

Am I Asexual?



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Determining Asexuality

In our current world it is expected that everyone will be sexually or romantically attracted to someone at one point in their adult life. From these encounters it is also expected that everyone will find a “special” person to build a romantic and/or sexual life with and from these relationships develop a family. It is considered natural or normal and, in many cultures, it may be the only way to gain financial or social benefits within careers and even in politics.

Heteronormativity is usually the main focus of most cultural structures in which we are all socialized to see heterosexuality (attraction to opposite genders) as the default sexuality. Most of us are born from heterosexual relationships and so our perception of reality is shaped by these familial settings. Any other sexualities (homosexuality, bisexuality, pansexuality, etc) are seen as alternative attractions to the “norm” in our society. When we don’t fit into the heteronormative framework, these “alternative” sexualities are usually seen as the next default. Any of the people who fall into these frameworks are known as allosexuals. **Allosexuals** are people who have the ability to experience sexual attraction. Allosexuality is understood and therefore assumed by the majority. But what if you don’t feel any sort of sexual attraction for *anyone*?

This is called **asexuality**. This type of person is a person that does not feel sexually attracted to any gender. Commonly, because allosexuality is considered the norm in society, many asexuals might go on believing they are straight, gay/lesbian, bi, or any other sexuality. Media, medical research, or even historical facts do not support the idea of asexuality the way it supports the idea of allosexuality. Yet, these are the cues we often rely on to discover our sexuality.

Of course, asexuals are not the only ones across the a-spectrum. Within this guide we will explore what it means to be asexual, romantic or aromantic, and the pitfalls or barriers that often cause us to dismiss asexuality from a structural, societal standpoint.

What Causes Internalized and Externalized Aphobia?

Can you remember a time when you realized you weren't sexually or romantically attracted to people? Do you remember some of the responses coming from those around you? Some common responses from parents or peers may be "you're still young" or "you just haven't found the right person yet". Some may have pressured you to date stating "you never know unless you try". Some may have assumed you were simply gay or lesbian. Some may have even implied that this feeling came from painful memories, heartbreak, or trauma instead.

This dismissive attitude stems from **Aphobia**. Aphobia is a fear, dislike, or even a hatred toward asexuals or aromantic people. Aphobia is so common in society that it is hard to recognize. You may even begin to internalize it, afraid that because you are different, you aren't "normal" and therefore aren't as deserving of respect or understanding. You might dismiss your own feelings as a result, which causes a repression of feelings that may not be healthy for you.

According to The Trevor Project, Asexual youth experienced slightly higher rates of depression and anxiety when compared to other LGBTQ+ youth. Much of this stems from societal aphobia and internalized aphobia that results from this. What exactly causes aphobia to go unnoticed? We'll examine different ways that aphobia manifests and discuss how to overcome aphobic ideologies.

Allonormativity

In our society, romance and sex are large parts of our culture. In fact, it is considered a rights-of-passage for every individual to have their first “crush” or go on their first date. Many medical professionals often equate sexual attraction as a sign of “puberty” or healthy forms of adulthood. It is also customary and encouraged in almost every portion of the world to get married and have children. Because it is such a big part of our universal culture, it has become the norm for us to assume that all people will follow these customs without question. This idea is known as allonormativity. **Allonormativity** is the idea or assumption that all people are allosexual or alloromantic (sexually or romantically attracted to people) and/or that allonormativity is the only way or superior way to be in society. It is also the assumption that every person wants to experience sex and/or romance.

A reflection of this norm is found all around us based on this assumption. TAAAP (The Ace And Aro Advocacy Project) shows ways in which media creates an allonormative understanding of sexuality. Allonormative thinking in media often encourages **compulsory sexuality** that enforces or re-enforces sexual ideologies. The following messages reflect this:

- Sexuality is seen as an important milestone in most coming-of-age stories as well as in most romantic storylines.
- Innuendo or sexual euphemisms are treated as a part of comedy.
- Asexuality is often used in television, movies, and books to mean “undesirable”.
- It is common and seen as acceptable to publicly sexualize characters and actors/celebrities.
- Nudity and sexuality are used to promote or sell products in the false belief that “sex sells”.

To elaborate on the example of advertisers, according to UGA at least 20% of ads feature sexual imagery whether it was for clothing, beauty, health and hygiene, travel, food, and even for drugs and/or medicine. Sex is also heavily found in the entertainment we consume, especially entertainment aimed at adults. Recent studies from KFF.org have shown that at least 70% of television shows alone talk about sex or have sex featured in TV shows overall. With the rise of social media marketing, these forms of advertisements or entertainment have only increased. However, while sexual imagery may garner attention, studies have shown that whether or not sex actually is effective at selling a product depends on what a company is selling. Yet, often times we are told these myths in order to “normalize” the exploitation of sex and sexual attraction.

For an asexual person, these ideas that sexual attraction is more normal can feel isolating and sometimes confusing because many of them do not experience attraction the way sex is marketed or celebrated. For an asexual living in an allonormative society, asexuals are often made to feel as if they are not “mature” or “healthy” for who they are. They are often told that because of who they are they are “missing out” on life and/or even selfish or emotionless for not sharing these types of feelings.

