

Attitudes Towards Sexual Behaviors: Asexuals Versus Heterosexuals, Homosexuals, And Bisexuals

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Abstract

Prior research on attitudes towards sexual behaviors has largely focused on gender differences, rather than on sexual orientation. I examined people's views of sexual relationships and behaviors, comparing asexuals (people who do not experience sexual attraction) to non-asexuals (heterosexuals, homosexuals, or bisexuals). I hypothesized that asexuals would consider heterosexual, homosexual, and polyamorous relationships to be more personally acceptable than non-asexuals would. I hypothesized that there would be no difference between asexuals' and non-asexuals' ratings of the social acceptability of the three relationship types. I also hypothesized that there would be differences between asexuals' and non-asexuals' attitudes towards sexual behaviors. I recruited participants from Hendrix College (N=140) and from the Asexuality Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) forums (N=152). Participants were asked to rate the acceptability of heterosexual, homosexual, and polyamorous relationships, how acceptable society considered those relationships, and the acceptability of various sexual behaviors on a seven-point Likert scale. Asexuals were less accepting of heterosexual relationships than non-asexuals, but more accepting of homosexual relationships and polyamorous relationships than non-asexuals. There were no differences in social acceptability of heterosexual, homosexual, or polyamorous relationships between asexual and non-asexual participants. There were no significant differences found between asexuals and non-asexuals in attitudes towards masturbation, casual sex, pornography, erotica, sadomasochism, bondage, autoerotic asphyxiation, dominance/submission, exhibitionism, or voyeurism. Asexuals were more accepting of prostitution and extramarital sex (defined as sex outside marriage with one's spouse's consent) than non-asexuals. This acceptance of polyamorous relationships, extramarital sex with partner's consent, and prostitution may indicate that asexuals may be more likely to consider these options when in a relationship with a non-asexual.

Keywords: Asexuality, Attitudes Towards Sexual Behaviors, Sexual Relationships

1. Introduction

Prior research on sexual attitudes has largely focused on gender differences, rather than on sexual orientation. Hendrick, Hendrick, Slapion-Foote, and Foote⁷ administered a 102 item questionnaire about sexual attitudes to 800 University of Miami students. They showed that men thought casual sex was acceptable, while women thought it was unacceptable. Both genders thought premarital sex was acceptable, though men were slightly more accepting of it than women were. Overall, they showed that women were more sexually responsible and conventional than men, while men were more sexually permissive than women.

Oliver and Hyde⁸ conducted a meta-analysis examining 177 studies on sexual attitudes and behaviors. They revealed that men were more permissive of most sexual behaviors than women were. Attitudes most notably differed toward extramarital sex, with men being much more accepting of it than women. Oliver and Hyde found no difference in attitudes towards homosexuality. They found that eleven of the twenty-one sexual attitudes and behaviors they examined correlated with the year the data was collected. They observed smaller gender differences over time in attitudes towards premarital sex, extramarital sex, and homosexuality.

Petersen and Shibley⁹ conducted another meta-analysis, covering studies of sexual attitudes from 1993-2007, and found no gender differences when examining attitudes towards extramarital sex or masturbation. They found that men were slightly more permissive than women regarding premarital sex, extramarital sex, and moderately more permissive regarding casual sex. Women were slightly more accepting of homosexuality. Much like Oliver and Hyde, Petersen and Shibley found decreases in gender differences in attitudes towards sexual behaviors have been declining over time. I am interested in continuing this research on people's views of sexual relationships and behaviors, with an eye towards participants' sexual orientation in addition to gender.

In 2004, Anthony Bogaert investigated data from a British survey of over 18,000 individuals, and determined that approximately 1% consisted of asexuals. However, while this study examined a number of demographic measures, no questions were asked about sexual attitudes³.

Brotto, Knudson, Inskip, Rhodes, and Erskine conducted both quantitative and qualitative surveys of 187 asexuals recruited from the Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN)⁶. The quantitative survey covered information about their relationships and sex lives, including frequency of sexual behaviors such as sexual fantasies, masturbation, and sexual intercourse. The researchers found that only 27% of the asexuals they studied reported having ever had sexual intercourse. They also found that 80% of men and 77% of women reported some frequency of masturbation.

