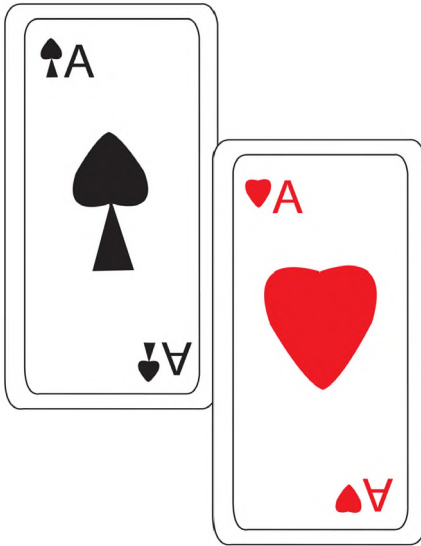


ASEXUALITY: COMING TO TERMS



AN ACE TORONTO ZINE
ISSUE 1

WHAT THE HECK IS ASEXUALITY?

Asexuality is the lack of sexual attraction to people of any gender.

Asexual people come in many flavours, including those who experience romantic attraction and those who do not (aromantic!).

The *asexual spectrum* also includes people who only very rarely experience sexual attraction (greysexual), and those who require a close emotional bond to feel it at all (demisexual).

THE ZINE

This zine is made up of people's personal experiences of coming to terms with their asexuality, and coming out to the people around them.

XAVARIAN

26 year old aromantic female. 3rd generation Dutch Canadian.

When I was a little girl growing up on a small street in the big city of Toronto I knew for a fact that kissing was gross.

I asked my mum what she would think if I never had sex and became a nun when I grew up. (They seemed to have a pretty cool life from what I could see in the Woopie Goldberg movies.) She said that she'd be sad because sex can be wonderful.

When I was a teenager I knew for a fact that I was too young for dating. All the kids practicing vertical CPR in the hallways of the high school were obviously early bloomers. What was the saying? Sweet 16 never been kissed? 17. 18. I wasn't worried about it like high school girls in movies. I'd get to it eventually.

Now high school is one thing, but I have seen lots of university movies. I was fairly confident that by that age most people had gotten over throwing a blanket over their head to avoid kissing scenes in movies and were ready to pursue some kissing of their own.

First year of university I had one of the

weirdest nights of my life. One of my good friends asked me to the winter formal. Great guy. We hung out all the time. During the date the vibes were so weird that we hardly talked, the next day we practically screamed "We are friends and friends only!" at each other when we saw each other.

After that experience the nun route was starting to look appealing again, but I'm pretty sure most nunneries have an atheist o-meter as part of their screening process for applicants.

I put it out of my mind.

In my third year of university I started to panic. I was turning 22. I was a residence assistant and regularly failing to realize that the people I was trying to hush, scold and stop from emptying trash into the hallways, were trying to flirt with me, until way after the fact. I thought there must be something medically or mentally wrong with me. I had daily vivid (Oh God, so vivid, my eyes!) evidence of the sexual feelings and expression of my peers and residents years younger than me. I didn't feel any.

Of course like any other person in this day and age, when terrified for my health and sanity what did I do but go directly to the google machine to self diagnose. Thankfully for me I actually came up with useful information. I was not alone, a freak or ill. It turns out I'm asexual!

Words cannot express the comfort and hope that one word gave me. "Asexual" is a tool that helps me explain who I am to my friends and family, and thereby gain their understanding. Even more importantly it gives me a vehicle to understand and accept myself. I am asexual, it took a while to figure it out, but I got there.

KELLY

20 year old, mostly androgynous, panromantic asexual with mild cerebral palsy.

"An asexual person is a person who does not experience sexual attraction" sits in a purple banner on the top of my computer screen. I'm on the Asexuality Visibility and Education (AVEN) website. When I was 17 I went onto AVEN for the first time – about to click learn more and check out the forms, unknowing how exactly my world was going to change.

But in order for me to explain to you exactly how much finding asexuality affected me and caused some amazing changes in my life, let's back up a little bit, to a few days before I had found AVEN.

