

motivations for masturbation may not stem from an intrinsic desire or sexual excitement. Finally, that social inhibition and withdrawal, both symptoms characteristic of the Cluster A Personality Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), were elevated among asexuals deserves greater exploration. A qualitative methodology allowed us to probe

The interview lasted 30–90 min and participants were paid a \$50 honorarium. The telephone interview was digitally recorded and later transcribed by a professional transcription service.

Data Analyses

This is an excerpt from:

Asexuality: A Mixed-Methods Approach

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For the full paper please ask your professor.

For this assignment you need to read "Results & Discussion" & "Conclusions"

Study 2 formed the sample. Following qualitative analyses, we were prepared to contact additional participants who expressed interest in being interviewed; however, we reached saturation of themes (Sandelowski, 1995) with these 15 participants and therefore did not find it necessary to continue recruitment. Participants were 4 men and 11 women with an age range of 20–57, and lived in various countries: United States, Germany, England, Canada, and New Zealand.

Procedure

Interview dates and times were scheduled via e-mail by the study assistant (K.R.), who also conducted all interviews via telephone. A list of pre-established questions was asked of all participants, and based on the replies and experiences shared by participants, follow-up questions were probed. Participants' results from their questionnaires were not made known to the interviewer. Individuals were told that the purpose of the interview was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of asexuals. Asexuals were invited to describe their own sexuality in whatever words they chose. They were asked to provide examples of sexual and non-sexual experiences or behaviors to exemplify their descriptions and were asked the following probing questions: Would you consider asexuality to be a sexual orientation? What are your beliefs about the associations between asexuality and low sexual desire? What is the link between asexuality and personal distress for you? Is there a link between religion and your asexuality? Describe your fears associated with sexuality? What are your feelings about yours and others' genitals?

the 10 themes to re-read the interview transcripts and to code passages of text that directly corresponded to those themes. Raters were mindful of themes that were not readily apparent in the transcripts, and documented if they believed there were additional themes, not previously discussed, present in any particular transcript that deserved more systematic exploration. A third meeting of the reviewers was used to review passages of text corresponding to each of the themes and to resolve discrepancies. Inter-coder reliability was established informally by discussing discrepancies and resolving them as a team in line with the guidelines for analysis developed for each theme.

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Results and Discussion

A total of 10 topics emerged from the analyses as being the most meaningful themes. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

Theme 1: Definition of Asexuality

There was a consistent theme to how asexuals defined asexuality. A "lack of sexual attraction" was evident in nearly all interviews, and individuals distinguished this lack of attraction from other aspects of sexual response which may still have been present, such as sexual desire. If sexual desire or arousal were present, asexuals argued that they were not "directed" at anyone. This persistent or lifelong lack of sexual attraction was differentiated from the normative decline in sexual attraction that takes place with relationship duration:

I have a sexual drive that comes up regularly through my hormonal cycle, before I menstruate, there are times when I feel aroused, but it is not directed towards any individual. (Participant 8)

Another recurrent theme around definitions of asexuality was that there was a lack of anticipation leading up to any sexual experiences, and such a lack of anticipation, they argued, is what differentiated sexuals from asexuals. Notably, there was still excitement and anticipation for other (non-sexual) activities; thus, this did not appear to be a general blunting of all excitement:

I think sexuals have a lot of anticipation and pleasure leading up to the sexual experience. I don't have any of that. I could do without it. Even though it is very pleasurable and exciting while I am doing it, I have absolutely no anticipation for it at all. I have no interest or desire that would lead me towards that in the way that I do towards other activities that I enjoy. (Participant 8)

I could be attracted to someone. I can...you know, think they're good looking and think they're interesting and want to spend time with them and get to know them better. But to me it's never, oh, yeah, I hope we end up in bed. (Participant 2)

Prause and Graham (2007) argued that the lack of sexual attraction was related neither to a fear of sexual activity nor to a fear of forced sexual activity. This was replicated in our findings where individuals reported enjoying and looking forward to romantic contact, but had no interest in, rather than avoiding, sexual activity.

Theme 2: Feeling Different

A sense that one has always been different than others was also apparent throughout most of the interviews. Several talked about puberty and how their experiences contrasted with their friends in that they did not experience intense sexual urges or interests, and they could not understand "what the fuss was about":

I always knew that I was different and I always knew that I didn't have that interest like my friends had...I always had this babysitting job and I thought it was great because they would always give me a huge tip, but then my friends would go, "Oh we went to this really cool party and everybody was making out and it was so much fun and you should come next year." I would make a point of getting a babysitting job because there was no way I wanted to be in that kind of environment because I...I just didn't want to. (Participant 3)

Some elaborated on the theme of feeling different by noting that although they could not relate to their peers'

sexual interests, they were unaware at the time that they may be asexual. Many added that once they discovered AVEN, and the large community of other asexuals, they felt that the asexual label explained them and their experiences completely. There was also strong agreement that asexuality was a sexual orientation rooted in biology. Some felt that if the biologic underpinnings of asexuality could be proven, then stigma associated with asexuality would lessen.

Theme 3: Distinguishing Romantic from Asexual Relationships

It was not the case that asexuals did not desire any kind of relationship, and there was a careful distinction between romantic versus sexual aspects to relationships. Several reported wanting the closeness, companionship, intellectual, and emotional connection that comes from romantic relationships, and in this regard, they were similar to sexual individuals who desire closeness and intimacy. Many also discussed hopes of marrying one day, of having a "life partner," and possibly of having children.

Basically, I just enjoy being close to someone and spending time with them and doing things that make them happy. Not sexually..... Well, like I like being touched and held but I just don't really want to do anything sexual if that makes any sense. Like I desire to be held and like to cuddle and stuff but not to have sex. (Participant 1)

The desire for a romantic relationship was not universal in our sample. Some indicated that they desired neither sexual nor romantic interactions. Among those who did desire a romantic relationship, they defined those relationships according to romantic as opposed to sexual attractions (e.g., hetero-romantic instead of hetero-sexual).

Everyone's definition of sexual activity is somewhat different but I mean asexual people just aren't interested in intercourse and there are all different levels of how far they'll go...there are some asexuals who are aromantic and they don't want anyone to touch them and they hate being touched at all....in asexuality there is the same types of romances there is with sexuality. There's aromantic, heteroromantic, biromantic, and homoromantic and their sexualities could differ and what they desire could differ. It just depends on the person. (Participant 1)

Theme 4: Asexuality is not Another Disorder "In Disguise"

Many opposed the notion that asexuality was a symptom or component of another disorder, including HSDD. Because

asexuals lack interest in sexual activity, and the defining feature of HSDD is a distressing lack of desire (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), Bogaert (2006) noted that there might be a subgroup of asexuals who are at the lower polar end of the desire continuum. He also noted that there is likely another subgroup of asexuals who have normal, or even high, desire, despite the lack of sexual attraction (Bogaert, 2006). This hypothesis was presented to the current sample who clarified that they felt an important difference between them and that those with HSDD is that the latter still have a sexual attraction for others, whereas asexuals do not. In addition, as borne out in our quantitative data, levels of sexual distress for the majority of participants fell below clinical cut-off scores, and this was supported in the interviews.

I've never had the interest and so, even if today you could say, "Oh here...here's a pill that will fix you"...no, that's okay, thanks. (Participant 3)

I know there is a spectrum of asexuality, so there are people who do experience some sexual attraction, but for me, low sexual desire says that I think there is a problem with who I am, I want to desire sex, I know what that feels like some of the time to have some kind of desire, and now I am not experiencing any desire, so I see this as a disorder. Whereas for me, I have never felt any kind of sexual attraction, so I do not miss what I do not know. (Participant 9)

There was resistance to labeling asexuality as any type of disorder because of the emphasis on the pathological aspects of the term. Instead, the sentiment was that if asexuality were more accurately considered as an orientation, and not as a disorder, that this would reduce stigma and enhance non-judgmental research into asexuality.

Everyone in the asexual community wants to spread the message that it's [asexuality] not a disorder and it's not something that's a problem and needs to be fixed and that's the big thing, the reason that we're trying to get the word out about it as an orientation because if it's not considered an orientation then there must be a problem because you have to have an orientation. (Participant 1)

Theme 5: Overlap with Schizoid Personality

We found in Study 1 that social withdrawal featured strongly among a subset of the sample. Given that the Personality Disorders considered within Cluster A of the DSM-IV-TR are characterized by social withdrawal, we probed this further throughout the interviews. Specifically, participants were asked about the extent to which they could relate to some of the features of Schizoid Personality Disorder, which

include having little interest in sexual experiences, emotional coldness, limited capacity to express warm feelings towards others, and lacking desire for close, confiding relationships. Some asexuals noted that several of the members of AVEN were introverts, and therefore fit the descriptions of the Cluster A personality disorders. In our probing, seven of the 15 participants felt that they personally met criteria for Schizoid Personality Disorder:

To, at least a moderate extent, I pretty much match all of them (referring to Schizoid criteria)...although I've never been formally diagnosed and probably never will...I am pretty sure that if I did walk in, they would probably diagnose me with Schizoid Personality Disorder. (Participant 11)

Interestingly, whereas we did not specifically solicit the information, a number of participants suggested that many asexuals might also fit the criteria for Asperger's Disorder, which is characterized by having more pervasive problems with social interactions (as well as stereotyped patterns of behaviors). One participant noted that this was discussed widely on the AVEN discussion board, and that researchers might turn there for preliminary ideas to fuel research on the topic. As we did not probe this information from all participants, this possible link requires further exploration.

Theme 6: Motivations for Masturbation

We specifically probed experiences with masturbation and the rationale for engaging in this behavior given that some of the negative media attention to asexuality has focused there. Specifically, the criticism has been that asexuality is an inappropriate label for an individual who continues to engage in intentional and planned sexual activity. A sizeable proportion of the interviewees (but by no means all) admitted to masturbating and this was proportionately higher in men than in women (as is the case in the general population; Oliver & Hyde, 1993). There was a strong sentiment that "sex with oneself" was qualitatively different from sex with another in that the former can exist without sexual attraction. Furthermore, in masturbation, the motivation stemmed more from physical/physiologic needs rather than from emotional or relational reasons:

Even though they (an asexual) might want to clean out the plumbing once in a while, they don't have any interest in doing it with someone else. ...so that would...you know, that would qualify (as an asexual). (Participant 4)

At least a third of participants had great discomfort in talking about masturbation and one individual elected not to talk about his motivations for masturbation. This suggests that just as there may be confusion in the non-asexual

community about why an asexual might desire masturbation, there may also be embarrassment, guilt, shame, or other negative emotions associated with reasons for masturbation, or associated with the consequences of masturbating. One might posit that such reluctance around talking about masturbation might be even more pronounced than in the sexual person given that an open admission of masturbatory activity could threaten one's asexual identity. Although this possibility was not probed in the current study, it deserves greater exploration.

Theme 7: Technical Language

In discussing their experiences with masturbation, it was highly evident that the language used to describe masturbation, sexual intercourse, and their bodies was void of any pleasurable or sexual affect. Instead, these experiences were discussed in more of a technical, emotionally-stripped manner. This was the case when individuals were discussing emotional changes at puberty, sexual arousal, and feelings for their genitals, among other sexual domains. For example:

Puberty, well uh, you know I had the hormones, uh stuff starting working there but I really didn't have anything, nothing to focus it on. I did you know test the equipment so to say and everything works fine, pleasurable and all it's just not actually attracted to anything. (Participant 2)

Yeah, I'd say I was... well I would say I was lubricated I guess...but enough? It's hard to know. Um...you know, I mean like the plumbing works, let's say, if you want an expression..... Well, I don't know if I'd call it aroused. I mean, just because I'm lubricated doesn't necessarily mean I'm aroused. (Participant 13)

In reference to their feelings about their genitals, several stated that "they are just there." For some with artistic backgrounds, they stated being able to appreciate the artistic value of the genitals, but that this was not sexual. Most noted that the genitals neither "bothered" nor "excited" them, and disgust with genitals did not play a role in their asexuality. Notably, these emotionally-bare descriptions were specific to discussing sexual activity, and not to other aspects of the individual's lives or behaviors. Thus, corroborating our findings from Study 1, it did not appear as though asexuals were, in general, alexithymic, or void of the ability to experience emotions.

