A Discursive Look at the Friend / Partner Distinction: Implications for Asexual People

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Example—Jean and Ann

I: What’s the, you know biggest difference or between friendship and a dating relationship with you then?
A: hmm
J: SEX? (A: laughs) (J: laughs)
A: Yeah that’s a big one. (J: laugha) And I finnd th- well you usually spend more time with somebody when you’re dating them, so (J: umhm) An uh the bound-
aries I think are different […] And you can get mad at different things at guys when you’re in a relationship and when you’re dating.
I: What do you mean by that?
A: Yeah like you can’t get mad at a guy friendnd for =
J =: or them when you’re friends
A= for not calling you. (J: yeaah) It’s not the same (J: laughs) as if your boy-
friend doesn’t call you.
J: Yeah totally
A: It’s totally different than a guy friend not calling (J: okay) you =
J: = a guy friend not calling you, they’d be weirded out if you got upset =
A: = that doesn’t matter
J: = probably they’d be like (A: yeah) Come on I’m not your boyfriend, as m-
probably what I think.
A: Umhm
I: Okay
J: And I also wouldn’t I- I don’t think I’d get upset if guy friend didn’t call me.
If a GUY FRIEND SAID I’ll call you, and then didn’t I’d be like, Yeah whatever
they got bussy. But you expect your boyfriend even if they’re busy to make that
time, that’s why they’re your boyfriend.
A: yeah (J: okay) you’re supposed to be special and (J: YEAH) kind of set
above everything else, not above EVERYTHING but =
J: = higher on the totem pole (A: yeah) than if you were just a friend

Jean and Ann situate themselves morally (as upstanding persons) by aligning themselves with their moral order

Implications & Conclusions

Sex (sexuality) is the clear initial difference. They delve deeper: sexuality is not enough

Explicit prioritisation: valuing romantic partners above friends

Moral prescriptions for friends’ and partners’ behaviour & acceptable responses to violations
• Partners (not friends) should be priorities,
• Anger is permitted if a partner (but not friend) violates the moral order

Participants corroborate each others’ accounts by acknowledging points and co-speaking

Discourse Analysis

Discursive psychology begins from the perspective that people’s social worlds, including their identities and relationships, are constituted through their conversations and interactions both with other people and with themselves. Instead of treating language as transparent and merely descriptive, language is seen as constructing the very things it describes. Discursive psychology is not concerned with what people think or believe, but instead with what they actually do when they speak: what do people accomplish and how? People hold each other accountable for what they say in conversation, and in doing so, they produce moral prescriptions about behaviour. Looking at what people explain or demand explanations for, and also what “counts” as a satisfactory explanation, discourse analysts infer the moral orders that speakers are orienting toward (Gergen & Waller, 1998). As people speak, they are constantly making themselves out to be moral persons in conversation (Harre, 1992).

Method

12 friend-pairs ages 18-25, post-secondary students
• Cross-gender and same-gender friends
• Variety of sexual orientations (straight, gay, bi)
Conversation guide with friendship topics
Research interview approximately 1 hour
• Recorded, transcribed and analysed

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References


Friendship

Friendship in adulthood is considered to be a less intense, non-
sexual analogue of romance. Researchers focus on (heterosexual) same-gender friendships, assuming it to be uncomplicated by sexual desire, and assuming it to be a less intense
sexual analogue of romance. While, even heterosexual people sometimes report being same-gender romance desire for friends, and also same-gender sexual attractions in friendships

Asexuality 101

Asexual - A person who does not experience sexual attraction

Asexuality is distinct from the DSM diagnosis of Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder, and has been discussed as a potential sexual orientation (Bogaert, 2006; Pausch & Graham, 2007). The asexual community has been compared with LGBTQ communities, reflecting their shared emphasis on respecting self-identification (Schererr, 2008). Schererr noted the asexual community’s critical distinction between the sexual and the

Asexuality is diverse, be they straight, gay
