The nuances of intimacy: Asexual perspectives and experiences with dating and relationships.

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ABSTRACT

Asexuality Studies is an emerging field in North America and Europe which lacks large-scale, qualitative studies. Much existing research focuses on defining and categorizing asexuality, with researchers calling for more focus on the romantic and sexual relationships of asexual people. Drawing from an online survey with 349 participants, this paper describes the perceptions and experiences that asexual people have with dating and relationships. Participants answered 16 open-ended and 9 close-ended questions. After rounds of coding, three themes were selected for examination. These were dating, romantic and/or sexual relationships, and platonic relationships. These results showcase the challenges asexuals face with dating while also demonstrating how asexual people actively dismantle understandings of romantic, sexual, and platonic relationships through their own experiences and perspectives. Overall, this study provides greater legitimacy to the fluidity of asexuality and asexual relationships.

KEYWORDS: Asexuality; Queer-platonic; Qualitative; Aromantic; Survey

INTRODUCTION

Estimates suggest that between 0.4 to 6 percent of the global population identifies as Asexual (Brunning & McKeever, 2021; Przybylo, 2019). Despite this, asexuality has only recently become a focus of public conversation and academic research. Bogaert's (2004) article is widely recognized as introducing the concept of asexuality as a sexual orientation to the academic field, but Van Houdenhove, Gijs, T'Sjoen and Enzlin (2015) argue that more work is still required, calling on researchers to further investigate how asexuals experience romantic and sexual relationships. There is also a lack of large-scale qualitative studies within the field, with some suggesting more work gathering rich data is warranted (Prause & Graham, 2007, as cited in Carrigan, 2011).

Research should examine the ways asexual people navigate societies that they perceive as hypersexual and amatonormative. For the purposes of this article, a hypersexual society is described as "a society in which sexual discourse, erotica, and pornography are persistently present in almost all aspects of the society" (Kammeyer, 2008, p. 12). Amatonormativity is "the assumptions that a central, exclusive, amorous relationship is normal for humans, in that it is a universally shared goal, and that such a relationship is normative, in that it should be aimed at in preference to other relationship types" (Brake, 2012, pp. 88-89). The way asexuality challenges these concepts provides opportunities for insight.

Accordingly, drawing from a survey of 349 responses, this paper provides a descriptive understanding of the perspectives and experiences asexual people have with romantic and sexual relationships, as well as platonic relationships and dating. Additionally, following suggestions by scholars, this article begins to move away from the deficit narratives found in the social sciences (DePaulo, 2023; Driver, 2008; Peel, Rivers, Tyler, Nodin, & Perez-Acevedo, 2023). Previous studies have focused on the negative aspects that come with being asexual, such as exclusion, loneliness, or lack of intimacy (Chasin, 2015; Dawson, McDonnell & Scott, 2016; Gupta, 2017; Vares, 2018). While asexual people can experience these feelings, this negative orientation towards asexual relationships seems to have become the dominant discourse in the field. Only recently have articles begun to explore the positive aspects of asexuality (Mandigo & Kavar, 2022). Another aim of this paper is to represent both the positive and negative perceptions and experiences asexual people have with dating and relationships. The findings of this article show the diversity and complexity of asexual relationships and may therefore contribute to combatting misperceptions and stigma surrounding asexuality.

LITERATURE REVIEW: CONCEPTUALIZING ASEXUALITY

Defining Asexuality

Understandings of asexuality, both scholarly and public, have been transformed in recent decades. The term has had limited historical use; in previous conceptualizations, asexuality was not often considered as a type of sexuality, instead being conflated with celibacy, illness, or trauma (Catri, 2021; Colborne, 2018; Shuttleworth & Mona, 2021). Asexuality differs from celibacy, a refrain from sexual activity for religious purposes, because it is not a choice made by an individual (Brunning & McKeever, 2021).

Asexuality has been connected to a medical discourse due to its similarities to Female Sexual Interest/Arousal Disorder and Male Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (Cranney, 2017; Van Houdenhove, Enzlin & Gijs, 2017). However, as both researchers and community members argue, the two cannot be consolidated (Catri, 2021; Hille, 2023; The Trevor Project, 2021). Significant distress is more prominent in those with sexual disorders, and while "asexual individuals may experience distress related to a lack of widespread social acceptance […] they are unlikely to seek treatment to try and 'fix' their lack of desire" (Bradshaw, Brown, Kingstone, & Brotto, 2021, p. 2).

In addition, asexuality has been associated with sexual trauma, as survivors of sexual assault often experience sexual dysfunction (O'Callaghan, Shepp, Ullman & Kirkner, 2019). Parent and Ferriter's (2018) study found that asexuals were more likely to report PTSD and an experience of sexual trauma than non-asexuals. However, the pressures of compulsory sexuality, stigma, and/or the denial of asexuality's existence may explain why asexuals tend to have higher rates of reported sexual trauma (Gupta, 2017; Kurowicka, 2023). One can identify as asexual without having experienced sexual trauma (Colborne, 2018).

A widely accepted way to describe asexuality is as a sexuality/sexual orientation (Hille, 2023). However, asexuality cannot be categorized in the same way as other sexualities, such as homosexuality or bisexuality (DeLuzio Chasin, 2011). Many studies have attempted to define or categorize asexuality (Catri, 2021; Cranney, 2017; Van Houdenhove, et al., 2017). Since asexuality is defined by the lack of a sexual drive, some scholars argue that it should not be categorized as a sexuality/sexual orientation (Catri, 2021). However, limiting the definition of asexuality causes the experiences of many people to be excluded, and Hille (2023) writes that "future research on asexuality can move beyond defining asexuality" (p. 3). The categorization of asexuality as a sexual orientation helps individuals normalize experiences in a way that empowers identities (Dawson, Scott & McDonnell, 2018). Those who feel as though they do not fit in with the perceived amatonormative and hypersexualized society can have their experiences validated by the label of asexuality (Glass, 2022).

Asexuality is an inclusive term, with some identities being more fluid than others (Mitchell & Hunnicutt, 2019). The largest online asexual resource and community, *The Asexuality Visibility and Education Network* (*AVEN;* 2023), describes an asexual as "someone who does not experience sexual attraction or an intrinsic desire to have sexual relationships" but notes that "asexuality and sexuality are not necessarily black and white. There is a broad spectrum between end points of 'asexual' and 'very sexual' with differing levels of sexuality". While this definition may not represent all asexuals, for the purposes of this study it will be used as a basis of understanding, aligning with existing literature (Guz, Hecht, Kattari, Gross & Ross, 2022). Moving forward, asexuality will be referred to as a spectrum of identities and experiences rather than a uniform concept. In this same way, asexuality will be referred to as a sexuality/sexual orientation.

