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**TOO QUEER TO BE QUEER?
REVISITING THE METAPHYSICS
AND EPISTEMOLOGY
OF ASEXUALITY**

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Abstract

The current trend of sex positivity in spaces of the Western and non-Western world alike – namely, within academia, popular culture, and the lived world, as well as its accompanying proliferation of ways to understand or identify one’s own or others’ sexuality (i.e., as “pansexual,” “demisexual,” “polyamorous,” etc.) – affects the lived experiences and self-understandings of asexual people themselves. While interest, both expert and otherwise, has increased with respect to non-*heterosexuality*, despite some exceptions, asexuality remains largely overlooked. Asexuality remains a relatively unknown, and perhaps worse, a largely misunderstood phenomenon or way of being a person. Scholarship pertaining to asexuality is therefore not only of importance to the natural or social sciences and the humanities; general conversation about asexuality, too, is imperative. This is because understanding asexuality is of moral importance: Conflict can arise when misunderstanding or ignorance is faced by individuals who are, or who are taken to be, asexual. When asexual persons are misunderstood, constraints placed upon them by others or even by themselves can be not only epistemically unwarranted, but unethical or oppressive. Further, when asexual persons themselves lack hermeneutic understanding of asexuality or when others lack hermeneutical understanding of others who identify as asexual, for some, self-understanding and someone attempting to understand the asexual other, too, can be difficult or even painful. This paper aims to explore the possibility of feminist (read: ameliorative) reimaginings of the very concept of asexuality and for asexual people qua individuals or groups afforded by academia, especially philosophical analyses, by popular culture, as well as for asexual people/groups and their allies.

Keywords

Social metaphysics. Popular culture. Ameliorative conceptual analysis. Asexuality. Queer studies. Social epistemology.

1. On the Importance of Beginning to Embark on Philosophical Analyses of Asexuality

Is asexuality too queer, too strange, and too imprecise a phenomenon to even be put under the LGBTQ* banner? This question is apt given that asexuality, conceptually, may not amount to one concept at all. Of course, the existence of multiple meanings and imprecision may be space- and time-dependent. To use one example, arguably, the masses have a better understanding of the meaning(s) of transgenderism (what used to largely be referred to as “transsexualism”) today than they did even a decade ago and much of this better understanding may be attributed to the increase in representation and discussion on popular media mediums of trans issues and trans people (trans TV characters, reality TV stars, YouTube “transitioning” vloggers, and so on). Perhaps the same fate will befall asexuality and asexual people. In any case, the referent of the concept of ‘asexuals’ or the term ‘asexuals’ may also not admit of one concept or point to one

homogenous group with membership conditions that admit of necessary and sufficient conditions. Why might it matter whether asexuals are accepted into most LGBTQ* communities? An obvious answer is the political traction that is afforded by group-membership. There is power in numbers. The LGBTQ* community and its subcommunities have sought to and have succeeded in securing some enablements and rights. Though this paper will not produce, and nor does it take as a goal in what follows to settle the issue of what asexuality *is* or what asexuals ultimately *are*, it proceeds with some tentative definitions of possible understandings of the meaning of asexuality, lest there be no footing whatsoever and no means by which to continue further. Herein, asexuality is defined as the experience or phenomenon of not experiencing or desiring sexual activity/pleasure or as experiencing or desiring sexual activity/pleasure, but *actively* choosing not to engage in sexual activity. Asexual people, it follows, refer to people to whom this tentative definition of asexuality applies.

While attention, both expert and otherwise,¹ has increased with respect to non-*hetero*-sexuality, despite some exceptions, asexuality remains largely overlooked in academia, and in philosophy in particular. In the lived world, though asexuality admits of a slightly rising presence in popular culture, for most people, asexuality remains a relatively unknown, and perhaps worse, a largely misunderstood phenomenon or way of being a person. Drawing from portrayals of asexual characters in popular culture, some typical misconceptions, or at least hegemonic representations, include the notion that an asexual is a “closeted homosexual,” a person who “has yet to find the right person,” or a person who is intellectually impressive in the sense of possessing logical and highly theoretical reasoning capacities, but lacking in emotional maturity. This list is, of course, non-exhaustive.² Examining asexuality is not only of consequence to the natural or social sciences and the humanities; general conversation in the lived world about asexuality, too, is vital because understanding asexuality is of *moral* importance. Constraints and enablements, to borrow Ásta’s³ language from “The Social Construction of Human Kinds” (2013), are placed on individuals who are, or who are taken to be, asexual. When asexual persons are misconstrued, constraints placed upon them by others or even by themselves can be not only epistemically unjustified, but unethical and oppressive. If feminism, broadly understood, aims to undermine oppression against Othered groups and persons qua individuals and/or groups, then asexuality is of feminist concern. Indeed, when asexual persons themselves lack hermeneutic understanding of asexuality or when others lack hermeneutical understanding of those who identify as asexual, for both asexuals seeking self-understanding or for someone attempting to understand the asexual Other, the situation of being asexual or being with (in whatever capacity) someone asexual can be difficult or even painful. Further scholarly examination and a more inclusive portrayal of asexuality and asexuals in popular mediums of cultural dispersion could aid

in emancipatory aims or in any project, descriptive or otherwise, affecting asexual people. In what follows, an attempt is made to explain why, as well as how.

Though some attention will be afforded to cases of past and present examples of popular culture portrayals of asexuality and asexuals, guiding goals of this paper are to set up motivation and a novel framework for philosophically or theoretically robust analyses of asexuality. The intent is not to undermine the value of the empirical – to undercut the worth of sociological analyses or case studies of depictions of asexuality or asexuals in or on popular cultural mediums. Where there is only theory, things can run amok. But, of course, empirical analyses are bolstered by good theoretical underpinnings. At the time same, this paper must aim to produce a tractable and *honest* analysis. On the latter point, this paper proceeds while cautiously remembering that its writer is prejudiced by the very language, and so thinking, including the assumptions that all thinking contains, in which the writer has been trained. As the writer who is at once “an analytic philosopher,” the paper, like the writer, dwells mostly in the theoretical – in the “meta.” This is to say that this paper, in the spirit of metaphysical analyses, takes as an essential task, and one at which this paper will mostly aim herein, to examine the very conditions of possibility of the following:

- (i) popular culture’s influence on asexuality understood conceptually and as a lived experience,
- (ii) popular culture’s potential for ameliorating asexuality understood conceptually and as a lived experience, and
- (iii) rebelling asexuals’ and non-asexual allies’ capacity to affect popular culture’s portrayal of asexuality and asexuals.

