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An Ace Theory of Relationships: Asexuality and Narratives of Relationship Norms

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Abstract

Asexuality studies is an emergent transdisciplinary field with many gaps to fill. This thesis aims to address asexual individuals' own stories and perspectives on relationships and the norms that surround them. Utilizing semi-structured interviews and the theory of queer phenomenology the thesis sets out to give space to often overlooked and underrepresented points of view. The material gives rise to two main themes, that of an asexual perspective on norms, as well as that of language, both as a tool for resistance and self-identification, but also as something that creates uncomfortable restraints.

Keywords: asexuality, norms, relationships, queer phenomenology, asexual theory

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List of Abbreviations

AVEN – The Asexual Visibility and Education Network

AUREA – The Aromantic-spectrum Union for Recognition, Education, and Advocacy

LGBTQIA+ – the acronym used to describe the queer community mainly used within this thesis. Sometimes substituted for LGBTQI+ to highlight the exclusion of asexuality and aromanticism

QPR – queer-platonic relationship

List of terminology

Allosexual – same as zedsexual, but has strong ties to sexology and a somewhat problematic history so it will not be used more than strictly necessary in this thesis

Aromantic – an aromantic person experiences little to no romantic attraction to other people

Asexual – an asexual person experiences little to no sexual attraction to other people

Demisexual – a demisexual person is someone who only experiences sexual attraction to people they have formed a strong emotional bond with

Graysexual – a graysexual person is someone who only experiences infrequent or very little sexual attraction

Sexual attraction – the desire to have sexual contact with someone else or to share one's sexuality with them

Zedromantic – a zedromantic person is someone who experiences romantic attraction. It is on the opposite end of the romantic spectrum to aromantic

Zedsexual – a zedsexual person experiences sexual attraction. Is on the opposite end of the spectrum to asexuality

1. Introduction

When I was in my late teens, I started to suspect I had a big crush on a friend. I wasn't ready to admit it to myself yet, but I posed the question 'do I want to have sex with this person?' My immediate response was 'no'. I could not imagine it ever happening, so I came to the conclusion that I in fact did not have a crush on my friend. Some years later I came across the term asexual, and after letting it simmer in the back of my head for a while, I came to the conclusion that it described me pretty well. In hindsight I realize that I indeed had had a crush on my friend, but that I had been conditioned into thinking that love equals desire for sex, as well as assuming that all romantic an/or partnered relationships have a sexual component. Coming to terms with my own asexuality made me realize that relationships are more nuanced. It is from some of these realizations and the discussions they bring that the topic of this master's thesis materialized.

Being asexual means a person does not experience sexual attraction. (AVEN, 2022a) The most common forms of asexuality are: experiencing no sexual attraction ever, experiencing very little or infrequent sexual attraction (also known as graysexual), or only experiencing sexual attraction once a strong emotional bond has been formed with a person (also known as demisexual). (Mardell, 2016) The second and third examples are sometimes seen as not necessarily strictly asexual, but on the asexual spectrum.

At the core of this thesis is the interrogation of asexual people's experiences of relationship norms. Through the use of semi structured interviews and a thematic analysis this thesis highlights the perspectives of asexual people, creating an asexual theory of relationships. This work also utilizes a queer phenomenological (Ahmed, 2006) theoretical perspective to understand norms. Queer phenomenology theorizes how interactions with objects, both abstract and concrete, shape how humans interact with other things in their vicinity, both metaphorically and practically. How people relate to their surroundings and what objects they have in reach is influenced by what objects are most commonly accessible. A less commonly reached for object is not impossible to reach out for but may be harder to access. Through this lens of queer phenomenology, and from a situated asexual perspective, the thesis sheds light on questions of community, asexual identity, and normativity.

2. Background

The largest online platform for asexuality, AVEN (The Asexual Education and Visibility Network), defines asexuality as follows: “An asexual person is a person who does not experience sexual attraction” (AVEN, 2022a). Sexual attraction can be understood in various broad terms, but within the asexual community it holds a rather specific meaning. AVEN defines it as “desire to have sexual contact with someone else or to share [one’s] sexuality with them.” They also note that sexual attraction might not be based on a physical attraction to a person, and that sexual attraction does not necessarily happen instantaneously. (AVEN, 2022b) In other words, sexual attraction is a form of attraction that informs a desire for sexual interaction. This is not to say that sexual attraction is the only reason for desiring sex or engaging in sexual activity, as seen from research by Meston and Buss (2007). They identified over 200 distinct reasons for why humans have sex, many of which are not explicitly related to sexual attraction, at least not in the terms AVEN understands it. Examples of these reasons could be connected to spirituality, wishes to pleasure a partner, getting revenge for being cheated on or simply desiring to feel good.

AVEN’s definition of asexuality is arguably the most widespread, but a variety of definitions exist within the community, some more similar to AVEN’s than others. For example, within their resource book based heavily on community testimonies, Ash Hardell defines asexuality as both an umbrella term and a specific identity term that means “someone who experiences little or no sexual attraction” (Mardell 2016¹: 7). Hardell also explains other terminology used to describe the spectrum of sexual attraction, such as zedsexual, graysexual, and demisexual. Zedsexuality is defined as experiencing lots of sexual attraction (p.29), in binary terms, the opposite of asexual. On the other hand graysexuality indicates “experience[ing] very low amounts of [sexual] attraction” or experiencing it “rarely or only under certain conditions”, but also if someone is unsure of what they experience is sexual attraction or not (p.10). Additionally, someone who is demisexual is generally defined as “a person who only experiences [sexual] attraction to people with whom they have formed a strong emotional bond” (p.165). Hardell’s definition is what will be utilized within this thesis, as it allows for more fluidity and is more open to self-definition than AVEN’s.

¹ Initially published as Ashley Mardell, but in the most recent edition of the book the author had changed their name to Ash Hardell. For respect of the author I will refer to them with their current name, even if it will cause some visual discrepancies with the reference.

Hardell also makes a note that the more common term for *opposite-of-aseexual* within the asexual community is *allosexual*. However, due to the history of the term (being rooted in a clinical sexology which arguably has caused a lot of hardship and pathologization of asexuality) and also due to the word being more of an opposite of the prefix ‘auto’, rather than ‘a”, Hardell prefers zedsexual (p.163-164). There is also the argument that since zed (or simply z) is referencing the whole spectrum by going ‘from A to Z’², from no sexual attraction to all the sexual attraction, it fits with the ongoing joke and generally embraced asexual stereotype of asexual persons appreciating puns.³

The label asexual can also be used together with other labels for sexual orientation, or alternatively, with labels for romantic orientation. Some examples of how labels could be put together are ‘gay asexual’, ‘biromantic asexual’ and ‘aromantic asexual’.

Similarly, aromanticism is a term for not experiencing romantic attraction. This means that a person does not experience attraction that indicates a desire to do romantic acts with another person. In the terms of AUREA, the Aromantic-spectrum Union for Recognition, Education, and Advocacy: “aromanticism is a romantic orientation, which most commonly describes people who experience little to no romantic attraction to others.” (AUREA, 2019). It is often using similar descriptive language as that used for asexuality but should *not* be confused with or assumed to be a sub-group of it. An aromantic person does not have to be asexual, just as an asexual person does not have to be aromantic, but some people do identify with both labels. Furthermore, just as with asexuality, aromanticism exists on a spectrum and come with sub-labels such as grayromantic and demi-romantic (Mardell, 2016: 161-166).

What constitutes as romantic attraction is potentially harder to define than sexual attraction, and each person will have their own understanding of what is romantic and what is not. Some will view for example kissing and handholding as platonic and therefore not inherently romantic (and/or sexual), while for others those acts would be considered romantic (and/or sexual). It can also be culturally and contextually dependent. Providing a comprehensive list of romantic acts would therefore be an impossible task.

² This is a reference of the English alphabet, and hence not universally applicable, at least not with its full context.

³ The underlying assumption of this joke is that if you are disinterested in sex, you have more time to spend on other things, such as wordplay. This could obviously be alienating to asexual people who have an interest in sex or enjoy it for one reason or another.

Furthermore, within the asexual community, the term ‘ace’ is often used as a shorthand for asexuality. An ‘ace person’ would therefore be an asexual person, and ‘ace community’ is the asexual community. The adjective is applicable in all sorts of circumstances and often played with within the community. Further discussions of this term will happen within the theory and analysis chapters.

3. Research overview

3.1 The emergence of asexuality studies

The study of asexuality dates back to at least the 1970’s, however dedicated research was few and far between up until the mid-2000’s.

The earliest study of asexuality that could be found within the scope of working with this thesis dates back to Myra T. Johnson’s essay on asexual and autoerotic women in an anthology called *The Sexually Oppressed* (Gochros & Gochros, 1977). Johnson defines asexuality as having no sexual desire at all, and autoeroticism as experiencing sexual desire but only being interested in engaging in sexual activities alone (p.99). While the definition of asexuality today differs from Johnson’s, autoeroticism has a lot in common with present definitions of autosexuality (see e.g. Mardell, 2016: 7).

Johnson showcases, through letters from readers published in North American women’s magazines in the 1970’s, how the sexual liberation and the encouragements of more and better sex that came with were not something that was universally appealing to women (Johnson 1977). Johnson provides us with a new perspective on a topic that is often lacking in nuance. Being opposed to the discourses of sexual liberation is often read as being conservative, sexually shackled, or simply just “unliberated” (Chu, 2014; Milks, 2014). Johnson’s essay presents us with an alternative. Some people who felt left behind or spoken over by the sexual liberation movement in the United States may simply have felt like the movement did not represent them and their experiences. The sexual revolution certainly brought a lot of important things to the table and opened up discussions, but more and better sex is evidently not the key to everyone’s happiness.

