

## We need to abolish asexual stereotypes

By [Kate Marshall](#)

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Image: [trollhare](#)

Take a moment to think back to your sex education. There are a few common experiences, in Britain at least.

It seems almost everyone has tried to put a condom on a plastic phallus. Most people were taught about the age of consent, that they should use contraception and how to avoid STIs. If you went to a progressive school, you may have been one of the lucky minority to learn about gay and lesbian relationships. We've all probably picked up on the importance of waiting until you're ready.

But one vital aspect of sexuality is almost always forgotten: asexuality. It is estimated that one per cent of the population falls somewhere on the asexual spectrum. This spectrum covers a plethora of identities, generally absorbing anyone who experiences sexual attraction or a sex drive different to the norm.

This includes people who have no libido, are repulsed by the idea of sex, do not feel sexual attraction until an emotional bond is formed, or find their interest in sex is in flux.

However, public perception of asexuality is limited almost totally to someone who does not want, and will never want to have sex.

Compounding this are stereotypes and stigmatisation. Portrayals of asexual characters in the media are generally limited to artificial intelligence, whose lack of interest in sex is a sign of inhumanity, or greater intelligences who have gone 'beyond' desire.

Alternatively, and more harmfully, many characters must 'overcome' their lack of interest as part of their

emotional development. It is often coded alongside autism, abuse victims and mental illness. Standoffish, socially awkward and emotionless characters are also frequently associated with a nonexistent libido.

Asexual identities outside of sexless dispositions are entirely forgotten. These stereotypes both exclude asexuals who don't fit the narrative, and turn those who do into their unwitting proof.

Abstinence often makes the sex ed curriculum, especially in Christian schools, but this does not suffice. Abstinence is a choice, a commitment based on aspirations or beliefs.

Asexuality, as evidenced by its appearance on the long-form acronym LGBTQIA, is a matter of orientation.

Even the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) ran a campaign claiming 'A is for Ally' earlier this year, replacing the position of asexuals in their own community with straight supporters.

It is for many an invisible orientation, unbeknown to others unless declared. Our society treats adults and their relationships as sexual by default. An adult virgin is treated with pity and mockery, particularly a male one, and a woman seeking romance or intimacy without a sex drive is shamed as a tease.

Too many asexuals head into their first sexual encounter unaware of their orientation and differing needs, and this can be an incredibly harmful experience.

Finally, there is hostility to the identity from within the community itself. Queer spaces are often sexual spaces, prioritising sexual health and pleasure. This is important, once again filling a gap often left by school sex ed, but it has exclusionary effects.

There is a continuing debate over the queerness of asexuality, and its combinations with romantic orientations - heteroromantic, biromantic, etc. As a spectrum of identities instead of an easily marked boundary, education and awareness about asexuality is vital.

With this in mind, Asexuality Awareness Week kicks off on 19 October, aiming to reach confused, questioning or totally ignorant individuals who still remain unaware of the asexual spectrum in all its complexity, and of asexual individuals in all their diversity.

If one per cent of the population is asexual, that makes seventy million of us. You've probably met a dozen already.



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## 5 comments

Kate

15 Oct '15 at 6:27 pm

The A can also stand for aromantic and agender! Thought I put that in, must have missed it.

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Julie D.

15 Oct '15 at 10:44 pm

Great article! Literally the other day I had to convince a guy at Philosophy society that ace people exist because he'd never heard of one. He said something along the lines of "Where are these people?" and I said "You're looking at one". The douchebag also denied the existence of non-binary people but I decided to save that one for another day. :P

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PiF

20 Oct '15 at 3:46 pm

Is it a stereotype or factual information? Most of those identify not as Asexual but as within the Asexual spectrum. Add to that most identifying are between 16-26 and 75% female. So is it a phase mostly by western young females on the internet or is it a genuine thing? I am Asexual, do not require a spectrum to identify as such and am well above the age of the internet identification. So stereotypes, or simply reporting the average identification?

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Kate

21 Oct '15 at 10:37 pm

A stereotype can be based in the majority but that doesn't stop it being harmful for those who don't fit. Asexual awareness is about highlighting and celebrating that diversity, not about defending a dominant narrative that excludes people who are welcome in the community.

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Sophie

27 Oct '15 at 12:59 am

I'd be very interested to read your sources for those statistics! But while it's great that you don't "require a spectrum" to ID, it's important to acknowledge that the spectrum exists regardless and whether you are a "typical" ace or not, you are no more or less valid and important. If you're already within a marginal and marginalised community the last thing you need is people going "oh but you're not like the rest of us so you're not important", that's what we're trying to stop!

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