Analyzing, perhaps combining, and utilizing the conclusions and conceptual tools afforded by (i), (ii), and (iii) might, eventually and hopefully, in some even modest way, ameliorate the lived experience of asexuals considered more broadly. Realizing in practice what (i), (ii), and (iii), whether independently or jointly tentatively conclude, might work to produce a positive change, via, to borrow Ian Hacking’s vernacular from *The Social Construction of What?* (1999), a looping effect.

Hacking (1999) sees child viewers of television, child abusers, schizophrenics, and women refugees, to name only a few examples, as constructed kinds of people or “interactive kinds.” Here, “kinds” refers to both the individual instances of some kind (e.g., particular women) and to the kinds themselves (e.g., *women*). Such kinds are subject to “the looping effect”: The kinds, qua the people classified as some X “become aware of how they are classified and modify their behavior accordingly” (Hacking 1999, p. 32). According to Hacking, the interaction between a person and a category happens through a person’s awareness of being classified and is mediated “by the larger

matrix of institutions and practices surrounding the classification” (Hacking 1999, pp. 31-32). Object-construction of this sort happens when social situations provide concepts and socially available classifications that people take up to frame their self-understandings and which inform their intentions. For example, if a woman is classified as a woman refugee,

she may be deported, or go into hiding, or marry to gain citizenship... She needs to become a woman refugee in order to stay in Canada; she learns what characteristics to establish, knows how to live her life. By living that life, she evolves, becomes a certain kind of person [a woman refugee]. And so it may make sense to say that the very individuals and their experiences are constructed within the matrix surrounding the classification “woman refugees.” (Hacking 1999, p. 11)

Given that popular culture and lived experience, as well the alteration of each, are, at least in most milieus of today’s world, inextricably linked and mutually-affective, and, though milieus are not individuals qua individual people (as is Hacking’s focus [1999]), but rather spaces of the world in which individuals dwell, these milieus and spaces are, or so this paper argues, also subject to Hacking’s looping effect. Other philosophers, namely Ásta and Sally Haslanger, are philosophers upon whose work I later draw heavily, and, like Hacking, their works are best described as attempting to offer a metaphysics for how social identities come to be, are carried out, lived out, explain how it is possible for social identities to dole out both limitations and enablements, and, further, how social identities’ referents/meanings and their corollary constraints and enablements can come to change.

To aid in the task of furthering feminist or other emancipatory programs, drawing largely from the work of such thinkers as Michel Foucault, and more recent thinkers such as Judith Butler, Ela Przybylo, Karli June Ceranowksi and Megan Milks, as well as Ásta, this paper proffers an analysis of (i) the background conditions under which questions such as “Who counts as asexual?” and “What might constitute an ameliorated situation for asexual people?” can even be well-formulated. In drawing mainly from the work of Haslanger from *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (herein, *Resisting Reality*) (2012), the following also propounds (ii) one possible mode of conceptual analysis that, like ideology critique or critical social theory, aims to debunk, queer, query, and ultimately alter or amend “our”⁴ (mainstream and mostly problematic) conceptions of asexuality and asexual people. These constitute the main theoretical aims of the paper, which, again, may hopefully contribute to practical, ethical, and political goals of asexuals and their allies.

It is fair to claim that (i) philosophers in particular have paid little attention to the subject of asexuality, but that, nonetheless, (ii) philosophy can serve as a useful tool in most analyses and

projects. The analysis of asexuality, as well as its relation to popular culture and to feminism (read: emancipatory movements/projects) in the sense of *Kritik* from the German, and especially borrowing from Kant's use in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), which means "to delimit the conditions of possibility and limits of," is an essential methodological precursor, or is at least a helpful tool, in undertaking robust empirically-attuned studies of asexuality. Demarcating the boundaries of categories, including categories of sexualities, "conceptual analysis" being the lovechild of analytic philosophy, contributes to the clarification of terms and categories used in academic and non-academic milieus. In theory or ideally, and thus, perhaps overly-optimistically, this philosophical task might lend itself to more careful or fine-grained theoretical research across ranges of disciplines, and, again, perhaps overly-optimistically and naïvely, to more careful colloquial vernacular and more informed and respectful lived relations. The hope is that the above processes initiated by demarcation might lend themselves to real-world ameliorative amendments to practices and understandings of both asexuals and non-aexuals alike.

Despite this paper's overriding adherence to the methods and goals of analytic philosophy, the writer does not pretend to be non-situated and nor does the writer pretend that analytic philosophy operates independent of time and space. Analytic philosophies are produced by individual people or groups. People do not occupy a God's eye view. Intuitions, including the intuition about how to even reason about the reasoning of any given domain, must come from somewhere. Intuitions, following the dictates of empiricism at least, must come from the world. Hence, just as a looping effect is actual and possibly ameliorative in the case of the relation between portrayals of asexuality/aexuals and asexuals themselves (or perhaps non-aexual allies), so too is there a looping effect between meta-analyses of analytic philosophical undertakings of explorations of domains of inquiry and "the real world." The real world "contains" popular culture, too. There is only one world. But this one world is a world wherein there exist constant dialectical relations between milieus. There exist perpetual dialectics between popular culture and individuals and groups of the everyday world, resulting in perpetual syntheses and then further dialectics and syntheses, in turn. All being and becoming, it seems, is being- and becoming-with others (through whatever medium).

While conceptual distinctions exist between the milieus of academia or theory, popular culture, and the lived world, and can perhaps be delimited as such (i.e., qua conceptually), it is naïve to assume or pretend that there exists a tripartite division between these milieus. The distinctions between the milieus, save theoretically, are not sharp, and the contours of each are porous. Some, indeed, may suggest that there is no difference between popular culture and "the real world." Many of us exist as pixels on screens – our faces, our ideas, our identities. Is it not more common, especially amongst the generation of now 20-something-year-olds who grew up

with smartphones, to FaceTime or WhatsApp friends than to call them using the now-old fashioned “call” function on even that same smartphone? Again, this paper, taken as a whole, aims to illustrate for the reader, in a novel way, not only that there exists a looping effect, for better or worse, between all three delicately divisible milieus (this claim is fairly uncontroversial), but to explicate in, once more, an original way, how to proactively and in a liberatory manner, employ the looping effect for feminist or otherwise ameliorative aims.

