panromantic asexual, meaning that she is romantically attracted to all genders. She states that discovering her panromanticism was much more of a journey than discovering her asexuality, and that she didn't identify as panromantic until she became romantically attracted to a genderfluid person. She explains that panromanticism adds another, unexpected, layer to her experiences as asexual. Theresa, a 30-year-old accountant in Tennessee, wishes that there were more resources for asexuals, explaining that she finds herself constantly needing to reaffirm her identity, but rarely having the necessary resources at her disposal. Theresa's testimony highlights the negative toll that a lack of resources can take on a person struggling with their identity. It is notable that none of the respondents feel negatively towards their identity, in fact, Elayne states that she often

brags to her boyfriend that asexuals are the best partners because they'll "never even cheat on you in their minds." There is also the topic of sex. Some asexuals identify as sex-positive which, according to Anne, means that they are open to having sex despite not experiencing sexual attraction. On the other end of the spectrum are people like Theresa, who identifies as sex-repulsed meaning she finds the idea of sex revolting in addition to not experiencing sexual attraction. Anne states that, of the minimal asexual representations in media, even fewer of them are sex-positive, which only adds to the confusion that her identity represents.

#### *Coming Out Reasons*

Coming out is an oft-talked about ritual that non cis-heterosexual people must go through in order to be correctly identified. This is because heterosexual is the assumed orientation. Given the invisibility of asexuality, I wondered how and if asexual people came out. During the course of the interviews I discovered that, of the participants, only Anne is fully out to the majority of her friends and family. She states that a large reason for coming out was that she didn't want to feel like she was hiding anymore. Theresa, Emily, Elayne, and Karen are all out to their social circles. Their reasons for this are broadly similar, with some specific differences. Broadly, they are out to their college friends because, in Karen's words, "they are more open. They understand. I didn't have to explain what asexuality is to them." For Emily, her reasons for coming out to her college friends stem back to her home life. "Most of home is very conservative," she says. Toni states that she was emboldened to come out because a close friend came out before her. "Once she came out, it was much easier for me to do the same. I didn't feel so alone."

#### *Coming Out Reactions*

As important as it is to understand why a person chooses to disclose their sexual identity, it is equally important to understand how that identity was received by those that the individual

chose to disclose to. Surprisingly, but not unhappily, many of my participants reported receiving no negative reactions to the announcement. Elayne states that her friends just went about their days when she told them, and Emily recalls how her friends barely reacted at all when she came out to them as panromantic. However, there were those that did receive negative reactions. Theresa, for example, recalls coming out to a close friend who told her that she was just going through a phase. "I remember thinking that this was ironic coming from her as she also identifies with a sexual minority" (Theresa Interview). Anne did not go into much detail but recalls sardonically that she lost a few friends who didn't believe that asexuality was real, "I'm not a fucking unicorn," she stated sarcastically. Toni faced the harsh reality of misunderstanding when she came out to her mother, who she states is her number one confidant. "My mom basically told me that I was lying, and that I needed to get over myself. It really hurt" (Toni Interview).

### *Passing*

In a world in which cisgender and heterosexual is the norm and deviations are stigmatized, many choose to distance themselves from that stigma using what sociologists refer to as passing techniques. The technique that is most often used by far is that of avoidance. Karen states that it is almost too easy to pass as straight at home because she doesn't talk about sex with her family. "They're never going to come up to me and ask, 'hey Karen are you doing the sex?' No, that would be weird" (Karen Interview). Elayne and Theresa expressed similar notions of family. In some regards, the fallacy that asexuality is akin to celibacy seems to make passing easier. "My family would prefer to pretend that I'm not having sex anyway, so why would I tell them that I'm asexual," (Sam Interview). Emily quips that "home is a little more conservative," which makes her desire to pass even stronger. Further, she holds strong ties with her church, so when it comes to asexuality, she simply smiles and nods when her family suggests that she spend

