



# Asexuality

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**Asexuality** is the lack of sexual attraction to anyone, or low or absent interest in or desire for sexual activity.<sup>[1][2][3]</sup> It may be considered the lack of a sexual orientation, or one of the variations thereof, alongside heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality.<sup>[4][5][6]</sup> It may also be an umbrella term used to categorize a broader spectrum of various asexual sub-identities. A study in 2004 placed the prevalence of asexuality at 1% in the British population.<sup>[4][7]</sup>

Asexuality is distinct from abstention from sexual activity and from celibacy,<sup>[8][9]</sup> which are behavioral and generally motivated by factors such as an individual's personal or religious beliefs.<sup>[10]</sup> Sexual orientation, unlike sexual behavior, is believed to be "enduring".<sup>[11]</sup> Some asexual people engage in sexual activity despite lacking sexual attraction or a desire for sex, due to a variety of reasons, such as a desire to pleasure themselves or romantic partners, or a desire to have children.<sup>[3][8]</sup>

Acceptance of asexuality as a sexual orientation and field of scientific research is still relatively new,<sup>[1][3][5]</sup> as a growing body of research from both sociological and psychological perspectives has begun to develop.<sup>[3]</sup> While some researchers assert that asexuality is a sexual orientation, other researchers disagree.<sup>[5][6]</sup>

Various asexual communities have started to form since the advent of the World Wide Web and social media. The most prolific and well-known of these communities is the Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN), which was founded in 2001 by David Jay.<sup>[6][12]</sup>

## Contents

- 1 Definition, identity and relationships
- 2 Research
  - 2.1 Prevalence
  - 2.2 Sexual orientation, mental health and etiology
  - 2.3 Sexual activity and sexuality
  - 2.4 Feminist research
  - 2.5 Bogaert's psychological work and theories
- 3 Community
  - 3.1 General
  - 3.2 Symbols
- 4 Discrimination and legal protections
- 5 In the media
- 6 See also
- 7 References
- 8 Further reading
- 9 External links

## Definition, identity and relationships

Asexuality is sometimes referred to as "ace" or "the ace community" by researchers or asexual and LGBT people.<sup>[13][14]</sup> Because there is significant variation among people who identify as asexual, asexuality can encompass broad definitions.<sup>[15]</sup> Researchers generally define asexuality as the lack of sexual attraction or the lack of sexual interest,<sup>[1][3][6]</sup> but their definitions vary; they may use the term "to refer to individuals with low or absent sexual desire or attractions, low or absent sexual behaviors, exclusively romantic non-sexual partnerships, or a combination of both absent sexual desires and behaviors."<sup>[3]</sup>

The Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) defines an asexual as "someone who does not experience sexual attraction" and stated, "[a]nother small minority will think of themselves as asexual for a brief period of time while exploring and questioning their own sexuality" and that "[t]here is no litmus test to determine if someone is asexual. Asexuality is like any other identity – at its core, it's just a word that people use to help figure themselves out. If at any point someone finds the word asexual useful to describe themselves, we encourage them to use it for as long as it makes sense to do so."<sup>[16]</sup>

Asexual people, though lacking sexual attraction to any gender, might engage in purely romantic relationships, while others might not.<sup>[6][17][18]</sup> There are asexual-identified individuals who report that they feel sexual attraction but not the inclination to act on it because they have no true desire or need to engage in sexual or non-sexual activity (cuddling, hand-holding, etc.), while other asexuals engage in cuddling or other non-sexual physical activity.<sup>[3][8][9][15]</sup> Some asexuals participate in sexual activity out of curiosity.<sup>[3]</sup> Some may masturbate as a solitary form of release, while others do not feel a need to do so.<sup>[15][19][20]</sup>