Theme 8: Negotiating Boundaries in Relationships

In Study 1, 26% of women but only 9% of men were currently in a relationship; however, 70% had reported ever previously being in relationships. Some asexuals had been/were

currently in relationships with another asexual. In such cases, there was little need for negotiating sexual activity since both partners were presumably uninterested in sex. Among those individuals paired with an asexual partner, participants talked about the advantage of not having to contend with "the messiness" of relationships. They reported being able to be naked and physically close to their partners without the pressure or expectation that it would lead to intercourse. Among those couples where a partner was sexual, the asexuals talked about having to negotiate what types of sexual activities they were willing to take part in, the frequency, and the boundaries around the relationship in the event that the asexual did not engage in any sexual activity with his/her sexual partner.

You know, the only reason I do it (intercourse) is to make the other person happy. And so, we were in a relationship and you know, he wanted to do it and we had been dating for a while and you know, I was in love or whatever and I thought we'll be together forever. So um...yeah, so we kind of planned it and that's...yeah...I mean it wasn't...I mean the way he was talking about it, oh it's so great and you're going to love it, blah, blah, blah, and then okay...you know, I believed him.....(Participant 14)

Although asexuals rejected the notion that they were engaging in nonconsensual sexual activity with their sexual partners, their consensual sexual activity was unwanted, similar to what has been described for heterosexual dating samples in which one study found the prevalence of such unwanted but consensual sexual activity to take place in 38% of the sample (e.g., O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). Sexual ambivalence (i.e., exploring the many dimensions of wanting and not wanting sex; Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2005) has been described among heterosexual couples and is highly relevant in cases of sexual-asexual pairings. Among such dyads, the asexual participants added that sexual activity did not help them to feel closer to their partners in the way that their (sexual) partners described. This was captured by the following quote from a woman:

(My boyfriend said to me) "Oh gosh, I would like to crawl into you," and I said, "Wow, I would like to crawl into you too!" And then he said that maybe that's what sexual feelings are, when I want to have sex with another person—that is the ultimate "crawling into". And then I said, "Well, aren't sexuals then disappointed when they find out that they have gone through all of this trouble to crawl into a person and then finally they have just had sex and are still not in the other person?" (Participant 10)

At least a few of the participants who engaged in sexual activity reported having to focus on something else while

being sexual and this made the asexual person experience only the physical stimulation aspects of sex, stripped of the emotional intimacy. One woman discussed having mythical fantasies during intercourse that served as a way to take her mind away from the act of sex. Another asexual woman who spoke about sexual activity she engaged in with her sexual partner described it as curiosity not triggered by anything even remotely sexual. The technical, emotionally-void language was also highly apparent in her description:

Well, because he is sexual and I am asexual, we have tried to see what our body parts do to each other, trying to find out what body positions are most appropriate for us, or what kind of feelings it brings about when we touch that body part...while touching my genitals doesn't do anything to me either, but I like very much them being very close to his, when the whole body is connected with the other body. (Participant 10)

Infidelity was a feature of asexual relationships, however, the unfaithfulness was discussed as being focused more on having romantic attractions with someone else as opposed to having sexual attractions and behaviors with another. Some of the participants indicated that if a sexual partner wished to (or needed to) have sexual activity, the asexual would be accepting of that person seeking it outside of the relationship, on the condition that the sexual relationship did not become emotional. There was a great deal of variability across the participants in the extent to which they might be bothered by a partner's sex with another person outside the relationship:

Basically in a sexual relationship cheating on someone is if the person has sex with someone else. In a purely romantic relationship cheating would just be like if I have a boyfriend who considers himself in love with another girl and like he goes and sees her and kisses her and stuff and cuddles with her and tells her he loves her. (Participant 5)

Theme 9: Religion

It has been speculated previously that religious prohibitions against sexual activity might underlie the experiences of some asexuals. In other words, is the expressed resistance against sexual attraction and sexual activity a manifestation of moral or religious feelings about sexuality? We probed this among our current sample and found, contrary to our predictions, a disproportionately high number of atheists in our sample. When questioned about this link between asexuality and atheism, one individual explained it by:

I think it (atheism and asexuality) might be related. I do think that because asexuals are forced to realize that they are different and they know they are different than

everybody else, they have to think about something that is perfectly natural for everybody else, I think it does sort of encourage a nonconformist streak in people to where if they have any tendencies whatsoever to be skeptical, then they are going to go that way... And a lot of religions place a lot of value on marriage and appropriate gender roles to include sex, so you can imagine somebody growing up asexual who doesn't want to have a relationship or who doesn't want to get married or doesn't want to be fruitful and multiply...It would be easier for them to reject the religion and become atheist. (Participant 14)

On the web site as well as there was an informal poll and there seemed to be a quite a lot of atheist people. (Participant 6)

Theme 10: A Need to Educate and Destigmatize

There has recently been a vast amount of media attention focused on asexuality, and in part, this stems from a strong desire among asexuals to educate the public about what is asexuality. Because some of the recent media attention has been negative, members of the AVEN community see it as part of the "visibility and education" efforts of AVEN to liaise with researchers to conduct scientific trials on asexuality, in particular if those studies have the result of reducing stigma.

Well, I think that it's (asexuality) really not perceived and that's the problem and that's why like we need the (AVEN) message board and all the news reports and stuff because nobody or very few people know that it exists or have heard of it. (Participant 9)

AVEN also was viewed as having the function of being a place to brainstorm on theories of asexuality and propose ideas for future study. AVEN members have even initiated a separate asexuality list-serv group for sexuality researchers. Some of the participants indicated that they encouraged researchers to use the AVEN discussion board as fodder for future studies. Another educational function of the AVEN website was to provide information and a sense of community for individuals who felt different, but who did not know enough about asexuality to feel like he/she could identify with it. Some talked about a great sense of relief upon discovering AVEN, particularly in finding that many others had also experienced a non-distressing lack of sexual attraction like them.

I am very keen on getting the word out because had I known years ago my life could have been so different. I always knew that I was different and I always knew that I didn't have that interest like my friends had. But I never

heard of asexuality. I didn't realize that I could say, hey, I'm asexual, you know...go away. (Participant 6)

Conclusion

The results from our two studies supported the definition, which characterized asexuality as a lack of sexual attraction, as proposed by Bogaert (2004, 2006). The definition of asexuality should not depend upon (absence of) sexual activity given that some asexuals continued to engage in sexual intercourse and many masturbated. The position held by AVEN—that each individual experiences and expresses sexual desire, arousal, and behavior somewhat differently—was borne out in the current studies where there was a great deal of variability in sexual response and behavior.

Our study also replicated and expanded upon several of the findings from Prause and Graham (2007) and provided an empirical test of some of the conceptual points raised by Bogaert (2006). For example, asexuality did not appear to be a fear-mediated construct, and the lack of sexual activity was not related to avoidance or disgust when envisaging the genitals. There was also a great deal of heterogeneity in the sexual behaviors engaged in by our sample. Some had rather frequent sexual intercourse and others had never had sexual intercourse. There was a general sentiment that since one could have sex without love, why could one not also have love without sex? Among those who were currently sexually active, many talked about motivations for intercourse stemming from the partner rather than from the asexual's own desires. Some also talked about wanting to preserve some sexual activities in an effort to "seem normal." Among those in relationships with a sexual person, the theme of negotiating the boundaries within that relationship was apparent. Communication was an essential element in the early stages of asexual-sexual partnerships to establish the rules around touching and sexual activity. Finally, there was a very apparent motivation to educate the public, via media outlets, participating in research, and through AVEN, to bring awareness about asexuality and to reduce stigma to those who are asexual.

Several of the transcripts also supported the finding by Prause and Graham (2007) that asexuals have low levels of sexual arousability or excitement. Many discussed a lack of anticipation of sexual activity and this bears some resemblance to women described by Basson (2000, 2002) who lack sufficient reasons or incentives for responding to a partner's sexual advances or for initiating sexual activity on their own. It may be possible that one subgroup of asexuals represents those at the low polar end of the sexual desire spectrum, and that encouraging them to deliberately anticipate sexual activity may bring them above the threshold to a point where the distress prompts them to seek attention. The border

between HSDD and asexuality is unclear. However, it is possible that the woman with lifelong lack of sexual attractions and interests and who is unbothered by her sexual status may better fit the asexuality label, whereas the woman initially labeled as asexual who, after declaring distress linked with her lack of interests, and also experiences sexual attractions, better fits the sexual dysfunction category of HSDD, and might therefore seek appropriate treatment. Only a fraction of women who report sexual problems, across all domains of sexual response, experience concomitant distress (Bancroft, Loftus, & Long, 2003; King, Holt, & Nazareth, 2007), and interestingly, among women who did not have any sexual problems, over 10% did experience marked distress about their relationship or marked distress about their own sexuality (Bancroft et al., 2003). Predictors of distress in their study were: negative mental state, overall physical health, subjective response during sexual activity (including pleasure, feeling emotionally close), impaired physical response, thinking about sex with interest, and college education (Bancroft et al., 2003). Just as a more thorough examination of the construct of distress may be integral to determining whether a sexual problem is a dysfunction, distress may also be at the heart of differentiating a problematic lack of sexual desire (HSDD) from a non-distressing lack of attraction (asexuality). The validity of this distinction requires empirical testing.

Seventy per cent of the sample had previously been in a romantic relationship, however, at the time of this study, only 7% of men and 20.8% of women were in a relationship. Study 1 showed that 11% defined their relationships with a focus on the romantic (i.e., hetero-romantic), and not the sexual (i.e., heterosexual). Moreover, their descriptions of the qualities they sought in a romantic partner were not at all different from those described by sexual individuals. Because sexual desire and romantic love are independent (Diamond, 2003), it is possible to have love without sex, just as one can have sex without love. By studying the developmental period in adolescence during which sexual desires and romantic love become interconnected (Furman & Wehner, 1994; Hazan & Zeifman, 1994), this may shed light on their separateness for asexuals. Given the natural human propensity to form pair-bonds that are sexual in nature, why there is a preference for pair-bonding via romantic attachment in asexuals is remains to be studied.

The link between Schizoid Personality, and possibly Asperger's, is also intriguing and deserves further study. The qualitative data provided a valuable opportunity to explore asexuals' experiences and thoughts around Cluster A personality features. The AVEN message board might be a useful source of analysis for the relationship between Schizoid Personality and Asperger's Disorder given that there is more candid dialog without potential socially desirable responding. Recent data have found a significantly higher proportion of asexuals among women with Autism Spectrum

Disorders compared to a matched control group without Autism (17% vs. 0%, respectively; Ingudomnukul, Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, & Knickmeyer, 2007). Whether the higher rates of asexuality in those with Autism were related to aberrations resulting in higher levels of testosterone, or to the social challenges inherent to having a diagnosis of Autism, is unknown.

Finally, the fact that all asexuals interviewed believed that asexuality was biologic and that there may be a genetic component to it deserves further study. There was also the very strong sentiment that it should be conceptualized as a sexual orientation, as suggested also by Bogaert (2006). Sexual psychophysiological techniques (e.g., vaginal photoplethysmography, penile plethysmography), as well as digit ratio, handedness, and birth order mapping in asexuals may be worthwhile research avenues to pursue in hopes of clarifying the extent of physiologic and biologic involvement in the development of asexuality.