In addition to refining definitions, current research focuses on the role of self-identification within the asexual community (Van Houdenhove et al., 2017). The creators of AVEN have advocated for inclusion through self-identification rather than maintaining rigid definitions (Catri, 2021; Chasin, 2015; Guz et al., 2022; MacNeela & Murphy, 2015). This paper draws directly on these perspectives within the 2SLGBTQI+ community (see Table 1) to develop a better grasp of how asexuality is understood, and so, self-identification is not questioned.

Asexual Microlabels

Asexuality can be understood as existing on a spectrum and a type of umbrella term that captures a range of specific labels or identities (Carrigan 2013; Clark, Lefkowitz & Zimmerman, 2023). Within this *ace-spectrum*, the experiences of individuals can vary greatly depending on their sexual and romantic attraction (Vares, 2018). There are many microlabels and terms used within the asexual community, such as greysexual or demisexual (see Table 1). In addition, the term *allosexual* refers to people who do not identify as asexual and experience unfluctuating sexual desire.

Despite not needing or desiring sex, asexual people can still feel certain types of attraction and enjoy the intimacy that comes from emotional connections (Winter-Gray & Hayfield, 2021). However, attraction is a concept that is not easily defined (Brunning & McKeever, 2021). What is understood as platonic, romantic, or sexual can vary for each person (Brotto, Knudson, Inskip, Rhodes & Erskine, 2010). Some asexuals define their sexuality using a split-attraction model, where romantic attraction and sexual attraction are separate entities which can exist without the other (Guz et al., 2022). This means that an individual can experience romantic attraction without any sexual desires or can experience sexual attraction without any romantic desires. However, for some, these attractions can be intertwined. For the purposes of

this paper, the term intimacy will be used to represent actions and emotions which are viewed as non-platonic by the majority of asexual people (i.e., kissing, cuddling, or sexual activity).

A common misconception about asexuality is that all asexual people hate sex and do not engage in sexual activity of any kind. This is not true; some asexuals are repulsed by sexual intimacy, but this does not apply to every member of the community (AVEN, 2023; Hermann et al., 2022). Some asexuals are *sex-aversive*, meaning they want no sexual activity in their life at all. Others are *sex-positive*, meaning that they may not feel a desire for sexual activity, but they are not opposed to having it. For those who willingly engage in sexual activity, reasons tend to include curiosity, pleasure, stress-release, desire to make their partner(s) happy, or a form of romantic/sensual/aesthetic attraction (Catri, 2021; Hermann et al., 2022).

Research on Asexuality

Existing asexual literature has noted that the majority of research participants tend to be young, white, single, North American, and/or female (Chan & Leung, 2023; Dawson et al., 2016; Gupta, 2017; Guz et al., 2022; Hille, 2023; Mollet, 2020; Scherrer, 2008; Thorpe & Arbeau, 2020; Van Houdenhove et al., 2015; Vares, 2018; Yule, Brotto & Gorzalka, 2017). These frequent demographics of research participants also align with common community demographics collected by the *2020 Ace Community Survey*, an online survey that aims to track the information of asexual people and contains information from over 14,000 individuals (Hermann et al., 2022). However, this resource does have limitations; Hermann et al. (2022) note that people "were far more inclined to participate in the survey if they were in contact with online Anglophone ace communities" (p. 8). Acknowledging this, the 2020 Ace Community Survey better describes the North American/European population of asexuals, rather than a global population.

There are few studies that focus solely on underrepresented demographics, such as male or non-white asexuals. In their article, Mandigo and Kavar (2022) show that, on a binary scale, asexual men are less represented in literature than asexual women. Due to the lower representation of male participants in asexual research, some studies opt to only include the responses of female participants (Van Houdenhove, et al., 2015). In addition, few studies focus entirely on non-white asexuals. Guz et al., (2022) found that, from 48 different studies, roughly 80% of participants were white. Su and Zheng's (2022) study about Chinese asexuals is one of the few works with an entirely non-white demographic. When addressing intersecting identities, Mollet (2020) explained that asexual participants "with multiple minoritized identities discussed ways oppression of their multiple identities, in conjunction with their asexuality, created cumulative marginalization" which "[emphasizes] the lasting effects of Whiteness associated with asexuality" (p. 203). Few studies are conducted outside of North America and Europe (Su & Zheng, 2022; Vares, 2018). There is still a need for studies that focus on underrepresented, intersecting identities such as faith, race, class, ethnicity, nationality, age, and gender (Gupta, 2017; Hille, 2023).

Asexual-focused studies that use surveys as their source of data generation have a varied number of participants, with close-ended surveys able to receive responses between 75 to over 1,000 people (Carvalho & Rodrigues, 2022; Hall & Knox, 2022; Hille, Simmons & Sanders, 2020). Open-ended surveys range roughly between 60 to 160 participants (Carrigan, 2011; Kelleher, Murphy & Su, 2023; MacNeela & Murphy, 2015; Scherrer, 2008). There is limited research on asexuality which focuses on qualitatively exploring the experiences and perspectives that asexuals have with relationships (Carrigan, 2011; MacNeela & Murphy, 2015; Scherrer,

2008). For the current study, the focus was on generating rich, descriptive data about asexual people's experiences and perspectives of dating and relationships.

The main goal of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of the interactions and experiences of asexual people when it comes to dating and relationships. It aims to offer insight into the subjective nature of building and maintaining romantic and/or sexual relationships for people within the ace-spectrum. This research aligns with recommendations made by previous studies which note how romantic asexual relationships have been underrepresented in literature (Hall & Knox, 2022; Hille, 2023; Vares, 2018). Previous research has noted that the asexual-specific struggles arise from complications about relationships (Clark et al., 2023; Vares, 2018). Van Houdenhove et al., (2015) write that "asexual individuals who are in a relationship should receive more attention in studies […] what problems do they encounter? How and to what extent does their asexuality affect their relationship?" (p. 278). This paper provides insight into these types of questions.

Many asexuals date allosexuals, which can cause compatibility difficulties (Dawson et al, 2016; Vares, 2018). However, this does not mean that asexual people should only date other asexuals. Healthy, intimate relationships between asexual and non-asexual people are possible, with communication and adaptability being critical to a positive partnership (Glass, 2022; Jolene Sloan, 2015). The aspects of allosexual and asexual (*allo-ace*) relationships can range widely from couple to couple (Scherrer, 2008). It has also been noted that, sometimes, people who identify within the asexual spectrum change their labels as their relationships progress (Mitchell & Hunnicutt, 2019). There has yet to be research that focuses on the experiences of asexual-only relationships.

Furthermore, there is a lack of research that explores the platonic relationships of asexual people. Few articles include platonic relationships in their studies (Edge et al., 2022; Dawson et al., 2016). This may be because the emphasis of asexuality is on its lack of sexual attraction, and therefore researchers do not see platonic relationships as necessary aspects to study. As the results of this paper will show, however, this lack of focus on platonic relationships causes a rich part of the asexual experience to be missed. Milks and Cerankowski (2014) note that there are lessons to be learned from the ways asexual people create intimacies in non-romantic and non-sexual ways, such as friendships. This article expands upon the concept in literature that defines relationships as something which must require romantic or sexual undertones by exploring the way single asexual people view and experience their relationships with friends and family.