With regard to sexual activity in particular, the need or desire for masturbation is commonly referred to as *sex drive* by asexuals and they disassociate it from sexual attraction and being sexual; asexuals who masturbate generally consider it to be a normal product of the human body and not a sign of latent sexuality, and may not even find it pleasurable.<sup>[3][21]</sup> Some asexual men are unable to get an erection and sexual activity by attempting penetration is impossible for them.<sup>[22]</sup> Asexuals also differ in their feelings toward performing sex acts: some are indifferent and may have sex for the benefit of a romantic partner; others are more strongly averse to the idea, though they do not typically dislike people for having sex.<sup>[3][15][20]</sup>

Many people who identify as asexual also identify with other labels. These other identities include, but are not limited to, how they define their gender and their romantic orientation.<sup>[23]</sup> They will oftentimes integrate these characteristics into a greater label that they identify with. Regarding romantic or emotional aspects of sexual orientation or sexual identity, for example, asexuals may identify as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer,<sup>[16][17]</sup> or by the following terms to indicate that they associate with the romantic, rather than sexual, aspects of sexual orientation:<sup>[15][17]</sup>

- aromantic; lack of romantic attraction towards anyone
- biromantic; as opposed to bisexual
- heteroromantic; as opposed to heterosexual

- homoromantic; as opposed to homosexual
- panromantic; as opposed to pansexual

People may also identify as a gray-A (such as a gray-romantic, demiromantic, demisexual or semisexual) because they feel that they are between being aromantic and non-aromantic, or between asexuality and sexual attraction. While the term *gray-A* may cover anyone who occasionally feels romantic or sexual attraction, demisexuals or semisexuals experience sexual attraction only as a secondary component, feeling sexual attraction once a reasonably stable or large emotional connection has been created.<sup>[15][24]</sup>

Other unique words and phrases used in the asexual to elaborate identities and relationships also exist. One term coined by individuals in the asexual community is "friend-focused," which refers to highly-valued, non-romantic relationships. Other terms include "squishes" and "zucchinis," which are non-romantic crushes and queer-platonic relationships, respectively. Terms such as "non-asexual" and "allosexual" are used to refer to individuals on the opposite side of the sexuality spectrum.<sup>[25]</sup>

## Research

### Prevalence

Asexuality is not a new aspect of human sexuality, but it is relatively new to public discourse.<sup>[26]</sup> SE Smith of *The Guardian* is not sure asexuality has actually increased, rather leaning towards the belief that it is simply more visible.<sup>[26]</sup> According to Bogaert, 1% of the population does not experience sexual attraction. Alfred Kinsey rated individuals from 0 to 6 according to their sexual orientation from heterosexual to homosexual, known as the Kinsey scale. He also included a category he called "X" for individuals with "no socio-sexual contacts or reactions";<sup>[27][28]</sup> in modern times, this is categorized as representing asexuality.<sup>[29]</sup> Kinsey labeled 1.5% of the adult male population as X.<sup>[27][28]</sup> In his second book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, he reported this breakdown of individuals who are X: unmarried females = 14–19%, married females = 1–3%, previously married females = 5–8%, unmarried males = 3–4%, married males = 0%, and previously married males = 1–2%.<sup>[28]</sup>

Further empirical data about an asexual demographic appeared in 1994, when a research team in the United Kingdom carried out a comprehensive survey of 18,876 British residents, spurred by the need for sexual information in the wake of the AIDS pandemic. The survey included a question on sexual attraction, to which 1.05% of the respondents replied that they had "never felt sexually attracted to anyone at all".<sup>[30]</sup> The study of this phenomenon was continued by the Canadian sexuality researcher Anthony Bogaert in 2004, who explored the asexual demographic in a series of studies. Bogaert believed that the 1% figure was not an accurate reflection of the likely much larger percentage of the population that could be identified as asexual, noting that 30% of people contacted for the initial survey chose not to participate in the survey. Since less sexually experienced people are more likely to refuse to participate in studies about sexuality, and asexuals tend to be less sexually experienced than sexuals, it is likely that asexuals were under-represented in the responding participants. The same study found the number of homosexuals and bisexuals combined to be about 1.1% of the population, which is much smaller than other studies indicate.<sup>[1][4]</sup>