Between the 1970’s and the 2000s, the study of asexuality was infrequent, with only a handful contributions in almost three decades. However, in the early 2000s Anthony F. Bogaert (2004)

helped launch the field into a wider consciousness when he suggested that the asexual population makes up about 1% of the general population. This figure comes from a British national study in the mid 1990's and is not based on self-identification as asexual. Rather it is based on people reporting never having experienced sexual attraction to "either sex" (p.279). Bogaert's study holds significance for the study of asexuality and the asexual community in that it showcased a potential number for prevalence of asexuality, but, as will be elaborated upon in coming paragraphs, within the asexual community it is generally suggested that asexuality is never assigned to anyone else. It is a label that one has to put on themselves. Bogaert's (2004) study is therefore a bit at odds with common practices within the asexual community, but still provides us with a baseline figure for how prevalent the experience is.

Bogaert's work has been widely cited in scholarly works on asexuality. I therefore believe it to be of much importance that we should address its problematic assertions. The figure of 1% is a good starting point for both the study of asexuality and the asexual community, even if the way of coming to that number does not align with current views on how asexuality is to be measured. However, citing this figure does not mean I stand by all of the conclusions drawn from Bogaert's analysis.

Furthermore, Bogaert's study presents a list of possible predictors for asexuality, based on the results from the study. These possible predictors include both biological, social and health factors. Study into predictors have also been endeavored by other researchers such as Poston and Baumle (2010), and Yule et al (2014). However, since asexuality, at least in recent years, is considered a sexual orientation this approach has issues, as trying to find determination factors of a sexual orientation has problematic ethical implications and is generally frowned upon by the LGBTQIA+ communities. Within the LGBTQIA+ communities, gender identities and sexual orientations are understood as innate, or in the case of identities which change overtime, that fluidity is not seen as caused by external factors, and not predicted based on physical attributes, a person's health status or their social context.

3.2 Asexuality and Gender Studies

Research on asexuality has been studied by scholars from many different academic fields such as psychology, sexology, and gender studies to name a few. How asexuality is being understood and approached by scholars seems to vary depending on what area of study the research is being conducted within. The field of gender studies is open to the asexual community's own

conceptions and understandings of itself, and allowing the knowledge production that takes place within the community to be legitimized makes for a fruitful discussion and analysis. Furthermore, as I, the author, identify as asexual and partake in the asexual community I believe this approach to be of benefit for the community. I also agree with Donna Haraway (1988) that perspectives are always partial, and that knowledge is always situated. I will return to discuss my situatedness in a subsequent chapter.

The work on asexuality within the field of gender studies and the many academic disciplines that are interlinked with it, focuses on multiple different topics – some more explicitly within the realm of gender studies than others. In 2014, Karli June Cerankowski and Megan Milks published an anthology collecting chapters on different aspects of asexuality from the perspective of feminist and queer studies. The collection ranges from critique of feminism and LGBTQ+ organizing for exclusion or infantilization of asexuality (Chu 2014), to asexuality's relationships to race and racism (Hawkins Owen, 2014), disability (Kim, 2014), masculinity (Grossman, 2014; Przybylo, 2014), to asexuality in media (Cerankowski, 2014) and much more.

There are also examples of the political position of asexuality within the feminist movement. *An Asexual Manifesto* was written in 1972 on the assuming of an asexual political position as a way of resisting oppressive and objectifying patriarchal structures. The manifesto argues that “needs for affection, warmth, skin contact, which we have been taught to satisfy through interpersonal sex” could be met in other ways and with other types of relations (Orlando, 1972: 4).

As eloquently shown by Ianna Hawkins Owen (2014), we can also see that *asexuality-as-ideology* has had a long and problematic history, intrinsically tangled into the very fabric of racism, colonialism and imperialism. To contrast with this Hawkins Owen uses the term *asexuality-as-orientation* to describe the asexual identities a person takes on by themselves. Furthermore, while *asexuality-as-orientation* connotes an agential position of self-determination, *asexuality-as-ideology* indicates historical and present oppressive practices such as assigning asexuality or hypersexuality to racialized subjects to maintain structures of power. These two phenomena are separate, but it is arguably still part of the history of asexuality and something the community needs to recon with. Especially when non-white members critique the community for making them feel alienated. (E.g. see Alok Vaid Menon (2014, May 3) and Yasmin Benoit (2022, April 5))

Another example of asexuality-as-ideology is the desexualization of disabled bodies. Eunjung Kim (2011) accounts for the complicated relationship between disability and asexuality and writes: “Although asexuality has been persistently denounced as a damaging myth imposed on disabled people, individuals with disabilities who do not identify as sexual highlight the unavoidable intersection of normality and sexuality.” (p. 480) While the disability rights movement denounces the notion of disabled people as inherently asexual with the intention to counter the perception of disabled people as undesirable, it serves to strengthen the normative as it redraws boundaries for what is a proper body and not. Instead of retracing these lines, the movement could benefit from questioning why sexuality is assumed to be a necessary component for a fulfilling life. It perpetuates an idea that disabled people need to adhere to, adapt to, or try to emulate abled-bodiedness and abled society to be seen as valid and complete humans. Kim proposes a shift of focus from a discussion about whether asexuality is good or bad, to a distinction between desexualization and asexuality. Kim also argues that (zed)sexuality is not attainable or wished for by everyone⁴. Being physically unable to participate in sexual intimacy, or being unwilling or just disinterested, does not make you more or less ‘liberated’ than anyone else (see also Milks (2014) for a discussion on being sexually ‘liberated’).

Furthermore, Chu (2014) addresses some of the lingering ideas within LGBTQI+ activism, regarding how atypical sexual practices are considered an antithesis to assimilation into a homonormative. When LGBTQI+ activism dichotomizes between conservative and radical, between respectability politics and non-normative actions, asexual people among others get caught in the rift between. Asexuality is outside the norm, but can allegedly pass for a cisheterosexual practice, or at least as palatable to normative society, and can therefore be left out of the struggles of LGBTQI+ communities. This assumption neglects the struggles of asexual people and assumes that asexuality is a monolithic experience always in tune with heteronormative society. It is counterintuitive to current LGBTQI+ politics to equate queer identities with sex in this way. There are large scale efforts to decouple gender identity from pervasive assumptions of it being inherently tied to sexual practice, and, furthermore, slogans such as ‘Love is Love’ have been widely used in an effort to show that sexual orientation is more than about sex. This is not to say that so called deviant sexual practices should not have

⁴ It is important to reiterate that the term zedsexuality is being used here instead of the term allosexual. As was discussed earlier in the background section of this thesis, zedsexual is a term that attempts to re-frame asexuality with terminology not as strongly tied to pathologizing sexology.

a place. They absolutely do, but assuming that sexual practices have to be at the core of queer identities is to be dismissive of the multiplicities within the LGBTQIA+ communities.

3.3 Asexuality and relationships

A few academic works have previously addressed asexual persons and their relationship experiences. Van Houdenhove and colleagues' (2015) study of asexual women's experiences was an initial point of inspiration for this thesis partly through their method of research, semi-structured interviews, as well as the topic they address. Van Houdenhove and colleagues (2015) discuss three main topics: "how asexual women experience their asexual identity, sexuality, and relationships" (p. 262). Within their study Van Houdenhove et al (2015) did find several themes and subthemes, some of which seem to strongly correlate to what my own thesis deals with. The authors categorized such themes as "Dealing with the role sex plays in society", "Societal expectations and norms regarding sex and sexuality", and "Normal versus abnormal" (p.267). However, Van Houdenhove and colleagues chose three different thematic foci for their article, specifically those which they categorized as "coming to an asexual identity, experiencing physical intimacy and sexuality, and experiencing love and relationships." (p. 266) and thus the results specifically pertaining to my own research are not presented in their paper.

Van Houdenhove et al describe how some of their participants had felt different, and that there was a level of feeling confused about one's identity. The sense of feeling different is mirrored in my sample, but the understanding of where it originates from is different from Van Houdenhove et al's sample.

3.4 The space this research fills

This thesis aims to help fill out an area of asexuality studies that has been left understudied. Discussing relationships from the perspective of asexuality rarely seems to also center the asexual perspective on normativity. Furthermore, study on asexuality within a Swedish context is from as far as I have been able to find a completely novel focus. There have been studies featuring a Swedish demographic, but none I was able to find focus on the experiences of Swedish asexual people. Finding relevant studies for my research to stand on and depart from has been limited to thematical similarities, not geographical location.

4. Aim and Research Questions

The aim with this thesis is to interrogate relationships and norms surrounding them through the lens of asexuality. Using material from six in-depth interviews with three persons who identify as asexual the discussion will center how the participants experience relationships and expectations put upon them. The questions I will focus on in the discussions are the following: how do asexual identified persons describe and conceptualize norms and expectations around relationships? How do asexual identified persons explain their navigations of relationships and the norms surrounding them? What experiences, negative, positive, and/or neutral, do asexual identified persons have of relationship norms and expectations? By addressing these questions a deeper discussion of an asexual positionality can be had.

The goal with this project is to highlight some of the asexual experiences with relationships, and through asexual perspectives analyze the normative assumptions and expectations surrounding relationships. The analysis is recruiting the help of Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology in the hopes of it facilitating a deeper understanding of asexual persons' navigation of relationship norms.