METHODS

Participants

In accordance with Canada's *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2022) for ethical research with human participants, all participants had to be 19 years of age or older to be able to give informed consent. Other than the age requirement, the only demographic requirement was that respondents needed to have internet-access to participate in the study. A total of 604 people consented to take part in the current study. Of these, 208 did not respond to the survey questions. An additional 47 people stated their age as under 19, so their responses were deleted from the data pool. The final sample included 349 participants. The number of responses received was larger than expected, but since this was a qualitative, descriptive study, no cut-off point for data saturation was set in advance (Tran, Porcher, Falissard, & Ravaud, 2016).

Participant demographics were collected through close-ended questions included in the survey. Age was grouped into ranges (see Table 2). The most common age range was 19-25 (n = 205) with amounts decreasing as age ranges increased.

For location, participants were asked to select on which continent they currently reside (see Table 3). North America received the most selections (n = 221).

Participants were given the option to input their own pronouns (see Table 4). This was due to the understanding that a large portion of the asexual community fall under the trans umbrella, as the analysis of the *2011 Asexual Awareness Week Community Census* "found that at least 23 percent of the respondents identified as both female and male or neither female nor male, and at least 10 percent of respondents identified as transgender" (Miller, 2012, as cited in Gupta, 2019, p. 1201). The most common pronouns were She/Her (n = 159).

Biological sex was not asked for. DeLuzio Chasin (2011) notes that in Brotto et al.'s (2010) study on asexuality, when forced to define themselves as either male or female, over 10% of the respondents opted to end their participation in the study rather than specify their sex. Choosing to not require biological sex maximizes the number of participants in a study while also acknowledging the large amount of trans, non-binary, intersex, and other gender diverse people within the asexual community.

All participants either identified as asexual or as questioning/unsure. Responses of those unsure if asexual was the correct label for them did not have their responses deleted, for the label of asexual is vast and can capture many identities. As Thorpe and Arbeau (2020) explain, "asexuality is still frequently defined and understood in absolute terms, a sentiment which fails to represent the diversity of identities reported by asexual individuals themselves" (p. 311).

Furthermore, of the 14 people who identified as questioning/unsure, over 70% still used an asexual spectrum microlabel (n = 10).

Participants were also given the option to specify which labels applied to them (see Table 5). In this study, the majority of participants used the terminology "Asexual/Ace" (n = 193).

Finally, participants were asked if they had ever been in a romantic or sexual relationship before (see Table 6; see Table 7). Over half of respondents had been in a romantic relationship at the time of the survey (n = 180), while roughly a third of participants had been in a sexual relationship (n = 100).

Procedures and Measures

Prior to data collection, the study received ethical approval by the University of the Fraser Valley's Human Research Ethics Board. Data was gathered through an online survey, consisting of both open-ended and close-ended questions. The survey was used as the tool of data collection for several reasons. First, an online survey helped in obtaining a wider range of participant demographics. Since respondents did not have to arrange a time to meet with an interviewer, the survey was more accessible on a global scale and provided flexibility. Next, a survey allows for more privacy. When working with 2SLGBTQI+ communities, researchers have the responsibility of ensuring the safety of their participants. Some asexuals might not have a safe space in which they can participate in an interview. Instead, the survey could be conducted from any device in any location with an internet connection, and it did not track the identity of respondents. Ultimately, the open-ended, digital approach was so that the widest range of experiences from the largest possible sample group could be captured in the data.

A majority of studies draw their participants solely from *AVEN* (Dawson et al., 2016; DeLuzio Chasin, 2011; Gupta, 2016; Guz et al, 2022). For this study, participants were recruited

from three online spaces to broaden the sample. Community norms can range depending on the platform used; by expanding beyond *AVEN*, researchers may be able to access new perspectives.

A recruitment post was made on *Tumblr, Reddit,* and *AVEN*. The survey was hosted through the platform *SurveyMonkey* and was left active for four months. Participants were then given 9 demographic questions and 16 open-ended questions to answer. Questions focused on topics such as defining asexuality, perspectives of relationships, and experiences with dating and romantic/sexual relationships. To participate in the survey, respondents were shown the consent form and required to check a box stating, "I consent to be in the study." Since the survey was anonymous and did not collect data on the names nor IP addresses of participants, once the survey was completed participants would be unable to delete their responses. This information was made clear in the consent form.

Data Analysis

The data produced from the survey was coded using inductive coding and thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a "method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data" (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297). In addition, thematic analysis is useful for providing insights on the differences and similarities between participants in large data sets (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). Since the purpose of the study was to examine perspectives and experiences, this method was chosen to provide a rich and complex description of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

The data was coded by one person, that being the author. Following the steps of thematic analysis, the author familiarized herself with the data prior to the start of the analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Since there was only one coder, inter-rater reliability and peer debriefing were unable to be used as measures of consistency. However, other measures were put

in place to establish credibility (Nowell et al., 2017). Both a digital codebook and hand-written decision trails were kept to ensure that accuracy and consistency was maintained. These audit trails were based on the entire data set, ensuring consistency within and across individual questions. As recommended by Clarke and Braun (2017), the author read through the data multiple times to ensure the effectiveness and dependability of the audit trails.

Coding was done inductively, with no predetermined codes created. Coding was done digitally, with selections of the data being tagged and named using descriptive words and phrases. During the coding process, the entire data set was systematically analyzed. Each of the 16 open-ended questions were analyzed and coded individually, with initial codes being generated from the interesting and relevant features of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes were then compared across questions and refined to better fit the data set as a whole.