Despite this research on sexual behavior, no research has yet been done on asexuals' attitudes towards sexual behaviors, perhaps due to their rarity in the general population^{3,4}. I intended to fill this gap in the current research. I am particularly interested in how asexuals (people who do not experience sexual attraction) compare to heterosexuals, homosexuals, or bisexuals. I intended to ask about relationships ranging from the typical (heterosexual), less typical (homosexual), to atypical (polyamorous). Similarly, the behaviors will range from typical (masturbation) to atypical (various paraphilias). Because asexuals experience little to no sexual attraction, I believe they will see all three types of consenting relationships as equally valuable, and will thus regard them as very acceptable. My hypotheses are that asexual participants will consider each of the sexual relationships and behaviors to be more personally acceptable than non-asexuals (heterosexuals, homosexuals, and bisexuals) will, and that there will be no difference in perceived social acceptability (how accepted participants think the three relationship types are by society) of heterosexual, homosexual, or polyamorous relationships between asexual and non-asexual participants.

2. Method

Participants were recruited from among Hendrix students via the daily digest email "Hendrix Today", from emails to introductory psychology classes and a psychopharmacology class, and from SONA, the psychology department's research facilitation program. Participants were also recruited via a post made on the Asexuality Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) forums. AVEN is a network focused on fostering an asexual community, and providing a source of information¹. They encourage research to further knowledge about asexuals, and have policies for allowing researchers to recruit participants from among their members to facilitate research. I chose to recruit from AVEN because they are the largest source of asexual participants available, and have a significant focus on facilitating research. These factors made AVEN an excellent source of participants.

Due to the online nature and sensitive topic, the consent form explicitly included the requirement that participants be US residents at least eighteen years old. Because sex may be a sensitive topic, particularly for conservative participants, the sexual nature of the questions was explicitly disclosed in the consent form.

There were 341 participants. Twenty-five did not complete the study, and one participant was excluded based on a reported age of 15. That left a total of 315 participants. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 63 years old, with a median of 20 and a mode of 19 ($M = 22.75$, $SD = 7.13$). Fifteen participants did not report their ages. On average, asexual participants were older ($M = 24.17$, $SD = 8.248$) than non-asexuals ($M = 21.91$, $SD = 6.254$), $t(300) = 2.687$, $p < 0.01$. Asexual participants ranged in age from 18 to 63, with a median age of 21 and a mode of 19. Non-asexual participants ranged in age from 18 to 62, with a median age of 20 and a mode of 19.

One hundred and ninety-seven participants (62.5%) reported their gender as primarily female, 78 (24.8%) reported their gender as primarily male, 20 (6.3%) reported that their gender was a mix of both male and female, 19 (6.0%) reported that their gender was neither male nor female, and one participant (0.3%) chose not to answer. Of the asexual participants, 68 (57.6%) of 118 reported their gender was primarily female, 24 (20.3%) reported their gender was primarily male, 8 (6.8%) reported their gender was a mix of both male and female, 17 (14.4%) reported their gender was neither male nor female, and 1 (0.8%) did not answer the question. Of my non-asexual participants, 129 (65.5%) of 197 reported their gender was primarily female, 54 (27.4%) reported their gender was primarily male, 12 (6.1%) reported their gender was a mix of both male and female, and 2 (1.0%) reported their gender was neither male nor female.

One hundred and twenty-three participants (39.0%) were heterosexual (attracted to people of a different gender), 30 (9.5%) were homosexual (attracted to people of the same gender), 44 (14.0%) were bisexual (attracted to all genders), and 118 (37.5%) were asexual (not sexually attracted to anyone).

When asked what race or ethnicity they most closely identified with, 254 participants (80.6%) identified as White / Caucasian, 3 (1.0%) identified as American Indian / Native American / Aleutian, 15 (4.8%) identified as Asian American, 14 (4.4%) identified as Black / African-American, 13 (4.1%) identified as Hispanic / Latino, and 16 (5.1%) chose 'Prefer not to answer'. One participant on AVEN reported that they had chosen 'prefer not to answer' because there was no option for mixed-race or other. Of the AVEN participants, 121 participants (79.6%) identified as White / Caucasian, 1 (0.7%) identified as American Indian / Native American / Aleutian, 6 (3.9%) identified as Asian American, 4 (2.6%) identified as Black / African-American, 7 (4.6%) identified as Hispanic / Latino, and 13 (8.6%) chose 'Prefer not to answer'. Of the Hendrix participants, 113 participants (80.7%) identified as White / Caucasian, 2 (1.4%) identified as American Indian / Native American / Aleutian, 9 (6.4%) identified as Asian American, 9 (6.4%) identified as Black / African-American, 4 (2.9%) identified as Hispanic / Latino, and 3 (2.1%) chose 'Prefer not to answer'.