5. Theory

5.1 Situatedness

As a researcher I firmly believe that my own situatedness and positionality largely informs the research that I am doing. Perspectives are never passive, nor are they impartial, rather, perspectives are always embodied, and Donna Haraway (1988) proposes that the partial perspective is what makes a feminist objectivity. The strive for an impartial view of phenomena is to chase a mirage. Instead Haraway argues that "objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility." (Haraway 1988: 582-583) Perspectives claiming to be impartial are irresponsible as they are "unable to be called into account." (Haraway 1988: 583) By being positioned, claims to knowledge can be addressed and critiqued, engaged with and developed.

By claiming a universal and unspecific perspective, the knowledge hails itself as a general truth, and falsely so since perspectives always are embodied and positioned.

That is not to say that partial and subjugated perspectives are not to be critically engaged with, quite the opposite. Haraway argues that these perspectives “are preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge.” (Haraway 1988: 584) The perspective from the position of the subjugated is less likely to claim to be natural or original, and instead acknowledge the localization of its knowledge. However, working from a partial perspective is not just about acknowledging one’s own positionality. It is also about engaging with other perspectives (p.585).

Positionalities are also not necessarily inherent, but rather culturally and socially constructed, and may very much shift over time. This is not to deny the importance these perspectives hold. Instead they are to be understood as equally as important as any other perspective, which is equally as culturally and temporarily dependent. (p. 580, 588) Haraway clarifies that objectivity is not a static point from which one views the world. Just like asexuality has been differently conceptualized in the past, it will evolve and change in the future. All I can do, as a researcher, is try to represent it at the best of my ability in the present, while understanding that even my own conceptualizations will likely change with time.

Furthermore, “situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource” (p. 592). Situated knowledge means agency for the subjugated, it means an active and agential perspective. It means action instead of passive perception.

I, the author of this thesis, am intrinsically linked to the themes of it. I myself identify as an asexual person and have friends who identify on the asexual spectrum. I have an interest in asexual perspectives being given space and for us to get to tell our own stories without pathologization. Simultaneously, I do not represent the whole asexual experience. I am white and able-bodied and have no personal experience of the entangled and complex experiences of navigating racism and asexuality, nor ableism and asexuality. This thesis does not focus explicitly on themes of racism and ableism, but considering the concerns raised by people within the asexual community (as well as people who do not identify with asexuality because of said concerns) it is of importance to at least acknowledge these shortcomings. If an asexual community is to be inviting and open for all who might feel like they want to partake in it, said community must also address its own biases and blind spots. Asexuality is not a monolithic

identity label, and while some very active efforts are made to be open and not gatekeeping the community, work still needs to be done.

I believe that my personal connection to the topic at hand creates an environment for research that is not possible to recreate for someone who does not share the asexual experience. My own frustrations with relationship norms informed how I approached this topic, and when talking to the research participants, knowing that we were part of the same community made it easier to create a safe(r) environment, as well increasing the likeliness for a shared language around asexuality⁵.

5.2 ‘Ace discourse’

Within the asexual community the term ‘ace discourse’ is often utilized to describe the ongoing discussions about how to describe and conceptualize the community. It includes the language the asexual community invents to better describe our experiences as well as evaluating and re-examining that terminology. It also includes discussions about how the community experiences zedsexual perspectives, the normative “sexusociety” (Przybylo, 2011).

Ace discourse is the knowledge production by ‘aces’ about asexuality. Therefore this very thesis is one manifestation of this ‘ace discourse’ as it both features material gathered from interviews with ‘aces’ but also is written from an ‘ace’ perspective since, I, the author also identifies as asexual.

In a society that values sexual relationships, and that promotes sexual and romantic committed couple relationships as the primary relationships, asexual experiences arguably get relegated to a non-normative Otherness. The asexual experience as viewed through society’s normative lens acquire certain shapes that makes it stand out as strange, premature, pathological, unnatural, et cetera (E.g. see Chu (2014) and Milks (2014)). But societies, however nebulous, also acquire certain shapes from the asexual perspective. This is what ace discourse highlights.

⁵ Creating completely safe spaces is impossible, but putting in effort to make a space as safe as possible is of much importance to me, as it makes it easier to talk about potentially heavy and/or very personal things that might be of importance for a person’s experience of asexuality.

5.3 Defining Relationships

Within this thesis the concept of relationships is kept purposefully vague. I let the participants make their own interpretations, because the word relationship can encompass so many different types of relating to other people. When necessary, I will clarify if it is a specific type of relationship dynamic I mean. Generally, though, within this thesis relationships refer to significant relationships in a person's life. That could be romantic, sexual, committed in some capacity, platonic, et cetera.

5.4 Queer Phenomenology

Asexuality, as discussed in the background, is often described as a sexual orientation, but could also be understood as a non-orientation or as a lack of orientation. The language of orientations is therefore a central theme to the asexual community and discussions of asexuality. It is arguably also an important aspect to many other people's lives as a big part of one's identity can be tied to one's sexual orientation. With sexual orientations being so important for identity it is undeniably important to engage with and try and unpack what constitutes orientation.

5.4.1 Introducing Queer Phenomenology

Sara Ahmed works with several forms of orientation and ways of relating to objects in her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006). Through utilizing phenomenology she discusses and unravels how we interact with things in our surroundings and within our horizons. We "turn toward" things that are within our horizon of reachable objects. What is within reach is dependent on what we already have reached for. If it is beyond the horizon you cannot orientate towards it because you cannot even perceive of it, but by realigning and orientating towards objects in new ways, new objects come into view.

Ahmed discusses the example of a table at length. Turning toward a table enables certain actions and puts certain objects into view. Turning towards the table as a surface for writing brings different things within reach than turning towards the table as a place for eating dinner. For some the writing table is always the writing table, the surface you turn to for writing, and which in turn can make the person a writer. For others a table might hold multiple purposes, sometimes a table for dining, a point to collect a family around, and at other points becomes a form of worktable, whether that is for writing, sewing, homework or something else. The table

acquires its meaning in how we turn toward it, but it also enables new things to reach for through these turnings. How we turn toward objects also relies on which “lines” we have been given, what well-trodden paths of turning that we are expected to follow.

Delving deeper into phenomenology Ahmed proceeds to queer it, purposefully twisting its usage, and shows the reader how a queer perspective – a slanted perspective, an orientation that is not aligned with the normative and most commonly trodden path, a view from a different point in space – appears as slanted and queer, and different from the normative perspective/point of view.

However, the ways Ahmed utilizes queer is in two ways and they are not always separate. One understanding is of queer in a broader sense as that which is non-normative: “I have used “queer” as a way of describing what is “oblique” or “off line.” This is why [...] I described a mixed orientation, which unfolds from the gap between reception and possession, as offering a queer angle on the reproduction of whiteness” (p.161). The other understanding is queer as more specific: “I have used queer to describe specific sexual practices. Queer in this sense would refer to those who practice nonnormative sexualities (Jagose 1996), which as we know involves a personal and social commitment to living in an oblique world, or in a world that has an oblique angle in relation to that which is given.” (Ibid)

The understanding that I will mainly use in this thesis is what Ahmed focuses on in chapter two of her book, queerness related to sexual orientation. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, discussing asexuality from the perspective of queerness as sexual orientation makes perfect sense with how the asexual community understands its place within the broader LGBTQIA+ community, and I will expand upon this later in the chapter. Secondly, although Ahmed utilizes queer in a broader sense, her examples for that section is on racialization, Orientalism and the construction on whiteness through its differentiation from what is ‘queer’ and considered non-normative. This understanding of queer will therefore not be utilized in my analysis as I do not wish to appropriate the experiences of mixed and racialized people for a discussion about three white research participants and their experiences of asexuality and potential queerness.

5.4.2 Ace-ing Queer Phenomenology

Before any analysis can be made, Ahmed’s queer phenomenology needs to be discussed and somewhat modified to give space for asexuality.

When Ahmed theorizes queer phenomenology, she leans heavily on desire, and a large part is spent on orientating toward others sexually. Regarding asexuality with these themes is not without its issues. While asexuality is defined as a sexual orientation by the asexual community, it is generally considered to not be an orientation *toward* something, at least not sexually. However, asexuality still leaves room for other types of orientations such as platonic, romantic, aesthetic and so on.

The argument can be made that desire is more than just sexual, for example including just a general desire for physical closeness to other bodies, but this argument still falls into the issue of alienating (aromantic) asexual people who have little to no interest in that. If desire is defined in its broadest form as whatever drives us, as desire in general, it better encompasses all human experiences, but then it loses some of its argumentative power. To make a queer phenomenology work for asexuality it therefore needs some reworking.

There have been some contestations about whether asexuality (and aromanticism) should be part of the LGBTQI+ community or not, mainly with argument such as ‘heteroromantic asexuals are pretty much straight’ or that heteroromantic asexual people are straight-passing and therefore do not experience the stigma and discrimination that people of other sexual orientations do. I personally think asexuality and aromanticism absolutely have a place in queer and LGBTQI+ spaces and conversation. Potentially, that is because my own experience of asexuality is strongly tied to my other queer experiences, but in general I see that asexual people can share a lot of similar struggles with other queer identities, from often having to come out to violent acts such as corrective rape (or at least the suggestion of ‘the right kind of sex’ fixing the assumed issue). Furthermore, no one is forced to see themselves as part of the wider LGBTQI+ community if they do not wish to, but I believe it to be invaluable that it is available to those who need it.