In contrast to Bogaert's suggestion in 2004 of a higher percentage, a study by Aicken et al., published in 2013, suggests that, based on Natsal-2 data from 2000–2001, the prevalence of asexuality in Britain is only 0.4% for people between the ages of 16–44.<sup>[31]</sup> This percentage indicates a decrease from the 0.9% figure determined from the Natsal-1 data collected on the same age-range a decade earlier.<sup>[31]</sup> Bogaert also found a similar decline between the Natsal-1 and Natsal-2 data.<sup>[32]</sup> Aicken, Mercer, and Cassell also found some evidence of ethnic differences among respondents who had not experienced sexual attraction; both men and women of Indian and Pakistani origin had a higher likelihood of reporting a lack of sexual attraction.<sup>[31]</sup> Muslims were also more likely to report this lack of attraction than respondents from Christian religions.<sup>[31]</sup>

### Sexual orientation, mental health and etiology

There is significant debate over whether or not asexuality is a sexual orientation.<sup>[5][6]</sup> It has been compared and equated with hypoactive sexual desire disorder (HSDD), in that both imply a general lack of sexual attraction to anyone; HSDD has been used to medicalize asexuality, but asexuality is generally not considered a disorder or a sexual dysfunction (such as anorgasmia, anhedonia, etc.), because it does not necessarily define someone as having a medical problem or problems relating to others socially.<sup>[9][17][33]</sup> Unlike people with HSDD, asexual people normally do not experience "marked distress" and "interpersonal difficulty" concerning feelings about their sexuality, or generally a lack of sexual arousal; asexuality is considered the lack or absence of sexual attraction as a life-enduring characteristic.<sup>[1][17]</sup> One study found that, compared to HSDD subjects, asexuals reported lower levels of sexual desire, sexual experience, sex-related distress and depressive symptoms.<sup>[34]</sup> Researchers Richards and Barker report that asexuals do not have disproportionate rates of alexithymia, depression, or personality disorders.<sup>[17]</sup> Some people, however, may identify as asexual even if their non-sexual state is explained by one or more of the aforementioned disorders.<sup>[35]</sup>

The first study that gave empirical data about asexuals was published in 1983 by Paula Nurius, concerning the relationship between sexual orientation and mental health. 689 subjects—most of whom were students at various universities in the United States taking psychology or sociology classes—were given several surveys, including four clinical well-being scales. Results showed that asexuals were more likely to have low self-esteem and more likely to be depressed than members of other sexual orientations; 25.88% of heterosexuals, 26.54% bisexuals (called "ambisexuals"), 29.88% of homosexuals, and 33.57% of asexuals were reported to have problems with self-esteem. A similar trend existed for depression. Nurius did not believe that firm conclusions can be drawn from this for a variety of reasons.<sup>[36]</sup>

In a 2013 study, Yule et al. looked into mental health variances between Caucasian heterosexuals, homosexuals, bisexuals, and asexuals. The results of 203 male and 603 female participants were included in the findings. Yule et al. found that asexual male participants were more likely to report having a mood disorder than other males, particularly in comparison to the heterosexual participants. The same was found for female asexual participants over their heterosexual counterparts; however, non-asexual, non-heterosexual females had the highest rates. Asexual participants of both sexes were more likely to have anxiety disorders than heterosexual and non-heterosexual participants, as were they more likely than heterosexual participants to report having had recent suicidal feelings. Yule et al. hypothesised that some of these differences may be due to discrimination and other societal factors.<sup>[37]</sup>

With regard to sexual orientation categories, asexuality may be argued as not being a meaningful category to add to the continuum, and instead argued as the lack of a sexual orientation or sexuality.<sup>[5]</sup> Other arguments propose that asexuality is the denial of one's natural sexuality, and that it is a disorder caused by shame of sexuality, anxiety or sexual abuse, sometimes basing this belief on asexuals who masturbate or occasionally engage in sexual activity simply to please a romantic partner.<sup>[5][20][22]</sup> Within the context of sexual orientation identity politics, asexuality may pragmatically fulfill the political function of a sexual orientation identity category.<sup>[38]</sup>