The survey was conducted online, using SurveyMonkey. All non-demographics questions were asked on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = not at all acceptable, 4 = somewhat acceptable, and 7 = completely acceptable.

The first three pairs of questions were intended to gauge participants' attitudes toward relationship types. Participants were asked how acceptable they thought heterosexual, homosexual, and polyamorous relationships were. ("How acceptable do you think heterosexual relationships are?") They were also asked how accepted each type of relationship was by society. ("How accepted do you think heterosexual relationships are by society?")

The thirteen sexual behavior questions on the survey were based on items from Kinsey's original survey⁵. These were chosen as a range of common and uncommon sexual behaviors, to assess attitudes towards behaviors that participants were likely (masturbation) or unlikely (autoerotic asphyxiation) to have done. Participants were asked to rate the acceptability of thirteen sexual behaviors (masturbation, premarital sex, prostitution, casual sex, pornography, erotica, extramarital sex, sadomasochism, bondage, autoerotic asphyxiation, dominance/submission, exhibitionism, and voyeurism), which were framed as being within the context of a stable, long-term relationship. Extramarital sex was defined here as engaging in sex outside marriage with one's spouse's consent, as I did not want consent to be a complicating factor in my survey.

Lastly, participants were asked questions about demographics information: their age, their sexual orientation, their gender, their race, and where they encountered the survey (Hendrix e-mail, AVEN, or other). Sexual orientation was determined by asking what genders participants were sexually attracted to (same gender, another gender, all genders, no one), rather than asking about potentially variable labels. Similarly, gender was determined by asking whether participants identified as primarily male, primarily female, a mixture of both, or neither. This was done to avoid the confusion of the many labels currently in use for gender identities. This was necessary because according to AVEN's 2008 demographics survey, approximately 10% of respondents identified as some type of non-binary gender—genderqueer, neutrois, or agender, to name a few².

All criteria set by AVEN for recruiting participants from their forums were met, and my survey was approved by AVEN staff prior to being posted on the forum.

Survey responses were collected between October 20th and November 1st, 2014. Participants clicked on the SurveyMonkey link either on the AVEN forum, in the Hendrix newsletter, or in a Hendrix email. They initially saw the consent form. After consenting, participants took the survey. After survey completion, participants were thanked for their participation and provided with the contact information for the researchers.

3. Results

My first hypothesis, that asexuals would consider sexual relationships and behaviors to be more personally acceptable than non-asexuals (heterosexuals, homosexuals, and bisexuals), was tested with independent samples *t*-tests. Asexuals were less accepting of heterosexual relationships ($M = 6.87, SD = 0.425$) than non-asexuals ($M = 6.99, SD = 0.071$), $t(313) = 3.947, p < .01$. Asexuals were more accepting of homosexual relationships ($M = 6.69, SD = 0.854$) than non-asexuals ($M = 6.52, SD = 1.299$), $t(312) = 1.274, p = 0.203$. Asexuals were more accepting of polyamorous relationships ($M = 5.67, SD = 1.913$) than non-asexuals ($M = 4.39, SD = 2.284$), $t(313) = 5.102, p < 0.01$.

The finding that asexuals were less accepting of heterosexual relationships than non-asexuals, was unexpected. The difference in means was a small one ($M = 6.87$ for asexuals, and $M = 6.99$ for non-asexuals). Since this was such a small difference in means, I ran a frequency analysis to examine the responses more closely. When asked about the acceptability of heterosexual relationships, 106 of 118 asexuals (89.8%) responded with a 7 (completely acceptable); 10 asexuals (8.5%) responded with a 6; 1 (0.8%) responded with a 5; and 1 (0.8%) responded with a 4 (somewhat acceptable). In contrast, 196 of 197 (99.5%) non-asexuals responded with a 7 (completely acceptable), and one (0.5%) responded with a 6.