Some limitations of the studies must be considered. Firstly, 27 individuals in Study 1 did not indicate their sex and were, therefore, removed from the analyses. Unlike the question about sexual orientation (which was free-response), the question about sex only offered “male” and “female” as response options. It is unlikely that this item was missed in error since it appeared at the very beginning of the online survey. It is possible that individuals deliberately left this item blank because they did not label themselves exclusively as male or female (i.e., agendered, gender queer, homoasexual, pan-asexual gender-free, gender-fluid girl born with an outie) or perhaps they identified equally as male and female. Given that this was not explored in the qualitative study, the extent to which this explanation accounts for the missing data on “sex” is unclear. It must also be acknowledged that there were potential selection biases in the sample recruited from AVEN. Those belonging to AVEN may be a distinct group given that they have (somewhat publicly) acknowledged their asexual identity, although it is important to point out those only aliases, and not actual names, are typically used on AVEN. Some of the similarities of the findings from the current study and that of Prause and Graham (2007) may be due to the fact that both studies recruited asexuals from AVEN. It is also possible that distress is a motivating factor for joining an online web community and this might have inflated psychopathology scores. However, given that those in Study 2 indicated that their distress significantly lessened once they found a community in AVEN, this possibility is unlikely.

It bears mentioning that there were many more female participants than male participants in Study 1 (71% female) and Study 2 (73% female). Bogaert (2004) found a significantly greater proportion of women than men in his population-based study, and because it is men, and not women, who are more likely to volunteer for questionnaire studies on

sexuality (Wolchik, Braver, & Jensen, 1985) our findings may reflect a true population gender difference in the prevalence of asexuality. Because women have been described as having greater sexual plasticity in sexual response and sexual orientation (e.g., Baumeister, 2000; Chivers, Rieger, Latty, & Bailey, 2004; Diamond, 2005), and to be more likely to show desynchrony between mental and physiologic arousal than men (Chivers, Seto, Lalumiere, Laan, & Grimbos, 2008), if this sex difference in asexuality prevalence is valid and not merely a volunteer bias, then it is reasonable to assume that women might also be more likely than men to lack sexual attractions. In a survey on AVEN conducted in July 2007 (<http://www.asexuality.org/en/index.php?showtopic=24599>), 61.9% of the sample endorsed female, 32.8% of the sample endorsed male, and 5% endorsed other categories (intersex, male-to-female transsexual, female-to-male transsexual). In the message board following the online poll results, several AVEN participants indicated that they had not completed the question about their biologic sex because they did not feel they could relate to any of the categories provided. Thus, the question of sex differences in the prevalence of asexuality is more complicated than simply assessing male versus female; it encompasses discussions of gender identity.

Overall, this study illustrated a number of personal and sexual characteristics of asexuals (Study 1) and illuminated these characteristics in more depth using detailed interviews (Study 2). Similar to the proposition by Bogaert (2006), the findings suggested that asexuals are a mentally healthy group who continue to seek out and engage in rewarding, emotionally connected relationships. They may be more likely to question conformity, as illustrated by their atheism, and they may be more likely to focus on the technical aspects of sexual activity during masturbation or partnered sexual activity. There is strong motivation for conceptualizing asexuality as a biologic, perhaps genetic, sexual orientation and, as such, asexuals are highly invested in working with sex researchers to execute this important research.

Whereas this study attempted to uncover some of the characteristics of asexuality by exploring asexuals' own narrative truths, this study did not address the true nature of asexuality. To what extent is asexuality a sexual identity versus a sexual orientation? Sexual orientation traditionally refers to behavioral characteristics and a predisposition towards a certain gender (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948) whereas sexual identity includes the recognition, acceptance, and identification with one's preferences (Mohr, 2002). Shively and De Cecco (1977) advanced a broad definition of sexual identity, which encompassed sexual orientation, biologic sex, gender identity, and social sex-role identity. Asexuals in this study conceptualized their asexuality as an identity but also referred to their asexuality as an orientation but many rejected the traditional categories of gender and sexual orientation. On the other hand, all participants

embraced the asexual identity, and this supports previous findings in which those with non-conventional sexual feelings may have a stronger sense of sexual identity than those who are unaware of their feelings (McConaghy & Armstrong, 1983).

Although the majority of research exploring sexual orientation identity formation has focused on non-heterosexual identity formation, Cass' (1979) model of identity formation might be extended to apply to asexuals. Cass' model illustrates the transition through identity confusion (confusion about who one is in light of their sexual desires and behaviors), identity comparison (the individual compares their identity with those sharing a similar identity to cope with the alienation), identity tolerance (the individual seeks to meet the social, sexual, and emotional needs that supports his/her emerging identity), identity acceptance (the individual is developing a clearer sense of their identity as gay/lesbian), identity pride (the individual experiences pride at their identity and may devalue heterosexuality), and identity synthesis (acknowledging supportive and devaluing non-supportive heterosexuals, and developing a sense of wholeness). Asexuals in the present study articulated their identity confusion, and many discussed long-standing confusion and "experimentation" with the heterosexual orientation prior to their knowledge of AVEN. With the discovery of an asexual community, many indeed discussed identity comparison, tolerance, and pride. Asexuality may, therefore, force reconceptualizations of sexual identity, sexual orientation, and gender identity to be more inclusive. Future research should be targeted to studying gender identity development in asexual individuals, and comparing those who are romantically inclined to same versus opposite sex partners.

It also bears mentioning that asexuality is likely a heterogeneous entity. Some accepted traditional categories of gender (male/female) and sexual orientation (hetero-, bi-, and homosexual), whereas others resisted these and preferred non-traditional descriptions. Also, whereas asexuality was characterized by a lifelong lack of sexual attractions, 29% in the current study recalled first sexual interests. Some (27%) engaged in intercourse despite the lack of attraction. The qualitative data indicated a lack of sexual distress, and only 10% scored in the clinical range on the measure of sexual distress. These data suggest that there is not one asexual prototype, and that as research continues to explore the nature and characteristics of asexuality, subtypes may emerge. It is also possible that some individuals may be more accurately categorized as having a sexual dysfunction or as having a paraphilia (this was the case for at least one participant in our sample).

What mechanisms might underlie the development of asexuality? A closer look at the development of sexual attraction might shed light on this perplexing question. One explanation may be gleaned from Bem's (1996) "exotic

becomes erotic" developmental theory, which posits that physiologic arousal generated by feeling different from opposite-sex peers becomes transformed into erotic attraction. To explicate *how* such transformation takes place, Bem proposed three possible mechanisms—one of which is the extrinsic arousal effect, in which physiologic arousal is combined with a cognitive causal attribution (e.g., my arousal was elicited by a potential sexual partner), giving rise to erotic desire. Thus, it may be that asexuals lack this cognitive causal attribution and their physiologic arousal does not become directed towards any target. McClintock and Herdt (1996) prefer a biologic explanation to the development of sexual attraction and strongly link normal attraction to adrenarche—the period of maturation of the adrenals between the ages of 6 and 10. This marks the first event in a developmental sequence progressing from attraction to fantasy to sexual behavior. Moreover, this "turning on" of sexual attractions takes place at the age of 10 for boys and girls, well before gonadal puberty, regardless of sexual orientation, and has been shown in a number of different countries (Herdt & McClintock, 2000). They hypothesize that with the maturation of the adrenal glands at the age of 6–8 and the increase in dehydroepiandrosterone secreted from the adrenal cortex, this alters brain function, including neural proliferation and selective loss of nonfunctional connections. Following from this theory of attraction, it is possible that disruptions in the process of adrenal maturation, such that the child does not experience the 10-fold rise in adrenal androgens, take place. Alternatively, asexuality may develop from a central mechanism that prevents the activation of neural receptors by these androgens thus preventing proliferation. Certainly, the finding that the majority of our participants could not recall onset of any sexual attractions during childhood and, instead, reported feeling different from their peers, who verbalized sexual attractions, points to possible aberrations in the period of adrenarche.

Longitudinal research designs, as have been conducted in exploring other facets of sexual orientation development and changes over time (e.g., Diamond, 2005), might be key to better understanding the development, nature, and trajectory of asexuality. Moreover, the combination of qualitative with quantitative methodologies may be essential for defining the central characteristics of this poorly understood construct.

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Proposed Models and Definitions of Asexuality

Being such a new and unexplored concept, the definition and categorization of asexuality has been the subject of much debate, not least among asexuals themselves. It is often conceived of as one of four or more orientations (homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual/pansexual, asexual), but is also spoken of as one of two (sexual and asexual) with gender preference being measured along a different axis (Storms' Model). In addition, a number of other definitions and more complex models have been proposed:

ABCD types

Two common cross-classifications within the spectrum of asexuality are based on romantic attraction (some asexuals desire romance with one or more genders, and some don't) and sex drive (some asexuals experience sexual arousal, but without the desire to express it with another person). One way of classifying asexuals is to sort them into the following four basic types:

Type A asexuals, who experience sex drive, but no attraction;

Type B asexuals, who experience romantic or other forms of attraction but do not have sex drives;

Type C asexuals, who experience sex drive and romantic or other forms of attraction, but do not see them as linked;

Type D asexuals, who experience neither.

This classification system was retired, because not all asexual people felt comfortable putting themselves in one of the four categories. However, some still find it useful to reference the concepts of the A, B, C, & D categories at times.

Without the existence of the ABCD classification pointing out obvious differences, it can become easy to lose sight of the great diversity of that asexual people experience. In particular, it can become easy to assume incorrectly that everyone is type D.

Collective identity model

This is a model of asexual identity put forth by AVENguy. Rather than trying to define a common sexual classification for all asexual people, this model frames asexuality in terms of collective identity. Asexual people have something in common because they have all chosen to actively disidentify with sexuality, a socially dominant framework for thinking about everything from pleasure to attractiveness to intimacy.

Under this model an asexual person is anyone who uses the term "asexual" to describe themselves. The label can only be applied internally, no one has the power to create a set of criteria which determine who "is" and "is not" asexual. The desire to identify as asexual comes from occupying a particular social position relative to culturally dominant ideas about sexuality. This common social position is the one thing which unifies all asexual people.

Imagine a person who does not experience sexual attraction. Imagine they are put in an environment where they are free to talk about desire and pleasure, pursue relationships, and go about their lives without their lack of sexuality ever becoming an issue. This person would feel sexually "normal", they would feel no desire to identify as asexual or participate in a community. Under the collective identity model this person would not be asexual, because they would not use the term "asexual" to describe themselves.

Now imagine that same person in a different environment, where they are reminded of their lack of sexuality constantly. In this environment things like intimacy and attraction are entangled in a set of sexual ideas which have nothing to do with the person's life. The person is constantly expected to be thinking and feeling things which they are not. This second environment could create feelings of confusion and isolation leading to the formation of an asexual identity and make the person asexual. The collective identity model implies that asexuality as we know it is a direct result of culturally dominant ideas about sex which are incompatible with our lifestyle. By growing as a community and becoming visible in the public sphere asexual people will challenge those ideas, changing what it means to be sexual and what it means to be asexual.

Dual Definitional Model

This model of asexuality was developed by mandrewliter, although he has since come to question it. It says that in asexual discourse, the word 'asexual' really has two related, but conceptually distinct, meanings. The first is a sexual orientation. An asexual is a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction. The second definition is an identity based on that sexual orientation: An asexual is someone who experiences little or no sexual attraction and calls themselves asexual. This identity is based on not only experiencing little or no sexual attraction, but on the effects of that within the cultural contexts in which people live.

