



Asexuality

an emerging sexual orientation and identity

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1. TYPES OF ATTRACTION

Asexuality is a sexual orientation characterized by the lack of sexual attraction or desire for sexual activity. By this definition, studies have found that about 1% to 3.5% of the population is asexual. Asexuality promises to change the way sexuality is conceptualized.

Asexuality only refers to the lack of sexual attraction. There are multiple types of attraction- sexual, romantic, sensual, and aesthetic- that are all separate. Asexuals often have identifiers for multiple types of attraction.

Sexual Attraction: Sexual attraction is a feeling that sexual people get that causes them to desire sexual contact with a specific other person.

Romantic Attraction: Romantic attraction is a feeling that causes people to desire a romantic relationship with a specific other person.

Sensual Attraction: A desire to do sensual (but not sexual) things with certain people, especially relating to tactile sensuality such as cuddling.

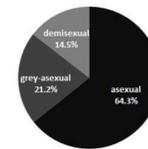
Aesthetic Attraction: An attraction to other people that is not connected to a desire to do anything with them, either sexually or romantically. They simply appreciate their appearance.

2. COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

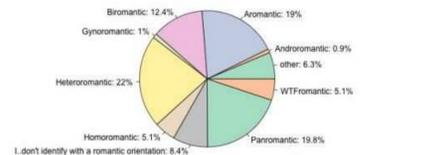
Asexuals are creating their own collective identity, in part through the online community Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) which was founded in 2001. Some asexuals identify as grey-asexual and some as demisexual. **Grey-asexuals** experience attraction very infrequently and **demisexuals** experience attraction only after a deep emotional bond has formed. All of these individuals who are part of the asexual spectrum are often referred to as **aces**.

The asexual pride flag symbolizes this spectrum of (a)sexual attraction:

- black = asexuality
- grey = grey/demisexuality
- white = sexuality
- purple = community



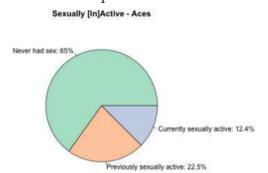
Due to lack of sexual attraction, romantic attraction becomes a major identifier within the asexual community. Some asexuals still engage in relationships and romantic identity is used to clarify preferred partners. Even aromantic asexuals can still have successful relationships despite the lack of sexual and romantic attraction.



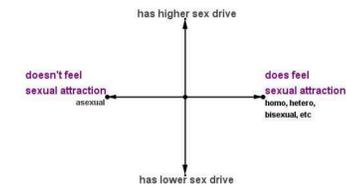
3. ATTRACTION VS BEHAVIOR

Asexuality is very different than abstinence/celesty, which is a purposeful choice to abstain from sexual behavior motivated by some personal belief. Less than 12% of asexuals also identify as celibate; most asexuals aren't actively avoiding sex so they don't consider themselves celibate. The lack of sexual attraction is **not a choice** nor is it indicative of a health problem.

While the majority of asexuals aren't sexually active, some choose to engage in sexual behavior. The most common reasons are for a partner, curiosity, societal expectations, and enjoyment in order of frequency. Also, over 3/4ths of asexuals engage in masturbation, indicating a present sexual drive.



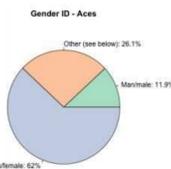
Thus, asexuality can be conceptualized by combining the spectrums of sexual attraction and sexual drive. The below model shows this relationship and demonstrates how sexual drive is not dependent on sexual attraction.



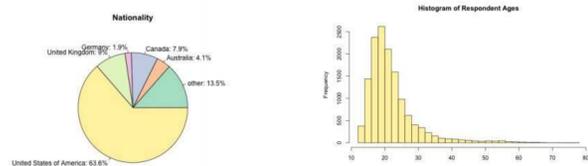
4. CORRELATIONS

There are many medical conditions where low or absent interest in sexual activity is a symptom. However, while those people could choose to identify as asexual, asexuality is **not** indicative of a medical or psychological problem. The cause of asexuality can only be theorized. Yet certain correlations have emerged:

One important identifier in the asexual population is gender. Some attribute the gender disparity to the difference in arousal patterns between males and females; others attribute it to gender norms. The large number of asexuals who identify outside of the gender binary (denoted as 'other' in the pie chart) demonstrates how gender and sexuality are intertwined.



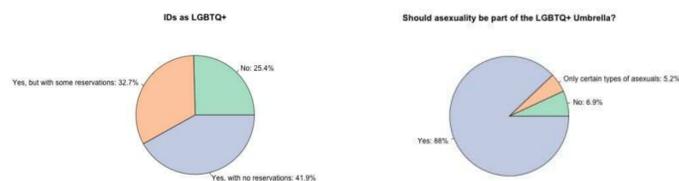
While conservative behaviors about sex normally are seen as religious, almost 50% of asexuals identify as atheists or agnostics. Also, the overwhelming majority of asexuals involved in research are from Westernized societies and young; the median age was 21.



5. ASEXUALITY IN LGBTQ+

The LGBTQ+ acronym is a symbolic legitimization of a collective identity. Basically, an identity gains recognition once it has been added to the acronym, as the inclusion of Bi, Trans, and Queer identities demonstrates. There are longer acronyms for the LGBTQ+ community that includes an **A** but it is often for **allies**. Should the A stand for asexual?

Asexuals have strong opinions about being included in the LGBTQ+ umbrella. 3/4ths of asexuals identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community and an overwhelming 88% believe asexuality should be part of LGBTQ+. Thus, asexuals think that the A should stand for asexual.



Asexuals will face a unique challenge joining the LGBTQ+ movement. From the beginning, the LGBTQ+ community has been a sexual movement. Thus, asexuals may not be welcome in this community. Yet asexuality promises to improve understanding of all sexualities. The visibility of the asexual community could help the bisexual and pansexual communities gain more acceptance by providing an opposing binary.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In conclusion, although asexuality is defined by a lack of sexual attraction or desire to engage in sexual activities, collective identity and behavior are also very important dimensions of asexuality. Asexuality is important in helping to understand the interaction between different types of attraction, and studying asexuality can improve our conceptualization of other sexualities.

Asexuality is a very recent collective identity. As such, there has been very little research done on this population. Thus, there are many questions that need to be explored to increase understanding and visibility of asexuality.

- What are the true causes of the correlations between asexuality and gender, religion, nationality, and age?
- How do cultural factors impact the visibility and acceptance of asexuality?
- Why has asexual movement emerged primarily among young people, and how will it impact older asexuals?
- What factors determine whether someone chooses to identify as asexual?
- How do the media representation of asexuality impact society and asexuals?
- How does our hypersexualized, Western culture affect the identities, relationships, and social status of asexuals?

For more information about the asexual community, visit www.asexuality.org, www.asexualcensus.wordpress.com, or the LGBTQ Resource Center on campus.

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