I must make some clarifications about how I understand Ahmed’s use of “desire”, because depending on how it is used it can have varied effects on a discussion of asexuality. The asexual community makes a distinction between (sexual) attraction, sex drive and a person’s actual sex life. Since the definition of asexuality is that of not experiencing sexual attraction, most people who identify as asexual can be assumed to experience little to none of that. But sex drive or libido is another thing, usually discussed as more of a physical urge for sexual acts within the asexual community. Some asexual people express frustration or even discomfort when their

libido is high or starts acting up when their mind is not into it. It is often framed as an incongruence between mind and body.

Moving on to sex life, this is something that can be completely separate from one's libido and whether one experiences sexual attraction or not. The reasons for why an asexual person decides to have sex could for example be to experience intimate connection with a partner, pleasing a partner, having children, or a plethora of other reasons. (Meston & Buss, 2007)

Unpacking 'desire' in this context therefore is a bit tricky. First, we must ask what desire is in an asexual context. I would argue that an asexual person can experience sexual desire in the forms of a physical urge (libido) or as a desire to have sex for any number of reasons (a person's sex life). Ahmed, on the other hand, uses the word akin to a synonym for sexual orientation, or at least as that which informs a sexual orientation, as that which directs your sexual orientation. A person's orientation toward an object of desire.

Furthermore, Ahmed discusses orientation devices, as that which shapes how we "reach" for things. She describes it as "'what" we think "from" is an orientation device" (p.4) and shows how what we have "in front of us", in her example, the table, also is what is behind us, what stabilizes us and orients us toward things. If desire is one such orientation device, that directs bodies to reach out into space in certain ways and directions we must ask ourselves what happens if a person does not experience certain types of desire, in this case sexual attraction. If there is no sexual attraction that directs a person towards other people in sexual ways, or if the person orientates sexually different than the expected ways, e.g. by engaging in sex for reasons that do not include sexual attraction, how does that change how we understand desire?

There might not always be sexual attraction that informs a sexual desire, but it is safe to assume that sexual desire is expected to occur at some point, judging from the confusion that often arises from when asexual persons assert that they do not experience sexual attraction. So if I am to utilize queer phenomenology here it will be with the understanding that desire is not a synonym for sexual attraction. Furthermore, some asexual people do experience sexual desire, but generally in the forms of desiring sexual interactions for other reasons that based on a sexual attraction.

Reiterating that asexuality is not a monolith is crucial. The experiences and needs vary widely within the asexual community. It makes it more difficult to properly describe asexuality and the asexual positionality, but the multitude of perspectives also gives an opportunity to remember the multitude of human experiences. This multitude means there might still be a

desire for closeness, for non-sexual intimacy, for emotional vulnerability, or even a desire for sex that is not related to an experience of sexual attraction.

5.4.3 Queer Phenomenology Within this Thesis

How will queer phenomenology be used in this thesis? First and foremost, queer will be understood as more than just an orientation based on sexual desire. Therefore, the desire that is one of the forces that orientate us towards certain objects, or that orientates us in certain ways is not an inherently sexual one. It could even be a desire for something explicitly non-sexual.

Ahmed describes orienting towards an object as involving a direction towards an object, as well as a perception of that object. Different ways of perception will make us act in different ways (pp. 27-28). Negative emotions might make us want to distance ourselves from the object, and positive might make us want to get closer. If the object then is sex, that many asexual persons have a neutral or negative perception of, it is no wonder that some of us prefer to distance ourselves from that or at least keep it at arms-length away from us. Simultaneously, it can become evident to others that there is something different about our orientation towards the object of sex.

5.4.4 Using Queer Phenomenology to Interpret Norms

Ahmed's conceptualizations of orientating towards objects can be interpreted as how normative ideas direct and shape a person's actions. By breaking from a norm a person becomes visible as not following the normative path and thereby orientating differently towards objects, or turning toward other objects. This turning-toward-other-things is a way of breaking norms, but can also be a new or re-tracing of orientating toward objects that in itself becomes normative in specific contexts and communities.

When a community is built around certain ways of turning it shapes the way new members are expected to also turn, and unless room for different ways to interpret norms are built into the community, new and/or different ways of turning can create moments of friction and resistance.

I would argue that some room for interpretation and flexibility in terms of the asexual community is definitely a central piece of the community. There is room for interpretation, and there is room for people who do not identify with the most common definition(s) to still partake in the community. As the community is still developing and growing we see a lot of knowledge

production which inevitably means the community is moldable. Simultaneously, as addressed previously the asexual community has been critiqued for not having much room for non-white asexual persons, and rightfully so.

Orientating both as a collective norm creating process that demands following (to at least some degree), but also the individual turning-toward objects that can come to clash with both hegemonic norms and counter-norms, and how my interview participants navigate their own turning-toward in different ways, either by following community norms, society norms or by breaking either or both.

6. Method

6.1 Material gathering process

To find people who identify as asexual and who were willing to participate in interviews, I posted a call for participants in a Swedish Facebook-group for asexual people. To make sure I stayed within the rules of the group and did not bring research into a safe space where it would not be welcome, I first checked with the administrators whether this sort of post would be allowed. After sending them a message explaining that I am asexual and that I wished to do research on asexuality to amplify asexual people's perspectives I was given permission to post the call for participants.

Interest in participation was gathered with the help of a Google-form, collecting contact information and preferred language for the interview (the choice being between English and Swedish). When getting responses I proceeded to reach out to the participants to set a time for the interviews, that were to happen over Zoom.

Five participants showed interest in the study, but only four responded to my interview invitations. Out of those four, one participant had to drop out for personal reasons. That means that the primary material on which I am doing my research comes from approximately six hours of semi-structured interviews, spread out over six occasions with three different participants.

Before conducting any interviews, I asked two people I know that identify as on the asexual spectrum to check whether the outline of questions and discussion topics for the first set of interviews seemed reasonable. Even though I am asexual myself, I wanted to get second

opinion from people with asexual experiences that are not academics and not students in my field to see if the outline made sense outside of my perspective. The feedback I got was then used to update my outline.

Hinderliter (2009) voiced some concerns for the study of asexuality. One of these concerns regard underlying assumptions used when posing questions to asexual participants in studies. If the assumption is that sexual attraction is universally experienced, an asexual person might not be able to respond the questions posed. Furthermore, questions formulated on the base assumption of sexual normativity, including a certain level of sexual desire being considered healthy, and low/no sexual desire being pathologized is likely alienating to asexual participants. Hinderliter instead argues that tools need to be developed specifically for the study of asexuality. It is acknowledged that it might be easier and more resource efficient to use already existing methods and tools, but Hinderliter argues that the risk of unintentionally using ill-fitting tools is not insignificant. In order to not generate misleading results, tools specifically fit for studying asexuality should be used. It is in an attempt to follow this advice that I reached out to other people with asexual experiences for their feedback on the questions and themes I were to use for the interviews.

After the first round of interviews I started transcribing and analyzing my material to prepare for the second round of interviews. I noted both commonalities and discrepancies between the first interviews to discuss in the second ones, as well as specific themes for each participant, to delve deeper into what we had discussed during the interviews.

For the second round of interviews my outline consisted of a few follow up questions I had after the first round. The questions were individually tailored for each person and consisted of a few topics I wanted to further discuss, apart from one question, which was about a common theme in all three of the first interviews. Finally there was left intentional space if the participants had additional thoughts and comments that did not come up during the first interview. After the concluding the final interview, I reached out to one participant for some additional questions.

The transcription process was ongoing parallel to the interviews but concluded some time after the sixth and final one. As I was transcribing, I took notes and started an initial analysis as I was working, but also came back to the transcriptions after the transcription process was finished for further analysis. I collected both quotes and general themes of the discussions and sorted them into five categories for analysis.

The method I applied was that of thematic analysis (Nowell et al, 2017), an approach “for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set” (p.2). It is a method that fit well with the aim of the thesis as it is comparatively accessible and straightforward to learn for a researcher with little previous experience. It also is a good fit for processing qualitative data. The authors present a six-step approach to conducting a thematic analysis, but also acknowledge that while the outline present these steps as distinct, the practical application generally consists of a back-and-forth between the steps or has several steps happening simultaneously.

6.2 Ethical Considerations

When conducting empirical research it is imperative to consider the ethical implications of one’s work. This includes power dynamics and anonymity. By keeping the identity of the research participants anonymous through aliases and omission of any information that would be too specific/personal I assured to the best of my ability the safety for the participants and endeavored to create a space that felt safe to open up in about potentially vulnerable things.

To better balance the power in favor of the participants, their involvement could be retracted at any time during the data gathering and writing process which would lead to the deletion of all of the material gathered from the interviews with them. They were also informed that the data from the interviews would only be used for this thesis and no other research.

Information about anonymity and the intentions of the study was presented when potential participants signed up. At the start of each interview the participants were asked to give their consent to proceed with the interviews.

6.3 Bias in Sample

Since I found people to interview through an online group for asexual people, I would only reach people who identify as such, or at least along the lines of asexuality. This was beneficial in this case since identifying as asexuality was one of the requirements for participation. Furthermore, only people who felt like they had something to say on the topic would be assumed to go through the process and respond to the call for participants. This means that the people I interviewed would feel to some degree that they had opinions on relationship norms,

whether that be positive or negative, as that was part of the description of the theme for the interviews.

I did ask all participants if they were comfortable with the term queer, and at the time of recording the interviews they either described themselves as queer or expressed that they were okay with me using the term about their experiences. Even if for a lot of LGBTQIA+ people the term queer is seen as reclaimed, there are people who have negative experiences with it and are not comfortable being described as such. I therefore think it is of huge importance to ensure that when talking about individuals that they themselves are comfortable with the terminology.