This model uses the phrase "a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction" because the boundary between sexual and asexual is blurry and there is no clear line to draw between them. The question of where to draw the line is something each person decides for themselves, so self-identification answers the question of who is and who isn't asexual. A longer explanation is given on his blog

Nonlibidoism

A **nonlibidoist** is a person who does not have a sex drive, and hence does not experience sexual urges or desires (and in particular, does not masturbate). Nonlibidoism is not equivalent to asexuality, since a large percentage of asexuals do have sex drives or libidos, but still lack any sexual attraction.

The term "nonlibidoism" was used by the (now defunct) Official Nonlibidoism Society (Internet Archive Link). Due to the popularity of a more inclusive definition of asexuality, the Official Nonlibidoism Society ceased to use the term "asexual" for its members, believing that it had "by now become almost synonymous for solo-sexual [or] masturbator" (reference no longer available). Nonlibidoism was a much more stringent definition than AVEN's standard description of asexuality, for people who have no sex drive, and have never had one. Some people considered nonlibidoism the only valid form of asexuality.

Most people on AVEN believe that nonlibidoism is simply one among many valid varieties of asexuality, neither better nor worse than being an asexual with a sex drive.

Not interested

One common definition of an asexual is of a person who is not interested in sex. This definition is often used by people who are trying to explain asexuality in simple terms to the people around them. While sexual attraction is a nebulous clinical term and can be argued about almost endlessly, simply not being interested is harder to refute.

Criticism

Some people who identify as asexual do not consider themselves to be uninterested in sex. They may be interested in sexual activities in order to please a romantic partner. There are also asexuals with an academic interest in the psychology or sociology of sex. Also, some people are not interested in sex, but might not be considered asexual; for example, a person who decided to be celibate for life might still experience the urge to have sex with another person, but ignore it. Some people have amended this definition to describe an asexual as a person who is not innately interested in having sex with anybody. But because innate interest is nearly as hard to define as sexual attraction, many people do not see the point in having this alternate definition.

Source: AVEN Wiki

http://www.asexuality.org/wiki/index.php?title=Asexuality#Proposed_Models_and_Definitions

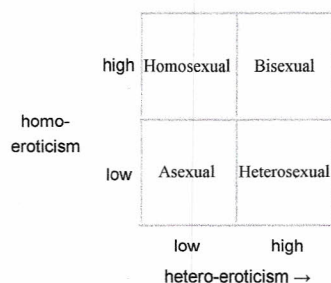
Also accessible from: <http://bit.ly/AVENWIKIDEFS>



Storms' Model

Storms' model is a two-dimensional map of erotic orientation showing four sexual orientation categories: homosexual, bisexual, asexual, and heterosexual. This model was proposed in 1979 by Michael Storms to address several inadequacies with the one-dimensional Kinsey scale. First, the Kinsey scale had no way to distinguish between strong attraction to males and females and little to no attraction to either. Associated with this, Kinsey had no way of dealing with asexuals and simply labeled them X, a point completely off of the scale. By placing hetero- and homo-eroticism on two perpendicular axes, Storms' model can both account for asexuality, which fits poorly into the bipolar Kinsey scale, and more accurately describe bisexuality.^[1]

In addition to this, the Storms model makes an interesting prediction regarding asexuals (that Storms did not mention): Asexuals should exist along a continuum with non-asexuals rather than being an inexplicable anomaly that must be placed off the scale.



Source: AVEN Wiki http://www.asexuality.org/wiki/index.php?title=Storms%27_model#_note-0
 Also accessible at <http://bit.ly/STORMSMODEL>

From SwankIvy.com

[Note: You can also opt to watch this series on YouTube instead <http://bit.ly/ACETOPTENYT>]

Asexuality Top Ten

Asexuals are people who aren't attracted to other people in a sexual way. It isn't a synonym for celibacy or a moral statement or a decision people make; it's an orientation, like being straight is. This page is here to do three things: ONE: to help you understand my experience in a complete and clear way; TWO: to contradict misconceptions that might arise about me or others like me; and THREE: to help other in similar situations understand that asexuality isn't an illness and they are not alone.

Some thoughts...

I have a site about this subject not because I think my sex life is anyone's business, but because a whole lot of people try to make it their business. Any asexual who has tried to be honest on this subject is going to have dealt with sexual people expecting that asexuality has to be "proved," "defended," or "justified" before it can be respected. We're confronted with demands for tests, requests that we jump through various hoops to try to make ourselves sexual, or beliefs that asexuality should be something we want to fix. I want people to understand that we're qualified to describe our own experiences.

I find myself in a position not unlike gay or bisexual people: I don't want to become my sexuality (or lack thereof), but I want to make information available about disinterest in sex being not a sickness or psychosis but rather a legitimate sexual orientation. I don't want to be on a soap box, but I am eager to contribute to the public acknowledgment and acceptance of asexual people, and I am not ashamed of being one of said minority. And maybe one day, with my help and the help of others like me, identifying as an asexual might be considered an unusual but acceptable alternative instead of a condition that causes asexual people's friends, loved ones, and mental health professionals to assume they're confused, immature, traumatized, or lying about their own feelings.

I don't mind discussing sex and matters related. I understand that people are curious about my lack of interest since it's such an unusual state for a person of my age. It's when they try to assign some all-encompassing "reason" for it, like they know better than I do even though they've just met me, or when they treat it like I have a disease that needs curing, that I start to get annoyed. Sorry, but I know me better than you do, and I think I'm probably the only person qualified to describe my feelings. And that's why I have this page; I figure it falls to me, a person who is used to deconstructing difficult-to-related concepts, to lay this out straight for the asexuals of the world and the people who want to understand us.

Top Ten Most Common Misconceptions

#10: "You hate men."

Well, let me just say, first of all, that this is not true. I don't hate men; in fact, most of my friends are men. I actually have very few female friends, at least compared to the amount of guys I hang out with. I have nothing against men; I just have something against willfully ignorant people who are offended when I don't think sex is the meaning of life. It just so happens that as a whole, men look for sex more often than women, and it also happens that I am rarely approached by females for sex seeing as how heterosexuality is quite a bit more popular. So maybe some people think that my public growling at *certain men* indicates that I'm a man-hater. No. I'm a hater of people who won't take no for an answer when it comes to sex. And I venture to say that even if I was heterosexual I still wouldn't like men who behaved this way. I can't think of any single person I actually hate; no WAY do I hate half the population.

#9: "You can't get a man."

Well, not only is this blatantly untrue since I'm never short for volunteers, but furthermore, I'm a nice, kind, interesting girl (not to mention reasonably attractive, for the record), and I like to think that if I wanted a boyfriend, I could easily get one. However, I don't believe in "looking" for a boyfriend, since that requires expectation of a certain type of relationship before you even know the person you're gonna meet. I prefer to not "look" for any certain type of relationship and just let whatever is natural develop . . . and while a host of unexpected results have occurred with people I've met, that particular interest/attraction/relationship has never developed on my end. I believe that when people make this suggestion for why I don't get laid, sometimes they're just trying to encourage my reactance . . . in other words, to reply, "I can too get a man! Watch me!" and proceed to invite them over. To sum up, I could *very easily* "get" a man if I wanted one; it is just that I don't believe men are things to be gotten.

#8: "You have a hormone problem."

It's possible that my hormones might be lower than average in production. I am one of the type of asexuals who doesn't recognize having a sex drive, though asexuals with libidos are just as common. But even people who have low sex drives are sometimes attracted to people, and just not really feeling like having sex isn't the same thing as being asexual. I probably *do* physically produce fewer "go get sex" hormones (though I don't consider it a "problem"), since I've gathered it's a little odd to pass your teens and twenties without having at least some sort of remote sexual interest. But I don't pretend to know the actual reason for my lack of interest in sex; all I know is that no physical exam I've ever had suggests I am sick because of any abnormal levels. Most people will agree when I say that sexual attraction is tied intimately with the human body's most important sexual organ: the mind.

When I see other people, I just don't experience any kind of sex-related attraction toward them. I've never met anyone who makes me want to get physically close with them, start a romance, or have sex. I like people based on how they interact with me and what we have in common, et cetera; I couldn't care less about what they look like. This does not mean I can't tell if someone is aesthetically pleasing; my eyes like some people more than others. But I honestly can't answer the question of whether someone is "hot" or not.

Some people suggest maybe I'm just a "late bloomer" and my hormones will eventually start making me think that way about people I like. Listen, I've been saying that I feel this way about other people since I was in high school, and if you'd like to do a little math to figure out how long it's been, I graduated from high school in 1996. I haven't made some kind of decision to never feel attraction, but when you notice patterns in how you feel, that's when you pick a label. Straight people don't have to "try out" sexuality with gay people to make sure "straight" is the right label; I'm using "asexual" because it describes how I've always felt and how I feel now. If that changes--due to hormones or not--I'll change what I call myself. If it doesn't, I expect people to respect the current state of affairs and trust me that I don't get attracted to people. It honestly doesn't mean that I'm sick, and asexuality is honestly not about hormones, even if having a low sex drive can sometimes contribute to how a person deals with it. But many people like to treat this as a disease worthy of immediate hospitalization. "Oh God, you don't want sex? . . . get this girl an ambulance." Funny, another common response to "No, I don't get horny" is "are you human??" I guess I'm not.

#7: "You're overly involved in your own busy life."

I do lead a busy life. But it involves all the things I want it to involve: My passion (writing), my hobbies (online communication, art, tennis, my Web page), my work (full time as a secretary), my social life (I'm usually busy at least three days out of the week with social events), and yes, even life necessities (eating, cleaning the house, et cetera), as well as any random obsession I happen to pick up. I have a feeling that if something meant something to me, I would find time for it . . . I certainly do so with everything else in my life.

If someone crossed the barrier that hasn't been crossed and somehow I responded to them that way and gave them the status of significant other, I would surely be able to find it in my schedule to give that person the time they deserved. It is not as if the fact that I keep busy actually keeps me from meeting or spending time with possible future mates; it also is not true that I have already decided I don't have room for a relationship in my cramped life. Like I said, if I decided I wanted something, I could and would make it work. At no point have I proclaimed that I will never want to date anyone (or get married, have kids, et cetera); I simply am not currently pursuing these things, nor do I plan to start. My lack of interest is by NO stretch of the imagination a declaration of unbreakable future chastity. If a signal from my body indicates that I should go grab someone, I will likely listen; same goes for mental cues for the same. I'm not too busy for the important things in life; it's just that I don't currently consider getting a man one of the important things in life. And THAT is no disease.

#6: "You just never had me in your bed."

Well, this is an obvious bit of stupidity. I do get this one fairly often; these guys honestly think that I don't know what love is because I have yet to be romanced by them. For some reason, even though *they're* the ones still searching for love (or sex, whatever, sometimes they think it's the same thing) and *I'm* the one who's perfectly happy . . . they still think they have something to teach me. Bullshit. I don't want anyone around who claims they can come into my life and sweep me off my feet, changing my whole outlook on life. I like my life, and while I'm not pigheaded or resistant to change, I don't think it needs any adjustments from someone I barely know, especially not in the form of a penis with a little bit of brain attached. I certainly don't want to keep company with any man arrogant enough to think he is the modern definition of love.

As an aside, an inordinate number of guys see my asexuality as some sort of challenge. Most of these sorts stay away from girls with boyfriends, thinking they're wasting their time and they might get their ass kicked by the boyfriend, but lesbians and people like me who claim to be uninterested are prime targets. They think their manliness is enough to attract even the most resistant woman. And yes, in this case I'd resist. Not that I've had to struggle to do so with any one of them. :P They don't seem to get that being ultra-manly is not impressive to someone who doesn't find manliness attractive. A few of these sorts, the kind that think I'm a challenge, also have this unwarranted idea that I am playing head games to keep them interested. I've never understood the concept of hard-to-get. I mean, sure, some girls don't want to be seen as easy, but I just can't understand why guys automatically think I'm playing games when I really DON'T want to be "gotten." If "yes" means "yes" and "no" means "playing hard to get," does that mean I have to kick you in the balls to really mean "no"?