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) concept of thematic maps, these codes were then grouped into main, overarching themes and smaller sub-themes. A total of six main themes and 26 sub-themes were identified. Then, after two additional rounds of revision and refinement, these were narrowed into three main themes for discussion in this study. These are: dating, romantic and/or sexual relationships, and platonic relationships. From each of these themes, the six sub-themes of greatest interest and relevance were selected to be expanded upon in this paper. These are described in the following section, with there being two sub-themes for every main theme presented.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

DATING

Navigating Relationships Between Asexual and Allosexual People

Two key findings arise when looking at the details of allo-ace relationships: Emphasis on sexual intimacy and mistrust of allosexual people. For many allosexual people, sex is important; it can be deemed an essential part of any relationship, and many allosexuals equate sexual love with romantic love. However, for many within the asexual community, this is not the case. A majority of respondents (n = 196) perceived their society to be hypersexual. They felt as though, in society, sex was deemed to be an essential part of the human existence. This can result in them feeling othered and abnormal. This acts as a point of contention between some allosexual and asexual people, which makes finding a romantic partner more challenging. Many respondents (n = 93) expressed challenges when finding a partner. As one participant shared:

> It is so hard to date as an asexual in the modern dating world. Hookup culture is such an unavoidable thing. So many people are convinced that sex is all that matters, even if they themselves (ace or allo) don't really care for it that much. It can be especially daunting as a man, seeing as much of [society's] views of masculinity revolve around sex. It is very scary opening up to another about your feelings towards sex, whatever they may be. (Respondent #16, He/They, Homoromantic asexual)

This heightened importance of sex and sexual activity is reinforced in numerous ways, with respondents sharing that they became aware of this through media, such as books and movies, advertisements, and peer and parental influence. Some asexual people (n = 120) feel as though sex and its outcomes (i.e., children, marriage, etc.) are socially deemed to be the most important things for one to do/have to achieve fulfilment. Someone who does not want these things is seen as strange. Many participants (n = 129) also noted that when they express their lack of desire for sex to others they are often treated in a hostile or dismissive manner. One participant wrote:

> I have felt a little distrustful towards the friend I came out to who I felt tried to undermine or write off my perspective, intentionally or not. (Respondent #262, She/They, Greysexual)

This point leads to the second common theme which connected many asexual perspectives: distrust of allosexual people. Through personal experience, second-hand stories, and a critical perspective on the social norms and expectations surrounding romantic relationships, some asexual people (n = 22) have developed a lack of trust towards allosexual people when it comes to dating and forming intimate relationships. This is not to suggest that asexuals hate or automatically distrust every allosexual person they meet, but rather to explain why they can be wary of reassurances made about their sexuality (or lack thereof). This sentiment was captured by one person's response:

> I made sure to be upfront about my asexuality, and they seemingly reassured me during the relationship whenever the doubt of not "being enough" crept back in, but over a year later I got broken up with because they "thought at this point [I'd] be willing" and they "missed sex too much." I mean I know I dodged a huge bullet there, but damn. And I haven't been in a relationship since then. I'm almost afraid to date an Allosexual person again. If I do date again in the future, I may very well try to find a fellow asexual. (Respondent #153, He/Him, Asexual)

A lack of information about asexuality means many allosexual people, especially ones not in the 2SLGBTQI+ community, do not properly understand what asexuality means. This can lead to asexual people having to deal with pushiness, misunderstandings, and aggression from allosexuals. Some respondents (n = 28) shared stories about having partners expecting them to change, as if their asexuality would go away after a period of time. While some people may be

able to gain romantic or sexual feelings over a long period of time due to more fluidity in their orientation, this is not the case for others. A participant explained their perspective:

> If you date an allosexual have the asexual talk, meaning explain to them what a sexuality means to you because of it being a spectrum and […] no asexual experience is the same. Your wants, needs and boundaries should be known by your partner/s. As a sex repulsed ace, I find it even more important to state my stance regarding sexual acts and depending on my partner response to that is how I know if it's [going to] work out or not, because many [allos] say sex is not important to them only for them to ask for it later in the relationship or hoping you change your mind, so words are one thing but their attitude and actions about it means more [...] Also we should never feel obliged to have sex, don't coerce yourself, don't force yourself. (Respondent #144, She/Her, Greysexual)

It can be hard for asexual people to maintain a sense of trust after being hurt, lied to, belittled, not believed, or even assaulted by allosexual people. For some, such events occurred many times with different partners. Past negative experiences contribute to this sense of distrust. When this is the case, it can create an impression that asexual people need to change to be more alike to allosexuals.

Lack of an Asexual Dating Pool

Some asexual people (n = 29) are only interested in dating other people on the asexual spectrum. By doing so, asexuals can trust that their perspectives and feelings will be understood, as their potential partner(s) usually have had similar experiences. While this may seem like a simple solution, it has its own unique obstacles. To begin, there are few proper dating sites or forums for asexual people, and the ones that exist are littered with issues. Participants (n = 27) explained how asexual-specific dating websites were not helpful for many reasons, such as many

members being inactive, a paywall preventing users from accessing aspects of the site, or a lack of local people to connect with. Additionally, it can be hard to meet other asexuals out in the world. As mentioned previously, only a small portion of the population identifies as asexual. If one does not live in a city or in a place which recognizes asexuality, the available options may be limited. One participant wrote:

> Being asexual made me realize, that there may even be a 'chance' for me to be in a relationship, as most aces are female, so I have an advantage in being of 'lower supply' as a male. But it's difficult to 'find someone naturally' not through a dating site, as well... about 98% of the population isn't ace, so finding someone compatible by random chance probably happens less often. (Respondent #37, He/Him, Aegosexual)

Even if an asexual happens to make connections with other asexuals, their shared sexual orientation does not remove the nuances of dating. It's unlikely two heterosexual people would be able to form a relationship on the basis of their sexuality alone, and the same can be said for asexual people. Partners have to be compatible with one another, and that bond comes from more than a shared lack of sexual attraction. One respondent shared their experience, explaining:

> I used an LGBT dating site where you could identify as asexual. First: I think it's a shame that one site didn't differentiate 'romantic' and 'sexual' attraction. […] Two: it really doesn't mean much in the end. I met a girl [around] my age, with a lot in common with me, who was ace. But I didn't feel anything romantic towards her. It's hard because just because you're both asexual doesn't mean you'll end up working as a couple! (Respondent #115, She/Her, Asexual)

As the statistics above showed, the demographics of asexuals tend to lean towards a larger young, white/Caucasian, female, and gender-neutral populations. If an asexual person is looking

to date someone who does not fall within these demographics, the challenge of finding a suitable partner may increase. So, understanding these insights, it becomes better understood why asexual people who want to be in romantic or sexual relationships usually have to navigate the allosexual dating field.

ROMANTIC AND/OR SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Experiences in Relationships

It is necessary to highlight that there are asexual people, across the spectrum, with positive experiences and outcomes of relationships. Researchers tend to focus on the negative aspects of asexuality and the challenges which come with navigating relationships, such as the ones mentioned above. However, many asexual people (n = 102) have either been in or are in healthy romantic relationships. These relationships can vary in their degree of intimacy and sexual activity between partners, with participants explaining how healthy communication and an accepting partner are essential in any relationship. One participant described their experience:

> Overall, it has been great. Not knowing my asexuality made it hard at times, but it has been good to know that my partner will remain by my side. We compromise with our sexual activities now, but I hadn't always been open to it. My partner has never pushed or coerced me into participating. We have shown our love for each other in different ways. (Respondent #14, She/Her, Asexual)

Healthy asexual relationships do not tend to follow heteronormative social scripts of what a "typical" relationship should look like. Some asexual people are polyamorous (n = 13) or are willing to be in open relationships, which allows them to build more complex relationships with their partner(s). Healthy asexual relationships showcase how sexual activity is not necessary in a

relationship for both partners to feel loved and fulfilled. However, asexual people can also enjoy traditional, monogamous, and nuclear relationships.

