



THE ASEXUAL  
VISIBILITY & EDUCATION  
NETWORK

## **Employment Discrimination Against The Asexual Community:**

### **A Growing Trend**

Recommendation to Include Asexuality as a Protected Category in the Employment  
Nondiscrimination Act

Presented to the National Center for Transgender Equality

January 26, 2013

### **Overview**

Although there is no legal precedent in case law describing employment discrimination against the asexual community, demographic and psychological research strongly suggests that this will dramatically change within the next decade, driven by three factors:

1. The historically unprecedented number of asexual-identified individuals preparing to enter the workforce.
2. The historically unprecedented public visibility of the asexual community.
3. The high rate at which people made aware of asexuality exhibit bias, most notably bias related to employment.

For this reason we strongly encourage the NGLTF to include asexuality as a protected class in upcoming discussions regarding the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, and are eager to participate in such discussions where appropriate.

### **Employment Discrimination Against The Asexual Community: A Growing Trend**

Employment discrimination against the asexual community exists, although incidents of it have so far been limited by the relatively low number of asexual individuals who are out at work and the lack of awareness about asexuality among employers. One typical case of asexual employment discrimination is described in a blog post entitled "Was I fired for being asexual?", in which an employee was fired for "attitude problems" after choosing not to participate in the sexual banter of her coworkers (Lasciel, 2011). These anecdotal cases have not been sufficient to create a trail of case law; additionally, the lack of employee protection laws to which to appeal

may also have limited the number of complaints.

### **The Rise of Asexual-Identified Employees**

Though academic research estimates that approximately 1% of the human population may not experience sexual attraction (Bogaert, 2004), the phenomenon of asexual identity is relatively recent. Ten years ago Asexuality.org had fewer than 150 members. Today it is the world's largest online community of people identifying as asexual with over 70,000 members, and is the largest of a robust ecosystem of online asexual communities. Registration rates on Asexuality.org are at an all-time high, averaging roughly 40 new members per day.

Demographic data indicates that a large percentage of these asexual-identified individuals are still too young to have experienced employment discrimination. Because asexual identity is still in its infancy, a disproportionate number of asexual-identified individuals are youth or young adults. A recent community census indicated that 73% of respondents from the asexual community are 23 or younger, limiting the number of opportunities they have had to be targets of employment discrimination (Miller, 2012). Over the next five years this large population of out asexuals will continue to grow in number and transition into the workforce, creating a historically unprecedented spike in visibly asexual employees across the country.

### **The Rise of Asexual-Aware Employers**

As asexual-identified individuals are preparing to enter the workforce, cultural awareness about asexuality has sharply increased. In addition to coverage in mainstream media outlets such as the New York Times, CNN and 20/20, the release of a 2011 documentary called *(A)Sexual* has sparked a new wave of interest among the press and among television and film producers. Since the first appearance of asexual characters on a major network show last year (where they were "cured" by Dr. House on the Fox series *House*), the asexual community has received regular solicitations from television and film producers interested in featuring asexual characters in fictional and reality television. The presence of these characters, combined with ongoing media coverage, are making asexuality widely known in mainstream straight culture. Despite the asexual community's best efforts, we expect that this increased visibility will also trigger more widespread discrimination.

### **The Facts About Discrimination Against Asexuals**

Asexual people do not experience the same type of discrimination as the gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender communities. Rather than attacked for being deviant and told to be ashamed, asexual people are told that we are broken and inhuman, and attacked in an attempt to "fix" us. Because sexuality is equated with healthy intimacy, asexual people are wrongly perceived as emotionally stunted, socially incompetent, and insufficiently masculine or feminine. In their 2012 online survey of heterosexual adults from the U.S. and Canada, MacInnis and Hodson reported that many respondents likened asexuals to mechanical devices lacking "human nature emotions" (MacInnis and Hodson, 2012).

This landmark study on discrimination in the asexual community found that among a heterosexual sample set intention to discriminate against asexuals in matters of housing and hiring was equivalent to that against homosexual and bisexual individuals. Furthermore, they argue that bias against asexuals is decoupled from singlism and "concern[s] their sexual deviancy rather than simple biases against those who are relatively independent and not in committed relationships" (MacInnis and Hodson, 2012, p. 738). Negative beliefs about asexuals were also reported. Study participants were more likely to indicate they would avoid contact with an asexual in the future than they were in relation to a homosexual or bisexual person. MacInnis and Hodgson conclude that their study corroborates the hypothesis that "as in the case of bias against celibate homosexuals, simple membership in a sexual minority group may suffice to trigger outgroup negativity among heterosexuals generally" (2012, p. 727).

## **Conclusion**

Over the next decade, asexuality will receive a historically unprecedented level of visibility in the workplace as more asexual employees come out and more non-asexual employers learn about asexuality through representations in the media and popular culture. This increased visibility will trigger widespread discrimination in the workplace, as asexual employees are wrongly perceived as socially incompetent and mechanical. In order to counter this pending discrimination, asexuality must be included in the definition of "sexual orientation" protected by the Employment Nondiscrimination Act.

Representatives from the two major asexual advocacy organizations, Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) and Asexual Awareness Week (AAW), are eager to join discussions about upcoming legislation regarding employment discrimination. Contact information for these representatives is listed below:

### **David Jay**

Founder, AVEN

[david@asexuality.org](mailto:david@asexuality.org)

314-210-7659

### **Sara Beth Brooks**

Founder, Asexual Awareness Week

[sarabrooks@gmail.com](mailto:sarabrooks@gmail.com)

916-212-3709

### **M Leclerc**

Boston Area Organizer, AVEN

[amleclerc@icloud.com](mailto:amleclerc@icloud.com)

508-642-9994

## References

- Bogaert, A. F. (2004). Asexuality: Its prevalence and associated factors in a national probability sample. *Journal of Sex Research, 41*, 279-287.
- Lasciel. (2011, August 10). Was I fired because of my asexuality? [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://thecupcakeace.wordpress.com/2011/08/10/was-i-fired-because-of-my-asexuality/>
- MacInnis, C. and Hodson, G. (2012). Intergroup bias toward "Group X": Evidence of prejudice, dehumanization, avoidance, and discrimination against asexuals. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations, 15*(6), 725-743.
- Miller, T. (2012). *Analysis of the 2011 Asexual Awareness Week community census*. Retrieved from <http://asexualawarenessweek.com/docs/SiggyAnalysis-AAWCensus.pdf>