Asexual desires and wishes within relationships are also least likely to be respected within personal relationships. Asexual people may be made to feel guilty for not consenting to sex on others’ terms or for not producing children or grandchildren. They may also be made to feel as if they do not love their romantic partners if they do not consent to sex or experience sexual attraction. Some asexual people may be mistaken for people who are “playing hard to get” and therefore many believe it is okay to harass, coerce, or force asexual people to date or have sex. In

fact, in many countries a lack of sexual interest can be grounds for separation from partners, divorce, or even abuse. Many asexual people fall into the category of dealing with sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and/or coercion equal to that of allosexuals. However, due to a lack of understanding or research on asexuality, it is often hard for asexuals to recognize trauma versus their natural inability to experience sex attraction.

Recognizing allonormativity can help us avoid internalizing aphobia and instead embrace more sexual diversity. The more we challenge our ideas of normality, the more tolerant we will be of ourselves and others.

Asexual Erasure

Asexual erasure, or ace erasure, is the erasure, misinterpretation, denial, and/or dismissal of asexuality and a-romanticism. As mentioned before, allonormativity makes people feel that the only sexualities that exist are ones that experience sexual attraction. As a result of this, asexuality is often erased from media, research, and even history.

Misinterpretation of asexuality is common from family members, friends, and even in media or entertainment. Often times asexuality is equated with a lack of popularity or social skills. Asexuals are often portrayed as prudish or judgmental. Asexuality is also seen as a reflection of a person with no emotion or they are portrayed as having a lack of interest in their appearance. Furthermore, asexuality is often affiliated with youth or immaturity. It is even wrongfully affiliated with virginity and the idea that all asexuals lack sexual experience. These stereotypes are intentionally made to stigmatize asexuality, encouraging allonormativity as the only normal sexuality while othering asexuals as strange or unusual.

Asexuals may also be erased or dismissed within the LGBTQIA+ community. Events catered to this community tend to focus on allosexuals and their liberation, while dismissing the struggles or triumphs of asexuals within the community. Furthermore, there is an assumption that all asexuals are closeted lesbians or gay people who are somehow “afraid” to address their feelings. This assumption that asexuals are simply closeted homosexuals in some way has led to much confusion regarding even historical and scientific facts surrounding asexuality and asexual people.

These damaging stereotypes not only lead to asexual erasure but internalized aphobia. A lack of adequate representation of asexuality can also lead to a lack of understanding of asexuality in relation to society.

The Expectations of Gender

For girls and women, sexuality is both stigmatized and controlled. Women, while prized for being “pure” or “virginal”, are encouraged to promote themselves as candidates for marriage and to eventually have children. Even the way they dress, speak, and walk is socialized to be beneficial for dating and appeasing men in society. **Compulsory heterosexuality**, which is the patriarchal system that enforces heterosexuality on women particularly, affects asexual women to just as much of a degree as it does other women within the LGBTQIA+ community. This system makes it difficult for asexual women to embrace their asexuality because society emphasizes a woman’s value based on how sexually available she is to others. Many asexual women may experience the following issues due to compulsory heterosexuality:

- A feeling that they must date and get married to fit in with the norm. They might simply select partners to be with just to appear “normal”.
- A feeling of guilt for not feeling sexually attracted to their partners, especially if they are men.
- A feeling of needing to be sexually attractive and gain validation from men, even if they are not sexually attracted to men.

The system of compulsory heterosexuality works in making sure that women only see themselves through the lens of heterosexuality in society. As a result, many women might repress their sexuality which causes many asexual women to internalize aphobia.

For boys and men, society places a high value on their ability to perform sexually. Asexuality is heavily stigmatized for men, often seen as a sign of weakness or inadequacy. In media, medical research, and even in history or folklore men have often been portrayed as sex-obsessed with an insatiable need for it. Often times, sexuality is equated with masculinity or a man’s level of testosterone. This might make asexual men feel as if they must date, have sex, or show sexual attraction to prove that they are masculine or worthy of their place in the patriarchal system. After all, the patriarchal system relies on men to be competitive even within personal relationships.

There is also a fear of being seen or perceived as gay or bisexual due to internalized homophobia or biphobia. Even if an asexual man is not gay or bisexual, the fear of this perception can equally lead to aphobia as well. After all, when many people see a man who is not sexually interested in women, they automatically assume the next default sexuality: that a man can only be gay if he does not experience this level of attraction. The asexual man may be afraid to become a target of vitriol or violence based on this perception, leading them to repress their sexual

identity. While internalized homophobia/biphobia may exist within asexual women, these fears are more exacerbated in asexual men due to a society that is more hostile towards gay men or men perceived as gay.

Recognizing that much of our perception of sexuality is based on social expectations of gender can help us unravel the chokehold that makes it difficult to recognize asexuality. A woman does not have to date, get married, or have children to be a woman. A man does not have to experience sex or sex attraction to be a man.

Characteristics and Behaviors of Asexuality

As mentioned before, asexuality can be hard to pinpoint because we live in a sex-based world and allonormativity is expected among people. While more people are discovering asexuality in the modern world more than ever before, there is still little understanding, knowledge, or research surrounding asexuality. Throughout the guide we will discuss different signs that you may be asexual in order to pinpoint or map out your sexual journey.

The following characteristics are common among various asexual people before discovering their sexuality:

- Discomfort when dating someone of interest (regardless of whether or not you have experienced any sort of trauma).
- Feeling attracted to people, then losing interest when they reciprocate your feelings.
- Developing high standards that are hard or impossible to meet by others. In contrast, you may also not have very many standards at all regarding the kind of partners you desire.

