



Think Tank for Inclusion & Equity

WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

Asexuals (or “aces”) are an umbrella community of people of any gender who experience little to no sexual attraction. Asexuality* is considered a sexual orientation, but rather than explaining *who* someone is attracted to, it explains *how* someone experiences attraction—if they do at all. Aces experience various levels of sexual, sensual, romantic, emotional, physical, and aesthetic attraction, and they desire a variety of relationships and types of intimacy.

HERE'S WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

The near complete erasure of ace characters onscreen leads many people to wrongly believe asexuality doesn't exist or to mistake it for abstinence, celibacy, or low sex drive. Asexuality is not a choice or any sort of disorder, but when improperly depicted as such, it creates a culture that supposes aces “need to be fixed.” This causes aces a great deal of emotional pain and leaves them vulnerable to harassment and violence, even cultivating dangerous exclusionist beliefs against aces within the larger LGBTQIA+ community. Mindful ace representation can help educate society on asexual identity *and* break new ground, as most ace experiences have yet to be depicted onscreen.

NOTE ON LANGUAGE: Many aces use the split attraction model*, which differentiates between *romantic* and *sexual* attraction, to explain their identity (e.g., homoromantic asexual, aromantic* asexual). Also, many aces use the term “ace” rather than “asexual” (in the same way that many use “gay” instead of “homosexual”). As TV writers, we should be intentional about the language our characters use to identify themselves.

ASEXUALS

OVERREPRESENTED STORIES & HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

- **Broken:** Storylines and characters that depict asexuality as a phase (e.g., saying they “just haven’t met the right person” or “had good enough sex”) or a disorder that can and should be corrected. These misrepresentations can put ace people in harmful situations (e.g., forced therapy or medications, sexual assault, rape).
- **Totally Sexless:** Characters who are *only* depicted as sex-averse or sex-repulsed (i.e., having visceral, negative reactions to sex). While these aces do exist and should be respectfully portrayed, other aces are sex-indifferent (i.e., neutral towards sex) or sex-favorable (i.e., open to sex). Even without attraction, some aces experience arousal, masturbate, and enjoy different kinds of sex, just like allosexuals*.
- **Cold Robots:** Characters who are closed off, inept at navigating human interactions, and averse to human touch (e.g., the “genius” who isn’t interested in attraction). Aces have personalities, express emotions, and desire various levels of touch and intimacy like everybody else.
- **Cheap Laughs:** Storylines and jokes that make fun of ace people and depict the lack of sexual experience and/or attraction as something irregular and wrong (e.g., jokes about virgins and late bloomers). These portrayals put sexual pressure on viewers of all identities.
- **Sad & Alone:** Aces who are depressed because they don’t have romantic and/or sexual partners. These depictions erase the happy lives of aces who find fulfillment in other kinds of relationships and activities.
- **Aliens:** Supernatural, genre, or fantasy beings depicted as asexual. These portrayals paint asexuality as inhuman and fake, perpetuating the lie that aces are “abnormal” and don’t fit in society.
- **Same Ol’ Love Story:** Love stories that always involve or lead to sex. Even allosexuals experience love, romance, intimacy, and attraction in a variety of ways that don’t make sex the be-all-end-all. Forcing these kinds of “standards” can be a source of shame and depression for aces.

THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

- **Visibility:** Ace characters of all kinds (e.g., BIPOC, disabled, older), with explicit ace identities, representing the variety of ace experiences (e.g., aromantic, graysexual*, demisexual*). Show ace characters in stories beyond their orientation (e.g., friendships, hobbies, careers).
- **Supportive Community:** Characters supported, accepted, and celebrated by friends, family, and partners when they come out or identify as ace.
- **Ace Friendships:** Characters in community with other aces, allowing them to explore and help each other through their shared experiences. Aces often find each other online, and this kind of community shouldn’t be depicted as weird or “less than” in-person relationships.
- **Dating & Relationships:** While not all aces seek any type of partnership, many do. Show stories of aces dating, in love, and in a variety of relationships (e.g., casual, romantic, sexual, queerplatonic*, polyamorous) with other aces and allosexuals. Show aces getting married and building families.
- **Gener-ace-ions:** Characters of all ages on various stages of their ace journey (e.g., older aces discovering their asexuality later in life; teenage aces out and proud at a young age).
- **Sexual Communication:** Ace *and* allosexual characters discussing their sexual, romantic, and intimate desires and boundaries in partnerships. More open conversations show that there’s no singular or “right” way to experience attraction and that respectfully navigating relationships takes work, no matter how someone sexually/romantically identifies.