Negative and unhealthy relationships are common for people of every sexuality and gender identity, and asexual people are not excluded from this. Many participants (n = 139) shared their experiences with negative relationships. The challenges with navigating the allo-ace dating field also make their way into romantic and sexual relationships. In established relationships, however, these negative aspects can worsen. Feelings of discomfort, guilt, sadness, denial, pressure, and self-loathing were also shared in responses about negative experiences in romantic/sexual relationships. Respondents also expressed feeling as though their actions were performative. They had to pretend to act or feel a certain way to appease their partner(s) or social expectations. For example, a participant explained their experience as:

> Stilted. Like I was playing a part in a play. I didn't realize people were supposed to want to kiss and be close until I was in that position in my early 20s. So, my teens felt like I was dressing up and playing a part in a play, and I was waiting for curtain call. (Respondent #194, She/Her, Demisexual)

Negative experiences in asexual relationships can be extreme. Some participants shared stories about having their identities suppressed, forcing themselves to engage in activities they were not comfortable with, emotional manipulation, and sexual assault. Another respondent shared their experience:

> Emotionally scarring. Having sex to get a partner is horrible. Having to keep it up after acquiring said partner, horrible. The emotional abuse I endured because I wasn't performing the way my partner thought I should be was devastating. The emotional pain

> and rejection my partners faced was unfair to them. Just a real crap show. (Respondent #297, She/Her, Asexual)

A large number of respondents (n = 121) shared how they did not realise they were asexual prior to entering into romantic and sexual relationships. So, for some, part of the negativity of their relationship(s) came from feeling as though something was wrong with them for not having the same intense libido which other people expected of them. As one person wrote:

> I have only been in romantic relationships when I was questioning my sexuality. I found the experience to be traumatic because I was upset by sexual contact and kissing but did not know why. I would dissociate during dates and be constantly anxious around my partner. This occurred with my first boyfriend, however I was extremely lucky because he was super understanding and patient and always asked for my consent. I had a much more fulfilling relationship with him after we broke up and just stayed really good friends. (Respondent #138, She/Her, Queer Asexual)

Some issues may stem from a lack of sexual libido. However, the problems lie in the responses that come from a lack of sexual activity. While some asexual people have a more fluid response to intimacy, this does not apply to every asexual. Participants felt that it was unfair for allosexual people to expect them to be able change their lack of desire, since that expectation cannot be met. Participants emphasized that it is acceptable for people to end a relationship due to sexual incompatibility, especially if it affects one's mental, physical, and/or emotional wellbeing.

Aspects of Allo-Ace Relationships

The analysis of asexual experiences and perspectives regarding allo-ace relationships brought forth two noteworthy topics. First, a grey area of consent was mentioned by several participants (n = 70). Some asexuals are sex-repulsed and do not desire any type of sexual

intimacy, but others are sex-neutral or sex-positive and therefore are willing to engage in sexual activities with their partners. However, this presents a conundrum of consent. Participants understood consent as needing an enthusiastic "yes" from both parties. But then, what of those who are willing, but not enthusiastic? Since many asexual people do not feel sexual attraction, the constructions and nuances of consent become unique to the individual. One participant explained this idea in their writing:

> Asexual consent is not allosexual consent. Even sex favorable aces have a fundamentally different sexual experience than their allosexual counterparts because they do not experience any particular attraction to the person. Sex is fundamentally different for asexual people in some often overlooked ways, and I've seen what ignorance of that fact can do to someone. [...] Often, our wants, [needs], and boundaries are different than what people are used to, and we have to be our own advocate when pursuing romantic and/or sexual relationships. (Respondent #63, She/They, Asexual)

This grey area can be messy and confusing, with no single question or answer able to apply to the diversity of asexual relationships. Some participants shared that they had consented and engaged in sexual activity prior to realising their asexuality, despite them not finding enjoyment in doing so. Others found compromises in their relationships and were willing to engage in sexual activities with their partners but would not describe themselves as enthusiastic. To this point, another respondent shared their experience:

> I felt [safe] and loved. I *wanted* to give myself to him, not because I had the drive but because I knew he wanted it and I wanted to make him happy. (Respondent #194, She/Her, Demisexual)

Respondents explained that if an asexual person willingly consents to sexual activity, and that consent is not impacted by coercion or manipulation, then it is not sexual assault. Sex-neutral and sex-positive asexuals can find enjoyment in sexual activity through many ways, such as making others feel pleasure. To define any sexual activity done with an asexual person as sexual assault delegitimizes these diverse experiences.

The second commonality participants mentioned included feelings of guilt and doubt. While some participants expressed feeling othered by society, those in relationships with allosexual people can experience a unique feeling of guilt and doubt due to their sexuality. For some (n = 33), this sense of guilt comes from feeling as though they cannot provide for their partners. As previously mentioned, asexual people understand sex to be an essential part of allosexual relationships, so by not desiring sexual activity, it can make one feel as though they are inhibiting their partner's happiness. Some feel as though they must engage in sexual activity for their partner's sake, despite not wanting to, while others maintain their boundaries but feel bad for saying "no." As one person explained:

> One of my partners is hyper-sexual so they can sometimes crave intimacy I can't give them, which can be stressful and guilt inducing (though they never try to pressure me). (Respondent #121, He/They, Demi-greysexual)

Other asexuals experience doubt in their relationships. This doubt can come both from one's self and their partner(s). A lack of trust in one's partner led to self-doubting, as some participants (n = 11) expressed feeling as though their lack of sexual desire might result in the relationship ending despite their partner(s) reassuring them that it was not a problem. Asexual people do trust their allosexual partners, but it can be hard to disconnect oneself from that feeling of doubt. As one participant explained:

> The feeling of "not being enough" for your partner […] It's a constant fear for a lot of asexual people, that gets [kind of] glossed over. Even if you overcome the fear and tell your partner you're ace upfront, there can be a fear that someday they'll leave you because "they miss sex." And for me, that is a founded fear. Because I've lived that exact scenario. (Respondent #153, He/Him, Asexual)

Then, doubt can come from one's partner(s). Some participants (n = 20) explained how their lack of sexual desire led to their partner(s) feeling unwanted, unattractive, or as though they had done something wrong to cause this "strain." This might be due to how sexual and romantic attractions are often intertwined for allosexual people. It may be difficult for an allosexual person to feel truly loved without their partner being sexually attracted to them. A respondent shared their experience:

> It did strain my relationship with my husband in a way, as my lack of sexual attraction to him compounded his self esteem issues with his appearance. (Respondent #264, They/Them, Asexual)

For some, these feelings can overwhelm the relationship and lead to its end. For others, their guilt was a tool used by their partners to manipulate them into undesired sexual activities. However, many of the participants expressed feeling happy and fulfilled in their relationships despite these negative feelings. While they or their partner(s) may feel this doubt or guilt, it was not enough to end the relationship or leave them feeling unhappy most of the time. Respondents explained how there are ways to healthily work through these negative emotions, such as prioritizing communication. Ultimately, asexuals still love their partner(s) and are loved in return.