- Feeling like you never understand what your friends see in certain individuals romantically or sexually.
- When dating you can only see people as friends or family members.
- You might like the idea of kissing, holding hands, or cuddling, but you either hardly ever think about sex or you are disgusted by this thought.
- Discomfort with topics about sex or romance.
- Fear of losing friends to romantic partners. This may cause a sense of jealousy that you and others mistake for sexual attraction or romantic attraction.
- Randomly selecting partners to be attracted to just to be seen as “normal”.
- Feeling exhausted or lethargic with the idea of dating, getting married, and/or having sex.
- Only experiencing attraction to fictional characters, celebrities, or any person unattainable such as teachers or authority figures.
- Being attracted to people because everyone else is, not because you actually desire them.
- Choosing partners based on the attention they give you rather than based on your attraction to them.
- Romantic or sexual Partners constantly feel inadequate or incapable around you. (This is usually due to a lack of understanding or knowledge about asexuality). Or you may constantly feel inadequate or incapable around your partners.
- You constantly mistake admiration with sexual attraction or even romantic attraction.
- You identify as gay or lesbian *only* because you are not attracted to the opposite gender (not necessarily because you are attracted to the same gender).

- You may have bouts of social anxiety for fear of having to address romantic or sexual feelings.
- You don't have long term goals regarding dating or marriage.
- You only feel sexually aroused after getting to know a person or after gaining emotional or romantic attachment.

While there are other ways to identify asexuality, these are some of the most common experiences that various people of asexual identities tend to encounter. Keep in mind that like all sexual orientations, asexuality exists on a spectrum. Some asexual people might experience a little sexual attraction while others don't experience any sexual attraction at all. Furthermore, asexuals may not experience sexual attraction to the same degree as others, but this does not mean that all asexuals do not like or enjoy sexual experiences. In the following sections of this guide, we will discuss the various ways that asexuals experience attraction.

What Does It Mean to Have Romantic Attraction?

In our society we have a tendency to conflate romantic attraction with sexual attraction. It is true that, for some, romantic attraction is often needed in order to experience sexual attraction or satisfaction. However, romantic desire is very different from sexual desire, as lust is different from love. People who experience romantic attraction are often called **alloromantic**.

The list below describes sexual attraction and romantic attraction with the following distinctions.

Sexual Attraction

- Sexual attraction makes you desire sex or makes you more lustful for a person.
- Sexual attraction does not involve a need for safety, trust, or love to initiate this desire; physical appearance is often enough.
- You may not yearn to be with a person you are sexually attracted to for the rest of your life.
- Your sensuality with this person is motivated by a need to have sexual intimacy.
- The focus is on sexual compatibility.
- Physical sensations include genital arousal (erection, vaginal wetness, or swelling of sex glands, etc), flushing, accelerated heartrate accompanied with harder breathing, and pupil dilation.

Romantic Attraction

- Romantic feelings urge you to desire love or makes you feel “in love” with a person.
- Romantic attraction involves fulfilling a need for safety, trust, and love; typically, physical appearance is not enough to feel this sense of attraction.
- You yearn to be with this person for the rest of your life, despite their quirks or inconsistencies.
- Your sensuality is motivated by a need to feel safe and loved.
- The focus is on emotional or mental compatibility.
- Physical sensations include an accelerated heartrate, butterflies of excitement, and excessive thoughts about a person for prolonged periods of time, a need for sensual affection or attraction.

While many asexual people may not experience sexual attraction to people, many of them may experience romantic attraction or desire.

Many asexual people may choose to date or get married as a result to people of varying sexual or romantic identities. It is important to note that an asexual person can have a fulfilling romantic life without the need for sexual attraction or gratification. To add, while many asexual people do not feel the need to be sexually attracted to any person, it doesn't mean that some asexual people do not or cannot enjoy sex in any capacity. Sexual attraction to a gender is not always necessary to enjoy or even desire sex for some asexual people.

Other Asexual Variations

As mentioned before, asexuality often exists on a spectrum. While most asexual people do not experience sexual attraction to a large degree, there are some asexual people that may experience some sexual attraction or sexual desire. There are also asexuals who may only experience sexual attraction depending on specific circumstances such as bonding.