The suggestion that asexuality is a sexual dysfunction is controversial among the asexual community. Those who identify as asexual usually prefer it to be recognized as a sexual orientation.<sup>[6][39]</sup> Various scholars state that asexuality is a sexual orientation, as some asexuals are unable to masturbate even though they reportedly have a normal sex drive, and that there are variations of sexual preferences, arguing that asexuality ought to be included as well.<sup>[5][8][22]</sup> They and many asexual people believe that the lack of

sexual attraction is valid enough to be categorized as a sexual orientation.<sup>[40]</sup> The researchers argue that asexuals do not choose to have no sexual desire, and generally start to find out their differences in sexual behaviors around adolescence. Because of these facts coming to light, it is reasoned that asexuality is more than a behavioral choice and is not something that can be cured like a disorder.<sup>[22][41]</sup>

*Etiology* in this context is without implication of disease, disorder, or abnormality.<sup>[42][43][44][45]</sup> Research on the etiology of sexual orientation when applied to asexuality has the definitional problem of sexual orientation not consistently being defined by researchers as including asexuality.<sup>[46]</sup> Sexual orientation is defined as "enduring" and resistant to change, proving to be generally impervious to interventions intended to change it.<sup>[11]</sup> While heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality are usually, but not always, determined during the early years of preadolescent life, it is not known when asexuality is determined. "It is unclear whether these characteristics [*viz.*, "lacking interest in or desire for sex"] are thought to be lifelong, or if they may be acquired."<sup>[3]</sup> Some studies have suggested that asexuality is linked to biological factors that are determined prenatally or in early childhood. These studies report that asexuals are shorter on average, more likely to be non-right-handed, and have more older brothers (known as the fraternal birth order effect). Correlations with handedness and birth order have also been reported for male homosexuality, possibly indicating that it has a similar origin.<sup>[32]</sup>

Non-measurement in some areas of sexual orientation is accepted by the American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association, and the National Association of Social Workers: "[S]imply to document that a phenomenon occurs, case studies and non-probability samples are often adequate ... Some groups are sufficiently few in number – relative to the entire population – that locating them with probability sampling is extremely expensive or practically impossible. In the latter cases, the use of non-probability samples is often appropriate."<sup>[47]</sup> In determining etiologies, when asexuals are a small percentage of a large society, asexuals with a given etiology will compose an even smaller percentage, so that etiological information is available only from some individuals, generally not randomly selected.<sup>[48]</sup>

### Sexual activity and sexuality

While some asexuals masturbate as a solitary form of release or have sex for the benefit of a romantic partner, others do not (see above).<sup>[3][15][19]</sup> The Kinsey Institute sponsored another small survey on the topic in 2007, which found that self-identified asexuals "reported significantly less desire for sex with a partner, lower sexual arousability, and lower sexual excitation but did not differ consistently from non-asexuals in their sexual inhibition scores or their desire to masturbate".<sup>[3]</sup>

A 1977 paper titled *Asexual and Autoerotic Women: Two Invisible Groups*, by Myra T. Johnson, may be the first paper explicitly devoted to asexuality in humans. Johnson defines asexuals as those men and women "who, regardless of physical or emotional condition, actual sexual history, and marital status or ideological orientation, seem to prefer not to engage in sexual activity." She contrasts autoerotic women with asexual women: "The asexual woman ... has no sexual desires at all [but] the autoerotic woman ... recognizes such desires but prefers to satisfy them alone." Johnson's evidence is mostly letters to the editor found in women's magazines written by asexual/autoerotic women. She portrays them as invisible, "oppressed by a consensus that they are nonexistent," and left behind by both the sexual revolution and the feminist movement. Society either ignores or denies their existence or insists they must be ascetic for religious reasons, neurotic, or asexual for political reasons.<sup>[49]</sup>