#5: "You are afraid of getting into a relationship."

Most of the ones who say this sort of thing think I'm afraid of love. They think I don't like to get close to people, that I have some issues with personal relationships. That isn't the case at all. I currently have and have had in the past plenty of extremely close friendships.

Many people argue that these don't "count" because they were only friendships. ONLY? Who are you to dismiss my relationships just because there's no good English word for "very-close-friends-but-not-sexually-involved"? Someone left me a message saying "But, dear, there is [such a word] - platonic. Come on, you, as well, are a writer." In response to that, I say that still doesn't work--don't people automatically demote "platonic" relationships to being less serious or worth less than "real" romantic relationships? "Oh, there's nothing between us, it's JUST platonic." Well, that's not "nothing." I tell ya what, my relationships with these folks involve everything you can have in a relationship except the sexual attraction. I don't know if you can argue that a relationship is for all intents and purposes meaningless without sex . . . maybe some people would say it is . . . but I think it's hogwash. I see no reason why I can't have a completely fulfilling relationship with another person without bringing sex into it.

I've had people assert that my friendships are just puppy love; that I don't know what real love is. Do you think that once you stick your penis in a vagina it's love? Where do you get off defining what can and can't happen with MY feelings? I view sex as a physical expression of love, not as an end in itself or a consummation of a relationship. In my opinion, relationships don't need to be "consummated." They just *are*. And they're very satisfying for me . . . and a hell of a lot less messy (in more ways than one). People have argued that I can't talk because I haven't had sex. I think it's very unfair of people to discount my ability to judge my own feelings of relationship deepness just because I never did the deed. I can see their point when they say I don't know what sex can bring into a relationship, and that I accept. But I've also heard that sex can make a relationship "get weird," and that I wouldn't want.

In any case, I'm proof that non-sexual relationships can exist happily and satisfyingly, and I'm also proof that one does not need sex to be happy. Too many people treat getting a mate like it's the completion of life. I think your life damn well better be complete (well, satisfying) in itself before you get it tangled up in another person's. Otherwise you're bound to have all kinds of problems. In closing, I'd like to say that my view on relationships carries an extra grain of truth when you see how many couples think they know what love is and how few of them stay together. Thank you very much.

#4: "You were sexually abused as a child."

Really? I don't remember it. Were you there? *ahem* People use this one quite often to explain why I am not interested in sex. They seriously think that disinterest in sex is so horrifying that I must have been sexually brutalized to not be into it. In this category also falls the question of whether I've been raped. No, and I'm a virgin, as mentioned above. When I was in kindergarten, there was a little boy on the next mat who used to crawl over to me during naptime and try to stick his hands in my pants. That's about the extent of my "sexual abuse," and I remember it very well as being annoying but not scarring or even enough to freak me out. I told my mommy. She told the teacher. Antonio spent his future naptimes where the teacher could see him. It certainly does not strike me as something that changed my views on sex, since the memory of it doesn't scare me or bring up bad feelings, or even count as something sex-related. It probably would have annoyed me about the same if he'd been stealing my blanky or pulling my hair. So anyway, no, I was never sexually assaulted, abused, or even sexually harassed. It's not a negative feeling against sex, it's just a disinterest.

In a way it can become a negative feeling when people try to force it on me or when I have done remotely sexual things (such as kissing, nibbling, groping et cetera) that I did not enjoy. I guess when it doesn't feel good, it's really kind of a gross thing; for instance, if you think about kissing, it's only good if you really like that person. Otherwise it's nasty to think about licking the inside of their mouth and swallowing their spit. Same thing with groping and all that stuff . . . if you're not really into a guy, there is nothing fun about him touching your privates. That's just all there is to it. But generally, I do not think of sex and freeze in horror. I'm just not turned on by the idea of it, either. And that's all I have to say about that.

#3: "You are a lesbian."

Yes, this one comes up quite often. Usually by people who just can't comprehend not having some sort of sexual attraction. "Oh, you don't like men? I see, you must like women." One or the other. This or that. I've got news for the folks that ask me this one: It just ain't so. The fact that I'm not turned on by men does NOT make me a closet lesbian. I have also had no sexual attraction toward any female. In this day and age, it is moderately accepted to have an alternative lifestyle™, and I like to think that if I did have some inclination towards lesbianism, I'd act on it. But just like my heterosexual feelings, they don't exist. Oh, and by the way . . . if I ever *do* become a lesbian, NO, you can't watch.

Most people can at least sort of understand when I put it like this: If you are a man and you have always been attracted to women, how do you "know" that you aren't gay? Probably because you never looked at a guy and thought, "Hey, I really want a piece of that." You've never seen them in a sexual context. You've never been turned on by the idea of sex with them or even thought about it except maybe in a joking sense followed by guffawing with your friends. But how do you KNOW? You never tried it, so how the hell are you so sure you're heterosexual?

Because you just *know*, right? If you were gay, you would have . . . wanted it at some point, right? But you haven't. And you sure as hell know it in your very core. And while the idea of it in a remote sense doesn't disgust you (well, maybe it does, I don't know), the idea of someone proposing it to you or attempting to engage in it with you would probably make you feel at best alienated and at worst sickened.

This is how all propositions of sex sound to ME.

Weird. Not interesting. No thank you.

If you can imagine that response, thought process, and feeling happening with me in proposed sex with a woman OR a man, you might be able to understand at least a little bit why I am so sure about myself. Because I have that exact same feeling, that same certainty. I can't say it won't change. But I doubt it.

Since it's somewhat related, I'd like to talk about sexual feelings in general. Usually people suggest I'm a lesbian because they can't imagine that I *don't* get horny, so they make up an alternative sexuality for me and assume I'm repressed. But I know there are people who are *acting* nonsexuals--people with no desire to sleep with others--who nevertheless have erotic fantasies and whatnot, and tend to--shall we say--take care of it themselves, perfectly content. Some might say these people should be called "autosexuals," since it *is* a sexual behavior but it doesn't involve others, but asexuality is pretty broad; the main point is that regardless of what a proclaimed asexual does with his/her naughty bits, it isn't because of being interested in another person that way. I've heard "do you masturbate?" and "do you have orgasms?" almost as often as "are you a lesbian?" and usually it's framed in disbelief and shock by one of the IM Idiots or something, but I've also gotten it from plain old curious parties and it's a legitimate question. But I just generally don't get "horny" (though I can recognize the aesthetics of a particularly handsome guy or beautiful girl), and am not interested in any kind of sex, even the safest form of all.

#2: "You just haven't met the right guy."

And maybe I haven't. Like I said, I'm not claiming that I will, no matter what, be asexual forever. It's not something you "decide"; it's something that describes your attitude and behavior, and for me there's no other option. If someone floats my boat, hey, I'll take it. (Not that I'm hoping for it, mind you.) What I don't like about this suggestion (or accusation) is the idea that there *must* be *someone* that'll do it for me. I don't like people giving me that "oh, one day you'll understand" thing. I don't consider my current sexual orientation (or lack thereof) to be a less-than-mature state. I also don't like people assuming that there definitely is a right guy for me. Maybe there isn't. Maybe there isn't a right girl for me either. Maybe I just *am* asexual. It is possible you know. It only makes sense that since there are some people who are MORE obsessed with sex than most people, there would be some people at the other end of the bell curve. That's me.

There is actually a disorder called "hypoactive sexual desire disorder," where people just don't want to have sex. Essentially, I may have something like that, but there's one important reason that I don't: In order to be considered a disorder, it has to be upsetting to the person involved. Therefore, if it doesn't bug me that I don't have a sex drive, there's nothing wrong with not having a sex drive. And believe me, it doesn't bother me that I'm asexual; it's the fact that these punks have a problem with it that bothers me.

#1: "You just got out of a bad relationship."

Here's the most common reaction to my marital status of "single, not looking." Again, it's the idea that being disinterested in sex is so bizarre that I must be psychically scarred from a bad experience. Just ain't so, folks. My last relationship ended before I was out of high school, and while its ending was by no means pleasant, the asexuality thing had been going on back then anyway, so it couldn't have been caused by the breakup. (Actually, the whole asexual thing was part of the reason for the ending of the relationship, but that is another story.)

UNDERSTANDING ASEXUALITY FROM THE OUTSIDE

A friend who rarely mentions sex has not had any in at least a decade. It has always seemed odd to me, but he is someone I really care for, and I accept him as he is.

When I discovered the AVEN board, I put two and two together and got asexuality. I did not want to confront my friend over something he might not be comfortable talking about, but I did want to let him know that I was asexual-friendly.

Unable to concoct a better plan, I sent a FYI e-mail to a dozen friends, letting them know that I was reading very interesting threads on the AVEN board. I even sent links to some of my favorites. My e-mail was not for the other eleven; it went to them so my friend would not think I was singling him out.

He wrote back a few days later, saying he had looked over the board and found it fascinating. He also said he wished he had been born asexual, as that would have made his life easier.

O.K., he is not asexual.

Two days later I received e-mail from a different friend, one of the eleven. He said he had always suspected he was asexual.

I was floored. Friend number two goes on and on about crushes on TV personalities, and I had long ago chalked him up as a typical heterosexual male. Of course, now that I understand asexuality, I know that asexuals may or may not be romantically oriented and may or may not fantasize about fictional characters. I should have known better than to stereotype.

I am really embarrassed to admit this, but my stereotyping goes further. My friend is a very good looking guy, and I suppose I assumed that guys who look like that have a harem of women at their beck and call. And here I pride myself on being a male feminist... Shame on me! And double shame on me for assuming that a handsome man could not be asexual, as physical appearance and asexuality have nothing to do with each other. If handsome men are by definition sexual, then what does that make asexual men? Triple shame on me.

My stereotype says a lot about my values as a sexual despite my efforts not to overvalue physical appearance. Logically speaking, why is it impossible for a Tyra Banks or a Brad Pitt to be asexual? To deny the possibility is to deny the worth of asexuals, to say that sexuality and beauty alone define who a person is.

And here, having reached the semi-ripe old age of 41, I thought myself wise. I clearly have a lot to learn, and the AVEN board is a good place to start.

THE FIRST PREMISE

So, what premise should a sexual who wants to understand asexuality start with? Here is a suggestion: Being asexual instead of sexual is like being left-handed instead of right-handed. It's not the way most people are, but it is no better or worse than being anything else. In a classroom with movable one-arm desks, a right-handed person can sit anywhere; a left-handed person can either sit in discomfort at a desk made for the right-handed or locate a left-handed desk and be as comfortable as everyone else. It takes a little more effort for the left-handed person to fit in, but that is because culture is dominated by the right-handed, not because a left-handed person is biologically inferior.

In the past, left-handed people were thought to be evil: On Judgment Day the damned stand on Christ's left side. Teachers once used physical punishment to force lefties to write with their right hands. Today we know better--and we further realize that some people are ambidextrous (neither left- nor right-handed). "Infinite diversity in infinite combinations," says the Vulcan IDIC.

Accepting equality on an intellectual level is one thing, but how can we sexuals know on an emotional level what being asexual is like? We cannot. Since I am not asexual, I cannot say with certainty what it is to be asexual--just as I cannot say with certainty what it is to be a lesbian, a woman, an aspie, an African American, a Hungarian, a Korean, or a senior citizen. Despite my limitations, however, I can still gain some understanding, and I can use analogies to put myself in asexual shoes; moreover, I can use simple human love and understanding to rejoice in difference and treat others as I wish to be treated.