PLATONIC RELATIONSHIPS

No Desire for Romance or Sex

For many respondents (n = 114), the idea of being in a romantic or sexual relationship was not appealing. The reasons for these sentiments ranged greatly across respondents, showcasing the diversity of perspectives within the asexual community. Some noted that perhaps one day they would want to be in a relationship of some kind, while others felt strongly opposed to the idea of any romance or sexuality in their lives.

One aspect some found unappealing was the standards and expectations that come with romantic relationships. Despite not wanting them, many asexuals (n = 139) noted how they feel or have felt pressured into relationships to be perceived as normal. Participants addressed the concept of amatonormativity and shared frustrations its expectations. Additionally, some respondents feel as though friendship and other platonic relationships are seen as less important than romantic/sexual ones. One participant explained this as they wrote:

> I identify as asexual and aromantic, so I've been in relationships, but I've never really felt sexually and romantically attracted to my partners. [...] I [would] rather take care of my platonic relationships. Friendships are very important to me. I feel very close to and love my friends. I share intimacy with them, by being open and honest and vulnerable about emotional and personal things. There is no sex and no romantic feelings. Just friendship. Something that I feel like is so overlooked and underrated in our society. I feel like our society rates romantic and sexual relationships much higher than platonic relationships. They seem more important. The lack of a sexual/romantic relationship, the lack of romantic love, is viewed as something devastating. There's something important missing. To me that is absolute rubbish. My life is whole and complete and full of love without romantic/sexual relationships. (Respondent #279, She/Her, Asexual)

Some participants (n = 45) also noted how friendship is often undervalued within Western society. As mentioned above, many asexuals feel annoyance and discomfort towards the emphasis placed on sexual relationships, but there are some who extend those feelings towards romantic relationships as well. They argue there is a certain type of privilege which comes with intimate relationships. Privileges can be institutional, such as marriage benefits or having someone to split rent with, but they can be social as well. Singleness is seen as something we must pity, something undesirable.

Next, the challenges with dating, as mentioned previously, were deemed to be a nuisance for some asexuals. Respondents noted their previous negative experiences with dating and relationships, explaining they were happier to not deal with those difficulties. Some participants also noted that choosing not to date was important for their safety. By not attempting to date allosexual people, they are able to keep themselves mentally, emotionally, and physically safe. As explained in this response:

> This is a part of the reason I don't think a relationship is achievable for me; as the majority of people are allosexual, telling a potential partner that I'm asexual would be necessary from the beginning, otherwise they may expect something from me that I won't be able to fulfill (I.e. sex). I feel like this would be a dealbreaker for a lot of people; either that or they'd pretend to be okay with it when they're actually not. Also, I'm scared of extreme reactions and would rather just not risk my health. (Respondent #263, She/They, Asexual)

Other reasons for not wanting to be in a romantic/sexual relationship was that some asexuals found them unappealing. They expressed not enjoying having other people taking up their time

and space. Some (n = 59) deemed romance and sex to be boring and overrated, describing relationships in negative terms, such as “claustrophobic” or “restricting.” One participant wrote:

> Not a fan. Seems nice on paper, and then it starts being claustrophobic and you miss having alone time. (Respondent #103, It/Its, Aromantic Asexual)

Next, a lack of desire for romantic and sexual relationships came from disgust of anything intimate. These responses do not necessarily come from a place of trauma, but rather are part of one’s self. For example, a portion of the asexual community also falls within the aromantic spectrum, meaning they have no desire for romantic or sexual relationships of any kind; they are much happier maintaining platonic relationships. Few people (n = 18) expressed discomfort at the thought of someone else feeling romantically or sexually interested in them, while others had more intense, negative reactions. For example, one person described relationships as:

> Horrifying and repulsive and something I’d almost pick jail or possibly even death over depending on how horribly incompatible the other person was and how trapped I was. I hate physical touch and inevitably hate anyone I have to live with long term and not being able to do what I want. (Respondent #212, She/Her, no label)

A small number of participants (n = 9) stated feelings of loneliness due to not having that sense of closeness romantic relationships tend to bring, but they found comfort in their friends and family. Overall, the potential loneliness was deemed as less of an issue than being in a relationship. Some participants noted they asexuals are taught that a life without a romantic partner was one filled with loneliness and sadness, but these results show that this is not a defining aspect of asexual experiences. Asexual people actively dismantle the idea that romantic relationships are needed to live a happy and fulfilling life.

Queer Platonic Relationships

As indicated in the participants' demographic information, many asexual people are also aromantic, which is why there can be an overlap in experiences. For example, one aspect of asexual relationships which ties in closely with aromantic relationships are *Queer Platonic Relationships* (QPRs). AVEN (2023) defines a QPR as "a committed relationship that is neither romantic nor sexual in nature but is based on an emotional bond beyond friendship, often between aromantic and/or asexual people" (n.p.). However, an individual might describe their own QPR differently, as these relationships change depending on the needs and wants of the people within them. QPRs were discussed by several respondents (n = 61). Some respondents expressed a desire to be in a QPR (n = 31) while others had experience being in them (n = 14). Of these individuals, most identified as asexual (n = 7), with demisexual being the second most common sexual identify (n = 3). Participants described QPRs as either intense friendships, family-like bonds, or romantic relationships without romance. Others shared they engaged in romantic or sexual activity with their QPR, but less so than one would expect in a romantic/sexual relationship. One participant described their experience in the following way:

> I'm in a queerplatonic relationship right now, and I don't have the vocab to describe how much it means to me. I can tell him anything. Anything, positive or negative, and he won't judge me for it. We spent a lot of time together in-person prior to graduating from college, and there were a couple of people who asked us about our relationship (separately). I ended up saying "There's nothing between us", because sex was definitely not part of it, but saying we were "just friends" felt like the bigger lie. Now that we don't live near each other, all of our interaction is via text and again I've had to field questions about our relationship and if it's "healthy." I wouldn't be alive today if it weren't for him.