2. Beginning Caveats

The referent of the term/concept of asexuality/asexual is at best vague, However, to proceed, one must begin with some at least tentative definitions. In what follows, the term ‘asexual’ is used to refer to persons who do not experience sexual arousal or sexual desire, or who, despite experiencing sexual arousal or desire, choose not to engage in sexual activity. Much controversy exists in academic and colloquial contexts and milieus surrounding who counts as asexual, as well as which acts and behaviours (or which non-acts and non-behaviours) fall under the extension of “asexual.” The following will examine these issues, amongst others, in turn. But some other initial disclaimers before continuing: It is acknowledged that, for many, there exists a close association, which is often misguided, between physically *otherly*-abled and asexual bodies/persons, though this important issue will not be explored in what follows.⁵ The reasons for this omission relate to the necessity to choose a manageable scope for a topic.

Another necessary caveat: So-called “psy” disorders will not be addressed herein. “Psy” conditions refer to those “conditions” familiar to readers of the *DSM*. The following will not address other “medical” (albeit non- “psy”) conditions associated with asexuality either (e.g., menopause, low testosterone, atypical genitalia, and so on). Though aware and uncomfortable with the division just drawn between “physically caused” and “psychologically caused” conditions, the paper will not delve into these issues further in order to maintain a manageable topic.

3. The Need to Develop a Theory of Asexuality Across and Between Disciplines

Arguably, the most important concept developed in critical sex studies (and it is certainly an essential element of feminist studies, queer studies, and so on) is the idea of *heterosexuality* as an institution. The conceptualization of heterosexuality as an institution allowed for analytical shifts – “Others” could now be understood, *however understood*, relative to a social condition of (descriptive and evaluative) normative heterosexuality. Politically, the concept of heterosexuality created, for some, a change in agenda. In what might this change have consisted? One change might be better understood as a goal, namely, to contest the social inequalities produced by the institutional enforcement by various mechanisms of power of heterosexuality (the power of popular

culture included) (Seidman 2009, p. 18). Perhaps best described in the works of Foucault, Western society pervasively and dramatically emphasizes “compulsory sexuality.” Despite the overt sexualization of society that most of us *do* notice, compulsory sexuality functions more insidiously – in the ways that are so embedded and hegemonic that they are almost invisible. Compulsory sexuality is the idea that human beings are “naturally sexual.” This idea, coupled with the current trend of “sex positivity” in many spaces of the world and its accompanying proliferation of ways to understand or identify one’s own or others’ *sexuality*, while considered emancipatory by some, can serve to reinforce the notion that there is something *wrong* with asexual people.

It has been decades since Foucault famously stated that “[s]exuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given [...]. [I]t is the name that can be given to a historical construct” (1990 [1978], p. 105). In 1990, Butler claimed that “acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance” (1999 [1990], p. 173). As Przybylo (2011) rightly notes, Foucault’s and Butler’s insights have become postmodern axioms: Sexual identity *construction*, for a long time, has and continues to be permeated by and produces essentialist impulses. Przybylo (2011) aptly puts the point as such: Essentialism is enacted not only by normative against marginalized sexualities, but “is rearticulated and recirculated throughout *all* sectors of [society], so that fringe identities fighting for their survival also replay its logic” (p. 445; my italics added for emphasis). On this theme, Wendy Brown (1991) echoes a similar concern: “[I]dentity politics – with its fierce assertion and production of subjects – appears less a radical political response to postmodernity than a symptom of its rupture and disorienting effects” (p. 67). It is not uncontroversial to claim that “identity politics” almost fully saturates and is at once a topic of conversation/much disagreement (both productive and otherwise) in academia, popular culture, and the lived world.

So far, it has been argued that compulsory sexuality creates, at minimum, a problematic for the asexual person. Now, an examination of how past “versions” of feminism have not served to emancipate or otherwise offer much assistance to the asexual person either is presented. To summarize a crucial point raised by Steven Seidman (2009) and others concerning the anti-porn/pro-sex “sex wars” of the 1980’s, both radical and pro-sex feminisms characterized their opposing views of female sexuality as “liberatory.” Radical feminists, broadly construed, sought out a sexuality uncorrupted by patriarchy. Pro-sex feminists, broadly construed, sought a “politically incorrect” feminine sexuality as they saw the general repression and subordination of women as a product of the sexual oppression of women and heterosexism. However, asexuality challenges us to consider how female and other marginalized subjects’ sexuality remains framed by the discourses of liberation of the 1980’s feminist movements. One difficulty with those anti-porn/pro-sex debates is that they position female or any person’s sexuality as either empowered or dominated. This binary then works to characterize asexuality or asexuals as repressed, dysfunctional,

dominated, and so forth. “The asexual movement challenges that assumption, working to distance asexuality from pathology” and, consequently, “[challenges] many of the basic tenets of pro-sex feminism – most obviously its privileging of transgressive female sexualities that are always already defined against repressive or ‘anti-sex’ sexualities” (Cerankowski & Milks 2010, p. 656). In short, one difficulty with a landscape or social imaginary that connects a language of emancipation (read: liberatory sexuality) with sex, is that sex (this kind of sex or that kind of sex, but sex nonetheless) remains intertwined with, and seemingly inextricably so, with emancipation or liberation. One worry therefore arises: “Does the asexual person threaten to remove sex from politics all over again, or does she or he challenge the ways we think about sex and desire even within queer communities” (Cerankowski & Milks 2010, p. 661)? Though the following will not attempt to answer this question, it is noted that the question itself, and providing an answer(s) to such a question may be part of an ameliorative political agenda of asexuals and their allies.

4. Who Counts as Asexual?

According to AVEN (The Asexual Visibility and Education Network: asexuality.org), a relatively popular Western website for asexuals, an asexual is a “person who does not experience sexual attraction.” In the non-Western world, asexuals are similarly categorized (consider the Indian Instagram site [indianasexuals](https://www.instagram.com/indianasexuals): <https://www.instagram.com/indianasexuals>). Some theorists and asexual individuals themselves do operationalize asexuals as those who have never felt sexual attraction to anyone at all. Notice that the presented definition is absolute. It is predicated on “lack, absence, and ‘neverness’” (Przybylo 2011, p. 445). Studies and many people underscore the complexity and variability of the lived experience of asexuals. For example, “some are not interested in any romantic physical contact, while others are simply not interested in coital sex” (Przybylo 2011, p. 445). Hence, while asexuality is lived “plurally,” to use Przybylo’s language, asexuality (institutionalized and reified in popular culture and the lived world) functions, even in its early stages, “to foreclose and boundary-set” (Przybylo 2011, p. 445). These boundaries enact Butler’s conviction that “to qualify as a substantive identity is an *arduous* task, for such appearances are rule-generated identities, ones which rely on [...] rules that condition and restrict (1999 [1990], p. 184).