THE WORLD OF EYEBROWS

Let us now imagine ourselves on another planet, perhaps Alpha Centauri, where the dominant culture is based on eyebrow beauty. In fact, males of the species are said to think about a raised eyebrow every 17.3672 seconds. The Centauri film industry is dominated by

eyebrow flicks, once considered too obscene to be shown in public. Touching another's eyebrow is, well, something you still do behind closed doors. Licking another's eyebrow... That is supposed to be reserved for marriage, although there are plenty of teens who slurp in parked cars, far from the eyes of prudish parents. Some teens' grades are bad because they cannot concentrate on academics; all they ever think about is eyebrows, especially big bushy ones.

"What on Earth (or Alpha Centauri) is this eyebrow thing?" you ask. You are aware of eyebrows' existence, and you are perfectly capable of admiring a nice set aesthetically, but who would devote such a large chunk of mental energy and waking hours to... eyebrows? It just does not make sense. You certainly do not want every damn conversation to focus on whose eyebrows warrant a good lick.

Do you see where I am taking this? You have never denied having eyebrows, and you can wax 'em, pluck 'em, or dye 'em with the best of them. But come on, eyebrows?!? There are more important things in life.

Now substitute "sex" for "eyebrows," and you are close to passing Asexuality 101.

BOMBARDED BY SEXUALITY

Back to the real world... In our sexual culture, asexuals are bombarded by sexuality that is foreign to them, made to feel as if they must have sexual prowess to hotrod with the cool clique and not be relegated to the geek squad. We never ask if they are interested in sex; we assume they are. Why wouldn't they be? Sex is great. Sex is the ultimate. Sex is da bomb.

So are eyebrows.

People question why asexuals need to come out, but in a society where sexual desire is assumed and many asexuals find they are forced to lie to be accepted, why would they not need to come out? It has nothing to do with asexual psychology and everything to do with the way we sexuals enforce sexual conformity. Asexuals need to confide in other asexuals, and those seeking romantic non-sexual relationships need to find others seeking the same. Painful self-examination and growing self-awareness cannot be endured in isolation. In addition, an asexual's experience in a sexually crass world may be so painful that self-abuse or even substance abuse may be real problems.

The irony is that sexuals ought to understand where asexuals are coming from. Heterosexual women and gay men sport a sort of asexual sentiment toward women, for example. They may desire them as warm friends, enjoy spending time with them, laugh or cry with them, admire their physical beauty... But it just is not sexual. Similarly, heterosexual men and lesbians have no sexual desire for men, but that does not mean men play no role in their lives.

Now here's the key point: Unless it is part of horsing around that all parties are comfortable with, a sexual advance from outside one's sexual orientation is usually not welcome. A heterosexual male does not want to be hit on by a gay male, and a gay male does not want to be hit on by a heterosexual woman. Asexuality is a valid sexual orientation, and asexuals do not want to be hit on by anyone. When we sexuals claim that asexuality is not normal, we are actually projecting our biological wiring and aspirations onto them. We are hearing our own voices, not theirs.

This is a childishly simplistic definition of sexuality, I realize, and it does not take the full sexual spectrum into account. I am not attempting to define all sexual possibilities here, and I certainly do not wish to alienate bisexuals or people with primary attraction to one sex and low, incidental attraction to the other. They, too, face unjust discrimination and have the right to be who they are. But, I am afraid, this article would be three times its size if I attempted to include all shades of sexual variation in it.

WHY NOT GET "FIXED"?

Back to asexuality. Now that its nature is a bit clearer, we should address the other question many sexuals ask: Why are asexuals reluctant to get "fixed" in therapy or by taking medication? The most important answer is that a number have gone that route, and it does not work. After all, why should it work? If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

If you, a sexual pondering this question, had no interest in heavy duty sexual bondage and domination, would you want to take a pill that would turn you on to it? Would you be willing to go to a therapist to explore what childhood traumas supposedly left you unwilling to wield a whip? Would you feel as if you were missing out on being submissive while tied up and splayed over the coffee table? Those who love these sex games feel that non-practitioners miss out on a lot. They would also feel that something had been stolen from them if they were no longer able to express their sexuality in this way. You, however, are unaware of missing anything. You can live a happy, productive life without heavy duty bondage. Or golden showers. Or rubber fantasies.

That is how asexuals view sexuality. They do not crave it, and they do not want to crave it.

WHAT ARE SEXUALS REALLY SAYING?

That last sentence is so hard for sexuals, myself included, to accept emotionally even though we may accept it intellectually. Much of human history is in fact the history of sex, and many great works of art--whether paintings or sculpture or music or literature--are very, very sexual, even if clandestinely. Many people have had to fight for free expression of sexuality, and in many societies sexuality remains restricted or denied. Even today some societies perform ritualized clitorectomies, imprison or even execute gay people, insist that sex be between a married couple and only in the missionary position. Foreign films that are clearly not pornographic must be strictly edited to avoid an X rating in the United States. Several episodes of the Canadian series *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, particularly the ones about abortion, have not been aired in the U.S. Mind you, *Degrassi* is about teenagers in high school and is hardly *Sex and the City*. (The latter show, like *Queer as Folk*, is only for Cable, not network TV.)

Tell people they cannot have something and they want it even more. People get very touchy about any encroachment on their sexual expression, yet they retain their predecessors' sexual squeamishness and condemn anything seen as sexual deviation. Despite our sexual liberation, we are still products of older generations' prejudices, older religious thought, and contemporary backroom humor. Sex is everywhere, yet it is taboo--and outright dirty.

Here lies the problem. We believe that asexuals are not like "us," so "they" must have something wrong with them. They seem to shove their sexuality (actually, their asexuality) in our faces, and that offends whatever Victorian morality still haunts us. Even worse, if an asexual dares not show "proper" sexual interest in us, we are furious. We want to get laid; who the hell are they to say no? How very sad.

Is sex truly the be-all and end-all of love? For a sexual, it is a key part of bonding, but is it the only possible expression of physical love? What of hugging, kissing, caressing lightly, snuggling, cuddling, and giving an arm in support? Is sex the only thing that cements a relationship? What of empathy, understanding, affection, patience, steadfastness, loyalty, honor, companionship, and shared wisdom?

If we forget so much else and define human relations by sex alone, then what does that say about us?

From the Asexual Perspectives series on AVEN - <http://www.asexuality.org/home/node/21>

Also accessible with: <http://bit.ly/AVENPERSPECTIVESOUTSIDE>

From A for Affort

In response to the question: "Being Asexual, would kissing and making out, like not... Asexual, I'm just confused can you explain please, this is not meant to be offensive. Also have you found an asexual "boyfriend"?? Also, why are you asexual??"

Sure, I'll try to explain as well as I can. It's really hard to do explain, so forgive me if I err into the binary system at first, as it's the simplest way to explain asexuality.

Asexuality is an orientation just like any other—pansexual, homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, etc.

For example, a homosexual male finds other males sexually attractive, but not females. He may be friends with females, he might love females, but as far as sex goes, he is interested in males, not females.

A heterosexual male finds females attractive, but not males. He may be friends with other males, he might love them, but as far as sex goes, he is interested in females, not males.

Well, an asexual person doesn't think males or females (or anyone else) is sexually attractive. An asexual person can be friends with people or love people, but as far as sex goes, they don't look at people and say, "I think that person is sexually attractive and I want to have sex with them because of that."

It's like you're looking at a painting. Maybe it's a painting of a beautiful woman or a very handsome man. You will say, "WOW, that is a very beautiful painting." But you don't think the painting itself—the paint slathered on the canvas—is sexy. You don't have the desire to have sex with the painting. This is often how asexuals see other people. They can tell, "Wow, what a good-looking person!" but they don't feel sexually attracted to them.

However, there's a difference between sexual orientation and sex drive. Someone can be asexual and still have a sex drive. Sex drive is simply a bodily function. Just like I'm sure you know some people who have a very high sex drive and either masturbate often or have/want to have sex very often, and I'm sure you know some people who are the opposite and don't seem to think about it very often, and there are many people in between.

So there are some asexuals who have a sex drive and who choose to have sex or to masturbate. The difference between them and sexuals is not the fact that they do (or do not) have sex, but the initial attraction. Sexuals experience sexual attraction/lust for others, asexuals do not.

Some asexuals do not have a sex drive. I am one of these people. Some asexuals without a sex drive really think sex is repulsive and never want to have it. Some are rather indifferent to sex and don't care one way or another. Some asexuals are in relationships with a sexual partner and choose to have sex to make their partner happy. Some asexual-sexual relationships are nonsexual relationships. That's up to the individuals in each relationship.

So regarding kissing/making out, that depends on each person. Some asexuals are comfortable with kissing and/or making out. Some are not.

As far as finding an asexual boyfriend is concerned, uh... I don't even know how to answer that question, but probably because I'm too busy being amused by your use of quotation notes. "Boyfriend" in quotation marks implies that were I to have one, he wouldn't be a REAL boyfriend. It's almost like if I were to have a boyfriend (or girlfriend or whatever), it wouldn't count because I am asexual. Which... doesn't make sense. Because if your friends have been dating for 3 years but decided not to have sex until marriage, it doesn't mean they are "dating." It means they're dating but not having sex.

As far as "boyfriends" or boyfriends or girlfriends or other romantic partners are concerned, I do not currently have a romantic partner. Once upon a time, I had an asexual "boyfriend." I know of and am personal friends with three married asexual couples. They don't have sex, but they're in love and want to be together forever. I was lucky enough to attend one of their weddings; had I had the funds, I would've been at all three.

I am not averse to being in a relationship with a sexual person; however, since I have no sex drive, I decided long ago that I will not be having sex unless I am married. It has to do with my personal view on sex in relationships and nothing to do with religion. I am not celibate or abstinent, because that means that I would be withholding sex from myself even though I wanted it. But I don't want it. I just am not interested in sex.

Finally, why am I asexual?
Oh, I don't know.

Why are you sexual? What makes you look at another person and think, "**YEAH I WANNA STICK PART OF MY BODY IN THAT PERSON**" or "**YEAH I WANT THAT PERSON TO STICK PART OF THEIR BODY IN ME**"

Because honestly
That's fuckin' weird
Then again... I'm asexual with no sex drive ;)

Being a Kinky Ace – from Verbs Not Nouns

May 22, 2011


To start, I'm Venn, a kinky asexual person who writes about being a kinky asexual person. Other potentially relevant labels are bottom, cisgender, female, able-bodied, virgin, aromantic, and fannish.

The fannish is important as it took me quite a long time to realize that my experience with the world was near the edges of the bell curve, (and I still am not quite sure how much of what I think is 'normal' is, in fact, strange to other people) and this is all because I grew up in fandom. I have spent and continue to spend a significant amount of time in spaces surrounded my people like me.

Thanks to fandom, I got to grow up seeing people being happy and kinky and in a huge range of relationships. The first fandom I was in had a distinction between sexual fic and relationship based fic (sexual yaoi pairing: 1x2, less-explicit shonen-ai friendship pairing: 1+2. Gundam Wing makes math fun!). Even if they weren't explicitly ace relationships, I could see myself in the shonen-ai fic and the gen team!fic in a way that I never saw in more typical media.

So when trying to come up with a topic for this, I flailed around for a while before settling into this: an attempt at trying to fine tune this space just a little bit more in order reflect more of my me, so that future young little mes can go even longer before they realize they're odd.

Or more succinctly: Venn Rambles About Her Life In The Hopes That People Will Write More Kinky Ace Fic.