In a study published in 1979 in *Advances in the Study of Affect*, vol. 5, and in another article using the same data and published in 1980 in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Michael D. Storms of the University of Kansas outlined his own reimagining of the Kinsey scale. Whereas Kinsey measured sexual orientation based on a combination of actual sexual behavior and fantasizing and eroticism, Storms only used fantasizing and eroticism. Storms, however, placed hetero-eroticism and homo-eroticism on separate axes rather than at two ends of a single scale; this allows for a distinction between bisexuality (exhibiting both hetero- and homo-eroticism in degrees comparable to hetero- or homosexuals, respectively) and asexuality (exhibiting a level of homo-eroticism comparable to a heterosexual and a level of hetero-eroticism comparable to a homosexual, namely, little to none). Storms conjectured that many researchers following Kinsey's model could be mis-categorizing asexual subjects as bisexual, because both were simply defined by a lack of preference for gender in sexual partners.<sup>[50][51]</sup>

In a 1983 study by Paula Nurius, which included 689 subjects (most of whom were students at various universities in the United States taking psychology or sociology classes), the two-dimensional fantasizing and eroticism scale was used to measure sexual orientation. Based on the results, respondents were given a score ranging from 0 to 100 for hetero-eroticism and from 0 to 100 for homo-eroticism. Respondents who scored lower than 10 on both were labeled "asexual." This consisted of 5% of the males and 10% of the females. Results showed that asexuals reported much lower frequency and desired frequency of a variety of sexual activities including having multiple partners, anal sexual activities, having sexual encounters in a variety of locations, and autoerotic activities.<sup>[36]</sup>

In some other sexually reproducing species, a portion of animals exhibit no sexual interest in either sex, and could be considered asexual.<sup>[32]</sup> Rodent studies use the label *duds* for rodents which express no sexual interest.<sup>[32]</sup> A series of studies on ram mating preferences found that 12.5% showed no interest in mating with either sex; the researchers termed these animals *asexual*.<sup>[32]</sup> The asexual rams did not differ from sexual rams in measured hormone levels.<sup>[52][53]</sup>

### Feminist research

A 2010 paper written by Karli June Cerankowski and Megan Milks, titled *New Orientations: Asexuality and Its Implications for Theory and Practice*, suggests that asexuality may be somewhat of a question in itself for the studies of gender and sexuality.<sup>[54]</sup> Cerankowski and Milks have suggested that asexuality raises many more questions than it resolves, such as how a person could abstain from having sex, which is generally accepted by society to be the most basic of instincts. The article also states that society has deemed "[LGBT and] female sexuality as empowered or repressed. The asexual movement challenges that assumption by challenging many of the basic tenets of pro-sex feminism [in which it is] already defined as repressive or anti-sex sexualities." In addition to accepting self-identification as asexual, the Asexual Visibility and Education Network has formulated asexuality as a biologically-determined orientation. This formula, if dissected scientifically and proven, would support researcher Simon LeVay's blind study of the hypothalamus in gay men, women, and straight men, which indicates that there is a biological difference between straight men and gay men.<sup>[55]</sup>

In 2014, Cerankowski and Milks edited and published *Asexualities: Feminist and Queer Perspectives*, a collection of essays intended to explore the politics of asexuality from a feminist and queer perspective. It is broken into the introduction and then six parts: Theorizing Asexuality: New Orientations; The Politics of Asexuality; Visualizing Asexuality in Media Culture; Asexuality and Masculinity; Health, Disability, and Medicalization; and Reading Asexually: Asexual Literary Theory. Each part contains two to three papers on a given aspect of asexuality research. One such paper is written by Ela Przybylo, another name that is becoming common in asexual scholarly literature. Her article, with regard to the Cerankowski and Milks anthology, focuses on accounts by self-identified male asexuals, with a particular focus on the pressures men experience towards having sex in dominant Western discourse and media. Three men living in Southern Ontario, Canada, were interviewed in 2011, and Przybylo admits that the small sample-size means that her findings cannot be generalized to a greater population in terms of representation, and that they are "exploratory and provisional," especially in a field that is still lacking in theorizations.<sup>[56]</sup> All three interviewees addressed being affected by the stereotype that men have to enjoy and want sex in order to be "real men."<sup>[56]</sup>