Furthermore, even if I conceptualize asexuality in terms of queerness, if one of the participants had not been comfortable with that, I would have made a conscious effort to not include them in analysis that was heavily based in asexuality as queer.

Finally, this study only draws from the experiences of three white Swedes and makes no claims of trying to give a comprehensive overview of Swedish asexual experiences in general.

7. Analysis of Material

This chapter will consist of a presentation of the material gathered from the interviews, showcased through quotes from the participants. It will also include an analysis and discussion of the material. Two primary strands of understanding asexuality and its interaction with relationship norms was found. The first one is creation of an asexual perspective on norms, turning the perspective from a normative gaze directed at the Other, to the Othered gazing at the normative. The second theme is that of language, how it both gives options to distinguish experiences and oneself from normative assumptions, but also how it creates new obstacles when the existing language is too limited to encompass specific experiences or when one simply refuses to specify.

The discussion of the material gathered from the interviews has been divided into five sections. All of the sections deal with at least one of the two themes of understanding asexuality as outlined above. In *Asexual Identity* the discussion traces how asexual identity is formed as well as how asexuality is understood by the participants. Following is the section called *Queerness and Community* which further delves into understandings of community and queerness, both asexual as queer and other queer identities entangled in the asexual experience. Under the title

Relationships one will find a deep dive into understandings of relationships as experienced by the participants as well as their encounters with external expectations. The discussion continues in *Strenuous Asexuality* where the participants recount times when the asexual identity has created discomfort, upset and tension, mainly through societal assumptions of asexuality or normativity. However, not from asexuality being inherently a problem, but from the clashes with societal norms and expectations around normality, maturity, and development. Finally, in *Society Through an Ace Lens* the thesis addresses some ways that the asexual Other views the normative and expected, highlighting contradictions and inconsistencies, as well as a discussion around language and what that means for how the participants understand themselves.

7.1 Asexual Identity

The asexual community is a space with an infinite spectrum of people with varying experiences of asexuality. As stated in the background, there are a few common definitions of asexuality with minor differences, and even if all three participants used common definitions when asked to define asexuality, they all had different understandings of what asexuality meant for them personally. At the same time, there was an unwillingness to define asexuality as a whole to be completely in line with their personal experience of it. All three participants expressed that the community should not be gatekept and excluding of those who had different understandings of asexuality, even if it did not align with either the participants' own understanding or the common definitions.

In the interview with Maria, she highlighted how the relationship between a personal understanding of asexuality and an asexual community can be complicated:

I rather feel like I would like a... that even the term asexual doesn't describe enough how extreme it is for me. Because it's actually the lack of sexual attraction, right, but for me it's total lack of... well yeah. So like part of it is that I can't feel attraction or fall in love or stuff but also really no libido at all. Never have. Also, and I don't really know why, but it's almost like a phobic component... yeah it's hard to explain but...

I would have liked just for my own sake to define it as lack of all of that, like not just the attraction but... yeah. But I don't want people who don't... like when it really just is the attraction it is about, that they shouldn't be able to have a term for that either.

Maria shows an understanding of her own identity as separate from a dictionary definition. She presents a personal conceptualization that fits within asexuality but is not completely and neatly matched with it, while also acknowledging the importance of community. Her wish for a more narrowly defined label that fits with her specific experience seems to not overshadow her understanding of the value of an open asexual community. She feels reluctant to gatekeep the community and prevent entry for those who might need it, even if that could mean a narrower definition of asexuality that better mirrors her own experience.

Evin's thoughts on the matter are in a similar vein:

There are people who also experience sexual attraction, right, but for different reasons can't or won't act on it and therefore... um, therefore use the word asexual about themselves and it's like... it's pretty far from my experience but like I can't tell them what to do, right? And then on a personal level... things are intertwined since I'm aromantic too. Like it's hard to separate.

Evin gives an example of how the asexual community is not a monolithic experience both through how they explain those who identify with asexuality even if they do not fit the most common definitions, as well as how they portray their own experience of asexuality as entangled with other parts of their identity.

Similarly, Aurora made sure to emphasize how actions and identity are not necessarily the same thing. For example, one can be asexual and still have sex:

I have never been sexually attracted to anyone since... well since I can remember. But that doesn't mean... I still do, like, I still sleep with my partners. And I was thinking about this before and tried to put it into words but it's hard. I don't know how to explain it. I can have sex with someone because it's fun. It doesn't mean I'm attracted to them in that way really. And I've talked to quite a lot of my friends or my family who say that, no, that doesn't work. But I think it does. [laughs]

I mean, that there is a whole spectrum of this [asexuality] is also completely valid. I understand that there are lots... probably lots who identify as asexual that never have had sex and don't want to either. And of course! But I also think there are lots who are like me who identify as it [asexual] but still have sex with people and that is also okay in a way, you know? [laughs]

Not experiencing sexual attraction does not mean that one cannot have sex. Like Aurora indicates, there are reasons for why one might like or want to have sex other than being sexually attracted to a person. As briefly discussed in the research overview, Meston and Buss (2007) listed over 200 reasons for why humans have sex, several of which did not seem to not be directly connected to sexual attraction, based on AVEN's definition of the term.

Unknowingly all three participants validate each other's experiences through how they describe asexuality. Maria expressing a distancing from and discomfort with sex is acknowledged by Aurora as something that can be part of asexual persons experience. Simultaneously, Aurora talks about how she has sex with her partners, because even if she does not experience sexual attraction other reasons can still frame sex as something that is appealing, which in Aurora's case is simply stating that 'it's fun', a perspective Maria admits is a possibility even if it's beyond her own.

Evin further opens up the scope of asexuality to include people that do not necessarily fit with AVEN's definition, but still might find that the asexual community is a space in which they feel a sense of belonging, for one reason or another.

Just as an asexual identity can be based on different experiences, they can also be ranging from static to fluid. Maria describes her asexuality as something that has always been, whereas Aurora explains further how she understands her asexuality as something that can fluctuate, and potentially change in the future:

Right now and the past few years, I've been identifying as asexual. I've been unsure at times but right now at least, I identify as that.

Aurora also describes how her relationship with sex has changed with time:

Before it was like 'Never! No, I don't want to. I don't even want to be near, and oh, this is so uncomfortable'. And now that has changed but I still identify as asexual.

When asked if they had any comments on how all three participants had responded in similar ways regarding how they do not want to gatekeep the community from those who want to be part of it, Evin expressed the following via a follow up e-mail:

Regarding the gatekeeping and stuff of the community, I first and foremost don't want to be the one to make anyone feel unwelcome when they have found community. If that person gets something out of identifying as asexual then I shouldn't draw arbitrary lines

and tell them that they can't do it just because many in the community don't have the same experience as them.

Furthermore, I think that if the person who wants to call themselves asexual have experiences clearly outside of the norm, it would be very unsupportive of me to deny that person the identity marker/the community that is the most right or the least wrong for them.

Ensuring that the community is open and welcoming, is something that for example AVEN promotes. Gatekeeping to argue a pure and proper asexuality has been something the platform has been working against since the outset (Hinderliter, 2013: 60-61). Seeing it being reflected by all three participants, despite their varying experiences is probably indicative of how the community at large tries to embrace everyone and not actively be exclusionary.⁶

Approaching the language of the community with a sense of fluidity and openness for self-interpretation is a throughline in the accounts of the people interviewed. Sometimes that fluidity and openness is met with confusion from others or a sense of instability within oneself, but nonetheless seems to follow the path the community has set out to follow. While the community has orientated towards one understanding of asexuality and the language of the in-group, members of the in-group run in to opposing or different orientations from the wider society.

7.2 Queerness and Community

During the interviews the topic of community came up a lot. All three participants reflected on their own experiences with community, both in terms of queer community and their own social contexts. There was also the theme of queer identity or queer experiences. Evin described themselves as queer, while Maria and Aurora talked about experiences that could be seen as part of queer identities. Upon asking them whether they called themselves queer or not both Aurora and Maria said that they were okay with the word queer being used to describe them.

Evin describes their emotions around coming into/realizing their queer identities, which include but are not limited to asexuality and aromanticism:

⁶ This of course is not a wholly uncomplicated matter as the asexual community also fails a lot of its communities of color since the inclusion is practically colorblind. See discussion of racism in the community in the research overview.

On one level it's really incredibly freeing because like I don't need to care about what anyone else does or how anyone else lives their life. I can just do what feels right and feels good and stuff. But it's also... that freedom also comes with like a feeling of instability, you know. And unpredictability and stuff.

They talk about how coming into a queer identity both entails a sense of becoming free, but also a mourning of a future that was promised but will never come to pass:

Up until like a few years ago, my idea of... my idea of like relationships and the future and having a family and stuff was very shaped by it [Evin's Christian upbringing].

The appearance of queerness in Evin's personal life did shake things up:

It has been a lot to process because it is so far from this picture I had of how... how my future would be, you know? So it has been a process of mourning in some ways.

It was both a relief but also like but now I don't... I don't know what my future will look like.

Finding a sense of self within a queer experience both creates possibilities in that it can help one find new community or allow for a more authentic relationship to oneself, but as Evin brings up, it can also drastically shift one's worldview. Paths that once were open now become inaccessible and new orientations are to be taken. Finding a new way to move through the world might be necessary, or a need to branch of might present itself. Previously Evin orientated towards a future that seemed full of certainties, but now when they have come re-oriented that future is out of reach. Now their future is uncertain because the familiar shapes that once appeared in that direction have been replaced, or at least tilted into new forms (Ahmed, 2006).