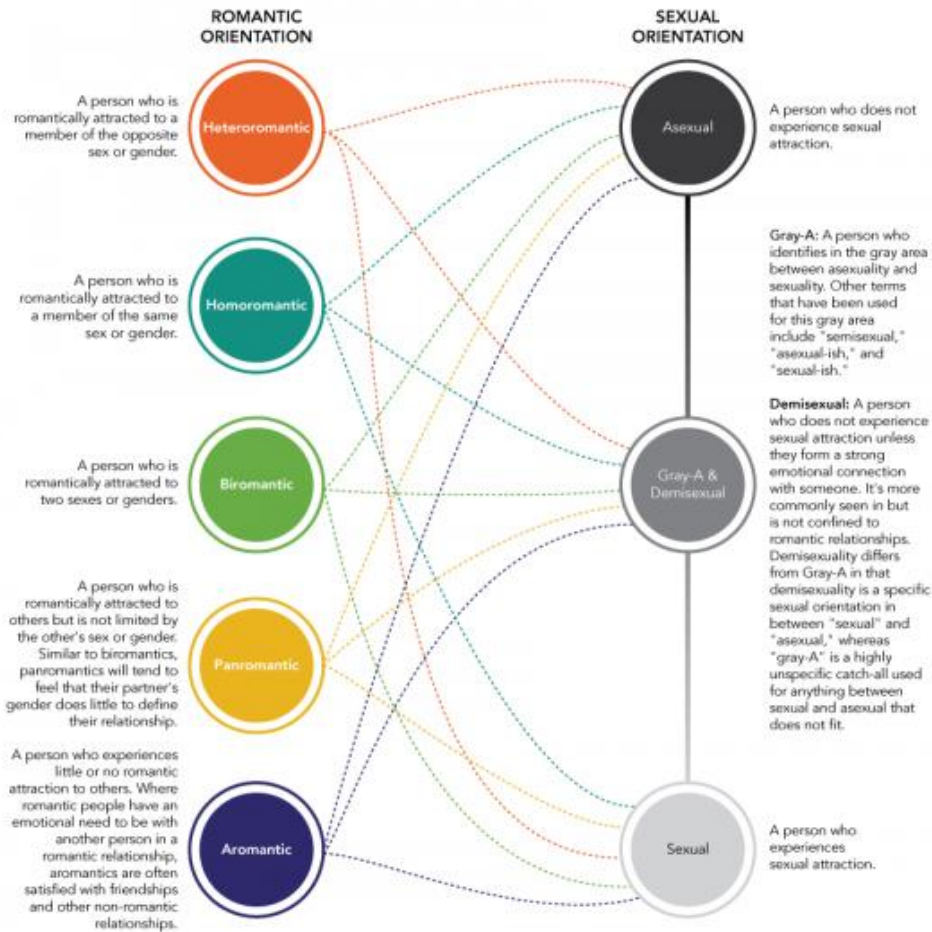
A **demisexual** person is a person that only experiences sexual attraction or desire when they have emotionally bonded with someone. These types of people are usually not sexually attracted until they are able to build a close relationship with a person, whether it is platonic or romantic in nature. Some asexuals might also consider themselves gray-asexual or **graysexual**. These individuals may experience limited sexual attraction or their sexual attraction may not be as intensely felt as others. While demisexuality is often treated as a specific sexual orientation, graysexuality often refers to any person that falls in between asexuality and sexuality.

Along with varying asexual identities are varying romantic identities as well. Asexuals can be **heteroromantic** (opposite-gender romantic

attraction), **homoromantic** (same-gender romantic attraction), and/or **biromantic** (two or more gender attractions) or **panromantic** (romantic attraction regardless of gender) as well. You may also be **demiromantic**, only desiring romantic intimacy (dating, marriage, commitment) after forming a strong emotional bond through friendship. Just as sexual attraction has a spectrum, so does romantic attraction. Below is a graph from the Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) that can help sort through the spectrum of sexuality and romantic attractions.

The Asexual Spectrum

Many asexuals identify with two orientations: a romantic and a sexual one. According to the Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN), an asexual's romantic orientation determines "which gender(s), if any, they are inclined to form romantic relationships with." There are also individuals in the asexual community who identify in the gray area between asexuality and sexuality.*



Aromance and Amatonormativity

As mentioned earlier, romance and sexuality are often treated as the same experience in society. There is an expectation that all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, will experience at least some form of romantic attraction along with sexual attraction. Romantic relationships, even more than sexual ones, are often pedestalized as a superior feeling over all others. While men are often pressured to subject to romantic obligations in order to “prove” their love and affections, women are especially expected to be romantic or seek romantic relationships. Unmarried people who decide to cohabit or have sexual relationships are often scorned, ridiculed, or condemned in society if they do not have a romantic relationship or are not married. In media, these types of individuals are often portrayed in a negative light as sociopathic, narcissistic, or selfish. They may even be portrayed as emotionless or immoral.

These ideologies are often motivated by **amatonormativity**. Coined by writer Elizabeth Blake, the term is meant to describe the widespread assumption that everyone is better off in an exclusive or monogamous, romantic, long-term coupled relationship. It often works alongside the allonormative framework that emphasizes sexual attraction as the norm as well. A reflection of the amatonormative ideology is often found in media consumption. The Ace and Aro Advocacy Project (TAAAP) created a list of various ways that amatonormativity is promoted.

- Romantic movies, books, and television promote unhealthy amatonormative tropes such as stalking or harassment as an okay form of showing love or romantic affection, a display of people feeling incomplete without romance, or romance becoming the focus of even those who are not involved in a relationship.

- Media consumption and marketing often focuses on romance above all other aspects of a piece of media, sometimes even when romance does not exist in the work itself.
- People feel entitled to know or speculate about famous people or celebrities' love lives.

In a systemic sense, amatonormativity can include assuming everyone's life goals are to get married, structuring society around married couples (such as with housing, taxes, adoption policies, etc). Even medical research emphasizes romance when speaking about mentally and emotionally healthy relationships far times more often than any other forms of relationships or love. Often times, romantic love is seen as the ultimate form of love as if familial or platonic love could never be as strongly felt or fulfilling long term.

Along with asexuality, there are some people who are **aromantic**. Aromantic people are those who do not experience romantic attraction or desire. Aromantic people can fall into any gender identity despite the misconceptions that all women are more romantic than men. Contrary to popular understanding, many aromantic people may or may not be asexual. Many aromantic people may also enjoy sexual relationships with a variety of people even without the aspect of romance.