> He got me through two suicidal periods. How can that be encapsulated by our current relationship vocabulary? (Respondent #309, They/Them, Asexual)

However, it can be challenging to find a partner for a QPR. It may be difficult for an allosexual person to grasp the idea in the same ways asexual and/or aromantic people do. The level of commitment and connection goes beyond a basic friendship, and allosexual people may have trouble seeing the difference between a QPR and an allosexual romantic/sexual relationship. Additionally, the concept seems to be niche within the 2SLGBTQI+ community, tending to be more common with asexual/aromantic individuals. As one participant explained:

> My dream relationship is a queerplatonic relationship where you live together with your best friend and you cuddle and [maybe] you smooch every now and then, but it's about the friendship. Ideally there would be no sex involved. Those expectations/wants are often hard to fulfill unless you are really patiently getting into heavily ace-[represented] spaces which are hard to find. (Respondent #118, She/They, Asexual)

Overall, queer platonic relationships are safe; they are a way for asexual and aromantic people to have a close bond with someone else without having to adhere to societal standards about what a typical relationship should look or be like. They challenge what can be considered as a legitimate intimate relationship. Their lack of consistency allows them to change and grow with the people involved. While only a small portion of participants stated that they were in a QPR or had been in a QPR, almost all who did expressed feelings of happiness with their relationships (n = 13).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate the complex ways asexual people perceive and experience dating and relationships, and in so doing, expand our understanding of the diversity of asexuality. The participants in this study shared diverse stories and mindsets in the ways they

navigated their intimate worlds, which align with the results from similar studies (Hall & Knox, 2022; Jolene Sloan, 2015; Vares, 2018). The results of this paper add new insights about asexuality by providing information about the underlying aspects of how asexuals perceive and experience relationships. The findings provide insight into the reasons why asexual people might be hesitant to attempt dating. Through awareness of the limited within-community dating pool, it can be understood why asexual people often only have allosexuals as options for potential partners. However, the allosexual emphasis on sex within relationships can cause asexual people to feel mistrustful of potential partners and result in them being wary of entering allo-ace relationships.

Moving past dating, once in relationships, the asexual experience is not consistently negative or positive. This shows that asexual relationships are as diverse as allosexual ones. When studying any marginalized or minority community, researchers can lean into deficit narratives. This portrayal of asexuals through deficit-based narratives can be unintentional, as findings highlight the challenges asexual people face without accounting for their resilience. This study too includes negative depictions of asexual experiences. However, overwhelming negativity can skew perspectives, causing studies to overlook the richness of the asexual community. For this article, a point was made to begin moving away from deficit narratives by showcasing the positive relationships asexual people have. By shifting focus from the struggles of asexuality, this study reinforces the diversity of asexual experiences regarding dating and relationships.

Feelings of guilt surrounding sexual intimacy can impact both the asexual person and their allosexual partner(s). Overall, there is no universal asexual experience of relationships; the way asexual people navigate dating and relationships can range widely from person to person.

The details about consent covered in the section *Aspects of allo-ace relationships* aligns with previous research about the concept of consenting to unwanted sex. In the study by O'Sullivan and Allgeier (1998), allosexual people were found to also experience this same grey area of consent when in a committed relationship. Impett and Peplau (2002) found that heterosexual women will sometimes engage in sexual activity, despite not feeling sexual desire, for the purposes of satisfying their partners sexual needs; this aligns with some of the reasons that asexuals will engage in sexual activity as documented by Catri (2021), Hermann et al. (2022) and the results of this study. Other times, compliance with sexual activity can be due to negative reasons, such as feelings of guilt or pressure (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010).

Additionally, it is common for both women and men to comply with unwanted sexual activities (Quinn-Nilas, Kennett & Humphreys, 2013; Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). Similar to the experiences shared by the asexuals in this study, for allosexuals "the outcomes of compliance with unwanted sexual advances are not unilaterally negative or positive" (Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018, p. 612). This shows that asexuals are not the only people who experience this grey area of consent. While the studies mentioned focus on heterosexual couples, this phenomenon potentially applies to most sexual minorities. Future research could examine the frequency that members of different sexual orientations consent to unwanted sex and investigate the broad impacts of this occurrence.

In addition, the lack of studies which focus on platonic relationships within the asexual community does support the asexual viewpoint that friendship and family connections are deemed as less valued than romantic/sexual relationships. This study addresses this problem by devoting a portion of the results to analyzing asexual platonic relationships. In doing so, a better understanding of asexual perspectives and experiences are shown. The results show how asexual

people find connection and fulfillment in their platonic relationships despite societal norms deeming them to be less important in comparison to romantic and sexual relationships. The pushback against amatonormativity is an emerging topic in asexual research (Vares, 2022). The information provided about Queer Platonic Relationships also provide further insight into the diversity of asexual relationships. QPRs demonstrate how the distinctions between platonic, romantic, and sexual relationships can be blurred. Asexuals in QPRs dismantle societal definitions of platonic relationships and question the limitations of our vocabulary.

The results show the experiences of asexual people transcend beyond *AVEN*'s community, providing greater legitimacy to previous research which share similar results. The large sample size of this study proved to be a benefit. Certain themes presented in this article have potential for generalizability. Another strength comes from the open-ended, qualitative nature of the study. Open-ended questions allowed participants to explain their thoughts and experiences, as close-ended questions do not allow for the fluidity of experiences to be represented in the same manner.

LIMITATIONS

The current study is limited in the diversity of its sample. To begin, the results of this study best represent the population of asexuals who live in the Global North, such as Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The survey was written in English and posted on websites primarily used by people who speak English. This impacted who was able to participate in the study. However, it should be noted that asexuality may not be known nor accepted in other parts of the world, particularly in places where 2SLGBTQI+ identities are criminalized, which strongly impacts location-based demographics. Secondly, the sample may not strongly represent people of color. An error in the question pertaining to the race and ethnicity of participants was

deemed to have low validity, and therefore was unable to be included in the demographic information of the study. Finally, there was no question about the education level nor social class of participants. The results of this study are not reliably able to represent these subgroups. Future work should address the limitations of this study. Non-Western populations, communities of color, and older generations are all in need of further insight.

Another limitation is that the current study does not include the sex of participants. Without this demographic information, the study cannot be used in comparison with existing research. Previous research has linked biological sex to sexual desire, finding that men desire and engage in sexual activity more than women (Nimbi, Tripodi, Rossi, Navarro-Cremades & Simonelli, 2020). It must be noted that this is not an absolute. In their meta-analytic review, Frankenbach, Weber, Loschelder, Kilger and Friese (2022) found that, while men tend to have stronger sex drives than women on average, it is not uncommon for women to have stronger sex drives than men. Approximately a third of cisgender women have higher sex drives than cisgender men (Frankenbach et al., 2022). Sexual desire tends to fluctuate based on sex. Over the life course, the sexual desire of men tends to be more stable than that of women. However, the "patterns of desire are remarkably similar for men and women when measured over the short term, although there is some evidence that women may show greater variability in desire over the longer term. Men, just like women, fluctuate in the degree to which they desire sex" (Harris et al., 2023, p. 1476). It cannot be known if the data of the current study aligns with previous understandings of heterosexual relationships in which men desire sexual activity more than women. Biological sex should be included in future studies, with precautions taken to ensure that demographic questions are sensitive to the gender diversity within the asexual community.

