

Formatting for “Readability”:

When formatting this zine, I tried to make it as easy as possible to read— especially for people with different reading difficulties (e.g., dyslexia & hyperlexia):

- the paragraphs are as short as possible— unusually short— with obvious paragraph breaks
- there is no text in italics, and there are spaces before and after punctuation marks like (parentheses) and / slashes /
- the fonts used (Trebuchet, Century Gothic, Sassoon, & Consolas) are fonts that people with dyslexia apparently find easier to read (according to the British Dyslexia Association: <http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/about-dyslexia>) [/further-information/dyslexia-style-guide.html](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/about-dyslexia/further-information/dyslexia-style-guide.html))

f-ace-ing silence
(Issue 4)

February, 2016

Thanks to the contributors for sharing their stories.
And thank you for reading them.

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(Printable pdf version available.)

<http://rotten-zucchiniis.tumblr.com/f-ace-ing>
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f-ace-ing silence

Issue 4
February, 2016

words by aces—
silenced in asexual / ace spaces

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An Editorial Note:

As an editor, I aim to include all relevant submissions if that's possible.

(I have never received a hateful submission.)

I assume submissions are relevant unless, for example, they don't seem to have anything to do with aceness.

(There have been some educational moments explaining that asexuality is a thing and what “ace” means...)

If it isn't obvious to me how a submission is relevant— i.e., how it's about feeling alienated or silenced in an ace space, or about something that isn't talked about much in an ace space — then I ask for a brief explanation. I figure that if it's unclear to me, someone else might also need help connecting the dots.

For this issue, there was also one submission that I could not include because it would have needed some context and I was unable to contact the submitter.

These are the stories of the contributors, in their own words. I provided feedback on drafts— asked for clarification— and pointed out where I thought pieces could be stronger.

But changes, if any, were up to the contributors: there were no ultimatums.

I do ask people to situate themselves in their bios in terms of several things, including race and age

(unless they have good reasons not to) because:

a) these things matter when it comes to understanding people's experiences and

b) it's important to be able to see whose perspectives are represented and whose are missing.

These words belong to their authors. I don't necessarily understand them or agree with them. (That's not really the point.) They matter to me *because* they are the words that these people wanted to write. It's a diverse silence we face, and we do that each in our own ways.

— Omnes et Nihil

Ongoing Call for Submission: f-ace-ing silence

As aces, we're often silenced in our non-ace communities. **But we're also silenced even in ace spaces—surrounded by other aces: that's what this zine is about.**

Feeling silenced doesn't necessarily mean having been *actively* silenced by other aces (although it could).

It's also about feeling like you can't talk about some part of your experience, or like there isn't room to talk about it (yet?). And sometimes it means feeling alienated or alone because nobody is talking (yet?) about some part of your experience.

- **What asexuality/ ace-related thing do you feel *silenced* or *alienated* about in asexual / ace communities?**
- **Is there some asexuality / ace-related part of your experience that nobody seems to be talking about (yet? much?) in ace spaces?**
- **And what do you have to say about it?**

5th issue theme— as an optional starting-point

- grey-ness, ambiguity, liminality, not-quite-ness, almost-ness and uncertainty
 - in relationships, identity, experience, community, etc.
- anything previous issues have inspired

Words, images... anything that can be printed on regular letter-sized (8.5"x11") printer paper— and contributions can be anonymous if that's what you prefer.

This is an ongoing zine. For info about upcoming and past issues check out: <http://rotten-zucchini.tumblr.com/f-ace-ing>

Please e-mail contributions, questions, comments... to:
rotten.zucchini@gmail.com

Content Warnings:

Content warnings (cw) are a “heads up” about topics that some people find upsetting. If they seem like “overkill” to you, please respect that they're for someone else. All writings in this zine address alienation and feeling / being silenced.

Introduction:

Now in its 4th issue— and apparently a biannual project— I don't feel this issue requires a lengthy introduction.