The following list represents various experiences or scenarios that aromantic people may encounter before self-discovery. Keep in mind that situations vary from person to person. These are simply common experiences that some aromantic people may encounter. While there may be some overlap with asexual people, there are some distinct experiences that many aromantic people have before recognizing they are aromantic.

- A stronger interest in polyamorous or open relationships even when married.

- Discomfort when speaking about romance or romantic relationships.
- Apprehension when attempting to date or get married.
- Inconsistency when dating; you may cancel various dates or arrangements.
- Experiencing sexual attraction, but afraid of commitment.
- Attracted more to the idea of having a lifelong friend or roommate rather than a romantic or marriage partner.
- You feel more tempted to be unfaithful in your long-term relationships (this is especially if you have not addressed internalized aphobia).
- You have unusually high romantic standards that are difficult or impossible to meet by others. Or, in contrast, you don't have many standards at all.
- There's a tendency to put distance from people who get too close.

In an amatonormative society, aromantics may find a harder time recognizing their feelings because romance is such a major part of many cultures. It is important to understand that romance is not the only way to live a fulfilling life with others. Here are a few important questions to help you navigate aromantic feelings.

- Do I want to date or marry someone because everyone around me expects this of me? Or do I want to date because I have found someone that I want to spend the rest of my life with?
- Do I want to date or marry just for the experience or to feel as if I am not missing out? Or do I want to date and marry to fulfill my need for a lifelong romantic partner?
- Do I want to date or marry due to the financial, political, or social benefits it will give me? Or do I want to date because I am

interested in having an intense emotional bond for the rest of my life with someone?

If the first questions of each bullet point feel more synonymous to your feelings, there's a chance you may be aromantic or you are drawn to aromantic relationships.

How Do I Determine Aesthetic Attraction Versus Sexual Attraction?

Aesthetic attraction is a form of attraction that all people experience. However, because we live in an allonormative society, we are often confused as to what our attractions could mean and, in most cases, we assume that it is sexual attraction. However, to say that all frames of attraction are sexual is to ignore the fact that most of us can see, taste, smell, hear, and feel no matter what age or situation we are in. The real question is, does everything that appeals to our senses make us feel sexual?

Have you ever walked into an art gallery? What about in a park surrounded by a natural landscape? These are places where we can see beauty all around us. However, these things don't necessarily make you feel as if you want to have sexual intimacy. We appreciate it because it makes us feel good, feel safe, or makes us feel better about ourselves.

Many asexual people might feel this magnetic desire to stare at someone. They might admire the way a person's physique looks, facial structure, their hair, their smell, etc. However, the component that is missing is a desire to want to have sex with any of these people (or in an aromantic case a lack of desire for romantic connections).

Along with aesthetic attraction, there are also various other attractions such as sensual attraction (the desire to touch someone, hug them, cuddle, etc), mental attraction (the desire to engage with someone on an intellectual level), and platonic attraction (the desire to be friends with another). These types of attractions do not always involve romantic or sexual desire or gratification.

Here is a list of feelings that one might feel when experiencing aesthetic attraction versus sexual or romantic attraction.

Aesthetic Attraction

- Aesthetic attraction does not involve a desire to have sex, date, or marry someone.
- Aesthetic attraction might encourage a person to imitate, be envious, or compare themselves to the person they admire.
- Aesthetic attraction does not require reciprocation.
- Aesthetic attraction does not linger or last.

Sexual Or Romantic Attraction

- Sexual attraction or romantic attraction may involve a desire to have sex, date, or marry someone.
- Sexual attraction or romantic attraction does not usually motivate someone to imitate, be envious, or compare themselves to the person they admire. Rather, it will motivate you to imitate the people your admirer admires.
- Sexual or romantic attraction usually involves the person needing these feelings to be reciprocated.
- Sexual or romantic attraction might last a long time.

Understanding Admiration

How do we know if we're attracted to someone or simply want to *be* them? This is a common question among many people questioning their sexuality. When living in an allonormative and amatonormative society, all forms of admiration are perceived as romantic or sexual in nature. The older we get, the less we are expected to seek role models, close friendships, or validation from those in authority. However, admiration is a part of our humanity. It helps us build relationships of all types, even outside the of experience of romance or sex.

When we show admiration for a person, we usually have a desire to be in the presence of that person, think about the person a lot, or hope for our admiration to be reciprocated. If you have a favorite celebrity, teacher, or other role model that you have always been impressed by you may want that person to give you special attention or praise. Similar behaviors might occur when we are sexually attracted to someone also. The difference comes down to the type of relationship we hope to have with the individual.

Admiration is often less about being involved with someone romantically or sexually and more about respecting the person, their abilities, and/or their accomplishments. We may even appreciate their appearance, experiencing aesthetic attraction. We might even compare ourselves to someone we admire. We might seek to be friends with these types of people or acquaintances. We might imitate those we admire as well.

Sexual or romantic attraction usually tends to focus on how someone's personality, abilities, and/or accomplishments will make a person a great sexual or romantic partner. When we are sexually attracted to someone, we don't desire to be just like them. Rather, we desire to know what type of people our potential partners are attracted to and often seek to be more like that. When we are sexually or romantically attracted to our

partners, we don't compare ourselves to them; we want that partner to be ours instead.

No matter what age we are or social status, it is natural to admire others and it is healthy. It helps us create clearly defined goals in life and helps us grow.

What If I Am Only Attracted to Fictional Characters/Celebrities?