time with young men in the church. "It helps that I'm sex-positive, in terms of passing, but I'm still not interested," (Emily Interview). Elayne is currently student teaching a high school class for her certification. She states that she never actively tried to pass until she was teaching her students about different sexualities, "when I started talking about asexuality, I had to focus on saying 'they' not 'we' and I really noticed myself actually trying to conceal my identity then." Debby, a 23-year-old musical graduate student in the Southern United States, fears losing her boyfriend if she fails to pass successfully. "There's a lot of homophobia there," she says sadly. She's almost positive that he and his family would react negatively to finding out that she is asexual. She loves her boyfriend and believes that she is happy with him, so she continues to pass. Similar fears are felt by Emily, who states that, while she doesn't believe that her nuclear family would reject her because of her asexuality, she fears that her church would. "It wasn't until last year that I finally told someone in the church about my identity, and I definitely worry more that someone else might find out on accident." She stressed heavily that she fears the exposure of her panromantic identity much more than that of her asexual identity. There are also those like Theresa and Sam, both of whom pass by avoidance, but neither of whom are concerned with the notion of people finding out. Theresa states that she is mainly worried about having to explain to her family what asexuality is, if they ever found out. Sam's interview revealed similar sentiments, "I just don't want to have to answer a ton of questions, and asexuality isn't like homosexuality where everyone already knows what you mean when you come out, so I know that I'd have to." Toni, Elayne, and Emily all find solace in simply going along with "the sexuals," as Elayne calls the sexual majority. She elaborates, "whenever someone says that another person is attractive, I just smile and nod. Life goes on."

### *Asexual Connections*

The asexual community is not a large one, or a prominently visible one. Pride Parades don't make the news for their inclusion of the asexual community, and the invisibility of the orientation often leaves asexuals feeling lost and confused, alone. My research unveiled a strong correlation between having other asexuals to talk to and decreased feelings of loneliness. Elayne and Karen make up the positive end of this, where Debby and Theresa the negative end. Elayne and Karen both have several friends who are asexual. Elayne's brother-in-law is demisexual, and she has an albeit small group of friends who are also asexual. She states that the group doesn't always talk about being asexual, but when she needs to talk about it, they're there. Karen reports similar comforts, stating that while she doesn't have more than three friends who are asexual, she does have several friends who fall under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella and who can sympathize. This is not to say that Karen and Elayne never experienced feelings of loneliness, they both reported that they did, however the inclusion in informal communities helped them, and are continuing to help them with self-acceptance. The feeling is especially true for Anne, who faced discovering her identity in a time before widespread internet and definitely before widespread knowledge of asexuality. She now finds herself relatively comfortable with a group of LGBTQIA+ people that she meets up with biweekly. Debby has no such support system. She expressed to how she felt like she could never talk to anyone about the way she felt, and how deeply the loneliness penetrates. Similarly, Theresa has no friends who are asexual and no close friends who are LGBTQIA+. She told me how she feels alone, and lost in a world that puts so much emphasis on sexual conquest and desire.

### *Analysis*

The research indicated that coming out occurs in liberal spaces and passing occurs in conservative spaces. The findings showed that all but one participant both passed and are out to some extent. The great majority of the participants were out to friends at college, a typically liberal space. This is revealed by the fact that Karen reported that she came out to her college friends because she knew that they would accept her. Emily and Elayne reported similar experiences and reasons for coming out. Conversely, participants showed tendencies to pass at home and in church, both traditionally conservative areas. Families were reported as being less understanding, or at least less knowledgeable, than the environment at school (Emily, Toni, Karen, Sam Interviews). The final analysis of the research indicates a strong sentiment that the information that is available for people new to the asexual community is largely inadequate and difficult to find. This reveals that there is a legitimate need for more widely available information about asexuality, not only for those who are beginning to identify but also for those who do identify as well as families that need to understand. Passing is a perceived necessity that has long been associated with sexual deviance, and minority status (Wallqvist and Lindblom 2015). Understanding how and why asexual people pass is a crucial facet of understanding asexuality as a whole.

### LIMITATIONS

This study is limited primarily in numbers and in diversity. Initially in numbers, the study only contains the testimonies of eight participants. This is not enough to gather truly conclusive evidence, and suggests strongly that further research is in order to prove any of the conclusions gathered from the study. Time allocation also limited the study, as I only had one semester to find and interview participants. This prevented me from finding a larger sample size that would

have provided more conclusive evidence. The nature of qualitative research is such that interaction with participants takes more time, leading to a disparity in sample size. Furthermore, the study is limited in diversity. As noted, the research participants were all female, and all but one biracial participant was white. While I could speculate as to the reasoning behind this, there is research suggesting that this study may look similar demographically even in one on a larger scale. Toxic masculinity, or the phenomenon suggesting that the patriarchy is detrimental to men as well as women, can be largely blamed for the lack of men in this study. To a point, Decker (2014) states that since men are expected to define themselves on the basis of sexual conquest, they are less likely to publicly identify as asexual due fears associated with the challenge of their masculinity (Decker 2014). I cannot say for certain what accounted for the lack of racial diversity in the study, but I would postulate that the reason lies in the marginalization of communities of color. For example, Decker (2014) claims that, because the largest, most public asexual advocacy groups are fronted by white people and white voices, asexual people of color may feel uncomfortable entering those spaces, and if they do enter, may feel as if their voices would be erased (Decker 2014).