My second hypothesis, that there would be no difference in social acceptability between asexual and non-asexual participants, was tested with independent samples *t*-tests. No significant differences were found in perceived social acceptability of heterosexual, homosexual, or polyamorous relationships between asexual and non-asexual participants. Asexuals ($M = 6.87, SD = 0.404$) and non-asexuals ($M = 6.87, SD = 0.554$), viewed heterosexual relationships as equally socially acceptable, $t(312) = 0.007, p = 0.994$. Asexuals ($M = 4.03, SD = 0.938$) and non-asexuals ($M = 3.85, SD = 1.047$), viewed homosexual relationships as equally socially acceptable, $t(313) = 1.472, p = 0.142$. Asexuals ($M = 2.22, SD = 1.047$) and non-asexuals ($M = 2.07, SD = 0.932$), viewed polyamorous relationships as equally socially acceptable, $t(313) = 1.358, p = 0.175$. This supports my second hypothesis.

My last hypothesis, that there would be differences between asexuals' and non-asexuals' ratings of the acceptability of sexual behaviors, was tested with independent samples *t*-tests. There were no significant differences found between asexuals and non-asexuals for masturbation (asexual $M = 6.31$ and $SD = 1.337$, non-asexual $M = 6.45$ and $SD = 1.353$; $t(313) = .936, p = 0.350$), casual sex (asexual $M = 5.05$ and $SD = 2.071$, non-asexual $M = 5.27$ and $SD = 1.988$; $t(312) = .933, p = .351$), pornography (asexual $M = 4.67$ and $SD = 2.164$, non-asexual $M = 4.94$ and $SD = 2.009$; $t(311) = 1.115, p = 0.266$), erotica (asexual $M = 5.45$ and $SD = 1.915$, non-asexual $M = 5.62$ and $SD = 1.821$; $t(310) = 0.781, p = 0.435$), sadomasochism (asexual $M = 4.84$ and $SD = 2.101$, non-asexual $M = 4.74$ and $SD = 2.102$; $t(312) = 0.393, p = 0.694$), bondage (asexual $M = 5.14$ and $SD = 1.987$, non-asexual $M = 5.02$ and $SD = 2.079$; $t(312) = 0.505, p = 0.614$), autoerotic asphyxiation (asexual $M = 3.81$ and $SD = 2.191$, non-asexual $M = 3.57$ and $SD = 2.117$; $t(311) = 0.943, p = 0.346$), dominance/submission (asexual $M = 5.05$ and $SD = 1.880$, non-asexual $M = 5.04$ and $SD = 1.993$; $t(313) = 0.067, p = 0.946$), exhibitionism (asexual $M = 3.68$ and $SD = 2.109$, non-asexual $M = 3.47$ and $SD = 2.077$; $t(309) = 0.851, p = 0.395$), or voyeurism (asexual $M = 3.42$ and $SD = 2.208$, non-asexual $M = 3.05$ and $SD = 2.021$; $t(309) = 1.512, p = 0.132$). There was a near-significant difference between asexuals ($M = 5.81, SD = 1.679$) and non-asexuals ($M = 6.17, SD = 1.601$) in attitudes towards premarital sex, $t(313) = 1.892, p = 0.059$. Asexuals ($M = 3.96, SD = 2.146$) approved more of prostitution than non-asexuals ($M = 3.36, SD = 1.955$), $t(312) = 2.541, p = 0.012$. Asexuals ($M = 5.07, SD = 2.206$) were more accepting of extramarital sex (defined as sex outside marriage with one's spouses consent) than non-asexuals ($M = 4.13, SD = 2.414$), $t(311) = 3.427, p < 0.01$.