Sitting in my high school classroom, there was a silent awkward between me and my friends. I never had an emotional engagement with the conversations my peers had as to who was hot or not and all those times of girls giggling over hot guys and guys talking about wanting to touch a girls breasts.

But those conversations, my peers stopped having with me after it had gotten around that I was uninterested. They found out after I was honest during an earlier conversation. Some thought it must be because of the disability I

was born with, others had speculated it must be because of another issue, an undiagnosed mental handicap or something. However I know that couldn't be it, my out of school friends at the childrens clinic I went to were having these sexual experiences and desires as well.

My friends where slowly growing up and I was being ever so slowly left behind in this one aspect of adolescence. In response to this they decided the best way to keep me from feeling left out was to just avoid the topic around me, just don't talk to me about this. Ever.

However one day a kid I hardly knew who probably didn't know about this rule of silence, asked someone who they thought was cute. They seemed to be looking at me so I replied the name of a guy who gave me "butterflies" once – but not in a sexual way.

"Huh – I thought you were asexual" they said.

"What do you mean?"

"Someone told me you where asexual."

So I googled it later in my room a couple days later and found AVEN. Where I found out I was Asexual. I took some time to process things and I had to come out to myself first. I also promised myself during this process that I would

just let myself feel what I feel without over – analyzing them. I felt asexual, all the experiences on AVEN from others matched mine in so many ways. And that promise helped me find out about my gender and accept whole other parts of me that I didn't know existed. I've met some of the most amazing people. I even find conversations about sex easier, we can talk without any feelings of isolation. Coming out to others is sometimes easy, sometimes difficult and met with resistance. But I wouldn't let go of knowing who I am, and being proud of it, for anything.

TRAVIS

Let me begin by introducing myself. I grew up in a small town in the early eighties, located in the Midwest of Alberta. I was an average white kid, with no physical or mental disabilities. There was always the struggle climbing up the social ladder growing up, trying to fit in and make friends. I would consider myself very average in academics, while participating in as many sports activities as I could. My talent and interests turned towards the arts, cooking, drawing, music and film. I took up cooking as my other interests didn't yield many options in the workforce in my local surroundings.

My first relationship was with a girl named Jennifer. I met her when she was six and a half months pregnant. I was nineteen at the time, and had a full time job working at a college cafeteria. I cared for her deeply and took my time to get to know her and establish a good foundation, to build a lasting relationship. After she gave birth to a healthy baby boy, I was overwhelmed with joy despite knowing that the child wasn't mine. Upon holding him in my arms, he immediately stopped crying, and being upset. This melted my heart and I was prepared to care for and support them however I could. The biggest oversight to this was she wanted sex and didn't tell me. This information was passed on to me

through her friends, and my reply was no. A few days later I received a phone call from one of her friends breaking off the relationship for her.

For a couple years afterwards I tried to figure out what was wrong with me and relationships. I had a genuine dislike for sex, or anything to do with it. Any discussions about it I would avoid like the plague, or any lust filled comments would turn me off and I would tune out. I understood that this wasn't a regular behavior, and I didn't know of any way to explain my actions that others would understand. While I wasn't gaining any relationship experience, I was learning other important life lessons. I was very mature and responsible for my age, and improved myself professionally through work.

My second girlfriend was a co-worker while I worked at Tim Hortons. Her name was Amanda and a very pleasant person to talk with and be around. We enjoyed each others company for the first couple of weeks getting to know one another. One day she decided to advance the relationship to a more physical state. I was very uncomfortable about this, and upon a heated discussion she admitted to being a nymphomaniac. Any and all feelings for her instantly went away, as I knew her happiness would be my suffering and vice versa. I guess opposites do attract but are not always meant to stay together.

I did some research to find a term that

would describe my lack of sexual desire. It was then when I discovered the word Asexual, but there was little to no extensive material to answer my questions. A part of me gave up hope that I could have a sustainable relationship, and I focused my attention to improving other aspects about myself. I'm pleased to find a group like Ace Toronto to hopefully shed some insight into my person life. I look forward to meeting others like myself.

