"I just thought I was a late-bloomer": Exploring Asexual People's Experiences of Identity and Community

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RCEU 2023 Project Proposal

Project Title

“I just thought I was just a late bloomer”: Exploring asexual people's experiences of identity and community

Faculty Information

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I. Project Description

As a part of Dr. Sims’ ongoing research project “Decentering Heteronormativity in Critical Mixed Race Studies,” this RCEU project will examine mixed-race asexuality. The majority of research on mixed-race people has and continues to focus on heterosexual people; and while there is a nascent, growing literature on mixed-race bisexual women, mixed-race lesbians, and mixed-race gay men, this work, too, focuses on allosexuals, i.e., people who feel sexual attraction to others. To date, there is no focused empirical work describing the identity and experiences of asexual mixed-race people.

Given the impact that sexuality has been shown to have on mixed-race people’s racial and gender identity development, extant theories thereto potentially do not apply to asexual people. In addition to this academic lacuna, lack of information on asexual mixed-race people means that parents, school counselors, social workers, doctors, and others who work with and care for members of the LGBTQIA population are operating without evidence-based information with respect to asexuals. This RCEU project will be a qualitative case study of one mixed-race asexual woman interviewed by Dr. Sims, and it will begin to address the gaps in academic and practical knowledge of this overlooked population.

II. Student Duties, Contributions, and Outcomes

a. Specific Student Duties

The student-researcher’s duties will include data analysis and literature review. Regarding the former, the student-researcher will work with Dr. Sims once a week to analyze interview data and write reports on the results. The student-researcher will also find and read at least two relevant peer-reviewed research articles on asexuality each week in order to write an annotated bibliography and a literature review by the end of the program.

b. Tangible Contributions by the Student to the Project

The student-researcher will advance this project by helping complete the data analysis and literature review. These contributions will directly lead to the publication of a co-authored journal article. This future article will be the first within the field (Sociology of Race/Ethnicity and Critical Mixed Race Studies) on mixed-race asexuality.

c. Specific Outcomes Provided by the Project to the Student

The main skills-based outcome provided by participation in this project is that the student-researcher will gain the ability to conduct qualitative data analysis. This will include gaining the ability to use QDA Miner, a qualitative data analysis computer program, as well as gaining the ability to effectively articulate qualitative results in writing. Secondly, from searching for relevant
literature, the student will hone their skills at finding, reading, and identify key findings from scholarly work. From completing an annotated bibliography, the student-researcher will improve their writing skills; and from completing a literature review, the student-researcher will improve their skills at synthesizing information. Regarding knowledge-based outcomes, the student-researcher will gain a deeper understanding of a minority population (asexual people). Both the skills-based and knowledge-based outcomes provided by this project will prepare the student-researcher for advanced social science courses, graduate school, and/or research focused employment positions.

III. Student Selection Criteria
Applicants to this student-researcher position must be Sociology majors who, by Summer 2023, will have successfully completed the following relevant major courses: SOC100 Intro to Soc, SOC301 Research Methods, and SOC309 Sociology of Sexuality.

IV. Project Mentorship
Dr. Sims will provide the student-researcher with skills training and mentorship via weekly meetings and consistent email communication. She will meet with the student-researcher once a week in the Sociology Department Lab (or via Zoom as a contingency plan) to work on data analysis, literature reviewing, and writing. Regarding data analysis, Dr. Sims will first teach/review the basics of qualitative data analysis; and then, she will train the student-researcher on how to use qualitative analysis computer programs. Following this, Dr. Sims will review and provide weekly feedback on the student-researcher’s progress analyzing the data.

Regarding literature reviewing, the student-researcher and Dr. Sims will have weekly discussions about the most recently located and read articles. By listening to the student-researcher’s summary of the articles as well as providing feedback on written drafts of their annotated bibliography and literature review, Dr. Sims will guide the student-researcher in improving their skills at finding appropriate academic literature, identifying and synthesizing key information, and effectively writing for a scientific audience.