Further independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to examine gender differences in attitudes towards the different sexual relationships and behaviors, to see how my results compared to previous research. I compared the participants who identified as primarily male to those who identified as primarily female (hereafter referred to as 'men' and 'women'). Participants who identified as a mix of male and female or neither male nor female were excluded, due to being under the thirty participant minimum suggested for statistical significance. No gender differences were found in attitudes towards heterosexual relationships (men $M = 6.92$ and $SD = 0.268$, women $M = 6.96$ and $SD = 0.211$; $t(272) = 0.084, p = 0.933$), homosexual relationships (men $M = 6.54$ and $SD = 1.203$, women $M = 6.58$ and $SD = 1.176$; $t(272) = 0.240, p = 0.810$), or polyamorous relationships (men $M = 4.86$ and $SD = 2.106$, women $M = 4.69$ and $SD = 2.291$; $t(273) = 0.580, p = 0.563$). No gender differences were found in attitudes towards premarital sex (men $M = 6.23$ and $SD = 1.318$, women $M = 5.95$ and $SD = 1.753$; $t(273) = 1.258, p = 0.209$), erotica (men $M = 5.66$ and $SD = 1.818$, women $M = 5.47$ and $SD = 1.856$; $t(270) = 0.767, p = 0.444$), extramarital sex (men $M = 4.57$ and $SD = 2.227$, women $M = 4.29$ and $SD = 2.412$; $t(271) = 0.900, p = 0.369$), sadomasochism (men $M = 4.78$ and $SD = 2.204$,

women $M = 4.66$ and $SD = 2.066$; $t(272) = 0.422$, $p = 0.674$), bondage (men $M = 5.01$ and $SD = 2.123$, women $M = 4.95$ and $SD = 2.045$; $t(272) = 0.231$, $p = 0.818$), autoerotic asphyxiation (men $M = 3.44$ and $SD = 2.231$, women $M = 3.55$ and $SD = 2.036$; $t(272) = 0.393$, $p = 0.695$), dominance/submission (men $M = 4.82$ and $SD = 1.972$, women $M = 5.03$ and $SD = 1.944$; $t(273) = 0.784$, $p = 0.433$), exhibitionism (men $M = 3.44$ and $SD = 2.112$, women $M = 3.44$ and $SD = 2.010$; $t(269) = 0.006$, $p = 0.995$), or voyeurism (men $M = 3.03$ and $SD = 1.980$, women $M = 3.06$ and $SD = 2.077$; $t(269) = 0.111$, $p = 0.911$).

Significant differences between genders were found in attitudes towards masturbation, prostitution, casual sex, and pornography. Participants identifying as primarily male were more accepting of masturbation ($M = 6.71$, $SD = 0.775$) than those identifying as primarily female ($M = 6.25$, $SD = 1.524$), $t(273) = 2.489$, $p = 0.013$. Men ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 2.213$) were also more accepting of prostitution than women ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.866$), $t(272) = 2.795$, $p < .01$. Men ($M = 5.57$, $SD = 1.720$) were more accepting of casual sex than women ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 2.116$), $t(272) = 1.999$, $p = 0.047$. Men ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 1.914$) were more accepting of pornography than women ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 2.043$), $t(271) = 2.880$, $p < 0.01$.

The men in my sample ($M = 24.89$, $SD = 8.791$) were also older than the women ($M = 21.60$, $SD = 5.824$), $t(261) = 3.552$, $p < 0.01$.

A chi square test of independence showed no significant difference between numbers of male and female participants for the asexual and non-asexual groups, $X^2(1, N = 197) = .353$, $p = .553$.

Independent samples t -tests were also conducted to examine any differences between the AVEN and Hendrix samples that might be accounting for differences between the asexual and non-asexual participants. For the purpose of this analysis, participants who marked that they had found the survey through the AVEN Forums, and participants who marked "Other" and explicitly referenced asexuality.org, were coded as belonging to the AVEN sample. Participants who marked they had found the survey through Hendrix E-mail, and participants who marked "Other" and explicitly referenced SONA, a specific psychology class at Hendrix, or a Hendrix-related communication, were coded as belonging to the Hendrix sample. This resulted in 152 AVEN participants and 140 Hendrix participants. Significant differences were found between samples in the acceptability of heterosexual relationships, the acceptability of polyamorous relationships, the social acceptability of polyamorous relationships, attitudes towards prostitution, attitudes towards extramarital sex, and attitudes towards voyeurism. AVEN participants ($M = 6.90$, $SD = 0.378$) were less accepting of heterosexual relationships than Hendrix participants ($M = 7.00$, $SD = 0.00$), $t(290) = 3.093$, $p < 0.01$. AVEN participants ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 2.124$) were more accepting of polyamorous relationships than Hendrix participants ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 2.206$), $t(290) = 5.409$, $p < 0.01$. AVEN participants ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.045$) also perceived polyamorous relationships to be more accepted by society than Hendrix participants did ($M = 1.99$, $SD = 0.906$), $t(290) = 2.129$, $p = 0.034$. AVEN participants ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 2.136$) were more accepting of prostitution than Hendrix participants were ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.808$), $t(289) = 3.859$, $p < 0.01$. AVEN participants ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 2.273$) were significantly more accepting of extramarital sex than Hendrix participants were ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 2.359$), $t(288) = 4.430$, $p < 0.01$. AVEN participants ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 2.200$) were also significantly more accepting of voyeurism than Hendrix participants were ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.962$), $t(286) = 2.627$, $p < 0.01$.