This is a zine of aces' stories of certain kinds of silence & alienation: alienation specifically from other aces or within ace community. It's about the silence we face amongst ourselves, in our own spaces, and the things people just aren't (yet) talking about (enough). This silence matters and aces' stories of it make sense together. Alienated aces aren't alone in alienation.

I stumbled upon this particular silence kind of by accident while I was fumbling around looking for something else. I didn't have a plan for this zine when I started and I still don't. It will be what it is, and that's not something I can predict in advance. (But since people continue to express their interest in upcoming issues it's a project I plan to continue.)

Silence is tricky— you never know what's there until you make space for it and wait. I've picked themes when people have brought up similar topics around the same time, and I've offered them as (optional) jumping-off points. But I don't have any expectation about what people submit or what the issues will ultimately include: usually the things people want to talk about not talking about... are things they haven't been talking about.

The topics in this issue are mostly familiar but the stories themselves are less so... and that's the point. Contributors explore (non-binary) gender and aceness and their connections with things ranging from race and racism to median systemhood. Some pieces deal with harmfully (mis)using aromantic discourse, with surviving abuse, with being sexualised. Others discuss things like how rejecting (hetero)sex with men in an Islamic context is “queer”, how ace discourse (mis?) treats grey-asexuality, and some reflections on (ace) words from childhood.

This zine is just a moment of a diverse, expansive silence — some stories of aces facing silence, alone (together).

-- Omnes et Nihil

Mx. Mel Mishael

Bio:

36 / Asexual / Aromantic / Agender / AFAB / Filipino / Canada

Pronouns:

They / Them / Theirs

cw: discussion of ciscentrism, sexual contact & genitals;
body dysphoria and hypersexuality

Some Definitions:

asexual: experiencing little or no sexual attraction and / or sexual desire for sexual contact with anyone

ace: abbreviation for “asexual”; can also include the whole complex asexual spectrum (e.g., grey- & demi- sexual)

aromantic: experiencing little or no romantic attraction and / or romantic desire for romantic relationships

aro: abbreviation for “aromantic”; can also include the whole complex aromantic spectrum (e.g., grey- & demi- romantic)

demisexual: someone who doesn't generally experience sexual attraction except that sexual attraction **might maybe** develop in the context of a strong emotional connection with someone

grey-asexuality: vast and diverse area on the asexual spectrum, where people might experience some sexual attraction, perhaps ambiguously, rarely, or only in certain circumstances or particular ways. People might also identify in the grey area for other reasons.

- - -

Compulsory sexuality is the set of social attitudes, institutions and practices holding that a) *everyone should have or want to have sex* (of the “right” kind... or at all); b) empowerment equals having or wanting sex; and c) sex or sexual access can be “owed”.

Compulsory sexuality plays out in specific intersectional ways & is related to compulsory heterosexuality— it doesn't just affect aces, and some marginalised groups are uniquely affected by it, particularly because it often functions as a tool of racism.

Amatonormativity is the normative prioritising and valuing of romantic relationships above all other kinds of relationships. It is the social force treating romance as intrinsically superior to, or more intimate, important, worthwhile than other kinds of relationships.

Amatonormativity includes the idea that all people want or should want to form romantic (often but not necessarily monogamous) partner relationships and that these relationships should be central to their lives... and without which people are destined to be lonely or to live empty or unfulfilling lives.

People had already been telling me for years that eventually I would “like boys” and in response I'd been telling them off just as confidently. The context of my articulation of my proto-aroaceness was one of hostile, heterosexist antagonism. I look back and see roots of resistance in my words, as embarrassing and trite as they might seem to me now, or as self-righteously earnest-sarcastic.

I wanted to share these words from 20 years ago, to remind myself of how much I've changed, and to remind you, dear reader, how much we all do— I feel it's important for us all to acknowledge where we started. In some sense, these words marked the beginning of my ace journey. Maybe they will help someone else along theirs.

“Impossible Impossibilities”
(by 11-year old me)

A game of spite or a life-long battle?
Both I'd say.