Thanks for your time.

STEVEN ACE

18, Male, Panromantic Asexual.

Asexuality is a difficult sexuality. Confusion, uncertainty and loneliness are a few of the many issues that are commonly associated with it. To venture into the world, seeking what little information one can on a hidden orientation behind the overwhelming mass of hyper sexuality is no small feat. To connect pieces, join confessions, relate feelings and thoughts to the experiences of others is impossible without the modern age. Raised with the heteronormative "I am straight" mindset, the emotions annoyed at my mind like a splinter. A little more freedom, a few more thoughts and a dozen more questions. "Am I Gay?" "What defines sexual attraction?" sprouted almost at a constant rate. And then the uncertainty begins to set in. Am I broken? The thought, repeated into oblivion is no longer a question, but a statement. I am broken. The realization of what that means slowly takes full effect after that. I am alone. Not a question, not a statement. Just a sentence of pure and utter truth. I am Alone...

However it doesn't have to be that way. Chivalry certainly isn't dead and neither is romance. In a hyper sexualized world there are pockets of individuals who genuinely seek company for company sake. The degrading thoughts

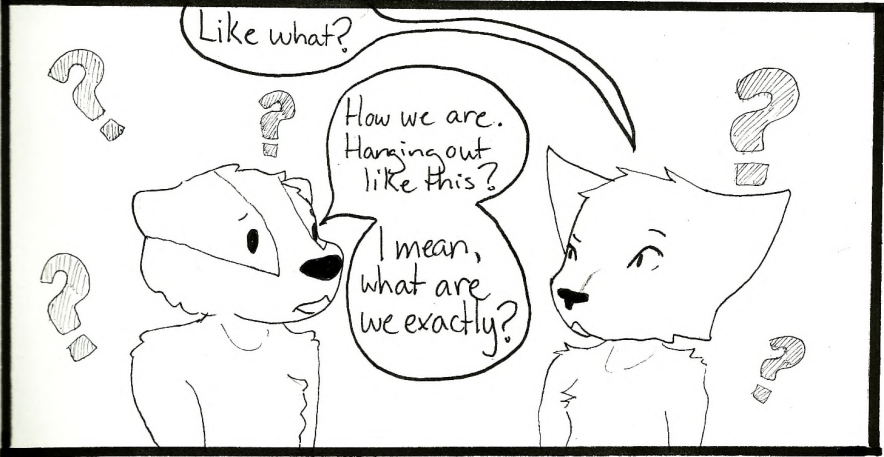
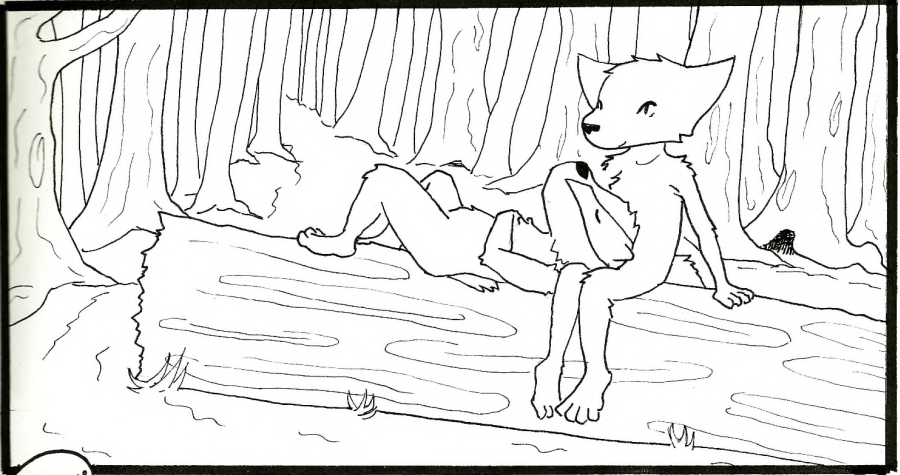
of 'I am alone', 'I am broken' and 'I am a failure' can be calmed by the simple touch of a lover's hand. Art, beauty and romance are the qualities of life that make it pleasurable and cannot be experienced alone! Friends, family, and partners are what we cherish. They are why we stand to live. They are why we are not alone.