The final limitation to this study is my own identification as asexual. This presents a limitation because it was impossible for me to completely separate my experiences from those of my participants. This led to unintended biases towards participants, as well as a bias towards the need for additional research in this area of study.

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study drew on the interviews with eight participants on their experiences with coming out and passing as asexual. The research showed that asexual people primarily engage in avoidance techniques to pass as straight. The research indicates heavily that asexuals find it relatively



simple to pass simply by avoiding the topic of sex. Throughout the interviews I got a sense that, while the participants feel comfortable with their own identities, they don't necessarily share the opinion that the collective world should be on board (Karen, Elayne Interviews). The asexual community has long been invisible; that invisibility has largely been attributed to the shortcomings of a sex-normative culture (Wong 2015). However, it appears that those within the community have had an impact on that invisibility as well. The decision to come out or pass is an intensely personal decision, and one that often comes with implications for the mental and emotional health of the person (Chow and Cheng 2010). Asexual people are choosing to pass and it is perhaps due to the fact that, while media is rife with sex, families and schools are not. Is it possible that abstinence-only sexual education is creating an environment in which recreational sex is a taboo in the home? If so, a dichotomy is being presented. On one hand, liberal spaces such as colleges and social circles promote freedom of consensual sexual expression. On the other hand, the conservative spaces – family life, church, politics – promote censorship of that same sexual expression. This could explain why 7 of the 8 participants were out of the closet while simultaneously engaging in passing. Further research is necessary to determine the extent to which the aforementioned dichotomy is true. If this research is conducted and the results found to be significant, it could present implications for both sides of the abstinence-only debate. When that debate is applied to the experiences of the asexual community, it becomes evident that asexual people will continue to toe the line between being completely out and completely closeted. The manner in which society discusses sex, and the places in which those discussions occur, impacts the ways in which sexual minorities discuss sex as well. In terms of asexuality, this involves capitalizing on conservative vernacular of sex (or the lack thereof) in order to avoid appearing deviant. The broader sociological issue is that asexuality is perceived to be sexually

deviant at all. Heterosexuality is the only sexual identity not societally viewed to be deviant. However, activism, outreach, and academic research on the topic of more well-known sexual minorities has proven to be effective in bringing about social acceptance (Chasin 2013). In order for asexuality to be socially accepted, society needs to know that it exists. As evidenced by hate crimes and legislation against homosexuality, simply bringing asexuality into the public eye is not enough. However, it is a crucial first step. It should not be the last.

APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

*Italics* denotes statements important to continuance of interview.

**Bold** denotes a new topic to frame the following questions.

General Demographic Questions

*Hello, my name is Taylor Rossi and I am conducting this interview for my senior thesis that looks into passing techniques used by asexual people. I would like to remind you that you have filled out an informed consent form, stating that you understand the risks/benefits/purpose of this interview and that you may leave the interview or the study if at any time you feel uncomfortable or that you no longer desire to be a part of it. To begin, I would like to ask you a few basic questions about yourself, and then we'll jump into some more research-specific questions. This interview should take no longer than an hour. Are you ready?*

1. What is your name?
2. Tell me about yourself
  - a. How old are you?
  - b. How would you describe your ethnicity?
  - c. Where are you from?
3. How do you identify as asexual?

Interview Questions (some adapted from previous research done in 2013, Houdenhove et al)

4. At what age did you begin to identify as asexual?
5. How central is asexuality to your identity?
6. Tell me how you felt when you discovered you were asexual.
7. Tell me about discovering the asexual community.
  - a. Specific events/realizations/etc
8. What does your perfect world look like?
  - a. If they don't bring up facets of asexuality: what about in terms of your asexual identity?
9. Physical Community Involvement
  - a. Are you involved in asexual pride events?
  - b. Why or why not?
  - c. How has this community provided support to you?
10. Online Community Involvement
  - a. How active are you in online asexual communities?
  - b. Tell me about your transition into online asexual communities?
  - c. Do you feel that online asexual communities have helped you?
    - i.Emotionally?
    - ii.With accepting/finding your identity?
    - iii.Physically?
    - iv.Mentally?
11. Coming Out
  - a. Does anyone, not online, know that you identify as asexual?
  - b. How did you choose to (not) come out?
  - c. If out – why did you choose those people to come out to?
  - d. If out—describe reactions of those you told.
  - e. If not out – describe why not?