Aurora talks about how a queer community has been crucial for her sense of self and to have friends to talk to about things that are difficult:

I have a pretty tight friend group, um, circle of friends that either... there are many who are bisexual, there are some others who are asexual, there are some who are demisexual. Like, LGBTQ+ people that I spend quite a lot of time with who understand me, who I can, like, openly talk to which is such a relief. We are a group of maybe eight people and I feel like I really can rant to them if I need to.

It feels like the friends I have who identify as homosexual or demisexual or asexual or bisexual, they understand me much better and there are no 'no, this is how a relationship should look' and 'you're doing this and that wrong'. And I'm super grateful for having many friends like this that I can turn to.

She added how the support from friends makes all the difference:

They may not share my sexual orientation but they... they make you feel validated anyway. It is so important to have those.

Knowing other people who are taking similar paths and orientate in similar ways makes the thorny paths of non-normative life easier to navigate.

However, having a community does not mean that everything is sunshine and rainbows. There can still be a lot of work to be done. Evin addresses the possible complications of being part of an emerging community:

It's actually very exciting especially to... partially with asexuality but especially with aromanticism. It's really, I mean it's now that things are happening! You know. I mean I don't know when it, what is it called? AUREA or something, the aromantic equivalent of AVEN. When it was founded but it's not many years ago and it is right now that we're starting to talk in these terms. And it's very interesting even if it of course is... it's a lot. It's frustrating because we don't have, well all of that with not having words for it you know and stuff like that. Well it's very interesting and exciting and stuff, first generation aromantics you know.

There is a lot of excitement with seeing a community forming around you, but there is also the struggle of making the language the community needs to both explain the experiences within the group, but also to help the members understand themselves. Evin's account hits the issue of language right on the head. The creation process is exciting and difficult, as language needs to be anchored in an understanding of it. A word holds no meaning if no one can use it or understand it. Simultaneously, there are expressed needs from within the asexual and aromantic communities to be able to explain experiences that many feel have been left unexplained and unexpressed. Potentially because the experiences are uncommon outside of an asexual community, potentially because things could be taboo or frowned upon being discussed. The orientation of a community creates a common language or a jargon that is being shared. By

inviting people from outside the community into at least glimpsing the perspective of the community's orientation this language can be shared and better understood.

7.3 Relationships

Does an asexual identity impact the types of relationships a person engages in? Within this section the discussion will engage questions about what constitute 'legitimate' relationships and whether one wishes to partake in such relationships or not. It also asks why some relationships are considered more important than others.

Maria described her complicated feelings around how to define relationships, and whether her current closest relationships should count more as familial or romantic:

I met a couple in their forties who have become like a- it gets difficult here already because I don't know what to call them because they are like my closest family but there is no word for it. So it isn't even possible to talk about this with... because others can say like they have a boyfriend or just a sibling for example and I have to call this 'it is like a brother but like closer'.

She further explains her struggles with definitions of herself and the relationship. She describes how it is difficult to be seen as an outsider and potential threat to an already established monogamous relationship:

What do I define myself as? Am I a threat or not to their relationship? Well, romantic, aromantic, what does it actually mean? And all of this has been very present in my mind over the past year. It feels like I have to have a definition you know because it makes the difference between if I am seen as a threat or not.

She points to the importance of needing words to describe certain relationships, both to describe the dynamic to other people, but also to understand for herself if she can be seen as a threat to the other relations in the dynamic. Or to be able to explain why she is not. She struggles with finding terms with the right nuance to properly give voice to what the relationship entails:

From an outside perspective it would probably be seen as romantic. But I don't really want to put any label on it because people seem to interpret that word very differently.

Describing the relationship as romantic creates discomfort for Maria. Simultaneously, applying such a descriptor could give validation to the relationship, or it could lead to assumptions

around infidelity and commitment issues, as mentioned by Maria earlier. Questions around what counts as a romantic relationship rise up.

Using the language of Ahmed (2006) about how we turn towards objects, and how the queer desire (here understood not as sexual desire, but rather in a broader sense including things like a desire to belong, desire for closeness, emotional intimacy et cetera) is slanted. Queer desire does not follow the paths of the cishetero desire and therefore appears misplaced or misdirected from the perspective of the cishetero norm. Additionally, there is also the aspect of a monogamy norm, and relationships that disrupt that norm can appear as a threat, as Maria points out. She must bear the burden of reassuring people that her relationships are not a problem and that they do not cause harm to an already-established couple.

Maria not being able to express her own experiences and feelings around the relationships she understands as some of her most important ones could be understood as one manifestation of this failure to align with the cishetero script. Because she does not turn towards objects in the expected cishetero way, her way of orienting, and the relationships she does experience and find to be of the most importance, become unintelligible. She is using familial terms but when both boyfriend and brother fails to properly describe her relationship to an important person in her life, conveying the meaning of the relationship also gets difficult. Maria's orientating toward this significant person in her life is either an unusual orientation, because of the lack of sufficient terminology, or this way of relating is meant to be understood within already existing familial terms, perhaps a term is to be found via process of elimination. If you already have a boyfriend/husband then this significant relationship might be categorized as a close friendship/brotherly relation. But since Maria finds neither brother nor boyfriend to really fit, which is further complicated with the non-monogamous structure of the relationship this process of elimination might not be applicable to the situation. Furthermore, Maria finds the method of hierarchically ranking relationship one relationship over another to be lacking. She asks why she would need to pick between them:

Maria: I mean, it's not like it's impossible to find two soulmates instead of one, right?
Can you then not [laughter] can you then not get to know them or spend your life with them?

During the interviews a theme of different types of expectations clashing revealed itself. Participants shared instances or stories of how assumptions around how relationships should work clash with expectations on what asexuality entails.

Evin commented:

I hesitate a little to come out to people. Partially because like... partially of other reasons obviously but also because I... I don't want others to think that I'm completely off limits when it comes to all types of relations and intimacy.

This is simultaneously contrasted with both Evin's and Maria's reservations towards having their affection being misunderstood.

Evin: I very rarely feel a need to express it but I find it very hard to express to my friends, especially guys because people assume things you know, that I like... that I really like them! And like, it's very rare that it means anything more than like you're a cool human. I like being with you. I want to be your friend, you know. There is so much I mean but it's so easy for people to assume and read into things because it's like... I mean it's probably reasonable for an allo-person⁷ I suppose. But also like... stop assuming things. Stop assuming that I mean things I'm not saying, you know?

Maria: If I completely avoid all situations as soon as someone... like if I always say that I don't want to be more than friends then I won't get more than friends. But I... more than friends for me doesn't mean it gets sexual, but I want a family at some point. And if I can't for my own sake or for others' sake allow people to get close, closer than what is considered pure friendship, then I also won't get it [a family].

These two perspectives, that of not wanting people to know of one's asexual identity, and that of needing people to know, can seem dichotomous at first glance. However, both are rooted in a necessity for the people a person surrounds themselves with to understand the positionality and experiences of the person. Both perspectives indicate a wish to not be misunderstood and for broader understandings of what certain actions indicate.

Notions of what a family is, combined with expectations on what an asexual person wants creates potential paradoxes, where people are caught in between. Both Maria and Aurora talk about their want for a form of family, and for Maria that is "someone or some people to come home to after work, [...] who is/are closer than friends but without closer than friends meaning it is something sexual".

Aurora talks about how it has been assumed that she never will have kids:

⁷ Allosexual: a person who does experience (a lot) of sexual attraction. The opposite of asexual.

A norm I feel is out there and which I'm very tired of is the assumption that I'll never have a family.

Maria echoes a similar sentiment:

Just because I'm asexual doesn't mean I don't want to be a part of a family.

Evin described a fantasy of a future with two of their friends that to Evin is much more ideal than a heterosexual nuclear family:

I imagined a future of us three living somewhere on the countryside and like, no one would be in a relationship with the others really but we would have like pets and maybe kids. I think that would have been so nice. But like kind of impossible to realize. Okay not impossible but difficult. But I realized how that longing or something after something like that is so much more inherent in me than a longing for a husband, children, a dog, and a car you know.

The idea of romantic partnerships not constituting the foundation for a family unit or for familial ties is appealing to Evin. Rather, a living situation orientated around friendship and common interests presents a more ideal future to them. Evin also acknowledges their worries about how possible this fantasy would be to realize. While it is not wholly impossible, it is not generally how families are organized and therefore it might be harder to actualize. Like Ahmed (2006) discusses, the paths most commonly travelled, the normative paths people take, are also the easiest to traverse from a social perspective. These paths cause the least friction with society.

Evin expresses a tentative future, an orientation towards family that might be outside the nuclear family norm. Their reflections around norms and how they navigate these norms takes the shape of declining allegiance to some orientations in favour of new ones. They acknowledge how their current slanted approach to family and cohabitation might be harder to attain than the classical nuclear family, but only by the ties to structures and norms, not on a personal level. How societies through institutional means shape paths of least resistance form the paths people are most likely to take. Evin acknowledges that it in some ways would be easier to follow the generally assumed path of orientation toward family structures, but that future is less appealing to Evin than the one which veers off from that laid out track. One would then assume that while the path of least resistance from society would still cause resistance in Evin, whereas the thornier path of non-normative households would be the path of least resistance to Evin themselves.