This will have a bit of overlap with  [melonbutterfly](#)'s lovely essay, because I wasn't actually expecting two (!!!) asexual essays so I started with the basics. I was going to cut the overlap, but then I decided that there's not exactly a glut of asexual perspectives, and people could deal with one more :)

Asexuality 101(-ish)

The generally accepted definition of an asexual person is a person who doesn't experience sexual attraction. Asexual people are sometimes referred to as 'ace' or 'aces'.

Now as you can imagine, defining something by a lack is a particularly difficult thing. My own realization was spent flailing around and trying to figure out exactly what this sexual attraction thing was and whether I was missing it, because I didn't feel like I was missing anything. This was surprisingly difficult, as it seems like everyone is functioning under the idea that a person knows sexual attraction when they feel it, and thus there is no reason to actually figure out how to talk about it. Descriptions of what sexual attraction tend to be the equivalent to saying "my borogoves feel mimsy" which leads to:

Asexual person: Your who are what?

Sexual person: My borogoves, they feel mimsy

Asexual person: I don't understand

Sexual person: You know your borogoves?

Asexual person: No

Sexual person: Okay, well, they're the things that can feel mimsy.

Asexual person: USE DIFFERENT WORDS

And then people turn to vague metaphors, which are only slightly more helpful.

So I figured that since you apparently know it when you feel it, I could probably safely assume I hadn't felt it. Thus, I am asexual.

Personally, I like the definition of asexual that goes something along the lines of "You're asexual if you feel like that is an appropriate label for yourself." because it's lovely and inclusive, but I realize it's remarkably unhelpful for most people, especially those trying to find their place.

Relationships and Other People

I like other people, generally. I appreciate attractive people, but it's just very much the same way I appreciate attractive clothing. It's not visceral in the way I suspect sexual attraction would be and doesn't go beyond "oh hey, you're nice to look at! I would like it if I could continue to look at you."

I can be aware of other people's bodies, but I tend to miss certain things unless I'm specifically paying attention. For example, my friends mock me endlessly for describing [this White Collar scene](#) (youtube link. No sound. Description: Neal Caffrey lounging around his apartment wearing nothing but a pair of low riding maroon pants which show off the well defined musculature of his upper body.) as "the scene with the pants!". I thought colour of the pants looked lovely and they seemed very comfortable and possibly silk? I couldn't quite tell. They thought that the pants weren't supposed to be the focus of that scene.

I do like bodies for the things they can do to/for me (hence 'verbs, not nouns'). My kink doesn't work nearly as well when it's something I'm doing to myself. I need an outside source. And sometimes I feel a little bad for just using people like this (I only want you for your experience!), but I'm trying to get better at remembering that they are also getting something out of this.



I'm also aromantic, so the whole intricacies of romantic, intimate relationships are a little bit confusing. It seems like such a huge time and energy sink, and I understand there must be some benefits to make that effort worthwhile but I don't get it. I also don't get why friendship counts as a 'just'. I guess, really, friends with benefits would be a close description of what it is I'm looking for, so long as benefits = play and not sex.

Of course, romantic asexuals would have a different opinion on that ;)

Asexual people can have and/or want all sorts of different relationships. Asexual people tend to separate out romantic orientation from sexual orientation. I'm an aromantic asexual. That means I don't have any particular romantic desires. Other asexual people may be homo-romantic, hetero-romantic, bi-romantic, pan-romantic or any other prefix. They may want a relationship, they may want to date, to cuddle, to live with, to find someone (or more than one someone) to spend their lives with.

Asexual people may have sex. It's a spectrum. There are also orientations between sexual and asexual typically called things like gray-A or demi-sexual who may have limited sexual desire, or sexual desire in certain situations. Also asexual people who don't identify as gray-A or demi-sexual may have sex because they want their partner to be happy, or they like orgasms, or it's fun, or relaxing, or any number of other reasons. Asexual people also have a range with respect to their libidos, and what they do with those sexual desires (eg sexual partners, masturbation, ignore it until it goes away etc). Neither libido nor sexual behavior are relevant to identifying as asexual.

Sex Is Just a Widely Held Kink

Sex isn't my kink. I understand that other people like this whole other people's body thing, and they think that interacting with genitalia is awesome and that's great for them. But Your Kink Is Not My Kink.

The 'sex is not my kink' revelation was one of the big moments for me as a person identifying as asexual. I realized that this thing I'm feeling about kink is probably similar to how sexual people feel about sex. It's not easy to explain, I don't really know why I want it, but I know my body wants this in a way I have never felt about sex.

And if sex is another kink, then it's easier to understand. Some people are ambivalent to it, some people are squicked by it, some people really like it. Some people will do it because their partner is really into it and they want to please their partner. Some people don't really get it in the way other people do, but they still like it. Some people like it *because* they don't like it, and *that's* what hot. And that's just the beginning. Just like any other kink, every response is a valid response.

Being Kinky and Asexual (aka: The Point)

One of my least favorite stereotypes about asexual people is that we're all frigid, uptight and repressed.

Fuck that. I love my body. I love the sensations my body can feel. I'm not overly hung up on orgasm because that is just one of many things my body can feel, and really isn't that big of a deal to me. Other things, (workouts, meals, conversations, fic) are so much more satisfying and more interesting.

For me, orgasm is simplistic. I push a button, I get happy chemicals. It gets a bit interesting with how the body tenses and muscles clench and breathing stutters, but I can get all that in other ways that last much longer than an orgasm. I don't doubt that for some/many it's a really big thing and that's good! But YKINMK, I'm not wired to crave it.

But, holy fuck the actual kink things are awesome.

I want kink because it's all about the physical.

I want situations where the mind is no longer required. I don't want to have to think, I just want to shut off my brain and feel. I just want to be able to *be* in my body. I want to feel how adrenaline spikes with pain, how a body can get so overwhelmed with sensation that it doesn't know what to feel. I want the stillness of mind that comes when there are no choices and the body is allowed to exist in and of itself.

Kink satisfies the times when I want physical contact without making it something that is inherently entwined with genitalia and mucus membranes. I want to feel my body, I want touch and strength and skin, and big muscle movements. I want to explore what I can do and where my limits are. I want to feel the rush that comes from pushing those limits and discovering that what I thought was my limit isn't.

I also like to be in a space where I can be casually Asexual. 1) because Fetlife has Asexual on the drop down menu so it's *right there* for people to see and 2) The BDSM community also has all these lovely structures that are really awesome as an asexual person. It's not weird to discuss limits and consent here.

So much of traditional sexual dating has assumed consent to intimacy. After a couple of dates, there should be touching, or kissing and there will eventually be sex, because the structures say that if you love someone there has to be sex, otherwise you're just a tease. As an asexual person who wants certain physical things, but not others, I love that this is a place where I'm allowed and encouraged to say 'touch like this, but not that' and 'kiss here, not here' or 'cuddling will go no further' so that everyone's on the same page and no one feels cheated or pressured.

Find this original post at: <http://verbs-not-nouns.dreamwidth.org/9902.html> or <http://bit.ly/KINKYACE>



How to Be an Asexual Ally (Part 1)

By swankivy • Jul 11th, 2011

A guide to being inclusive: Part 1 of 3

Think about when you first heard of asexuality. What was your first thought?
 “What’s wrong with them? How could they not be interested in the best thing in the world?”
 “Wow, how interesting . . . I want to know what it’s like to be that person!”
 “Oh, that’s cool . . . I didn’t know that existed, but it makes sense!”
 “I hope for their sake they can be cured. . . .”
 “That sounds awfully familiar . . . maybe I’m asexual!”

Unless this article is your first introduction to asexuality, you thought something. Maybe you said something. Maybe you wondered later whether what you said sounded ignorant. Or maybe you stayed silent and regretted it. Maybe you’re wondering if it would have been okay to ask questions. Maybe you’re wondering how you can be supportive of the asexual community even if you’re not one of its members. Maybe you want to know how to be an asexual ally.

Well, we hope so. And for people like you, I’ve collected some statements from around the asexuality community about what people like us want from people like you.

So first: *What would we like sexual people to do to make us feel valued and accepted?*

The single most common and resoundingly consistent answer from the asexual community is that we want you to acknowledge that asexuality exists.

Sounds easy, but keep in mind asexuals are a largely invisible minority. They’re not exactly discriminated against so much as they are erased—it’s not an oppression of phobia against but an oppression of complete lack of acknowledgment. And yes, that is still oppression, though no one is comparing it with more violent expressions of oppression or suggesting we have it as bad or worse. (In other words, comments like “so what, gay people/racial minorities/women have much bigger problems” is not a helpful statement, because we aren’t trying to create a hierarchy of whose oppression sucks more.) We’re saying that it means the world to asexuals if we’re included when sexual orientations are examined and counted up.

How?

Obviously it’d seem a little silly if an asexual mentioned being asexual and you jumped in with “Oh, hi there. I believe you exist!” So how can you show that you acknowledge their existence?

Mainly by watching your blanket statements when it comes to sexuality, especially when it comes to comparing lack of sexuality with lack of humanity or suggesting that “everybody” needs sex. You can make sure it gets represented in academic discussions or surveys of sexuality if you have the power to do so. You can refrain from assuming that everyone who’s single is trying desperately to be otherwise (as aromantic asexuals don’t want to date), and if an asexual brings up the subject just try to be your brand of accepting. You can approach people in general without assuming they are sexual until proven otherwise.

Ultimately, taking care to NOT assume sexuality is the default and being mindful of including asexuals even outside of their presence will help bring their existence into the common consciousness.

Don’t: Here are some comments we sometimes hear from sexual people who want to be supportive but don’t realize what they’re saying. (We assume the usual mocking or dismissive comments don’t need to be discussed here, because they’re not uttered by people who want to be allies.)

Don’t start arguing with an asexual about whether asexuality is “actually” latent homosexuality, suppressed trauma, or a disorder (all under the guise of “I’m just trying to help you!” of course). We understand that these things exist and that they also can cause lack of interest in sex, but we don’t feel that asexuality is a “last resort diagnosis” that can only be applied if we’ve proved it’s not anything else.

Don’t immediately start trying to be sympathetic by saying you are “sometimes asexual” or that you wish you were, and don’t start rattling off all the bright sides of our situation. (We know. We live it.) We’re probably not asking you to comfort us. Though I’ve definitely had some interesting discussions with people who thought they were asexual and turned out not to be. (That’s a different discussion.) There are some things about being asexual that make life easier for some, but “I wish I was like you!” can come off as infantilizing—in other words, “Wow, your sexless life is easy while sexuality makes my life hard. Must be nice to be so innocent.” (Clearly not everyone who says this is implying that their lives are harder, but if you wish to be an ally you should know that you might be coming off that way if you use that phrasing.)

Incidentally, most of the people who’ve told me they “wish they were asexual” are actually expressing that their sexual urges are distracting or annoying. That’s actually a very different thing from “I wish I wasn’t attracted to anybody,” and I’m afraid that even if

you mean well, saying you wish you were an oppressed minority does have a partial effect of trivializing what we go through. Some of us have at times wished we were like you too, but the truth is, neither of us actually knows what we're asking for if we say so. Probably best to leave it out of a first conversation at least, until you know more about the asexual person's experiences and attitudes.

Don't make assumptions about what our asexuality means, even if the statements technically express support (e.g., "I think it's GREAT that you're saving yourself!" or "You must be so spiritually enlightened!").

And while we do want your acknowledgment if we're revealing this aspect of our lives to you, don't constantly bring it up in group settings or one-on-one chats. This often makes us feel like you can't think of us as anything but "that *asexual* person." We want it to be an important but integral part of who we are to you, just like your sexuality isn't the first thing on our minds when we talk to you. You may want to ask us whether we're out to the public about our asexuality, because accidentally outing your friend or family member could be a disaster for both of you.

And speaking of coming out, this article will be continued in Part 2: What would we like your reactions to sound like when we come out, and how would we like you to treat us afterwards?