Another of Przybylo's articles, *Asexuality and the feminist politics of 'not doing it'*, published in 2011, takes a feminist lens to scientific writings on asexuality. Przybylo argues that asexuality is made possible only through the Western context of "sexual, coital, and heterosexual imperatives".<sup>[57]</sup> She addresses earlier works by Dana Denmore, Valerie Solanas, and Breanne Fahs, who argued for "asexuality and celibacy" as radical feminist political strategies against patriarchy.<sup>[57]</sup> While Przybylo does make some distinctions between asexuality and celibacy, she considers blurring the lines between the two to be productive for a feminist understanding of the topic.<sup>[57]</sup> In her 2013 article, "Producing Facts: Empirical Asexuality and the Scientific Study of Sex," Przybylo distinguishes between two different stages of asexual research - that of the late 1970s to the

early 1990s, which often included a very limited understanding of asexuality, and the more recent revisiting of the subject which she says began with Bogaert's 2004 study (see above) and has popularized the subject and made it more "culturally visible". In this article, Przybylo once again asserts the understanding of asexuality as a cultural phenomenon, and continues to be critical of its scientific study.<sup>[58]</sup>

CJ DeLuzio Chasin states in *Reconsidering Asexuality and Its Radical Potential* that academic research on asexuality "has positioned asexuality in line with essentialist discourses of sexual orientation" which is troublesome as it creates a binary between asexuals and persons who have been subjected to psychiatric intervention for disorders such as Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder.<sup>[33]</sup> Chasin says that this binary implies that all asexuals experience a lifelong (hence, enduring) lack of sexual attraction, that all non-asexuals who experience a lack of sexual desire experience distress over it, and that it pathologizes asexuals who do experience such distress.<sup>[33]</sup> As Chasin says such diagnoses as HSDD act to medicalize and govern women's sexuality, the article aims to "unpack" problematic definitions of asexuality that are harmful to both asexuals and women alike. Chasin states that asexuality has the power to challenge commonplace discourse of the naturalness of sexuality, but that the unquestioned acceptance of its current definition does not allow for this. Chasin also argues there and elsewhere in *Making Sense in and of the Asexual Community: Navigating Relationships and Identities in a Context of Resistance* that is important to interrogate why someone might be distressed about low sexual desire. Chasin further argues that clinicians have an ethical obligation to avoid treating low sexual desire per se as pathological, and to discuss asexuality as a viable possibility (where relevant) with clients presenting clinically with low sexual desire.<sup>[38]</sup>

### Bogaert's psychological work and theories

In a 2015 volume of *The Journal of Sex Research*, Bogaert argued that understanding asexuality is of key importance to understanding sexuality in general.<sup>[32]</sup> For his work, Bogaert defines asexuality as "a lack of lustful inclinations/feelings directed toward others," a definition that he argues is relatively new in light of recent theory and empirical work on sexual orientation. This definition of asexuality also makes clear this distinction between behavior and desire, for both asexuality and celibacy, although Bogaert also notes that there is some evidence of reduced sexual activity for those who fit this definition. He further distinguishes between desire for others and desire for sexual stimulation, the latter of which is not always absent for those who identify as asexual, although he acknowledges that other theorists define asexuality differently and that further research needs to be done on the "complex relationship between attraction and desire".<sup>[32]</sup> Another distinction is made between romantic and sexual attraction, and he draws on work from developmental psychology, which suggests that romantic systems derive from attachment theory while sexual systems "primarily reside in different brain structures".<sup>[32]</sup>

Concurrent with Bogaert's suggestion that understanding asexuality will lead to a better understanding of sexuality overall, he discusses the topic of asexual masturbation to theorize on asexuals and "'target-oriented' paraphilia, in which there is an inversion, reversal, or disconnection between the self and the typical target/object of sexual interest/attraction" (such as attraction to oneself, labelled "automonosexualism").<sup>[32]</sup>