As mentioned before, sometimes we may admire a celebrity for various reasons even if we cannot see ourselves being intimate with this celebrity in any way. However, there are some people who do in fact experience sexual attraction only to celebrities and/or fictional characters.

Some people who experience this attraction may call themselves **fictosexual** or **fictoromantic**. Others may simply call themselves asexual, falling anywhere on the asexual spectrum, and through celebrity attraction or fictional characters they explore their sexuality or romantic attractions. Many asexual or aromantic people may not desire physical contact with anyone, but may enjoy simply being romantically or sexually attracted to someone. Some asexual or aromantic people have a little sexual or romantic attraction when observing celebrities or fictional characters, but these feelings may not last long or they go away upon meeting people in real life.

Sexuality exists on a spectrum. We can't choose who we are attracted to. We can, however, choose *how* we explore our sexuality or romantic attractions.

Dissolving Myths About Asexuality

Asexuality has always existed; however, our understanding of asexuality is more recent. Very few medical researchers have studied asexuality in adults, treating it more as an outlier even if it may be more common than understood. The lack of knowledge regarding asexuality can sometimes cause misconceptions to occur regarding what it means to be asexual.

For example, many people often believe that asexual people simply have medical issues or a low libido. Many people may also believe that asexual people do not like sex. Some even believe that all asexual people have experienced trauma that has caused them to be this way.

This is not to say that asexual people cannot experience all of these things. However, it is important to understand that people of *all* sexual orientations can experience low libido, sex repulsion, as well as trauma. These things do not necessarily change your sexuality, even if these things may shape the way you perceive your sexuality.

Understanding Trauma and Dysphoria

Unfortunately, there are asexual people who have experienced various forms of trauma. The effects of trauma can warp one's understanding of oneself in relation to others. Physical, mental, and sexual trauma can cause a person to develop a distrust of people and situations which only makes self-discovery more challenging.

If a person chooses to identify as asexual because it is more comforting to do so, there is no rule saying that this can't be done. After all, labels should be seen as descriptors of how we see ourselves in relation to others rather than restrictive categories.

However, understand that not everyone who is asexual is this way because of trauma. Many asexual or aromantic people have never experienced trauma and yet they still do not experience sexual or

romantic attraction. In contrast, many people have experienced trauma and yet they do experience sexual or romantic attraction to people. Fear is not the same as asexuality. Many asexual people are not afraid of people or sexual/romantic experiences.

Experiences of dysphoria, especially gender dysphoria, can also cause confusion regarding sexuality. **Gender dysphoria** is the feeling of distress in one's own body because you want to be seen as the gender you are. Often times our relationship with our gender and our disconnection from the body can affect how we relate to others. Many people who experience gender dysphoria may not feel as sexually open due to the discomfort gender dysphoria makes them feel. If you are transgender and you are experiencing dysphoria it is best to understand that many transgender people often experience a shift in sexual perception once they are at a place where they do feel comfort. Take your time in navigating yourself. It may be best to focus on one journey at a time whether it's gender self-discovery or physical transition. There is no rush to figure out what your sexuality is and, in many cases, you may discover your sexuality naturally as you navigate throughout your journey with gender.

Of course, as stated before, if asexuality is a comfortable description of you, currently there is no rule that says that you cannot make use of this label to describe yourself. However, understand that not everyone who has gender dysphoria is asexual and people who experience gender dysphoria can be of any sexual orientation or identity. Discomfort with sex or romance does not have to be equated with your sexual or romantic attractions. Whether you have sex or engage in romantic activities is a choice. Your sexual or romantic attractions are not a choice.

Understanding Libido and Sex Repulsion

Many people often mistakenly believe that a person who is asexual simply has a low libido, or a lack of sexual interest. While some asexual people do have a low libido or sex drive, this is not the case for all of them.

What must be understood is that sexual attraction does not equal sexual interest or desire. Many allosexual people (straight, gay, lesbian, bi, etc) may experience sexual attraction, but even their libido can fluctuate. Numerous of reasons a person has low libido could be as follows:

- Medical issues or concerns
- Hormonal changes or imbalances
- Stress
- Insomnia
- Depression or anxiety
- Low-self esteem
- Trauma
- Gender dysphoria
- Incompatibility
- Pregnancy
- Weight changes

What makes libido different from asexuality is the length of time each is experienced. Libido fluctuates more often, while asexuality may last a longer time and is more consistent.

Here are some other key differences that may be experienced by an asexual person versus someone with a low libido:

Asexuality

- You may desire sex, but you can't think of any person that you would want to have sex with.
- You find yourself feeling satisfied with just masturbation.

- You don't often initiate sex when in a romantic partnership.
- You haven't had many "crushes" when growing up (or they were all unattainable).
- You were uncomfortable with being touched in a romantic or sexual way, even by your significant other.

Low Libido or Sex Drive

- You find yourself sexually attracted to your partner, but feel exhausted by the idea of sexual activity.
- You don't have much interest in masturbation.
- You may or may not initiate sex depending on your mood.
- You have had several crushes throughout your life, but very seldom was sexual activity mandatory for relationship establishment.
- You were/are comfortable with being touched in a romantic or sexual way by your significant other.

There are many asexual people that desire sex even if they don't experience attraction, for numerous of reasons. Some asexual people have a natural curiosity about it. Others might want to have children or experience pregnancy. Many may simply want to show affection or bond emotionally through sex. Others may simply want to please their partner or they themselves may get pleasure from having sex. In many cases asexual people can become aroused by the idea of having sexual intimacy without being sexually attracted to anyone in particular.