It is clear that AVEN’s “official” formulation of asexuality as *not a chosen*, but a biologically (?) determined orientation (a definition that opens up the large ongoing nature/nurture debate in studies of human sexuality) does not easily map on to a theory of asexuality as a chosen, feminist mode of resistance (one construal, in turn, that may be of emancipatory value). To opt out of enacting sexual acts, whether one experiences sexual desire or not, may indeed be a positive mode of political engagement qua an *active* refusal to partake in an action or behaviour

precisely on account of the hegemony and the constraints and enablements a society demands and enforces. In fact, problematically, AVEN repeatedly opposes asexuality to celibacy. Celibacy, like positive, feminist resistance, is chosen and not biologically or otherwise “naturally” determined. For example, in an informational brochure, AVEN claims, “[c]elibacy is a choice to abstain from sexual activity. Asexuality is not a choice, but rather a sexual orientation describing people who do not experience sexual attraction. While most asexual people do not form sexual relationships, some asexuals participate in sexual behavior for the pleasure of others” (AVEN, “Asexuality: Not Everyone Is Interested in Sex”: unpublished Seidman 2009 document circulated in San Francisco, 2008 as quoted in Cerankowski & Milks 2010, p. 658). “This [...] [claim] forces us to question to what extent the practice or abstention from sex acts matters to the definition of asexuality” (Cerankowski & Milks 2010, p. 658; my italics added for emphasis).

A possibility? Perhaps “we” (us “progressive” thinkers?) should define asexuality by means of a self-identification? Perhaps it is better, at least for feminist purposes, to define someone who has *no sex drive*, but who does *not* see herself as asexual as “not asexual” and to define someone who *does* experience a sex drive, but who *does* see herself as asexual, as “asexual” (Cerankowski & Milks 2010, pp. 658-659). This definition contradicts AVEN’s definition, but more closely aligns with an emancipatory feminism (not to be conflated with the more particular “radical feminisms” of the 1980’s). This inverted definition of asexuality that this paper quasi-endorses or entertains applies to those who do not “lack” sexual attraction or desire, but who are sexually inactive “not through religious or spiritual vows of celibacy, but [on account] feminist agency” (Cerankowski & Milks 2010, p. 659). This understanding echoes Simone de Beauvoir’s reading of “frigidity” from *The Second Sex* (1949). Therein, Beauvoir argues that “frigid” symptoms are not always intrinsically natural (i.e., are not non-socially or non-interpersonally caused). She suggests, rather, though not in the following language, that these “symptoms” are at least sometimes the result of rejected, albeit internalized norms of a socially (male-) constructed world of compulsory sexuality. I gesture here at only one possible alternative definition to AVEN’s and many other groups’ and organizations’ stated definitions of who counts as asexual.

5. A Metaphysics for the Question of “Who Counts as Asexual?”:

Learning and Drawing from Ásta

Is someone asexual on account of intrinsic properties (whatever those may be) or on account of extrinsic properties, including the perceptions of others or on account of the relations in which they figure with respect to other individuals or groups? In what follows, it is assumed that the meaning of “asexuality” and thus, who counts as asexual, is socially constructed. If this is so, then it follows that, at least to a large extent, being asexual is determined by social factors.

Indeed, the very concept of asexuality, then, must be socially constructed since there is, following Ludwig Wittgenstein and Hilary Putnam, at least, no such thing as a private language. The philosophers in whom this paper is most interested do not attempt to sketch a metaphysics for the question of “Who counts as asexual?”. The philosophers with whom this paper engages are best described as independently attempting to understand the metaphysics and epistemology of social categories, as well as what it means to say that any category at all, “asexuality” and “asexual” included, and thus, the individuals falling under its extension, are socially constructed.

Ameliorative or emancipatory constructionism is propounded by some social scientists, various branches of the humanities, grassroots interest groups, and philosophers. These constructionists attempt to show that categories and kinds usually thought to be natural or inevitable are really socially founded or non-inevitable and, as such, can be amended or even discarded altogether. Haslanger clearly and succinctly distinguishes between descriptive and ameliorative social constructionism in *Resisting Reality* (2012), though she does not suggest, of course, that the distinction between “the descriptive” and “the ameliorative” is specific to social constructionism. Indeed, quite the contrary. She assumes that both are traditional ways of pursuing philosophical analysis. Descriptive programs ask “What is X?” where X is some category or kind and ameliorative or emancipatory versions ask “What do we want X to be?” or “What *should* X be?” Ameliorative projects thus have both descriptive and normative components since the possibility of the latter is, at least to some extent, parasitic on the former.

In “The Social Construction of Human Kinds” (2013), Ásta creates a new name for social categories that entail constraints and enablements, but which are maintained and enforced by unofficial (read: popular/social) power. Call these types of kind, as does Ásta, “communal” or “constraining and enabling kinds.” In the case of constraining and enabling kinds, one can be subject to a script attached to a social role or property that constrains or enables without being officially or collectively acknowledged as having (or being given) some status of falling under some category of persons (e.g., female-gendered, bisexual, asexual, indigenous, etc.) and without being officially (i.e., legally, medically, etc.) obligated to follow the constraints and enablements of the script attached to the category. Similarly, when it comes to interacting with a person qua person understood as falling under some way of being a person (i.e., a scene kid, a “typical millennial,” an ethical vegan), in some cases, individuals/groups are not obligated by an official authority to behave in any particular way towards another person who falls under the category of some constraining or enabling kind. Individuals and groups, however, may feel social pressure to act in a particular way towards them or may act in a particular way towards them out of habit or on account of having no script to draw from to know how they “should” (descriptively or normatively) act.

For Ásta, the conferral of a property by a conferral involves a five-part conferralist schema:

Conferred property: being of gender G, for example, a woman, man, trans

Who: the subject S in the particular context C

What: the perception of the subject S that the person have the grounding property P

When: in some particular context C

Grounding property: the grounding property P (Ásta 2013, p. 9).

Where any one item of the five-part schema differs, so too perhaps can the script that follows from the conferral of a property and so too can one fail or succeed in meeting the conditions for counting as an X (or, to use Ásta's language, being taken to possess some property X). Though not explicitly noted by Ásta, it seems that a conferred property can be thicker or thinner depending on others' beliefs about the expectations that follow from having (or, to use Ásta's language once more, being perceived to have) property X. The language of "thicker" or "thinner" here refers to the number of expectations connected to some category and rigour with which individuals taken to belong to some categories of personhood are expected to behave.

