

Racing Ace

Asexuality, Race, and Social Justice

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Introduction

- ❖ Racialization of sexuality and sexual practices and vice versa
- ❖ Role of asexual communities in addressing racialized (a)sexualization
- ❖ Practice including this awareness in your advocacy!
 - What does this look like in ace activism?
 - What role does/can asexuality play in other activist movements?
 - How do we create ace-affirming spaces with race in mind?



Terms & Definitions

Asexuality: The experience of little or no sexual desire. Exists on a spectrum, including gray asexuality and demisexuality.

Compulsory (hetero)sexuality: A set of attitudes, institutions, and practices that reinforce the belief that everyone should have or want to have frequent sex (of a socially approved kind).

Institutional racism: The patterns and practices embedded in society that perpetuate racism; racism isn't limited to individual/interpersonal acts.

Asexualization: Ascribing an asexual identity to a group (e.g. racial groups) without their consent.

Non-sexual: The absence of sexual desire/sexual behavior. Not necessarily claimed as an identity – distinct from an ace identity.

Hypersexuality: An emphasis on sexuality and sexual behavior and practices; the racial connotations of hypersexuality construct certain groups as *excessively* sexual and therefore deviant.

White supremacy: The belief that the social construction of whiteness is inherently superior to other racial groups, which naturalizes and justifies their dominant positions in society.

Historical Background

- ❖ Sexuality shapes and is shaped by race
 - Constructions of sexuality have racial (and class and gender, etc.) connotations
 - Similarly, racism and sexual discrimination shape each other
 - Constructed sexuality is a tool for violence against racialized Others
 - Racist ideologies have influenced ideas behind discrimination against sexual minorities
- ❖ Social constructs aren't identities
 - Here we're talking about *sexualization* not *sexual identity* i.e. these are assigned labels and don't reflect individual preferences/nuances
- ❖ Content warning: sexual and physical violence (about 20 minutes)

How are Indigenous peoples talked about?

- ❖ “They live naked in bodie, as if their shame of their sinne deserved no covering ... They esteem it a virtue to lie, deceive and steale as their master the divell teacheth them.” – Alexander Whitaker (English Christian minister in Virginia), 1613
- ❖ “Their marriages are not a sacrament but a sacrilege. They are idolatrous, libidinous, and commit sodomy. Their chief desire is to eat, drink, worship heathen idols, and commit bestial obscenities.” – Bernadino de Minaya (Dominican cleric)
- ❖ “I think that the Indian way of life as you call it, to me means cigarette burns in arms of children, double checking the locks on my cars, keeping a loaded shotgun by my door, and car bodies and beer cans on the front lawn.” – Ontario council member Mike Whelan (middle class white man), 1990

“Inherent Violability” and Hypersexualization

- ❖ Wealthy cis het white European colonizers constructed Indigenous identities as inherently physically, morally, and sexually “impure” and “deviant”
 - In contrast to the “purity” of white cis het men and women’s sexuality
- ❖ “Inherent violability” (Andrea Smith) was weaponized as a tool of racism and colonialism and functioned as a tool of white supremacy
 - Racial Others weren’t afforded bodily integrity, justifying the violation of their bodies and their land
- ❖ Construction of black and brown bodies as inherently sexually deviant in the form of excessive/improper sexuality → hypersexualization
 - Genocide of Indigenous peoples, rape of enslaved black women (and men), lynching of men of color for “preying” on cis het white women, border policing

- ❖ “(My master) was a good man but he was pretty bad among the women ... They all used their women like they wanted to, and there wasn’t nobody to say anything about it.” – Slave testimony from South Carolina
- ❖ The American Friends Service Committee documented over 346 reports of gender violence on the U.S.-Mexico border from 1993 to 1995 (excluding cases that went unreported or were reported to a different agency)
- ❖ “There was this (immigration service agent) who was at the International Bridge. ... He had a thing for people, especially women ... who were lesbian, or in his mind were deviates ...” – Description of a white officer who stopped Mexican women as they traveled over the border
- ❖ Racially discriminatory employment laws forced Chinese women into the sex trade; by 1860 nearly a quarter of the San Francisco population of Chinese women were employed in prostitution. The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and the Page Law (1875) prohibited the entry of Chinese women into the country for “lewd and immoral purposes.”