How to Be an Asexual Ally (Part 2)

By swankivy • Jul 18th, 2011

A guide to being inclusive: Part 2 of 3

So, now we're on to the next step. If someone in your life is asexual, there will probably come a time when that person decides to tell you so. If you're unsure of how you should act, read on!

What would we like your reactions to sound like when we come out, and how would we like you to treat us afterwards?

Unfortunately, sexual folks' reactions usually come out sounding negative, even if they don't mean them to—we often hear condescending utterances of "are you sure?" and "don't you think you'll regret that?" along with attitudes ranging from disbelieving to horrified.

Much like gay folks, we're used to being asked why we "decided" to be asexual. We're used to being asked to attend therapy to make sure nothing's wrong with us before we call ourselves asexual. We're used to being told to just TRY sex or somehow change our inclinations, because surely it's not such a big deal to try it, right? Well, say you're a straight person. Say every time you say so, people ask you why you don't try being "open-minded" enough to just try gay sex. You could be missing out! Do most people feel this is an inappropriate request? Probably. Would most straight people be able to be "reasoned into" recognizing their heterosexuality as merely a result of close-mindedness toward homosexuality? I don't think so.

Please understand that it feels like sex isn't really a big deal if you DO experience that attraction, and for someone who doesn't, "just trying it" might very well be too much to ask. (Especially since, in our experience, we just get told we did it wrong or with the wrong person if we try it and still don't like it.) There are asexuals who have sex, and they do so for various reasons, but for much of humanity a desire for sex grows out of being attracted to someone. Not being sexually attracted to anyone tends to strongly affect interest in seeking out sex.

Look at it this way. If you can't imagine yourself having sex with someone whose traits are unattractive to you (based on anything from gender to body type), you probably feel the way most asexuals do when it comes to willingness to try it anyway. Remember that they likely feel about all sex the way you feel about sex with people who aren't sexually attractive to you, and asexuals are unlikely to see you as an ally if you tell them they "should" be indifferent enough to experiment. Asexuals don't have an obligation to try to be sexual, and that's really important to remember when talking about our orientation with us. You'll be establishing a double standard if you say straight people don't have to try to be gay before they're trusted to label themselves, but that we on the other hand should try to be like you before self-identifying as asexual. You'll have trouble getting us to take you seriously as an ally if you think we can only be asexual if we've tried and failed to be everything else.

How?

This is going to vary widely depending on who the asexual person in your life is and what your relationship is like. But in general, if an asexual is coming out of the closet and wants you to be partial to this revelation, the best thing you can do is listen.

This person is expressing trust toward you, and even if you have some misgivings about asexuality or don't understand what it means in this particular asexual's case, if you don't listen and at least try to process what is being said, anything you say against it during this delicate time may cause a shutdown or a withdrawal. The asexual may regret being honest with you and may be completely closed to discussion with you on this topic if you don't keep your mind open. Let us speak, and consider what we say without automatic condemnation. That's all we can ask.

Don't:

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The worst thing you can do when an asexual has just come out is start setting down conditions for “belief.” If you’re reading this article hoping you can be an ally, I’m going to assume you aren’t the type who would start screaming “get thee to therapy,” would never go into denial and start forcing blind dates on the person, and aren’t interested in parroting the “you haven’t tried it/you haven’t met the right person/you’re too afraid/you have issues” mantra. Nevertheless, people who are trying to be supportive still make many mistakes in this situation.

This is important: when you’re made partial to this information about your asexual friend or family member, it does not mean you are being asked to intervene. You’re not being asked for advice and you’re not being recruited; you’re just being asked to understand. This isn’t about putting yourself in an asexual’s shoes; it’s about recognizing that people wear different shoes because they have different feet. If the only context you have for not having sex is wanting it but not getting it, you might have trouble grasping not getting it because you don’t want it. An asexual’s life is not likely to be empty because of the lack of sex, so if this is the only way you can see it—if it seems bleak and boring and horrific to you—then you are not processing this person’s situation. You’re processing yours in a situation that would be distasteful to you, and until you accept that this is someone else’s “normal,” you may be unable to react constructively.

This is not the time to express doubts or ask the person to prove the validity of asexuality to you, and this is not the time to suggest that it would be better to try harder to be like you. This is the time to let the asexual control the conversation. The de-closeting may be something this asexual has been gearing up for for months, and there may be quite a lot of nerves involved . . . it’s possible the asexual has been preparing, and if you have been chosen to hear this message, your reaction probably means a lot. Make it a good one.

How to Be an Asexual Ally (Part 3)

By swankivy • Jul 25th, 2011 • Category: Blog

A guide to being inclusive: Part 3 of 3

So you’ve got some hints on how to make your asexual friends and family members feel valued and accepted, and you’ve heard from the asexual community on reactions we’d appreciate when we come out. Now we’re on to this:

What questions would we like you to ask, and what behaviors would we prefer you avoid? What assumptions would we caution you against making regarding us and others like us?

This, again, varies greatly by individual. If an asexual has done something awareness-related in a public forum and you are interacting with that asexual through the public forum, questions are usually appropriate and even welcomed. Many asexual awareness activists are quite used to being asked out-and-out crude questions, so your polite ones are unlikely to offend us. Use a little more caution when you’re talking to someone who’s discussing the subject with you one on one. And you can’t go wrong if you politely ASK if you can ask first. Some people will just say “Sorry, I don’t really want to talk about my personal life.”

Some asexuals just want to be asexuals, not spokespeople. As with any minority, we do often get portrayed as being representative of “our group,” so please keep in mind that we don’t necessarily speak for each other and that our answers are not to be generalized as the accepted status quo for “the community.”

How?

Well, we would like your questions to be open-minded, polite, and not rendered in biased language. For instance, a question like “Don’t you think you’d better get your hormone levels checked?” is stacked toward “of course you should.” If you really want to know whether the asexual in question might have a hormonal issue, keep in mind that’s a personal medical question and it may very well not be your business. Also keep in mind that hormonal lack of sex drive is different from lack of sexual attraction, and if someone is actually lacking in hormones there are other health problems that develop from it. We frequently hear these kinds of questions lobbed ungracefully by actual well-meaning people as well as from trolls.

So, what I suggest is to imagine you’re talking to a person who is the same sexual orientation you are. Then ask yourself whether you are close enough to that person to say such things as “Say, have you ever been sexually molested?” or “Do your genitals work?” or “Do you masturbate?” or “Have you ever had an orgasm?” In some people’s minds, these kinds of questions suddenly become fair game when sexual people want to know how we function. I don’t recommend asking them unless your relationship with that person is such that you could have comfortably asked the same questions if the person wasn’t asexual. We generally don’t like being thrown impersonally under the microscope and used for answer mining. If you suddenly switch into “but the specimen exists to satisfy my curiosity!” mode, don’t be surprised if that person withdraws from you as a result. If you treat people impersonally and behave as if they owe you answers, they will withdraw.

Don’t:

Here are some discussions about assumptions you should avoid making . . . either privately or while asking questions. (Some are just consensus, and some are specific quotes from asexuals.)

We aren’t looking down on you for being sexual. Some sexual people automatically believe that if someone’s asexual, it constitutes

taking a stand against sex (necessitating defense of or adamant glorification of one's sexuality), and that is not the case at all.

Many of us are sex-positive, as long as the sex doesn't involve us. Remember that sex-positivity is about empowerment regarding sex—including the option to NOT engage in it. Unfortunately a lot of people misunderstand sex-positivity as “sex is good, period.” But if a person's natural inclination does not include sexual attraction, this “celebrate sex!” attitude can be perceived as “what's wrong with you, you sex-repressed prude?!” If you don't want to sound like that to your asexual friends and family members, keep this in mind when you choose your words for your sex-positive message. Make it about freedom, not about demonizing those who don't feel interested.

Sex-positivity is about choice—about not marginalizing anyone based on lifestyle or inclination, even if said lifestyle includes no sex at all. We might sometimes be relieved that we don't have some of your problems, but believe me, we have a whole different set, and we don't think we're superior. Asexual forum participant qaface says, “I don't want the sexuals to be like me, I accept them and their choices. I just want them to respect mine in return.” Similarly, forum participant feenix says, “I've encountered quite a few sexual people who, for some reason, respond to asexuality by asserting how sexual they are and how important this part of their life is to them. Hey, if sex makes them happy, then I'm happy for them – but it just seems like a strange reaction to me. I don't automatically respond to discussions about sex/sexuality by declaring that I'm asexual and how wonderful it is.”

We aren't necessarily disgusted by or naïve about relationships or sexuality. News flash: “Asexual” is not a synonym for “prude.”

Sometimes sexual people bend over backwards to placate their one asexual guest, trying to avoid references to sex in conversation, or deliberately leaving their asexual friend out of an invitation to a movie that features romance or sexuality. Unless we've expressed that we wish to be left out of this sort of thing, please don't assume “oh that would gross you out,” and also don't assume that we have no idea how sex works. Some of us have even had sex, and nearly all of us are going to know the facts of life if we're adults. As best said by forum participant mullenkamp: “There's no need to talk down or explain or censor oneself just because you're talking to someone who isn't sexually attracted to any gender [. . .] The fact that most people pursue and enjoy sex [. . .] is neither a revelation or a scandal.”

We aren't buying into a fad or trying to be unique. This may sound silly, but ask any asexual who's done visibility work and I'll bet that person's heard this multiple times: “You just want attention” or “Everybody's trying to be special these days” or “This is silly; why do you need a label for all the sex you're NOT having?” See how insidious this invisibility is?

I don't think asexuals are “a fad” any more than homosexuality was a fad when it seemed like suddenly there were more gay people than there used to be. See, for the gays it was all about shame, and when communities found themselves enough that they could provide safe spaces for each other, more people could admit who they were. With asexuals, we're much rarer than homosexuals, and since society constantly hits us over the head with “thou shalt be sexual” messages, we know that our feelings are unpopular. If there wasn't an Internet-based community, most of us would probably be the only asexual we'd ever heard of. And while awareness of a phenomenon does trigger some misdiagnoses, it'd be extremely offensive to write off everyone who comes out as asexual and send them away with a diagnosis of sexual-orientation-based hypochondria. It's unlikely we read about it on the Internet and thought “that's me!” if we'd never had an inkling of the sort before.

Asexuality isn't a decision, an oath, or a phase. For most of us, we say we're asexual like any of you declare your sexual orientation. But we acknowledge that things do sometimes change and we are sometimes wrong about ourselves, just like people of any sexual orientation are. It isn't fair to treat asexuals as though our orientation is temporary, but keep in mind being asexual is not the same as having sworn off sex.

If we are telling you we're asexual, we're saying we aren't sexually attracted to people. It's a fact stating how we feel—not a logical decision based on close-mindedness that you have to reason with us about. In short, you aren't going to change our attraction experiences by arguing that we won't have a full life unless we “change our minds.” We haven't made a decision. We've made an observation, and we're living our lives based on the assumption that what we observed about ourselves is true.

And as a final thought:

Please remember that a big part of being an ally is being one even when no asexuals are there to appreciate it.

We don't want to recruit you for an advertising campaign, but if you're allied with our visibility efforts, you can help in a natural way. Do what you can as far as research on the subject so you don't end up spreading misinformation, and if you see or hear a conversation that misrepresents, erases, or mocks asexuals/asexuality, say something. If you study sexuality or are in some way devoted to increasing awareness about its many facets, make sure you include asexuality in a realistic capacity—as in, don't give it its own special section and then go back to discussing sexuality as if there's no such thing. We're not asking you to swoop in and play advocate if that's not something you'd do regarding any other type of misinformation, but if that IS the sort of thing you enjoy, we're happy to have you spreading helpful information.

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