Aurora talks about her current relationship, how her partner is not aware of Aurora's asexuality, and how they have sex, but she does not feel like there is a pressure put on her if she is not in the mood:

This person I'm together with, he doesn't know I'm asexual. But he has never ever... I have never felt as pressured as I have in other situations.

If I just say no I'm not interested, he never gets passive aggressive, he never puts blame on me. He just says okay we can watch *The Walking Dead* instead.

Aurora also contrasts her current relationship with previous ones where she did not disclose her asexuality:

These people I've been together with but never said anything to... how should I say it? They have obviously noticed that I basically never... that I generally am less interested or that I never take the initiative you know. And it has led to a lot of discussions and fights generally speaking.

Juxtaposing these different experiences of being out as asexuality creates an interesting pattern. Seemingly, orientating differently towards sexuality and desire can still be noticeable even without putting a name to these differences. Simultaneously, these differences cause more tensions in some instances than others. To some people they cause more discomfort than in others.

7.4 Strenuous Asexuality

Being asexual is not an inherently problematic and strenuous experience, but having your own perception juxtaposed against societal perceptions of what you are can certainly create discomfort.

Maria talks about how going through puberty and adulthood makes people assume that a person has become a sexual being. Maria expresses feeling upset because of how that also creates assumptions about what types of relationships one is allowed to have to one's peers, and how some acts are seen as trespassing into the territory of another relationship, acts that before becoming an adult were unproblematic:

Had I been five years old and like hugged this person then no one would have given it a second thought, you know, and suddenly just because I'm an adult, well, it gets weird.

And I'm not comfortable with it still- yeah it has become hard again this whole thing with asexuality.

In the previous chapter, Aurora's views on her current relationship were presented. She talked about how sex is not a topic that creates conflicts between her and her current partner. However, she recounts how in previous relationships it has caused tension or even contributed to fragmentation and breaking of relationships. She expresses that these tensions have had impacts on her not telling her current partner of her asexuality:

I've chosen to tell two, no, three people that I'm asexual. And then it has... it has backfired. A bit. One of the people broke up with me right away and the other two... it's kind of complicated. It felt like a burden. Because these two people that I was together with that didn't break up with me, they were both pretty sexually active. And then it felt like things got very tense because they kept emphasizing that 'if you don't want to or if you're uncomfortable with this then tell me and we won't have sex if you're not comfortable with it. And then I still, like, I still did have sex for fun. It's not like... I was not repulsed, you know, but I still didn't have the same drive as they did. We didn't really match. It put a lot of strain on the relationships. Because either I felt guilty because I knew they wanted it and I kept feeling anxious about that. Or I noticed that my partner felt that way because they wanted to initiate something or ask if we could have sex but they didn't want to because they didn't want to make me uncomfortable, and that has like been very straining... it is pretty stressful and that's why I've chosen to for my more recent... Or well, for the relationships I've had in more recent years I've actively chosen not to tell my partner that I'm asexual. Like with the guy I live with now [...]. Because it feels like... like I'm scared to tell people. Because it puts a lot of, or at least in my case, it has put a lot of pressure on both parties in the relationship. And it's just [sigh] it feels like it's better to not bring it up. Which isn't good either [laugh] so it's... ugh, it's hard.

Later during the same interview she reiterated:

I told one person before we started dating. With the other person I realized it during... or like I told her about halfway through our relationship. And both were very supportive at the time. But it also led to... or with these two in particular it often led to them initiating sex. And if I wasn't interested or did not feel like it they could take it very personally. 'Oh okay you don't love me. Okay.' And then they got like not angry but

I... they could start crying and take it as like ‘Okay, let’s break up. You’re not interested in me at all.’ And then I didn’t feel like... or of course I had a choice. Of course I did. But also felt like it’s just easier to agree to it. Which is a little difficult. [laugh] It’s a bit draining in a way.

Aurora addresses how it for some people can be hard to disentangle sexual intimacy from affection and how a perceived or real lack of sexual interest can affect someone’s sense of self-worth. Just like sex is unimportant to some people it is highly important to others. Sex and love are assumed to be intrinsically linked and when one is present but not the other it can cause confusion and distrust. Aurora told the story of when she had a conversation with a friend about how a previous relationship was going:

When I told him that me and my boyfriend were about to break up he said ‘Well of course he wants to break up because you never have sex.’ That’s not true! We had lots of sex! [laugh] And like ‘of course it’s... you won’t find a partner very easily.’ That’s not true. I mean what the hell? Well it feels like if you say you’re asexual then it’s like ‘okay then you live in celibacy. You won’t get married, you’ll never have kids, you’ll live... you’ll get five cats and you’ll live alone.’ It couldn’t be further from the truth. It’s frustrating.

Within Aurora’s description is an example of existing assumptions about asexuality. She also talked about other instances of when these ideas came into play:

They haven’t said it in exactly those words but it really sounds like they are saying ‘well okay you never have sex. You choose to live alone. I accept you.’ But I don’t! What are you talking about? And it’s such a frustrating, what’s it called, stereotype. I understand that they think like that because if they aren’t well versed in the topic, they’ll base their assumptions on stereotypes. Which doesn’t make it right. [...] Like if I tell them ‘What do you mean? Me and my partner still have sex.’ They say ‘well then you aren’t asexual.’

But it’s a pity that this is the norm because then I and other people who identify as asexual have to explain everything to other people. And it’s us who have to explain ‘well, that’s just how it is.’ And no one understands a thing. It’s a pity that this is the norm because it’s draining to have to say like ‘I identify as asexual. That means this and this and this and this.’ And then it gets misinterpreted, and people start assuming loads of thing about you and then... [sigh] God, yeah, it’s really hard.

Judith Butler writes “The norm governs intelligibility, allows for certain kinds of practices and action to become recognizable as such and defining the parameters of what will and will not appear within the domain of the social.” (2004: 42) Aurora describes encountering stories that make asexuality intelligible, and when she proceeds to challenge or defy these narratives her asexuality becomes unintelligible. Her way of turning towards asexuality is perceived as incorrect or even impossible.

7.5 Society Through an ‘Ace’ Lens

Within the asexual community ‘ace’ is used as shorthand for asexual, as briefly discussed in the background and theory chapters. This lends itself well to puns and is often embraced by members of the community. Through playing with the term ‘ace’ that is both shorthand for asexual and comes with the connotations of ‘being the best’ (the playing card with the highest value, getting top grades, etc.) the asexual perspective gets reframed as something worthy of attention and consideration to the same (or even greater) degree as normative perspectives. It can serve as a linguistic clue to rebalance structures of power by (at least briefly) claiming the center stage and a loud voice.

By then utilizing the term ace in combination with the term discourse it provides an interesting change in perspective. Ace discourse both comes to mean ‘asexual discourse/asexual understandings of language’ as well as ‘the best discourse/way of understanding language’. Utilizing an asexual language to describe the larger non-asexual society can cast the normative in a new light, making possible questions or perspectives that might not have been considered otherwise. By disrupting an often-assumed naturalness and universality of sexual desire, ace discourse can cast doubt onto what many seem to consider a fundamental part of human life, or even human nature/humanity.

During my interview with Evin they said “The ideal human is basically demi-sexual” in reference to their Christian upbringing and encouragements for waiting until marriage with sexual intimacy. The implication here being that since demi-sexuality means a person only experiences sexual attraction to someone they have a strong emotional bond with, it seems more plausible that they would have less incentives to have pre-marital sex, but once in a committed and emotionally bonded relationship sexual reproduction would be possible, assuming cisheterosexuality. Evin’s observation also ties into discussion of asexuality as ideology, and asexuality as desirable in some circumstances, and not others (Hawkins Owen,

2014.). Evin's observation that one asexual identity would mesh well with certain beliefs is simultaneously framed by Evin's own asexual and aromantic experiences not being as easily matched with the set expectations. Evin's perception of certain societal norms and expectations showcases an understanding of the arbitrary relationship between these expectations. While asexuality is seen as Other, certain asexual traits are hailed as admirable and are to be strived for. The inclusion/exclusion of asexuality, and especially the cherry picking of certain configurations of an asexual experience over other is arbitrary. Framed by an ace perspective the contradiction of acceptance and rejection/making invisible of asexuality stand out in stark contrast to each other.

Evin and I were also discussing how the burden of self-reflection around one's own identity lies on those outside the norm, in this particular instance that of LGBTQIA+ individuals, and how this self-reflection is a lot of work but also lead to great insights into one's self. Evin said:

I read something along with that quote [a tweet regarding self-reflection we were discussing] and I think it said something like 'I want all cis people to be cis with purpose.' That it is an active decision and not just like 'um yeah I just do whatever I've always done' and stuff. And I think it's the same with sexuality, and that's why I'm so tired of not being able to discuss relations and sexuality with heteros, you know. Like, have you never thought about this? Have you never thought of what it is attraction actually consists of or how it works? Like, have you never thought of this?

The complication of on the one hand the self-reflection process being time consuming but on the other hand it yielding material for a more complex understanding of one's emotional processes. Would more people feel like they align with asexual perspectives on attraction if they took the time to carefully process their own actions and attractions? How common are asexual experiences? Evin makes the argument that these deeper conversations would greatly benefit from some introspection. The asexual perspectives on attraction could open up for a more nuanced discussion about what constitutes a person's attractions and why and how they act on it. For some the notion of different types of attraction or the split attraction model might be helpful in considering the relations a person has in their life. Being actively aware that being attracted a person could come in many different forms might be beneficial to people even outside the asexual community. As the burden of being actively aware of one's identities or categorizations falls on the marginalized or those outside the norm the normative gets to be invisible and neutral.