False Justification of White Supremacy

- ❖ By scapegoating men of color, cishet white men erased themselves as perpetrators of violence and positioned themselves as protectors of white cishet femininity and liberators of women of color from “oppressive” cultures
 - Indigenous women “are submitted to unjust drudgery. This I believe is the case with every barbarous people. It is civilization alone which replaces women in the enjoyment of their equality.” – Thomas Jefferson
 - Ida B. Wells found that only a third of more than 10,000 black people that had been lynched between 1865 and 1895 were accused of rape and most of the black men that had been accused had been involved in “obviously consensual” relationships with white women
- ❖ White women have also ignored the autonomy and capacity of women of color to organize, especially those in the Global South

Asexualization/De-sexualization

- ❖ Groups of people have also been forcibly desexualized, also to the benefit of white supremacist heteropatriarchy
 - White women's racial "purity" was represented through expectations of virtual asexuality and passionlessness
 - "Pure" white Southern mistress held up as ideal of Victorian womanhood compared to "Jezebel" stereotype; also exploited image to coerce and rape black men
 - "Mammy" stereotype arose as continued justification of slavery
 - Black women allowed into white households were being "uplifted" through their proximity to the white family
 - Influx of male immigrant laborers (especially Chinese and Japanese) and the exclusion of immigrant women → stereotype of East Asian men prioritizing work, which implies asexualization

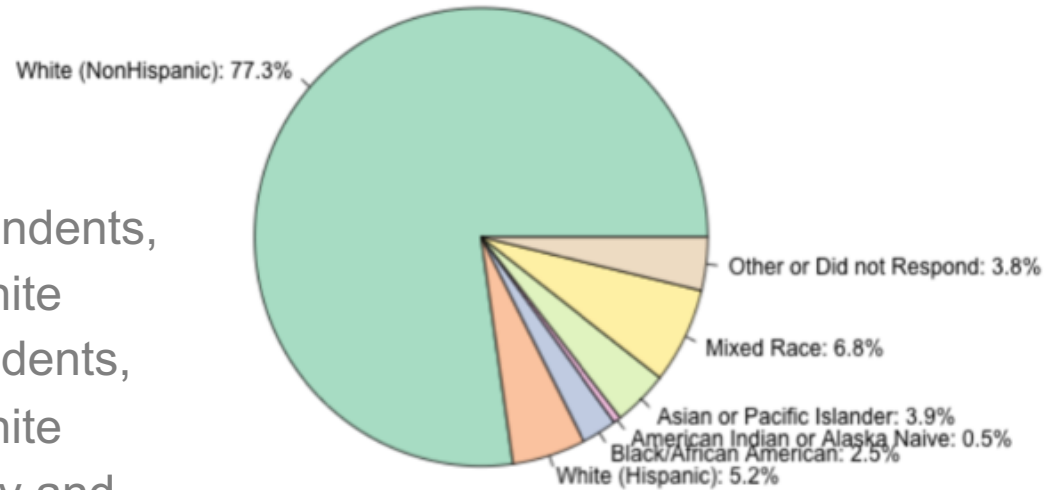
Shifting Constructions of White Sexuality

- ❖ Cishet white men and women have always constructed themselves as the bearers of normative sexuality, although definitions have shifted over time
 - White middle class Victorian ideals of “manliness” (self-restraint) shifted to an appropriation of working class “masculinity” (aggressive (hetero)sexuality)
 - “Manliness” connoted “civility,” and therefore white supremacy; “God has not been preparing the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing but vain and idle self-contemplation and self-admiration. No! He has...made us adepts in government that we may administer government among savage and senile peoples.” – Sen. Albert Beveridge, 1900
 - Twentieth century sex manuals posed monogamous heterosexual marital sex as essential to the health of a relationship
 - Books marketed toward middle class white cishet married couples

Asexual Census

- ❖ 2014: out of 10,880 asexual respondents, 77.3% identified themselves as white
- ❖ 2015: out of 8,663 asexual respondents, 83.4% identified themselves as white
- ❖ What does this mean for asexuality and race?
 - Asexuality began in white online spaces
 - Not a word one is often exposed to outside of these spaces
 - Knowledge of asexuality = privilege
 - White spaces remain white

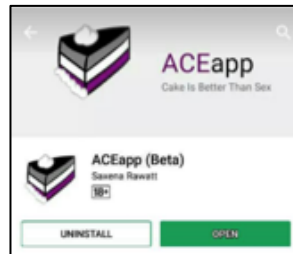
Race: United States of America



From the 2014 Asexuality Census

The Online Ace Community

- ❖ AVEN (Asexual Visibility and Education Network)
 - Founded by David Jay in 2001
- ❖ First/largest online asexual community
- ❖ For many people, first encounter with asexuality
 - Site becomes authority/representative
- ❖ Other communities:
 - Twitter
 - Tumblr
 - AceApp



David Jay and the Whiteness of Ace Activism

- ❖ Creator of AVEN
- ❖ Figurehead of the asexual movement
 - Appeared on TV, other interviews
- ❖ Tasked with “speaking for all asexuals”
- ❖ White man, one of the only public asexual figures
 - Keeps image of asexuality white



