

Asexuality panel aims to spread awareness, educate

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"You just haven't met the right person."
 "You're just trying to make yourself special."
 "You mean you're abstinent, right?"

These are some of the statements Riki Higgins, a master's student in special education, has heard about her asexuality. They reflect misconceptions that UT's OUTreach: LGBT and Ally Resource Center hopes to change with a panel event on asexuality Thursday at 6:30 p.m. at the Black Cultural Center.

The OUTreach center has hosted bisexual, pansexual and LGBTQ+ panels before, but this is the first time a public event will focus solely on asexuality. For Genevieve Jeter, a senior in BCMB who has been one of the main organizers of the event, it's an important milestone for UT.

"Asexuality as an orientation, as a spectrum that has terminology that people can identify with and a flag — these are relatively new things, like the past 15-20 years," Jeter said. "Having a panel like this is a big event, because we're basically unveiling asexuality as a sexual orientation and a spectrum in itself to the campus."

Jeter described the OUTreach Center as having a growing asexual community, one where she said she felt welcomed and legitimate in her orientation. Now that asexuality is becoming

more widely discussed, Jeter said it is important to address misconceptions like the ones Higgins mentioned.

"The biggest point of doing this panel is education of the public," Jeter said. "Because so few people know what asexuality is, what it's about and that it's affecting a lot of people and it's a very large community."

Higgins said she had never met another asexual person until she heard about the Q&A. She reached out to Jeter and will now be one of the panelists at tonight's event.

"I'm excited to be on the panel because I feel like I've been vocal solo for so long that I'm glad to have a forum to talk about it," Higgins said. "It's an issue that deserves to be addressed."

All of the panelists are somewhere on the asexuality spectrum and will answer pre-written questions as well as questions from the audience.

"There's something elegant about (asexuality) because it's its own spectrum ... There's a lot to think about," Jeter said. "It's really amazing to meet people who occupy different parts of it. That's why we're having the panel."

In addition to tonight's panel, the OUTreach center also hosts asexuality discussion groups on Thursdays at 7 p.m. in Melrose Hall for those who identify as asexual or are questioning. For more information, visit lgbt.utk.edu (<http://lgbt.utk.edu/>).

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