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intimacy like everybody else.”

*Denotes a term in the glossary

QUICK FACTS

➔ Of the 637 LGBTQIA+ characters across the 2021-22 TV season, only two were known to be asexual.

➔ While measuring sexuality and sexual orientation is complicated, several studies suggest that ~1% of the population is asexual, with 10% of LGBTQIA+ youth identifying along the ace spectrum.

➔ 26% of aces identify outside of the man/woman binary, and 27% identify as transgender (or are unsure).

➔ Attitudes toward sex vary among aces. About 37% are repulsed by the idea of engaging in sex, 18% are uncertain, 28% are indifferent, and 8% are favorable to the idea of having sex.

➔ 32% of aces identify along the aromantic spectrum. Others have romantic orientations such as hetero-, homo-, bi-, and panromantic, though some choose not to describe their romantic and sexual orientations separately.

ONLINE REFERENCES & RESOURCES:

- [The Ace Community Survey](#)
- [Aces & Aros: "The aromantic umbrella" "The asexual umbrella"](#)
- [The Asexual Visibility & Education Network: "Asexuals and Attitudes Toward Sex" "General FAQ"](#)
- Autostraddle: ["Coming Out Twice: On Being Gay and Asexual in a World Without Representation"](#)
- GLAAD: ["7 young people discuss their ace identities and what people get wrong about asexuality" "Accelerating Acceptance 2021" "explore the spectrum: guide to finding your ace community" "Where We Are on TV, 2021-2022"](#)
- Huffington Post: ["Battling Asexual Discrimination, Sexual Violence And 'Corrective' Rape"](#)
- Human Rights Campaign: ["Understanding the Asexual Community"](#)
- LGBTQ&A Podcast: ["Angela Chen: What Asexuality Reveals About Desire, Society, and the Meaning of Sex"](#)
- The Mary Sue: ["We Need More Asexual and Aromantic Representation in Television"](#)
- Odyssey: ["The Hardships Of Being An Asexual Woman of Color"](#)
- Rewire: ["Here's What Asexual People Want You to Know"](#)
- The Trevor Project: ["Asexual and Ace Spectrum Youth" "Understanding Asexuality"](#)

GLOSSARY

Allosexual:

The opposite of asexual; someone who regularly experiences sexual attraction toward other people.

Aromantic:

A person who experiences little or no romantic attraction. Aromantics might or might not experience sexual attraction.

Asexuality:

The total or near total lack of sexual attraction to anyone and/or the lack of desire for sexual contact. Asexuality is not a choice; it shouldn't be conflated with celibacy, abstinence, or low sex drive. It's also a spectrum, with a diversity of needs and experiences among the ace community. Note: While some aces consider "asexual" their sexual orientation, others feel like they have no orientation.

Demisexual:

A person who doesn't experience sexual attraction to another person unless or until they've formed an emotional connection with them. Many demisexuals consider themselves ace, but some identify as allosexual, and others in between.

Graysexual (Gray-A):

A catch-all term for someone who identifies somewhere on the asexual spectrum or between "sexual" and "asexual" (i.e., in the "gray area").

Queerplatonic:

An umbrella term for a partnership/relationship that defies the divide between romantic and "just" friends. It may involve a greater degree of intimacy or commitment than platonic friendship but doesn't often include sexual or romantic elements.

Split Attraction Model:

The idea that *romantic* attraction and *sexual* attraction are separate from one another, meaning someone's romantic orientation and sexual orientation can be different (e.g., someone romantically attracted to multiple genders but not sexually attracted to anyone might identify as "panromantic asexual").

Please visit our [Expanded Glossary](#) for in-depth definitions of the above terms and definitions of additional terms: **a-spec**, **abstinence**, **celibacy**, **heteronormative**, **minority stress**, **perioriented**, and **polyamorous**.

In-kind support and materials for this factsheet were provided by the following partner organizations. Please contact them for additional information, story guidance, and in-room consultations.



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A list of the most up-to-date contact information for all of our partner organizations can be found on our website:
WriteInclusion.org/factsheets

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