- ❖ (A)sexual documentary (2011):
 - Jay featured
 - Ace community depicted as mainly white

Ace Media Representation

❖ *Bojack Horseman* (released 2014)

- Todd Chavez (white cis man) realizes his asexuality
- Occurs in fourth season (released Sept 2017)
- “Asexual meet-up” briefly shown, others barely featured
- Todd remains the primary depiction of asexuality



❖ *Jughead* comics by Chip Zdarsky (2016)

- Named asexual on page
- White cis teenager
- Ambiguous treatment of sexuality on Riverdale TV show

The Asexual by Michael Paramo

theasexual.com A space specifically devoted to asexual voices. Created by Michael Paramo, “an asexual Latinx demiguy” who saw a lack of ace representation and ace spaces and sought to change that.

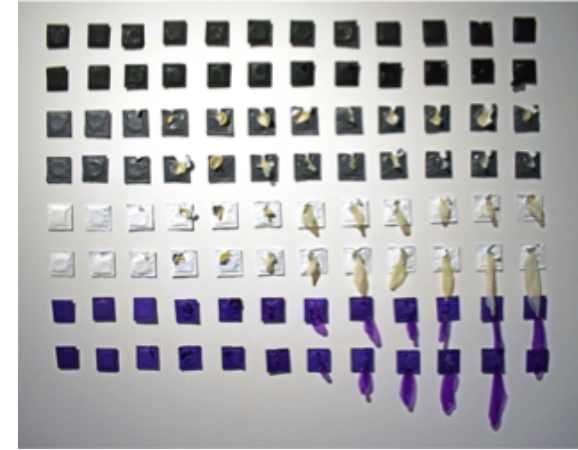
From the website: “*The Asexual* was founded by Michael Paramo in October 2016. It serves as a space for writers and artists under the ace umbrella to publish their work in an online and physical quarterly journal. Its main objective is to center narratives, perspectives, and activism of ace and asexual people.”

- ❖ Themes include:
 - Asexuality and body
 - Intersections of race and asexuality
 - Asexuality and sex
- ❖ “On the intersections of asexuality and race” received pushback from white asexuals because “submissions by ace people of color will be prioritized”
- ❖ Highlights how the community stays white

Asexual Art as Activism

Three “waves” of asexual activism

1. Establishing identity
 - a. Ace people have always existed, just no access to term/community
2. Promoting visibility
 - a. Spreading concept of asexuality and making it more well-known
3. Challenging mainstream ideas of sex
 - a. Hypersexualized society poses asexuality as counter-narrative
 - b. Everyone experiences sex differently and is affected by compulsory sexuality (societal pressure/expectation to have sex, even if one is not ready or has no interest)
 - c. Reclaim individual asexual identities; avoid blanket statements about asexuality
 - i. Asexual does not equal a complete absence of all sex or sexuality: many asexual people are comfortable talking about sex and sometimes having sex
 - ii. Sex-repulsed aces also exist and are valid, but their experience does not reflect that of every ace person



As an asexual person and an artist, I made an art piece to bring awareness to the individuality of the ace community and people’s relationship to sex.

Defining Asexual Activism

- ❖ Emerging contemporary sexual and gender social movement
- ❖ Links to other movements
 - Gay liberation, trans movement, etc.
- ❖ Distinguishing characteristics
 - Common desire to promote visibility and validity of identities and orientations
 - Protect and ensure their rights and treatment as people
 - Online/digital communities

Important facets of asexual activism

Ace Affirming Spaces

- Importance of validation and place of understanding

Building and Ace Empowerment Movement

- Challenging dominant ideologies
- Visibility
- Confronting marginalization from multiple angles

Alienation of Asexuality

Not “straight” enough	Not queer enough	Not ace enough
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Just haven’t met the right person• Humans are meant to have sex and reproduce• Asexuals are need to be fixed/cured	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Asexuals don’t belong in/are invading the lgbt+ community• Asexuals aren’t oppressed so they can’t be queer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You can’t be asexual if you have or enjoy sex• You can’t be asexual if you have a libido• You can’t be asexual if you masturbate• Etc.

How does your race affect the way you experience your ace identity?

Important facets of asexual activism

Ace Affirming Spaces

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Building and Ace Empowerment Movement

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What are ace-affirming spaces and why are they needed? How do we build them with race in mind? How do we move away from expressions of identity (stereotypical or subversive) that privilege sexual behavior?

Discussion Questions

- ❖ How do asexuality/ace people matter to lives/work/activism? Why does your work/activism matter to ace people?
- ❖ What can be done differently to be more inclusive? How can you incorporate new awareness about asexuality and race into the things you're already doing?
- ❖ How can ace activism intersect with other movements? (E.g. BLM, disability, reproductive justice, etc.)