In an earlier 2006 article, Bogaert acknowledges that a distinction between behavior and attraction has been accepted into recent conceptualizations of sexual orientation, which aids in positioning asexuality as such.<sup>[59]</sup> He adds that, by this framework, "(subjective) sexual attraction is the psychological core of sexual orientation", and also addresses that there may be "some skepticism in [both] the academic and clinical communities" about classifying asexuality as a sexual orientation, and that it raises two objections to such a classification: First, he suggests that there could be an issue with self-reporting (i.e., "a 'perceived' or 'reported' lack of attraction," particularly for definitions of sexual orientation that consider physical arousal over subjective attraction), and, second, he raises the issue of overlap between absent and *very low* sexual desire, as those with an extremely low desire may still have an "underlying sexual orientation" despite potentially identifying as asexual.<sup>[59]</sup>

## Community

### General

A community of self-identified asexuals coalesced in the early 21st century, aided by the popularity of online communities.<sup>[19]</sup> For some, being a part of a community is an important resource because they often report having felt "alone" and "broken," or like a "freak".<sup>[23]</sup> Although online communities exist, affiliation with online communities vary. Some question the concept of online community, while others depend on the online asexual community heavily for support. Elizabeth Abbott, author of *A History of Celibacy*, acknowledges a difference between asexuality and celibacy, and posits that there has always been an asexual element in the population but that asexual people kept a low profile. While the failure to consummate marriage was seen as "an insult to the sacrament of marriage" in medieval Europe, and has sometimes been used as grounds for divorce or to rule a marriage void, asexuality, unlike homosexuality, has never been illegal, and asexual people have usually been able to "fly under the radar". However, in the 21st century, the anonymity of online communication and general popularity of social networking online has facilitated the formation of a community built around a common asexual identity.<sup>[61]</sup>

The Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) is an organization founded by American asexuality activist David Jay in 2001 that focuses on asexuality issues.<sup>[61][62]</sup> Its stated goals are "creating public acceptance and discussion of asexuality and facilitating the growth of an asexual community".<sup>[62]</sup> Communities such as AVEN can be beneficial to those in search of answers to solve a crisis of identity with regard to their possible asexuality. Individuals go through a series of emotional processes that end with their identifying with the asexual community. They first realize that their sexual attractions differ from those of most of society. This difference leads to questioning whether the way they feel is acceptable, and possible reasons for why they feel this way. Pathological beliefs tend to follow, in which, in some cases, they may seek medical help because they feel they have a disease. Self-understanding is usually reached when they find a definition that matches their feelings. Asexuality communities provide support and information that allows newly identified asexuals to move from self-clarification to identifying on a communal level, which can be empowering, because they now have something to associate with, which gives normality to this overall socially-isolating situation.<sup>[63]</sup>

Asexual organizations and other Internet resources play a key role in informing people about asexuality. The lack of research makes it difficult for doctors to understand the causation. Like with any sexual orientation, most people who are asexual are self-identified. This can be a problem when asexuality is mistaken for an intimacy or relationship problem or for other symptoms that do not define asexuality. There is also a significant population that either does not understand or does not believe in asexuality, which adds to the importance of these organizations to inform the general population; however, due to the lack of scientific fact on the subject, what these groups promote as information is often questioned.

On June 29, 2014, AVEN organised the second International Asexuality Conference, as an affiliate WorldPride event in Toronto. The event, which was attended by around 250 people, was the largest gathering of asexuals to date.<sup>[64]</sup> The conference included presentations, discussions, and workshops on topics such as research on asexuality, asexual relationships, and intersecting identities.



A commonly used asexual pride flag



Some members of the asexual community opt to wear a black ring on the middle finger of their right hand as a form of identification.<sup>[60]</sup>

## Symbols

In 2009, AVEN members participated in the first asexual entry into an American pride parade when they walked in the San Francisco Pride Parade.<sup>[65]</sup> In August 2010, after a period of debate over having an **asexual flag** and how to set up a system to create one, and contacting as many asexual communities as possible, a flag was announced as the **asexual pride flag** by one of the teams involved. The final flag had been a popular candidate and had previously seen use in online forums outside of AVEN. The final vote was held on a survey system outside of AVEN where the main flag creation efforts were organized. The flag colors have been used in artwork and referenced in articles about the sexuality.<sup>[66]</sup>

