

Intracommunity Attitudes Toward the Gatekeeping of Asexuality in the LGBTQ+ Community on Tumblr

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Abstract : This is a qualitative investigation that examines the social media site, Tumblr, for the goal of analyzing the controversy regarding the inclusion of asexuality in the LGBTQ+ community. As platforms such as Tumblr permit the development of communities for marginalized groups, social media serves as a core component to exclusionary practices and boundary negotiations for community membership. This research is important because there is a paucity of research on the topic and a significant gap in the literature with regards to intracommunity gatekeeping. However, discourse on the topic is blatantly apparent on social media platforms. The objectives are to begin to bridge the gap in the literature by examining attitudes towards the inclusion of asexuality within the LGBTQ+ community. In order to analyze the attitudes developed towards the inclusion of asexuality in the LGBTQ+ community, eight publicly available blogs on Tumblr.com were selected from both the "inclusionist" and "exclusionist" perspectives. Blogs selected were found through a basic search for "inclusionist" and "exclusionist" on the Tumblr website. Out of the first twenty blogs listed for each set of results, those centrally focused on asexuality discourse were selected. For each blog, the fifty most recent postings were collected. Analysis of the collected postings exposed three central themes from the exclusionist perspective as well as for the inclusionist perspective. Findings indicate that from the inclusionist perspective, asexuality belongs to the LGBTQ+ community. One primary argument from this perspective is that asexual individuals face opposition for their identity just as do other identities included in the community. This opposition is said to take a variety of forms, such as verbal shaming, assumption of illness and corrective rape. Another argument is that the LGBTQ+ community and asexuals face a common opponent in cisheterosexism as asexuals struggle with the assumed and expected sexualization. A final central theme is that denying asexual inclusion leads to the assumption of heteronormativity. Findings also indicate that from the exclusionist perspective, asexuality does not belong to the LGBTQ+ community. One central theme from this perspective is the equalization of cisgender heteroromantic asexuals with cisgender heterosexuals. As straight individuals are not allowed in the community, exclusionists argue that asexuals engaged in opposite gender partnerships should not be included. Another debate is that including asexuality in the community sexualizes all other identities by assuming sexual orientation is inherently sexual rather than romantic. Finally, exclusionists also argue that asexuality encourages childhood labeling and forces sexual identities on children, something not promoted by the LGBTQ+ community. Conclusions drawn from analyzing both perspectives is that integration may be a possibility, but complexities add another layer of discourse. For example, both inclusionists and exclusionists agree that privileged identities do not belong to the LGBTQ+ community. The focus of discourse is whether or not asexuals are privileged. Clearly, both sides of the debate have the same vision of what binds the community together. The question that remains is who belongs to that community.

Keywords : asexuality, exclusionists, inclusionists, Tumblr

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