Some constraining and enabling kinds are robust (e.g., *being a Southern belle in the late 18th century*) in the sense that they place more expectations on the behaviours of both the individual qua some constraining and enabling kind and for others in their dealings with an individual conferred as Y. Other constraining and enabling kinds are less robust (e.g., *being female in San Francisco in 2022*). Correlatively, failure to behave according to the scripts attached to constraining and enabling kinds can result in heavier or weaker social sanctions. Before homing in further on the question of "Who counts as asexual?" we first require a description of the background in which such a question arises. What is presented in the next section is, obviously, but *one* possible description and not *the* description if there is indeed one "correct" description at all. That being so, what I present in the next section, however, I take to be in the service of ideological critique and political agendas aimed at ameliorating the lived situations and popular representations (lived situations being in a dialectical relation with popular representations) of asexual people.

6. Przybylo's "Sexusociety" (Compulsory Sexuality Re-Named?):

General Metaphysics and Epistemology of Przybylo's "Sexusociety"

As Seidman (1989) writes of sexuality, it is a "natural" force akin to eating and sleeping; "sexuality, in other words, is built into our biological make-up" (p. 299). According to Przybylo (2011), sexusociety is for asexuals "very much akin to what patriarchy is for feminists and heteronormativity for LGBTQ [sic] populations" (2011, p. 446). Sexusociety constitutes "the oppressive force against which some sort of marginalizing and rebellion must take place" (Przybylo 2011, p.

246). Przybylo's use of the concept of *sexusociety* is worth clarifying in full. "Substituting *sexusociety* for 'sexual world' which is 'out there'" allows one, textually and verbally, to emphasize that "sexusociety is everywhere, it is within us, it is us" (Przybylo 2011, p. 246). *Sexusociety* is a rhetoric that lives in and through our bodies, as Butler might claim. However, while *sexusociety* may be everywhere, it is not solid or monolithic (Przybylo 2011, p. 246). But neither is it the case that "the 'sexual world' connives and organizes; [similarly] *sexusociety* [is not a] front that crushes everything in its wake" (Przybylo 2011, p. 246). *Sexusociety* does not have a monolithic representation, but it is nonetheless organized around "conceptualizations of the sexual imperative" (Przybylo 2011, p. 246). *Sexusociety* functions as such: Subjects mimic each other, not *en masse*, but akin to a game of telephone, and hence, "there are always slight variations of repetition, amounting to the *impression* of a coherent body politic" (Przybylo 2011, pp. 246-247). This performance, to use Butler's language, is, however, enlarged – the "doer" is compounded from the repetition, some repetitions being very privileged, of the individual deeds and the doer is "society" (Przybylo 2011, p. 247).

7. Pathological Repetitions Amongst the Doer

As Cerankowski and Milks (2010) note, there is a significant distinction between people who experience a low sex drive or lack sexual desire and are not distressed by this "lack" and those who experience a low sex drive or lack of sexual desire and *are* distressed by this "lack." Cerankowski and Milks (2010) "are interested in the latter group [...] and in locating asexuality as a viable sexual and social identity" (p. 653). What Cerankowski and Milks oversimplify or overlook – in the case of the lack of distress or in the case of the distress of the supposed lack – is whether the distress of lack is primarily a result of one's situation (others' support or lack thereof) or whether it is primarily indicative of a subject's internal/personal distress or lack thereof as considered independently of a subject's social relations.⁶ Of course, the distress or lack thereof could be a result of both etiologies and might be time- and situation-dependent.

8. Why Asexuals are Between a Rock and a Hard Place in Light of Old Repetitions. Asexual Identity and Absence: Who am I? What am I "For"?

The hegemony of postmodernism's and liberal politics' (read: the so-called emancipatory and "Other-friendly" agendas of institutions, popular cultural mediums included, and within the many milieus of the Western and non-Western lived world alike) emphasis on the need to self-identify (consider, as just *one* example, the now popular and sometimes enforced practice of including one's preferred pronouns in email signatures in formal correspondences) entails that one must confess even the absence of anything to confess – the absence itself must be confessed

(Przybylo 2011, p. 449). One must “confess” that one is not Other. Such performances are often uttered half-jokingly, perhaps to mask discomfort or to place emphasis on a perceived ridiculousness of the situation – e.g., “I guess I’m ‘the straight white guy’ in the room!” One must announce oneself as a this or a that. If one announces oneself as neither a this nor a that, but rather as non-binary or otherwise ambiguous, in the very act of naming or labeling, one makes oneself into a this or a that, and so, does not remain, to use Jacques Derrida’s language, “monstrous,” or to use Beauvoir’s language, “ambiguous.” The confession of sexual taboo as outlined by Foucault in *The History of Madness* (1978) is by now far less verboten than the confession of having nothing to confess. Announcing oneself as asexual is at once taboo in the Foucauldian sense (because misunderstood, because largely unheard of) and in the sense of having no sex acts (or even perhaps desires) to confess, which require, in turn, confessing.

Echoing Jean Baudrillard’s (1998 [1981]) reading of postmodernity, and in particular, his diagnosis that for those living under postmodern conditions, “it is the map that precedes the territory” (p. 350) and such a condition is the catalyst for an overabundance of identity formulations because “as habitants of postmodernity [we] resort to the fierce assertions of ‘identities’ in order to know/invent who, where, and what [we] are” (Brown 1991, p. 67). This postmodern condition seems not to be on its way out. Indeed, this postmodern requirement is so entrenched and enforced by power that some who even privately reject its proliferation choose, at minimum, to feign belief in its emancipatory agenda just, say, to avoid being labeled as “politically incorrect,” at best, or as racist/sexist/transphobic/conservative (in its pejorative sense), and so on. Given these conditions, for better or worse, providing a conceptual analysis of asexuality, for both asexuals and for others in their dealings with asexual persons, is all the more pressing. Perhaps one can be human and asexual (however defined). But how can one live out their personhood or subjectivity under postmodern conditions? Colonized by sexusociety, which is reinforced in both popular mediums and then largely re-acted in the lived world, What is an asexual person *for*? How will/should others engage with the asexual person? What do/should asexuals do with themselves, with their time? These questions are pressing in light of postmodernism’s (i) compulsory sexuality and (ii) postmodernism’s emphasis on the need to present and understand oneself by means of ever complicated and constantly multiplying “self-identifications.” Consider the above questions. If one presents as, is taken to be, or is asexual, there are few rules or language games familiar to most of us for how to engage with asexuals. Wittgensteinian-style games provide social maps through which we unconsciously order even everyday conversations, but these games or maps offer up little by way of “rules of the game” for understanding asexuality.