## Discrimination and legal protections

A 2012 study published in *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* reports there is more prejudice, dehumanization and discrimination toward asexuals than toward other sexual minorities, such as gay men, lesbians and bisexuals. Both homosexual and heterosexual people thought of asexuals as not only cold, but also animalistic and unrestrained.<sup>[67]</sup> Asexual activist, author, and blogger Julie Decker has observed that sexual harassment and violence, such as corrective rape, commonly victimizes the asexual community.<sup>[68]</sup> However, a different study found little evidence of serious discrimination against asexuals because of their asexuality.<sup>[69]</sup> Sociologist Mark Karrigan sees a middle ground, claiming that while asexuals do often experience discrimination, it is not of a phobic nature but "more about marginalization because people genuinely don't understand asexuality."<sup>[70]</sup>

Asexuals also face prejudice from the LGBT community. Upon coming out as asexual, activist Sara Beth Brooks was told by many LGBT people that asexuals are mistaken in their self-identification and seek undeserved attention within the social justice movement.<sup>[68]</sup>

In some jurisdictions, asexuals have legal protections. While Brazil bans since 1999 whatever pathologization or attempted treatment of sexual orientation by mental health professionals through the national ethical code,<sup>[71][72]</sup> the U.S. state of New York has labeled asexuals as a protected class.<sup>[73]</sup> However, asexuality does not typically attract the attention of the public or major scrutiny; therefore, it has not been the subject of legislation as much as other sexual orientations have.<sup>[4]</sup>

## In the media

Asexual representation in the media is limited and rarely openly acknowledged or confirmed by creators or authors. Asexuality as a sexual identity, rather than as a biological entity, became more widely discussed in the media in the beginning of the 21st century.<sup>[74]</sup> Before, sexuality in general was not questioned; it was often assumed, and little research had been conducted, thus susceptible to social influence, including media portrayal.<sup>[75]</sup>

## See also

- Asociality: a lack of interest in social relationships in general
- Androgyny: the mixing of masculine and feminine characteristics, personality, fashion, or culture
- Antisexualism: the views of someone who is antagonistic towards sexuality
- Platonic love: a non-romantic/non-sexual affectionate relationship
- Sexless marriage: a marriage in which little or no sex is performed
- Sexual anorexia: a loss of "appetite" for romantic-sexual interaction
- The Bone People*: a 1984 novel with an asexual protagonist, which explicitly makes reference to the subject of asexuality
- Handedness and sexual orientation

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Asexuals marching together in a pride parade

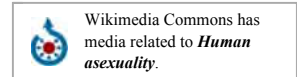
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## Further reading

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- "We're married, we just don't have sex" (<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/sep/08/relationships.healthandwellbeing>), UK *Guardian*, 8 September 2008
- Asexuals leave the closet, find community (<http://www.sfgate.com/health/article/Asexuals-leave-the-closet-find-community-3219180.php>) – SFGate.com

## External links

- Apositive (<http://www.apositive.org/>)
- Asexuality Archive (<http://www.asexualityarchive.com/>)
- Asexual Awareness Week (<http://www.asexualawarenessweek.com>)
- Asexual Explorations. *Existing Research*, an annotated bibliography (<http://www.asexualexplorations.net/home/extantresearch.html>), as retrieved 23 February 2010.
- Asexual Explorations: Promoting the Academic Study of Asexuality (<http://www.asexualexplorations.net/>)
- AVEN: Asexual Visibility and Education Network (<http://www.asexuality.org/>)
- AVENwiki (<http://www.asexuality.org/wiki/>)
- Pieces of Ace - The Asexual Podcast (<http://piecesoface.com/>)



### External video

*A fictional film about asexuality at Amazon Studios*

 Antisex: No Sex and the City  
(<http://studios.amazon.com/movies/3363>)

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Categories: Non-sexuality | Sexual orientation | Sexual attraction | Asexuality

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