COMING OUT TO SOMEONE WHO CARES

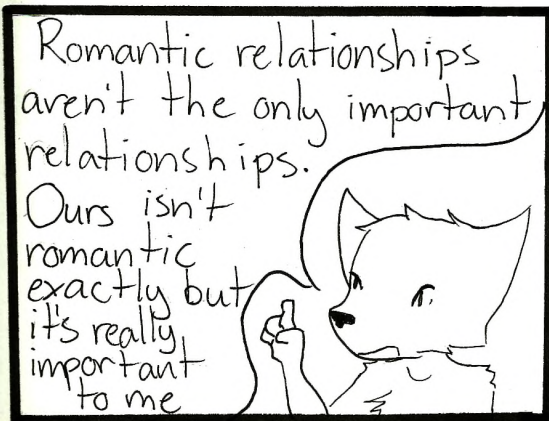
ENNIS

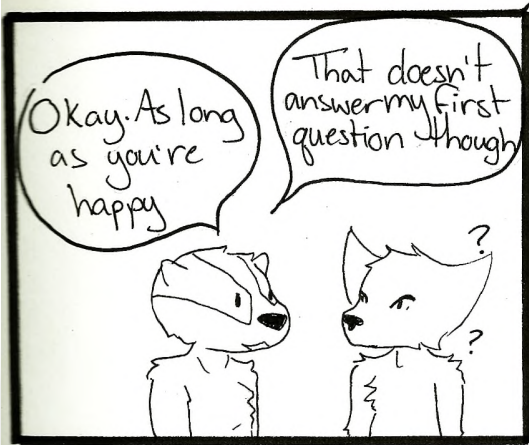
*Twenty-three year old androgynous white person.
Mentally ill. Asexual with no idea how to define my
romantic orientation, but I love to think about it.*

(theendeye.tumblr.com)









***This relationship is queerplatonic! A queerplatonic relationship is one that doesn't fit the model of a friendship or a romance, but is equally significant.*

OMNES ET NIHIL

I'm a queer asexual non-binary freak of the (sort - of - Jewish) hyper-educated white dfab person variety. I'm functionally aromantic and my life is shaped by non-normative relationships (that I do with other rainbow freaks... one or two at a time). For the most part, my body does what I need it to do, I've never had to go hungry, and I've been fortunate enough that in my three decades on this planet, nobody has raped me— and those are things I do not take for granted.

People talk about coming out as a process, of something you have to do over and over again, for the rest of your life. It is, and I do. But coming out as asexual isn't like coming out as lesbian, gay or bisexual. It's not just a series of discrete moments that form a "process" over time.

I don't just have to keep coming out to different people, or keep coming out to the same people because they forget or reject what I've already told them— repeatedly revealing that I'm (still) asexual because they believe asexuality is necessarily "just a phase"**. (Although that certainly was something I had to do for the first few years... and usually something that required delivering comprehensive, yet impromptu asexuality 101 workshops, every time.)

It's more than that. I have to keep coming out to the same people even after they believe me. I have to keep coming out to them more and more.

Being asexual means a lot more in my life than a handful of definitions, concepts or bullet points. And what it means is so alien to most non-asexual people that it takes a long time to bridge the gap even after I provide them with asexuality's discursive tools and concepts. Even when they know what I'm talking about, they still don't know what I'm talking about.

My asexuality is about the way I do relationships as a functionally aromantic asexual. How I live my life and navigate my social world. And trying to explain how and how much my significant relationships— and the people I do them with— matter to me has been difficult.

It's taken years of fighting and I'm still not there, especially with my family. (They're eager to learn and very queer-positive, and count among them several pairs of married women as well as straight people who've spent years doing ant-homophobia work). They can understand homophobia, but homophobia doesn't begin to cover it (and I've had enough of that— and still do— to be able to speak to it).