Of course, every asexual person has a different perception or attitude toward sex. The organization TAAAP (The Aro and Ace Advocacy Project)

uses a favorability scale to map out the approach asexual and aromantic people might have when thinking about sex in their personal lives.

A **Romance-favorable** asexual person may seek out romantic relationships or engage in romantic activities with their friends, even if they are not romantically attracted to any of the people they engage in these activities with. A **sex-favorable** asexual person may have sex because they enjoy it, even if they are not sexually attracted to the people they engage in these activities with.

A **Romance-neutral** person is someone who may be indifferent or neutral with some romantic gestures without actually desiring or enjoying it. They are also not bothered by romantic subplots in media. A **sex-neutral** person may have sex or not without feeling any particular way about it. They may engage in sexual activities for a variety of reasons or to satisfy the needs of their romantic partners. They neither enjoy nor are they bothered by hearing about sex or watching media centered on sexual intimacy.

A **romance-averse** person may not want to engage in any type of romantic relationship and they may be uncomfortable with people pursuing them romantically. A **sex-averse** person may not want to engage in sex and they may be uncomfortable being in a relationship where sex is a “need” for their partner.

A **romance-repulsed** person is someone who is disgusted by the idea of romance and/or gestures seen as romantic. They may not like consuming media that focuses on romance or they may avoid engaging in conversations about it. A **sex-repulsed** person is someone who is disgusted by the idea of sex, sexual innuendos, or even public affection. They may not like seeing or hearing about media that focuses on sex or they may avoid engaging in conversations about it.

Other terms like **aro-flux/ace-flux** or **romance-ambivalent/sex-ambivalent** could reflect aromantic and asexual people who have mixed feelings regarding romance and/or sex or whose feelings towards these things change or fluctuate day by day.

Asexual people vary across the spectrum. It should be understood that when speaking with an asexual person you see them as individuals with varying intersectional experiences. How one perceives their own asexuality is a personal choice. Our understanding of asexual people should not be based on what an asexual person *does* but more so based on how they *feel* about it.

Do Asexuals Belong in the LGBTQIA+ Community?

In recent years, asexuality has been welcomed as a part of the LGBTQIA+ community. This newfound acceptance is a great way for asexuality to gain visibility and find a sense of community where they would not have found it before.

But do asexuals or aromantics belong within this space of people who are also fighting for the right to be lesbian/gay/bi/pan allosexuals or alloromantics? The question surrounding the place of asexuals comes down to how you see the LGBTQIA+ community as a whole. For some, it is a way to mobilize politically. For others, it is a space for people to express themselves outside of the scrutiny of heteronormativity. For many, it represents a statement of tolerance for people who are different.

Throughout history, many people in the LGBTQIA+ community have fought to be respected for who they are in some capacity. Asexual people have always been fighting and mobilizing alongside others within

the community, even if there wasn't always a clear understanding of what asexuality was.

Many people believe that asexual people do not need the support of the LGBTQIA+ community. They might believe that asexual people do not experience oppression and that being asexual is a privileged position. While being asexual comes with privileges (as with all LGBTQIA+ identities), asexual people are various and, depending on how they express their asexuality, this could cause many social and political consequences.

Oppression versus Privilege

As mentioned before, asexuality exists on a spectrum. Many people in the LGBTQIA+ community might assume that because asexual and/or aromantic people do not experience sexual attraction and/or romantic attraction that they are not as affected by oppressive laws that restrict gay, lesbian, and other bi+ identities from dating and marrying someone of the same or similar gender.

However, this is a false assumption. Many asexual people can be homoromantic, biromantic, panromantic, and other romantic identities across the spectrum. Aromantic people can be homosexual, bisexual, and other sexualities across the spectrum as well. This would mean that any form of legislation that restricts them from expressing love or attraction could also affect people across the a-spectrum.

Furthermore, allonormativity often has a systemic component to it that in many countries can make asexual or aromantic people feel marginalized, discriminated against, or oppressed. As mentioned, before in the section [Aromance and Amatonormativity](#), much of society's structures are catered to allosexuals. People who are married

have a higher likelihood of acquiring a house or property, adopting children, acquiring higher paid jobs, and political positions.

According to statistics, 90% of US companies offer benefits of greater value if you are married. 34% of companies offer married employees additional pension contributions when compared to those who are single. Those who are single are also less likely to receive bereavement leave compared to those who are married. To add, 41% of companies in the US only offer flexible work schedules to married employees. While these situations can affect anyone of any sexuality, asexual and aromantic people have a higher likelihood of experiencing these situations.

In some countries, marriages are often arranged and expected. There is also an expectation that you will have children. Some parents have even sued their offspring for not producing an heir! As mentioned before, some asexuals have disproportionately encountered mental, physical, and sexual abuse for not complying to their partner's sexual or romantic demands.

It is also statistically acknowledged that a percentage of asexual people are also transgender. Many misconceptions of transgender people are based on the idea that they are only transitioning for the sake of sexual or romantic attraction, which is farther from the truth. Yet, these claims have caused many asexual transgender people to be targeted for their gender identity.

Coming together with the LGBTQIA+ community for the sake of preserving the livelihood and freedom of all people is necessary if we are going to have a future of tolerance and acceptance for all people. The more people of varying identities are welcome, the stronger the message of liberation will be.

