

## “The Sex-Ladenness and Romance-Ladenness of Everyday Chit Chat: Revisiting (Introducing?) Asexuality”

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The term ‘asexual’ refers to persons who do not experience sexual arousal or who choose not to engage in sexual activity, although some may experience romantic feelings. Perhaps best described by Foucault, society upholds “compulsory sexuality” – the idea that human beings are “naturally sexual.” This idea, coupled with the current Western trend of “sex positivity” – the notion that sex and sexuality are both natural and healthy – and its proliferation of sexualities (“pansexual,” “demisexual,” etc.), can serve to reinforce the sense that there is something wrong with asexuals. Recently, the natural and social sciences have shown increased interest in “alternative” (i.e., non-heteronormative) sexualities. While interest, expert and otherwise, has increased with respect to alternative sexualities, asexuality remains relatively under-researched, unknown, or largely misunderstood. When asexuals are misunderstood, social constraints placed upon them can be not only epistemically misguided, but oppressive. Confessing a lack of sexual desire (or a lack of desire to act on sexual desire) could be emancipatory for those who wish to feel free in announcing aspects of their self. However, in spaces where sex positivity is celebrated, asexual people may feel not only loneliness in their inability to “out” who they are, but also anxiety and perhaps a need to feign normalcy (i.e., feign sexual desire) in order to be with others, whether comfortably or not.

Certainly, “normal” bodies are not just “for sex,” but sex is “supposed to be” part of what a “normal” body and those with a “normal” psychology desire. In turn, an asexual person may wonder, “What is my body for?; What am *I* for?” Of a declared (or taken to be) asexual person, others too may wonder, “What is their body for?” or, more radically, “What is an asexual *for*?”; “What do I do with them?”; How am I to behave around them?” Wittgensteinian-style games provide social maps through which we unconsciously order even everyday conversations. I wish to focus on the linguistic aspects of these social maps. For instance, while the bluntness and details of apparently innocent questions such as “Are you married?” or “Are you single?” vary depending on location and context, they can be the cause of much discomfort and aloneness for ace folk. Everyday conversations are embedded with assumptions of compulsory sexuality, sometimes producing a feeling on the part of many ace people that they are out of sync with the rest of the sexual world (and, perhaps, for better or worse, they are).

Examining asexuality in relation to, but not limited to, social epistemology and social metaphysics in particular, is a relatively novel area of research. Philosophy has paid little attention to this area of inquiry, yet can serve in the task of demarcating boundaries and types of sexualities, lending itself to finer-grained interdisciplinary research. This, in turn, can lend itself to real-world amendments to practices and understandings of both others and the self. Moreover, while research pertaining to asexuality is of importance to the natural and social sciences, examining asexuality from a philosophical perspective is imperative as there is a moral dimension to asexuality that philosophy is uniquely able to address.