I also examined racial differences in attitudes towards the different sexual behaviors using independent samples t -tests, to see whether the racial distribution of the asexual and non-asexual samples might have had an effect on my results. Due to the number of non-white participants of each race being well below the recommended 30-person minimum for statistical analysis (3 American Indian / Native American / Aleutian, 15 Asian American, 14 Black / African-American, 13 Hispanic / Latino), I grouped all non-white participants together for the purposes of analysis. Participants who chose "Prefer not to say" on the race/ethnicity question were excluded from this analysis. White participants were more accepting of heterosexual relationships (white $M = 6.96$ and $SD = 0.185$, non-white $M = 6.87$ and $SD = 0.548$; $t(297) = 2.230$, $p = 0.026$), homosexual relationships (white $M = 6.74$ and $SD = 0.852$, non-white $M = 5.98$ and $SD = 1.764$; $t(296) = 4.528$, $p < 0.01$), polyamorous relationships (white $M = 5.06$ and $SD = 2.149$, non-white $M = 4.02$ and $SD = 2.463$; $t(297) = 2.916$, $p < 0.01$), masturbation (white $M = 6.51$ and $SD = 1.134$, non-white $M = 6.04$ and $SD = 1.846$; $t(297) = 2.265$, $p = 0.024$), premarital sex (white $M = 6.20$ and $SD = 1.444$, non-white $M = 5.56$ and $SD = 2.095$; $t(297) = 2.577$, $p = 0.010$), casual sex (white $M = 5.34$ and $SD = 1.900$, non-white $M = 4.61$ and $SD = 2.295$; $t(296) = 2.275$, $p = 0.024$), use of erotica (white $M = 5.73$ and $SD = 1.686$, non-white $M = 4.84$ and $SD = 2.312$; $t(294) = 3.038$, $p < 0.01$), extramarital sex (white $M = 4.66$ and $SD = 2.286$, non-white $M = 3.52$ and $SD = 2.610$; $t(295) = 2.981$, $p = 0.003$), sadomasochism (white $M = 4.91$ and $SD = 1.971$, non-white $M = 4.11$ and $SD = 2.525$); $t(296) = 2.391$, $p = 0.017$), bondage (white $M = 5.19$ and $SD = 1.934$, non-white $M = 4.44$ and $SD = 2.436$;

$t(296) = 2.273, p = 0.024$), and masturbation (white $M = 5.17$ and $SD = 1.841$, non-white $M = 4.47$ and $SD = 2.302$; $t(297) = 2.255, p = 0.025$) than non-white participants were.

I examined correlations between age and responses, to determine whether the age difference between the asexual and non-asexual participants might account for some of the differences between them. Age was negatively correlated with acceptance of homosexual relationships ($r = -0.152, p = 0.008$), casual sex ($r = -0.130, p = 0.024$), and dominance/submission ($r = -0.138, p = 0.016$).

4. Discussion

The hypothesis that asexuals would consider the three sexual relationships to be more personally acceptable than non-asexuals was partially supported by the data; asexuals considered heterosexual relationships less acceptable than non-asexuals did, but considered homosexual and polyamorous relationships more acceptable than non-asexuals did. The finding that asexuals were less accepting of heterosexual relationships than non-asexuals, was unexpected. The frequency analysis suggests that the majority of asexuals are still very accepting of heterosexual relationships, but that a few are slightly less accepting. Thus, this wider range of responses creates a significant difference. If this reflects a difference in real world attitudes, it might be that asexuals are simply frustrated by the overrepresentation of heterosexual relationships in American society and the media; however, more research is needed to support this idea.