Further Evin adds:

Someone who doesn't know anything at all about asexuality and aromanticism will... you'll have to explain and simplify to basically 'I don't want this type of relations' and stuff even if it's only partially true. And if it's someone who already know what it is about a bit it also gets difficult because like 'yeah, I know exactly what it means when you don't want this or that.' Like it gets hard in all circumstances.

Evin points out the assumed monolith of certain experiences and how often people do not know what certain labels or identities entail, or assume that one way of experiencing that identity encompasses everyone's experience of said identity. They talk about how the burden of marginalization in part means a burden of education and of mitigating ignorance.

Instead Evin seems to suggest that larger numbers of people should be more aware of asexual experiences, not only for the benefits of the asexual community, but also because it could provide helpful to people outside the community as well.

Aurora further adds to the discussion of language:

I'm super used to talking about sexuality and gender identity and everything with my circle of friends that identify as trans or bisexual or whatever else there might be. We have these terms, and we know what they mean. And if you're not used to... like my heterosexual friends might not at all understand when I talk or start talking about different types of attraction or whatever it might be. I think it's very easy, like you say, to completely talk around each other. And I don't know, for me it's obvious what different things mean and now... I don't know it's... I think I for a long time assumed that everyone else would just know what it was that I was talking about and what terms I use and words and blah blah blah. I don't think they have. And that's a thing that I've gone around expecting that everyone just knows, and I guess it's unfair to do so. You can't really do that either.

Shared languages within a community might not automatically translate to outside the community and Aurora's comment points to such a discrepancy. There is a question to be asked regarding how much the out-group can be expected to know and understand of an in-group jargon. Furthermore there is also a discussion to be had of how much the in-group want an out-group to actually grasp the language. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is still

very common and sometimes there might be a wish to go unnoticed for fear of the consequences of coming out or being outed.

Maria once again discusses the complicated nature of language and how it is contentious and hard to truly pin down. She gives the example of the term 'queer-platonic relationship':

It creates a relationship that in many ways can seem like a romantic one or maybe even feature hugs, holding hands, kisses but that it doesn't have to mean it's romantic. Having children, for example, could be but doesn't have to be romantic. Because it is a term that describes an aromantic relationship that is very strong and deep. But in other places this exact term is used to describe romantic asexual. And I wonder, then, what even does the distinction mean? It becomes lacking in substance.

People don't need to be in a romantic relationship to have kids. The desire for kids is not inherently linked to a wish for sexual and romantic relationships. Deep and profound relationships do not have to rely on sexual or romantic attraction. Commitment doesn't have to rely on those types of attractions. The term queer-platonic relationship (QPR) has the benefit of putting words to a specific type of relationship, but with different interpretations floating around and being utilized by different people the exact meaning is not set in stone. It provides an alternative but will still require some sort of explanation even if a person is aware of its general meaning.

Despite Maria's frustrations she does point to a crucial point. The Swedish society seems to organize itself largely around a nuclear family assumed to be based on two adults that experience certain forms of attraction towards each other, or at least create an initially sexual and romantic relationship. Within this family unit dependents are expected to be produced. However that is not the only way of creating a family unit. The QPR shows a different way of turning towards a familial unit, a different way of turning towards committed relationship. It has the ability to legitimize close and intimate friendships, a relationship type that tends to be ranked below sexual and romantic relationships in the relationship hierarchy within the society of which this study is focused.

Maria had further thoughts on the matter, returning to some of the previous discussions:

It makes me not wanting to use any word because I don't know how others will interpret it. And especially not when it often if I am to describe my relationship to this man as romantic, then people automatically interpret it as if I am a threat to his relationship to

his wife. So then I absolutely do not want to use the term 'romantic'. At the same time I know that if I don't use those terms then [the relationship] won't seem as legitimate.

I also think about the whole thing with hugs and kisses. I don't see them as romantic because to me there is no difference. I mean I have gotten hugs and kisses from my mom. That is not romantic. It's like just because I'm an adult and entered puberty and is viewed as sexual by others, I basically do not have the right to have this sort of intimacy without being seen as a threat.

Once again, Maria encounters how people have different perceptions and interpretations of different acts, and how changing circumstances also change how people relate to and orientate towards certain acts. For Maria, a hug is no different across different contexts depending on her age, whereas she feels like for most others the meaning of a hug changes drastically throughout growing up.

Finally, Maria put it beautifully into words how she feels like she views the world differently from the majority of people:

[J]ust from looking at how everyone else talks about their lives and prioritizes their relationships it feels like I experience the world drastically different. A bit like everyone else can see color and I am color blind. And because I've never seen color, I cannot possibly explain exactly how my perspective is different from others, but I can understand that there might be a difference judging by how everyone is looking at the flowers.

Sometimes it feels like there is a whole dimension out there that I don't have access to. But exactly because I cannot see those colors that everyone else sees I also don't feel like I'm missing out on anything. Quite the opposite. I have in many ways an easier time connecting with people around me because I don't see the boundaries. I'm not caught up in what colors the flowers are. It isn't logical for me that truly deep relationships only are allowed to develop within the scope of a sexual relationship. I can create lifelong ties to my teachers and principals, mom's past classmates and the hotel staff on a skiing trip. I can see the possibility of a deep and family-like sense of belonging where others don't. So I definitely don't feel like my way of viewing the world is lesser or not as rewarding than others'. If anything, I feel like other people's perspectives can be a little more limiting. A bit like everyone else being stuck on the ground with the flowers while I want to climb the trees, both figuratively and literally.

This conceptualization, of Maria's ace perspective on the wider society, shows how an assumed lack does not mean a lesser life or a negative experience. Not having access to a certain dimension of relating to objects still leaves plenty of room for other things. Maria spending times in the trees, turning towards climbing branches and sitting among leaves is just as fulfilling as other people admiring the flowers.

Maria acknowledges that she orientates differently. She is aware that she does not see the same colors as seemingly most other people do, but she does not grieve something she does not know, only that so few others seem to share her desires. This image of trees and flowers presents the perspective that maybe lack is not necessarily a negative thing. Maria does not orientate towards the flowers, or at least not in the ways most others do. She is aware of them but her focus is on the trees as they are the ones that bring her the most joy.

8. Conclusions

At the core of this research lies the argument that living from an asexual experience can create certain frictions with dominant norms surrounding relationships (with significant others/partners/people one is emotionally intimate with and/or committed to), but also how different/emerging perspectives on relationships can turn these assumptions on their head and question their validity and assumed universality. What this thesis does is highlight the perspective on these experiences from an asexual lens and presents an asexual theory of relationship norms. It also showcased how language is both a barrier and a tool for community. The research discusses issues with translatability as well as in-group language, and lack of terminology or language to describe experiences and relations. Furthermore, this thesis shifts the perspective from an Othering gaze on asexuality from outside the community, to an in-group perspective on the norms and expectations that affect the group and the participants in the community.

The orientation of asexuality, the asexual experiences of the wider world around them and specifically of relationships, showcases how a different way of perceiving the world is not uncomplicated. The asexual orientation towards objects is not lesser, just different. The friction between dominant orientations and in-group orientations can cause discomfort to the individual, but ultimately the community creates a space for finding new ways of relating to others, together.

Even within a very limited amount of material we see a variety of asexual experiences. The thesis by no means aims to be representative of all asexual experiences and perspectives, partially because the interview method as utilized for this research does not lend itself to such conceptualizations. Partially because showcasing individual stories lets the perspective shine in its own right without having to be a universal experience. Nonetheless, the views and stories shared by the asexual people interviewed showcase that even within a very small sample there can be great variation in perspectives.

8.1 Further study

This thesis marks only a small part of a larger study I am envisioning. The field of asexuality research has a lot of ground yet uncovered and further study on asexual persons' experiences presented from an asexual perspective has almost unlimited possibilities. To just name a few options for future research endeavors, discrimination towards asexual people on the basis of their asexuality (also known as aphobia) is vastly underrecognized in the existing literature and dedicated research even less prevalent. Furthermore, the study of positive experiences of asexuality has found little to no space in research, as has the study of asexual people's interests and lives beyond that which relates to relationships and sex. I would highly encourage further examination of the experiences of asexual persons in areas that are not directly connected to an assumed defining factor of their lives (sex and relationships, or the assumed lack thereof). Instead, research regarding hobbies, and different types of community building and connections beyond that of just other asexual persons would be valuable for the future of the field. How does asexuality and faith connect? Asexual persons who play sports, how do they experience that community? Finally, the research on the interconnectedness of hyper-/desexualization and race and/or (dis)ability and neurodivergence has been given very little space within the field. More widespread and increased knowledge of these phenomena are crucial both for the field of research but also for the asexual community.

In addition, conducting research on asexuality in the online sphere, both in terms of online safety as well as community building are of timely importance. Not to mention further academic endeavors into asexuality beyond the English-speaking sphere. What do asexual communities look like beyond the anglophone? As alluded to in this thesis there is a discrepancy between how Swedish asexual people balance language and that a lot of theorization and asexual jargon is in English. How does the utilization of anglophone terms

shape language in places where English is not the dominant language? How does that create new language hybridity? And what limitations and possibilities does that create for communication?

Finally, delving into the relations of kinship theory, queer kinship and queer theory would be an important endeavor. Due to time restraint these topics had to be left out of this thesis, but regarding the centrality of relationships within this thesis these themes should be addressed and examined. To my knowledge, these intersections are completely unexplored and an asexual theory of kinship seems like the natural continuation of the research this thesis has started.

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