Coming out (about sexual orientation) is about getting people to the point where they

understand what it means for you to be non-heterosexual. For me— for most aces— that’s a lengthy process. You can’t usually come out as asexual in a moment or even a single conversation. You come out over the course of years— that’s how long it takes for non-asexual people who already believe in your asexuality to start understanding what you mean, what asexuality means. After a decade, I think people in my life are just starting to get it.

I’m as out as humanly possible to my family. I’ve brought some of them to march in asexual contingents in pride parades, and they’ve helped me spread the word about asexuality, attended ace education events and even helped make them happen. They clip out newspaper articles that quote me about asexuality and listen to me being interviewed on the radio. They even bring up asexuality to people when I’m not around— to educate other people. They’re trying. But they still don’t really get it. And they still don’t really recognise the significance of my (non-romantic) relationships. And that hard. (And I can’t imagine what it’s like for aces whose families don’t try so hard— most don’t.)

I don’t know if I will ever be finished coming out to my family.

Coming out as asexual isn’t a process. It’s a process of processes. And it never ends.

** Sexual orientations do change for some people over time. For some people asexuality is a phase and for a lot of us, asexuality— or grey-sexuality or demisexuality— is the end point of a process after a phase of identifying with some other sexual orientation.

That sexual orientations sometimes change doesn't undermine them or make them any less real. The problem is assuming that one (less socially sanctioned) sexual orientation is just a phase on the way to a more socially acceptable one... especially when people are trying to "cure" them (and when they're never assuming that heterosexuality is just a phase).

(Non-asexual) lesbians, gay men, and especially bisexual folks do have to deal with this presumption sometimes... but for asexual folks it's ubiquitous— and it never lets up because there's always someone else! Fortunately, the "it's a phase" presumption is often itself a phase that a lot of people get over to eventually accept asexuality as something that doesn't need to be cured (or as something other than an immaturity that we will or should grow out of).

AVERIE REID

(ze and hir pronouns)

I'm a student digital artist and storyteller based in the Greater Toronto Area. I'm primarily a non-binary, trans, and (gender)queer, young identifying person of mixed race. I also sometimes refer to myself as an (in)visibly disabled, gray-polysexual, polyromantic, and polyamorous person of intersex experience. Nice to meet you!

Sex is many things to me. Sometimes sex is something that makes me feel distance, something I completely lack connection to. Other times, I am completely engulfed by sex and its intensity. Invader. Bystander. Guest. Sex takes on different forms and changes often. Sometimes sex can make me full or turn me inside out. Sex can be everything for a few, short seconds. Other times – mostly, for me – it is nothing. It is here that I spend the most time in neutrality or ambivalence.

I call this space greyness. It is where my being is caught in the in-between. It allows for some fluidity, ambiguity. This is the only space I can come to understand, appreciate, and take care of my being. And that makes everything grey incredibly important to me. In a way, it is me.

Sometimes the people I engage with do not take the time to understand this space – or else,

completely ignore or reject it. This space, even though I may not always like it, is a core part of me. It's where I find some of my other identities too. As a non-binary person and a person of mixed race, I am familiar with greyness in more aspects than one. It comes out in almost everything I do, I say, I think.

It's quite a scary thing when people refuse greyness – mine or others'. In my life, this is often where the biggest conflicts draw their anger. This is when greyness becomes a site of trauma, of repulsion, of hatred and disgust: hurt.

To me, it's simple. It's me. But I want to know you and I need for you to know me. And that is why I write this today.

QUESTIONS THAT CAME-UP WHEN I CAME-OUT.

A middle-aged guy who identifies as a homoromantic graysexual (experiencing some attraction but not wanting sex).