CONCLUSION

Future research can delve more deeply into some of the more preliminary findings that emerged from this study. For example, the following questions are fertile areas for future research: Do the romantic and sexual experiences of asexuals vary by microlabel? Are sex-positive and sex-neutral asexuals more likely to have satisfying relationships than sex-adverse asexuals? In addition, there can be more research done about QPRs. They could provide new avenues for asexual research, potentially adding insight into the relationships of aromantic individuals. Limited information is available about the demographics of QPRs, their outcomes and effects, or overall satisfaction for those in them. In this study, the majority of individuals in QPRs identified as "asexual", so future research could examine the differences between asexual and aromantic QPRs. By providing further detail into the experiences of asexual people, researchers can begin to spread awareness about this sexuality and analyze the impact of societal norms about romance, sex, and friendships. Asexuality presents an exciting area of study for researchers. With such diversity in the community, there is still much to be learned. Asexual people are eager to have their unique voices heard.

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COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Conflicts of interest/Competing interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

Research involving Human Participants and/or Animals

This study involved human participants and was approved by a Research Ethics Board.

Informed consent

Informed consent was received from all participants involved in the study. Additionally, all participants gave informed consent for the publication of their responses

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Table 1

Common microlabels

Key Term	Definition
Aceflux	"someone whose sexuality or romantic orientation fluctuates or changes over time or in different environments, while generally staying within the ace spectrum" (Young, 2023, p. 58).
Aegosexual	"someone who may enjoy or be aroused by sexual content, masturbate, or have sexual fantasies but has no desire to have sex with someone or get into a sexual relationship with another person. An aegosexual person's fantasies might be in third person" (Young, 2023, p. 58).
Apothisexual	"another word for sex repulsed. This describes a range of different experiences: a sex-repulsed person may be comfortable engaging with or encountering sexual content 'in the wild' but not want to have sex themself, or they may be totally revolted by anything sexual" (Young, 2023, pp. 59-60).
Cupiosexual	"an ace-spectrum person who is not sex averse" (Young, 2023, p. 60).
Demisexual	"someone who can only experience sexual attraction or desire after an emotional bond has been formed (or the adjective describing a person as such). This is different from the choice to abstain from sex until certain criteria are met" (AVEN, 2023).
Graysexual	"someone who identifies with the area between asexuality and sexuality (or the adjective describing a person as such). For example, they may experience sexual attraction very rarely, only under specific circumstances, or of an

	intensity so low that is ignorable and not a necessity in relationships." (AVEN, 2023).
2SLGBTQI+	"the acronym used by the Government of Canada […] 2S: at the front, recognizes Two-Spirit people […] L: Lesbian; G: Gay; B: Bisexual; T: Transgender; Q: Queer; I: Intersex, considers sex characteristics beyond sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression; +: is inclusive of people who identify as part of sexual and gender diverse communities, who use additional terminologies" (Government of Canada, 2022).
Allosexual	A person who is not asexual (Brunning & McKeever, 2021).

Table 2

Age ranges of participants

Age	N	Percent
19-25	205	58.45%
26-35	110	31.52%
36-45	30	8.60%
46-55	4	1.15%
56-65	1	0.29%

Table 3

Location of participants

Location	N	Percent
North America	221	63.32%
Europe	105	30.09%
Australia/Oceania	9	2.58%
South America	7	2.01%
Asia	6	1.72%
Africa	1	.29%

Table 4

Pronouns of participants

Pronouns	N	Percent
She/Her	159	45.55%
They/Them	53	15.18%
She/They	39	11.17%
He/Him	28	8.02%
He/They	20	5.73%
Any/All	21	6.02%
She/He/They	4	1.15%
Other*	21	6.02%
No answer	4	1.15%

*The category “Other” includes neo pronouns/pronoun combinations which were not used more than three times, such as It, Xe, Hen, and Ey.

Table 5

Labels and Microlabels used by participants

Microlabel	N	Percent
Asexual/Ace	193	55.30%
Aromantic Asexual/AroAce	48	13.75%
Demisexual	30	8.60%
Aegosexual	17	4.87%
Greysexual	15	4.30%
Demi/Grey	6	1.72%
Queer Ace	4	1.15%
Ace Spec*	15	4.30%
Questioning/Unsure	12	3.44%

*The category “Ace Spec” includes microlabels or combinations of labels that did not appear more than three times such as Aceflux, Quirosexual, Apothisexual, or Cupiosexual.

Table 6

Have you ever been in a romantic relationship?

Microlabel	N	Percent	Overall Percent
Asexual			
Yes	104	53.88%	30.59%
No	85	44.04%	25.00%
Prefer not to answer	4	2.07%	1.18%
AroAce			
Yes	18	37.50%	5.29%
No	28	58.33%	8.24%
Prefer not to answer	2	4.17%	0.59%
Demisexual			
Yes	24	80.00%	7.06%
No	4	13.33%	1.18%
Prefer not to answer	2	6.67%	0.59%
Aegosexual			
Yes	4	23.53%	1.18%
No	12	70.59%	3.53%
Prefer not to answer	1	5.88%	0.29%
Greysexual			
Yes	9	60.00%	2.65%
No	5	33.33%	1.47%
Prefer not to answer	1	6.67%	0.29%

Demi/Grey			
Yes	6	100%	1.76%
Queer Ace			
Yes	3	75.00%	0.88%
No	1	25.00%	0.29%
Ace Spec			
Yes	9	60.00%	2.65%
No	4	26.67%	1.18%
Prefer not to answer	2	13.33%	0.59%
None/Questioning			
Yes	6	50.00%	1.76%
No	5	41.67%	1.47%
Prefer not to answer	1	8.33%	0.29%

Table 7

Have you ever been in a sexual relationship?

Microlabel	N	Percent	Overall Percent
Asexual			
Yes	45	23.32%	13.24%
No	142	73.58%	41.76%
Prefer not to answer	6	3.11%	1.76%
AroAce			
Yes	9	18.75%	2.65%
No	39	81.25%	11.47%
Demisexual			
Yes	19	63.33%	5.59%
No	9	30.00%	2.65%
Prefer not to answer	2	6.67%	0.59%
Aegosexual			
Yes	2	11.76%	0.59%
No	15	88.24%	4.41%
Greysexual			
Yes	5	33.33%	1.47%
No	9	60.00%	2.65%
Prefer not to answer	1	6.67%	0.29%
Demi/Grey			
Yes	5	83.33%	1.47%

No	1	16.67%	0.29%
Queer Ace			
Yes	3	75.00%	0.88%
No	1	25.00%	0.29%
Ace Spec			
Yes	7	46.67%	2.06%
No	8	53.33%	2.35%
None/Questioning			
Yes	5	41.67%	1.47%
No	7	58.33%	2.06%