9. Popular Culture Portrayals of Asexuality and Asexuals.

There exist a few “maps” or portrayals to which one might look, or through osmosis, adopt, to engage, problematically or not, with asexual people and to try to understand (or take oneself to understand) asexuality. Across a range of asexual-friendly websites (and if one engages in just a quick Google search), it is often written that pop culture characters assumed (one might ask: Assumed by whom?) to be asexual include Sherlock Holmes, Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games*, Doctor Who from the BBC’s *Doctor Who* series, Elsa from *Frozen*, Todd Chaves from *Bojack Horseman*, Sheldon, a character portrayed as possessing “theoretical hyper-intelligence,” but lacking “normal” human emotion and emotional maturity from *Big Bang Theory*, DC Comics’ *Prime Earth*’s character Tremor, and SpongeBob (“considered ‘*somewhat asexual*’ by the creator and ‘*gay*’ by the fandom”) (“Asexuality In Popular Culture: The Need For Diverse Representation Of The Asexual Experience [sic]”). A quick search of Wikipedia using “media portrayals of asexuality” produces a short list of asexual popular culture portrayals in the West as well.

Perhaps best, though not perfectly, stated by Aarthi Ramnath, writer of “Asexuality In Popular Culture: The Need For Diverse Representation Of The Asexual Experience [sic]”:

The problem with this [common portrayals of asexuals and asexuality] is [amongst other issues] the erasure of homo/bi/poly romantic and aromantic attractions within the Ace [a shorthand for ‘asexual’] representation in popular media [...] Another problem with the portrayal of asexual characters in pop culture is that some characters may resonate fully with the Ace community [sic] and they may clearly state they do not feel attraction or desire for sexual intimacy but the omission of the label ‘*asexual*’ leads to an unconfirmed Ace character which does more harm than it does good in terms of representation [...] Of course, there need not be a golden, do-no-wrong character for every Ace representation in pop culture narratives but when representation is already scarce, it is important to give the characters the right language and labels so that the audience who are coming to terms with their own queerness, have the vocabulary to express and know for themselves that they are not alone [...] To conclude, I would like to leave this quote by Angela Chen, author of *Ace: What Asexuality reveals about Desires, Society and the Meaning of Sex*: “Representation not only reflects, but actually changes reality.” I am hopeful that one day we shall see more diverse asexual and romantically queer characters on-screen and in stories but till then we can appreciate and celebrate the handful of Ace representation we have today.

It is here noted that Ramnath problematically assumes that asexuals must not have sexual desires or in any sense desire sex.

10. Returning to Ásta to Precise the Question:

“Who (and Actually, According to Who Does Who) Counts as Asexual?”

In “The Social Construction of Human Kinds” (2013), Ásta intends to provide a metaphysics for constraining and enabling non-institutional categories such as “asexuality” or “being asexual.” Unlike Ásta, however, herein, this paper considers “constraining and enabling kinds” to refer to identity-categories that place constraints or enablements *upon the conferee or upon others* in their dealings with the person upon whom kind-membership is conferred. Ásta’s “communal” kinds, in her original sense, are constraining and enabling with one important qualification. She commits herself only to the position that communal kinds place constraints and enablements upon the conferee. But, departing from Ásta’s original analysis, it is possible that at least sometimes, misunderstandings on the part of the conferee can constrain and enable the conferee, as well. Misunderstanding another or mislabeling another constrains the other insofar as the individual possessing the misunderstanding or who mislabels lacks hermeneutical depth, for example – an epistemic harm – and may enable the conferee, assuming they hold some social power, in deciding how the individual or group upon which a conferral is placed, is treated. On Ásta’s account, the conferral of a property or properties (*being a woman, being an intellectual, and so on*) by another subject’s or subjects’ attitudes is what limits and permits the individual upon whom the property or properties is conferred to *do* or *not do* certain things. One occupies a social role or has a social property just in case he or she is subject to the mainstream or popular socially-enforced constraints and enablements that come from being taken to belong to a social category or being taken to have some socially salient property or properties.

Ásta emphasizes that when it comes to certain social properties, the physical facts (non-conferred properties) do not determine, or are not sufficient to explain the existence of the social property. Consider the view that asexuality or being an asexual means, according to popular social meanings, not desiring sex and/or desiring sexual interaction, but not engaging in such actions. On the conferralist program, an asexual can be understood as follows. A body and mind that does not desire sex is the nonconferred or grounding property and “asexual” (understood as a social category under which such an individual falls, along with the categories’ privileges and burdens) is conferred by society on the person taken to have a body and mind that does not desire sex and/or desires sex, but does not engage in sexual acts. Ásta acknowledges that conferralism about many grounding properties and their social categorization can be cashed out multiply. Much feminist, queer theory, and activism has been aimed at challenging the assumption that grounding and social categories are co-extensive; that is, “tracking one of these properties need not help us track the others” (Ásta 2013, p. 8). Accordingly, Ásta would, it seems, suggest that the conferral of sexuality is highly time- and space-dependent. Faithful to her

account, sexuality assignment is dependent on one's place in history, one's geographical location, and so on. Moreover, "when it comes to historical periods and geographical locations, [the same locations] can allow for radically different contexts, so that a person may count as a certain gender [for example] in some contexts and not others" (Ásta 2013, p. 9). This is possible since different properties may be tracked in different situations in order to attribute property P (see below) or because judgments about the same grounding property differ across milieus.

Ásta (2014) considers the conferred property of gender to explicate, once more, her five-part conferralist schema:

Conferred property: being of gender G, for example, a woman, man, trans

Who: the subject S in the particular context C

What: the perception of the subject S that the person have the grounding property P

When: in some particular context C

Grounding property: the grounding property P (p. 9).

Ásta (2014) further notes that the conferral of a social category like one's perceived sexuality is not done as a one-time act; rather, sexuality conferral involves what she calls a "standing attitude," namely

the perception by the subjects in the context that the person has the relevant grounding property. This perception can be in error and the person may not in fact have the property. What matters is simply the perception (p. 9).