Navigating Multisexual Relationships

A common concern among many people when dealing with asexuality is whether or not they are date-able to people who are not asexual. Many allosexual people believe that an asexual person cannot satisfy the needs of the partner, in the belief that sex and/or sexual attraction is one of their “necessities”. Many people who are allosexual may be dismissive of romantic affection as a satisfactory form of affection as well, seeing it as less important to the makeup of a relationship compared to sexual affection.

For aromantic people, many people might also dismiss their sexual attraction or even their platonic attraction as a less than satisfactory way of showing love or affection.

However, sex or sexual attraction is not a necessity like food and water. While whom we desire is not a choice, whether we perform acts of sex is a choice. Furthermore, as mentioned before, while many asexuals don't experience much sexual attraction, they can still enjoy sex. Asexuality is versatile.

Romance is also not necessary to build strong relationships. Many people can have healthy partnerships without the inclusion of romance, whether as friends or as sexual partners. As long as all parties involved are consensual partners, there is no need to scorn such relationships.

On the other hand, everyone has a right to explore their sexuality or romantic life in the way they choose. An asexual or aromantic person that is sex or romance repulsed should not condemn or blame a partner that desires sexual attraction or romantic attraction. Communication is always helpful when in a multisexual relationship. Recognize each other's limits within every relationship you encounter.

The Value of Building Platonic Love or Relationships

In an allonormative society, we are taught that the greatest form of love is romantic love. Much of discourse even within the LGBTQ+ community tends to focus on romantic and sexual relationships over all others. Even among asexual communities, the emphasis is on trying to debunk myths about romantic and sexual attraction in order to be more embraced by the allonormative communities. What about platonic love?

Platonic love is a love that is not romantic or sexual in nature. It is a love named after the Greek philosopher Plato, whom was a prominent philosopher on love. Throughout history, much of his teachings have evolved to be what it means to day. In the modern world it is the kind of love we often have for close friends.

In the LGBTQ+ community many asexual and aromantic people have found comfort in building **queerplatonic relationships** (QPR) or Platonic long-term partnerships (PLP). A queer platonic relationship is a committed relationship between friends. In some ways this kind of relationship tends to blur the lines of friendship and romance. Often times, queerplatonic partners might develop oaths similar to that of marriage, live together, have sex, or even have children together. Many may wonder: what is the difference between a romantic relationship and a queerplatonic one? The difference is in how a person wants to be perceived socially and the instincts or feelings that one may feel toward their partners. Keep in mind that queerplatonic relationships don't only have to exist between asexual or aromantic people; people of varying sexual or romantic identities can enjoy such partnerships. Below is a list of some examples based on experiences many in queerplatonic relationships may experience when compared to a romantic relationship.

Romantic Relationships

- Causes a physical reaction (a feeling of butterflies in the stomach, thoughts return to that person all the time, feeling flushed when around them, etc). You might feel like the world revolves around just the two of you.
- A need for the feelings of romantic attraction to be reciprocated to a similar degree.
- A strong need for intimacy (physical and emotional closeness, kissing, holding hands to signify oneness, etc).
- Commitment is more necessary in order to explore.

Queerplatonic or Platonic Long-term Relationships

- Does not cause physical sensations. Rather it is motivated by a mutual bond, trust, and/or support from another person.
- Your feelings of attraction do not have to be reciprocated to the same degree.
- The relationship may or may not involve intimacy (physical and emotional closeness, kissing, holding hands to signify oneness, etc).
- Commitment is not necessary in order to explore.

Platonic love among adults is not often explored in media or even in research, leading to the misunderstanding that love is only necessary or important for children or spouses. However, according to two research studies analyzed by William J. Chopik from the journal *Personal Relationships*, the cases in which people had strained relationships with friends often had more chronic illnesses when compared to those who reported having strained relationships with their spouses or children. He also examined that we often enjoy our time with friends more often than

with family or spouses, where things can become more serious or monotonous at times.

A great way to feel more included as asexual people across the spectrum is to include days where you can connect and celebrate friendship. For example, instead of looking to celebrate Valentine's Day with a romantic partner, perhaps find a friend to celebrate with. Or perhaps have little anniversaries or ceremonies celebrating your friendship with others. The best way to dismantle the stronghold of allonormativity, amatonormativity, and heteronormativity is to uplift and normalize the power of friendship.

In Conclusion

Asexuality doesn't have to make you feel different or strange. It is a natural part of being a human being. Of course, like all LGBTQIA+ labels, asexuality can mean whatever you wish it to mean to you. Only you can determine which label fits, if you need any labels at all. Recognizing your power of choice is the most important part of discovery. Recognizing allonormativity and amatonormativity can also help in overcoming both internalized and externalized aphobia. The first step is recognizing that asexuality is valid in our society as an identity. Visibility is also important. It is important that aspec people are able to tell their stories. The more we speak out about asexuality, the easier it will be for asexual people to "come out" and embrace themselves. Being asexual doesn't have to limit your experiences in life nor does it have to interfere with great personal relationships. In fact, the more understanding you have of asexuality, the easier it will be to have experiences that are truly fulfilling outside of societal expectations. My hope is that by reading this guide to asexuality you feel empowered and embraced. My hope is when you

read this you will see it as another tool or map to help open your mind to new possibilities. Finally, my hope is that this reading will help people across the asexual spectrum feel more respected and loved, no matter how they choose to identify.

*This document was done in collaboration with
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