I recently came out to a buddy of mine who is straight. A normal healthy guy, with a normal healthy sex drive, and a normal healthy sex life. He thought I was his gay friend, and I am, but I realised that he had assumptions about my experience of life that were not true for me. As does almost every person I ever meet. I am trying to live an authentic life. Ignoring false assumptions of someone close to me feels deceptive. Casual friends and strangers, they can think what they like, but I'm talking about a best friend.

I had hinted towards wanting to talk about something that I didn't know how to bring-up. So on this particular evening, when we were chatting in his living room and his wife had gone to bed, the topic came-up and I just couldn't ignore it.

I'm not sure why it would be offensive to anyone that I don't want to have sex. I am happy that you want to have sex. In fact, I wish

I wanted to have sex too. I've forced myself to have sex in the past. But it holds no enjoyment for me. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Sometimes, even though I forced myself to consent, I would feel dirty and violated and depressed afterwards. An unwanted sexual experience, even though I had wanted to want it.

I felt great relief when someone told me about asexuality, another straight guy friend who was more in the know about these things. My relief was greater still when I realised that I didn't have to force myself to be sexual anymore. That I am okay as I am.

"So, you know how you desire and enjoy having sex with women, but you have no desire to have sex with guys?" "Sure." "Well, I have no desire to have sex with women, as you know, but I also have no desire to have sex with guys."

I don't actually have the ability to understand why this would make any difference to a straight male friend who never had any hopes of having a sexual relationship with me, his gay male friend. But it did seem to blow his mind. Even this well-adjusted, open-minded, mainstream guy had to perform some mental gymnastics to get his mind around the idea. I'm thinking, I don't want to have sex with you - you don't want to have sex with me, it should be a non-issue.

After sharing numerous sexual escapades with me, seemingly feeling the need to point-out his own main-stream sexuality to make sure I understood how very different I was from him (believe me, I already understood), my friend had many questions.

Why do I feel the need to define myself like that? I simply find it helpful in relating to the world and how I fit or don't fit-in. I don't see it as defining myself, the language of spectrums just helps me explain my feelings, to myself and others.

Maybe it will change? Maybe it will, but looking back, I can see that this has been stable throughout my adult life. Which has been a considerable number of years.

Why do I need to tell people? (ie. tell him?) For one, it's good to know who would accept me as I am and who would only accept me as how they thought I was. For my own feeling of safety and security, who can I truly trust? For two, there is my own need to be authentic and to not always pretend when false assumptions about me are being made, which is most of the time. And for three, don't most people want to be known to their close friends? There is this huge part of who I am, of how I experience the world differently than most. Is there some reason I should share that with no one? Because in not sharing, it feels like something to be

ashamed of. And it really isn't.

Maybe because being gay became a non-issue in society, maybe I needed to take-up another cause? No, I really didn't. And telling one of my closest friends is not me choosing to be a poster-child or an asexual activist. I don't know how far my coming-out asexually will go yet. I do plan to tell my family and my closest friends, I will start there. Being accepted as I am by those who are close to me feels important.

I know it's hard for someone to grasp a new concept. And for some reason, some people even jump to thinking that being asexual is wrong. I think it is a fear response to the unknown. "It's like you're a little kid who didn't go through puberty yet, who just innocently wants to cuddle and doesn't understand why others wouldn't, or even why that would be sexual," another friend had thought aloud in trying to understand my specific experience of being ace. I may never understand the whole sexual side of the world- how sex sells, how people are motivated by sex, what it feels like to crave it, how sexual desire plays a role in the way people interact. But there's nothing wrong about that, it is simply an innocence and a naivety that I never chose. If I had a choice I would choose to be sexual. I'm a romantic guy who craves the intimacy of a partner and that really doesn't work so well with not wanting sex.

Being asexual is simply the way I am. It's not an illness, it's not a response to abuse or environment, and it should not be something to be embarrassed or ashamed of. Let's hope this becomes the case in society and at the very least with our closest friends and family. In the end, coming-out to this friend was good. But, it reminded me how hard it can be for ordinary people to accept, and that's a bit scary for me.

THANKS FOR READING!

ACE TORONTO IS A COMMUNITY OF
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OCTOBER 2014