If sexuality assignment functions as Ásta suggests, then upon entering any new situation, it follows that a sexuality is conferred upon individuals by some subject(s) who is authorized, which is to say, has the unofficial social power or influence, to do the conferral within the particular milieu (say, in the context of a house party or on the site of an influential blogger or YouTuber). Ásta, it follows, would agree that others have power to confer a sexuality upon others.⁷ However, they do not have institutional authority (as when a doctor declares the sex of a baby to be female, male, or intersex). In the case of a social media influencer on, say, Instagram, "the conferral [...] involves a complicated negotiation over what rules apply in the context and who should play what role" (Ásta 2013, p. 9). The complicated negotiation may sometimes involve a matrix wherein individuals in some situation (say, the Instagram subscribers to the influencer's account) disagree on some property conferral. However complicated or simple the negotiation, very often, as Ásta would hold, the users confer a social classification upon others by citing the unofficial authority. Since Paul is the relevant social influencer in our hypothetical example, what Paul posts is what is accepted).⁸ In other cases, others confer identities upon others by appeal to structures of power that may or may not lack normative support – some of these

structures may be maintained and constituted by habit or by threat (Ásta 2013, p. 9). She suggests that in any milieu, the conferral of a social identity upon another is undertaken by citing maps of social relations or games with rules for social relations within that milieu. These rules might prescribe how, for instance, a single or married woman is to act at a party or how an asexual man should act towards a non-asexual person who seems to be flirting with him.

For Ásta, these maps originate from outside the particular milieu. They are derived from a structure(s) that has been operative in other situations and are then taken on by those in a comparable situation to be utilized consciously or unconsciously. The structure, I submit, is Przybylo's *sexusociety*. What I would add to Przybylo's account of *sexusociety*, however, is that *sexusociety* just is the dialectical interplay of academic, popular culture, and, as Ásta emphasizes, lived world interactions. Recognizing this interplay, however, does not address certain concerns. Which milieu has the most power to influence? Dialectical relations aside, it is commonplace and well-founded to worry that media Goliaths, for instance, have too much power over what can be seen and not seen on their platforms. This is especially problematic if individuals and groups rely heavily on popular media or on popular media influencers to make sense of and normatively evaluate social and political goings on. Another worry is that platforms with tailored information are a cause of political polarization and civic antagonism. Though the latter issue, specifically, strikes me as critical topic, I will here simply point out that relativism and disagreement need not necessarily be construed as destructive, immobilizing, vitiating, or aporetic. I have argued for this position elsewhere.⁹

11. Where to Do We Go from Here? Haslanger's Ameliorative and Feminist (Read: Liberatory Program)

Empirical and psychological investigations are but one dimension of capturing the meaning and the constraints and enablements that follow from "being asexual." In Hacking's terms, asexual people are also subject to the looping effect. Being characterized as asexual by oneself or by others, an individual has some capacity to negotiate the meaning of that characterization. They may accept, reject, or (aim to) alter it. Our contemporary abundance of social media mediums and the uncontroversial influence of popular culture on everyday lived, and ever changing, norms, entails that not only can popular culture negatively and or positively (read: amelioratively) affect asexuals, but that asexuals too have the power through these very mediums, mediums that are by now largely interactive or dialectical to affect the conferrals, narratives, and portrayals afforded by popular culture. Resistance from those of the everyday world can sometimes lead to changes in representations in popular culture mediums.

With the goal of negotiating and imagining more emancipatory meanings of belonging to some social category, as previously highlighted, Beauvoir’s analysis of “frigidity” is useful in providing a lens through which to reconceptualize asexuality by means of ideology critique. She reconstructs frigidity as an active resistance to one’s situation rather than a passive pathology. This is, of course, just one way that frigidity or asexuality may be reconceptualized in order to create a less pathological and more feminist-friendly (read: liberatory and inclusive) understanding of various ways of living out and portraying various ways of being a person. Haslanger’s work in *Resisting Reality* (2012) is mostly focused on ameliorative conceptual projects. One useful and liberatory-aiming undertaking would be to, in Haslanger’s spirit, and in the letter of her characterization of ameliorative social constructionist programs (programs that ask what do “we”¹⁰ want some concept to do), explore and ask, what do “we” want the concept “asexual” to represent or do?

Haslanger (2012) introduces novel analytic tools and demarcates the concerns of various social constructionist programs. She delineates three approaches that may be taken when asking questions of the form “What is X?” A conceptual or internalist approach looks to a priori methods and to introspection, asks “What is our concept of X?,” and aims to achieve reflective equilibrium by taking “into account intuitions about cases and principles” (Haslanger 2012, p. 386). A descriptive approach tries to identify whether our concepts track objective types, and its goal is to develop “more accurate concepts through [...] consideration of the phenomena, usually relying on empirical or quasi-empirical methods” (Haslanger 2012, p. 386). Descriptive projects attempt to elucidate and capture paradigmatic natural kinds (i.e., chemical, biological, neurological, and other purported natural kinds) and social kinds as well (institutions, practices, and other social kinds). Descriptive genealogies analyze the social matrices (history, practices, power relations) within which we discriminate and have discriminated in the past between Xs and non-Xs (Haslanger 2012, p. 376). Descriptive approaches may also attempt to track individuals’ and groups’ operative conceptions – that is, the way they apply a concept or delineate Xs from non-Xs (this may be accomplished through experimental philosophy, social psychology, or other empirical or quasi-empirical means). Finally, according to Haslanger, an ameliorative project asks, “What is the point of having concept X?” and then asks “What conception of X would do the work we want it to do, best” (2012, p. 386)? In her view, the latter question requires normative input, and its goal is to provide the (or a?) concept we seek considering our critically examined purposes (epistemic, ethical, or both) (Haslanger 2012, p. 386). We may, of course, decide not to reform our concept of X, but rather to throw it out entirely. Further, although Haslanger does not say so herself, it is also possible that upon reflection, we may decide to keep our concept of X as it is.

If different approaches to the question of “What is X?” produce different accounts of X, it is perhaps not immediately obvious why this is a problem. Once one considers why Haslanger

elaborates on these approaches in the first place, it becomes clearer why a divergence between the results of the three approaches does constitute a problem for the social constructionist. She elucidates various approaches to (i) emphasize the importance of debunking and ameliorative projects and (ii) draw attention to a common situation wherein people take themselves and others to be asking the same question and talking about the same thing, but are, in fact, talking past one another. To bring out more clearly why a mismatch among the three approaches can sometimes constitute a problem, she puts forth a three-fold distinction between manifest, operative, and target concepts, which corresponds, respectively, to the distinction between conceptual, descriptive, and ameliorative approaches. She notes that, in practice, the approaches are not usually neatly disentangled and the results of one approach may alter one's conception of the result arrived at by means of another approach (Haslanger 2012, p. 343).