12. Passing Techniques
  - a. *The following questions are in relation to passing techniques. Some will be excluded depending on whether the interviewee is out to many people or not (this information gleaned from previous questions in "coming out.")*
  - b. Prior to coming out, how did you pass?
    - i. How did you respond when friends/family asked about sexual relationships/child-bearing/etc?
  - c. If you aren't out, how do you respond when friends/family ask about sexual relationships/other questions?
  - d. *Brief description of what passing is, stigmatized identities, other groups try to pass before coming out, etc. (if needed)*
  - e. How often did you think about this process of passing?
  - f. Did you/do you engage in any strategies?
    - i. What were they?
    - ii. How did they work?
    - iii. How effective were they?
  - g. How did passing make you feel?
  - h. How did you think about the passing process?
  - i. If you are no longer passing, how do you reflect on that process?
  - j. What advice would you give to someone who is passing?
13. *This is the end of my portion of the interview, What did you think was the most important thing we discussed in this interview? I want an idea of which questions you liked vs questions that you didn't.*
14. Do you have anything else that you would like to add?
15. *I have one more thing to wrap up and then you can be on your way. I will be creating fake names for the purposes of data presentation. I can make one up for you, or is there a name that you would prefer I use? What pronouns would you like me to use in reference to your fake name?*
16. *(Name), thank you again for participating in this interview. Can I contact you in the future if I think of something else to ask? Would you like to receive transcripts from the interview and/or the final paper upon completion? If so, could you provide me with an email address, please?*

## Appendix B

### Interview Coding Guide

#### Categories

Difference, Connection, Lack of time, Family, Supportive, Medical, Phase, Invisibility, Community, Unnecessary, Avoidance, Censor, Confusing, Personal, Happy.

#### Themes

Discovering Identity, Views of Asexuality, Coming Out Reasons, Coming Out Reactions, Asexual Connections, Passing Reasons

#### Convergence of Categories and Themes

1. Discovering Identity
  - a. Connection
  - b. Happy
  - c. Difference
  - d. Personal
  - e. Confusing
2. Views of Asexuality
  - a. Personal
  - b. Supportive
  - c. Confusing
3. Coming Out Reasons
  - a. Supportive
  - b. Community
  - c. Family
  - d. Invisibility
  - e. Unnecessary
4. Coming Out Reactions
  - a. Confusing
  - b. Medical
  - c. Phase
  - d. Supportive
5. Asexual Connections
  - a. Connection
  - b. Supportive
  - c. Lack of time
  - d. Community
  - e. Censor
6. Passing Reasons
  - a. Family
  - b. Confusing
  - c. Invisibility
  - d. Unnecessary
  - e. Avoidance

Appendix C

Consent Form

The purpose of this research is to determine the existence and/or effectiveness of passing techniques used by those who identify as asexual. The research topic, interview guide, and the following consent form have been approved by the McKendree Institutional Review Board. Any questions, comments, or concerns that you have regarding the research may be directed to myself or my advisor, Dr. Stephen Hagan, at the numbers or emails listed below.

Consent for Participation in Interview Research

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read and understand the following consent form.

1. My participation in this interview is voluntary. I can withdraw from the project at any time, with no repercussions. Should I decide to withdraw my consent, all of my interview data will be removed from the project.
2. It is the goal of the interviewer that I do not feel uncomfortable, however, I understand that if at any time, I do feel uncomfortable, I have the right to inform the interviewer and stop or pause the interview.
3. I understand that the purpose of this research is to determine the existence and/or effectiveness of passing techniques used by people who are asexual
4. I understand that the duration of this interview is between 30 minutes and one hour.
5. I understand that I will not be identified by my actual name, but rather by an appropriate pseudonym.
6. I understand that this research and the interview questions have been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board, or the IRB, at McKendree University.
7. The interviewer has answered any and all questions that I have asked concerning the contents and procedure of the interview.
8. I understand that I will receive no (\$0) compensation for my involvement in this research.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please contact

Taylor Rossi  
[tmrossi@mckendree.edu](mailto:tmrossi@mckendree.edu)  
217-381-4062  
or  
Dr. Stephen Hagan  
[sphagan@mckendree.edu](mailto:sphagan@mckendree.edu)  
618-537-6904

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