My second hypothesis, that there would be no difference in social acceptability between asexual and non-asexual participants, was supported by the data. No differences in perceived social acceptability of heterosexual, homosexual, or polyamorous relationships were found between asexual and non-asexual participants. This suggests that, as expected, the different sexual orientations all had a similar gauge of what society finds acceptable.

There were fewer differences in attitudes towards sexual behaviors between asexuals and non-asexuals than I expected. It is interesting that asexuals were more accepting of extramarital sex (with one's spouse's consent) than non-asexuals were. Oliver and Hyde⁸ found that men were much more accepting of extramarital sex than women. This raised the question of whether this difference might be due (at least in part) to gender differences. However, the chi square test of independence showed no significant difference between numbers of male and female participants for the asexual and non-asexual groups, suggesting that the source of the difference is not gender. It is likely that this acceptance of extramarital sex ties in with the finding that asexuals are more accepting of polyamorous relationships than non-asexuals are, as consent is the deciding factor in both circumstances. As for asexuals' greater approval of prostitution than non-asexuals, it is possible that this may be due to differences in views of sex. Since asexuals do not experience sexual attraction, they may be viewing sex as a skill like any other, without the same degree of stigma that other sexual orientations apply. The lack of differences between asexuals' and non-asexuals' views of exhibitionism and voyeurism may not be accurate reflections; there were at least two comments from AVEN participants that indicated that they were unfamiliar with these terms, and thus had no opinion about the practices. In future research, I need to define all terms, rather than just those that I believe have multiple definitions. In addition, I should make it more clear that participants need not answer questions about which they have no opinion, or should provide an explicit 'no opinion' option, to better gauge my participants' opinions. There were also remarks about exhibitionism, voyeurism, and autoerotic asphyxiation that suggested that participants would respond differently to different scenarios and safety levels. This indicates that for future research, more precision than simply specifying that the behaviors are within a consenting, long-term relationship is needed.

The differences between AVEN and Hendrix participants likely reflect the differences in attitudes between sexual orientations, since AVEN participants were overwhelmingly asexual and Hendrix participants were largely heterosexual, and the significant differences appeared on the same questions as they did between sexual orientations.

The results of the t -tests examining gender differences supported some previous work in the area while countering others. I found no differences in attitudes towards extramarital sex, supporting Petersen and Shibley's⁹ meta-analysis, but countering Oliver and Hyde's⁸ older meta-analysis. My finding that males were slightly more accepting of masturbation runs counter to the Petersen and Shibley's⁹ finding of no gender difference. However, my research supports their findings that males were more accepting of casual sex.

The racial differences found show a tendency towards more conservative sexual attitudes among non-white participants than among white participants. However, due to the limited sample sizes of the different non-white races in my study, I could not break this down further to examine differences between races/ethnicities more closely. Racial variability should be a factor in future research, in order to better illuminate these differences.

I had examined correlations between age and responses, to determine whether the age difference between the asexual and non-asexual participants might account for some of the differences between them. Age was slightly negatively correlated with acceptance of homosexual relationships, casual sex, and dominance/submission. Since these were not items that significantly differed between asexuals and non-asexuals, it is unlikely that age accounted for the differences between them. Since the men in my sample were an average of three years older than the women in my sample, I also examined whether age might account for the gender differences I saw. Since men were more accepting of casual sex than women (contrary to what would be expected if age were influencing the results), and there was no difference in acceptance of homosexual relationships or dominance/submission between genders, it is unlikely that the age difference had a significant effect on the differences in sexual attitudes between genders.

This research is an important step in examining asexuals' attitudes towards sexual behavior, in comparison with non-asexuals. The differences in views of polyamorous relationships, extramarital sex, and prostitution are striking. It is possible that the asexuals more accepting of these behaviors are those in relationships with non-asexual partners; the difficulties of navigating a relationship where one partner is interested in sex and the other does not might make extramarital sex, prostitution, or polyamorous relationships attractive possibilities. Brotto et al. found during interviews of asexuals that some participants expressed acceptance of a partner seeking sex outside their relationship, as long as there was no emotional tie⁶. This supports the possibility that asexuals are more accepting of extramarital sex, prostitution, or polyamorous relationships because they are more likely to have considered these items as possibilities within their own relationships. Further investigation into the sexual attitudes and personal lives of asexuals should be done to examine this possibility.

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