Haslanger's distinction between intrinsic or natural properties and social properties is compatible with Ásta's (2013) distinction between grounding and conferred properties. According to Haslanger, some social categories like gender, race, and sexuality are not dependent on the intrinsic features of bodies even though the markers of belonging to some categories are (Haslanger 2012, p. 7). Many, though not all, social roles, categories, or kinds (understood as ways of being a person) are defined by "a set of attitudes and patterns of treatment towards bodies as they are perceived (or imagined) through frameworks of salience implicit in the attitudes" (Haslanger 2012, p. 7). Like Ásta's account, according to Haslanger, to be an X is to be subject to such and such expectations and to have certain self-understandings that one is such and such or ought to perform in such and such a way.

Haslanger's (2012) program draws attention to the fact that the meaning of any social identity and the practices in which one is "supposed to" engage given that social-identity classification given by others, as well as others' behavior and attitudes towards a socially-classified individual or sub-group, vary across space and time. Thus, social constructionists concerned with the effects of categorization for individuals are usually interested not only in the meaning of nominal classifications, or to state it differently, in the meaning of concepts independent of context (i.e., "woman refugee," "asexual," and so on), but also in the larger social matrix that determines whether social categorizations will admit of, to use Ásta's language, weaker or stronger constraints and enablements (Haslanger 2012, p. 126). Social constructionists and social scientists are also interested in the ways in which

[m]embers of... subordinate groups typically internalize and eventually come to resemble and even reinforce the dominant image because of the coercive power behind it. Thus [sic] the dominants' view appears to be confirmed, when in fact they have the power to enforce it (Haslanger 2012, p. 6).

Social constructionists see the goal of debunking projects to be that of undermining the sense of necessity in what are really conventional categories or practices, and moreover, exposing to individuals their complicity in these conventions, including the ways in which their beliefs and other practices contribute to the perpetuation of other beliefs and practices.

With respect to the critique of a concept or practice, Haslanger (2012) approvingly quotes Elizabeth S. Anderson's "Unstrapping the Straitjacket of 'Preference': A Comment on Amartya Sen's Contributions to Philosophy and Economics" (2001) directly:

A critique of a concept is not a rejection of that concept, but an exploration of its various meanings and limitations. One way to expose the limitations of a concept is by introducing new concepts that have different meanings but can plausibly contend for some of the same uses to which the criticized concept is typically put. The introduction of such new concepts gives us choices about how to think that we did not clearly envision before. Before envisioning these alternatives, our use of the concept under question is *dogmatic*. We employ it automatically, un-questioningly, because it seems as if it is the inevitable conceptual framework within which inquiry must proceed. But envisioning alternatives, we convert dogmas into *tools*; ideas we can *choose* or not, depending on how well the use of these ideas suits our investigations and purposes (Anderson as quoted in Haslanger, p. 17).

The preceding has provided a general overview of what descriptive and ameliorative social constructionist programs amount to and has shown that Ásta's and Haslanger's works independently and jointly reveal the complexity and difficulties involved in attending to disagreements about the meanings and demarcations of the extensions of social kind-concepts. Though this paper has not provided an answer to the question of how asexuals and allies might specifically proceed in altering and ameliorating popular conceptions of asexuality and asexuals qua individuals or as a group(s), and while this paper has not provided a specific account of how popular mediums might work to do the same, it has, by incorporating the works of Ásta and Haslanger's social-epistemological and social-metaphysical programs in particular, expounded a general description of how sexusociety might come into being and an ameliorative program that might do some work in the service of altering, in a liberatory manner for asexuals, Przybyło's sexusociety.

12. Conclusion

While much attention is and has been focused on LGBTQ* rights and pro-sex issues, asexuality has and continues to be marginalized in society writ large and within the marginalized LGBTQ* community as well. This subject has important philosophical and real-world ethical implications. This paper has attempted to make clearer a particular, perhaps ironic, phenomenon,

which is that as non-heteronormative, non-monogamous, and generally pro-sex movements gain momentum and public support, asexuals are left by the wayside or even seen as standing in the way of emancipatory goals (or in need of emancipation themselves). All of this serves to underscore asexuality as a pathos, creating a climate, whether in academic milieus, in most of popular culture, or in the everyday world, where allies are hard to come by on account of an epistemic harm. The notion of asexuality is not well-enough understood to be defended, questioned, or even re-evaluated. This paper has provided *one* general description of a hegemonic sexually compulsory society by combining Ásta's and Przybylo's programs. This paper has also suggested *one* precursor to an ameliorative escape route for asexuals and allies, be they individuals, groups, popular culture influencers (whether individuals or technologies/technological productions). This has been undertaken by combining Ásta's and Haslanger's programs in the service of providing a backdrop or metaphysical picture that may prove useful in at least some proactive feminist or otherwise ameliorative programs. Przybylo's, Ásta's, and Haslanger's accounts emphasize how, to various degrees, by means of dialectic, "we" might attempt to alter and ameliorate the portrayed and lived experiences of asexuals, as well as the portrayed and colloquially understood meaning(s) of asexuality.

1 The following pressing question arises: Who is the expert on the topic? This is to say, who are the real experts, if anyone: Academics or asexuals themselves?

2 More radically, perhaps, as portrayed in popular news media, asexual persons can be wrongly associated with the recent uprising of "involuntary celibates" or "incels" – persons desiring, but unable to secure sexual or romantic partners. "Incelism" is often characterized by misogyny, resentment, a sense of entitlement to sex, and the endorsement of violence against people who are sexually active. Recent media coverage of violent incel cases includes the 2014 U.S. shooting massacre undertaken by Elliot Rodger, for example. Though examining involuntary celibacy is of vital importance and in need of further analysis given its overtly violent nature, and given incelism's incorrect association with asexuality, I will not address the topic herein, but wish nonetheless to draw attention here, in only a cursory manner, that this misguided connection exists.

3 In 2013, Ásta self-referred and published under the name Ásta Kristjana Sveinsdóttir. I refer to Ásta herein as she does herself currently. I do so despite her article from which I reference having been published under her now not-in-use name.

4 The "we" to whom this "our" corresponds remains an open question.

5 What will not be explored is the issue of asexuality's relation to those individuals and groups classified as physically otherly-abled where "physically otherly-abled" is understood according to non-homogenous, but still fairly comparable lay understandings.

6 Given that we are social creatures, perhaps through and through, one might wonder if it is indeed possible to consider such a question independent of social relations or social influence.

7 Plausibly, a question to ask Ásta (2013) is where this coercive power originates, as well as what sustains its force.

8 Obviously, in the case of a party, deferral to an authority on sex is very much an unlikely scenario. How often, for example, could an individual have access to a medical specialist's interpretation of some individual's chromosomal makeup?

9 See Klassen 2017.

10 Admittedly, it is unclear to whom this "we" does or should refer.

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