A war to which all lose:
Most are surcome by the endless possibilities,
Others, the joy of hopeless imprisonment.
With the young memory washed out by illusions,
the loss becomes a victory with countless advantages.

The rare few who win also lose.
Those who win wish they hadn't.
Some bear the independent, lonely sorry of victory/
Rare still are those who prefer the covert
opening and closing of doors.

Why? A reason Learn! or don't.
Ignorance is the easiest way, the merriest way,
the subtle way that remains discrete.
Impossible to win; however loosing is even better.
One can but win the battle for one cannot win the war,
It's narrow, winding contorted road runs but one way.
Impossible to buy a two-way ticket,
one way is the greatest luxury known.
A return to innocence can only be for those who never
left.
Never left!

“A Self-imposed Silence”

Sometimes it isn't an external source that keeps you silent, but an internal.

I've spent most of my life feeling alienated. In order to create a sense of “normalcy”, there were many things I had to keep hidden. I came from a broken home with an alcoholic and gambling addict father, who had an undiagnosed mental illness. The same mental illness started to manifest within me as early as my toddler years. It continues to plague me today.

My sexuality and trans identity began to emerge during puberty, but with everything else going on in my life, I didn't want to deal with it, so I decided to bury it and keep it hidden.

At the time I didn't see myself as asexual, or agender, but thought I was a “gay man trapped in the wrong body”. Now I realize that I was possibly a homoromantic male trapped in the wrong body, but it wasn't something I was able to properly explore, for the sake of keeping peace in my conservative Catholic family.

It is difficult to explain my struggles being trans as well as my sexual identity. Due to my family environment, I was ostracized when I finally had the guts to come out as a gay trans man, in 2011. In fact, I had to temporarily move out for my own safety.

I had been involved in the local gay community as ally, and had many gay friends, however, as soon as I came out, I faced the reality that sex was a bigger deal than I realized in the community.

I was literally told to my face, that my lack of male genitalia made me sexually undesirable. This realization nearly destroyed me, and turned me off from wanting to be a man. I will say the ftm support group I attended during this time was a lifesaver, but the rejection from the cisgay male community, was more than I could take.

I attempted to live as a female once more, and salvage ties with my family, but I haven't ever felt female, and this proved to make me even more miserable. If not for my gender therapist (at the time), telling me that I didn't need to fit in, that it was ok to be a “black sheep”, I don't know what I would've done.

I spent the next few years living like this (neither male nor female, but not having a name for it) until I eventually stumbled upon the term “genderqueer” on the internet. From there I found out about other non binary genders, and have identified as “agender” ever since.

It wasn't until I started identifying as asexual, that I found a community of other nb folks like myself, which has been so wonderful, as I no longer feel lonely. In the past I tended to keep to myself, with the exception of volunteering at pride, and stumbling upon binary trans people in random scenarios such as places of study or employment.

I do constantly wonder about my validity as a member of the asexual community, given that I have been sexually active in the past, and that I originally identified as a gay trans man.

When I say that I think I was a homoromantic male asexual (when I used to ID as a gay trans man), I say this because I didn't realize that sex and sexual organs would be such a big deal to gay men when I originally came out. I'm quite confused if me identifying as a gay man when I first came out, was actually true, or whether it would have made a difference if I knew about non binary identities.

You see, I don't experience any type of romantic or sexual attraction to any sex. I may have related to gay men back then because I never felt female, and didn't want to be with another female, because this brought up problems of gender / body dysphoria for me. Now I'm at peace with my body, and even enjoy femme expression, but I still experience no attraction towards any gender.

I am currently in a romantic relationship with my partner of 4 years. I originally picked him up during a bout of hypersexuality, brought on by the medication I was on at the time. Ironically he was supposed to be a one-night stand, but we've remained together, even though I have been off the medication for quite sometime.

I don't have a libido, nor much interest in engaging in sexual behaviour, however, he seems to still want to be together despite this fact.

I hover between sex favourable and sex indifferent, and have told him I am open to engaging in sexual conduct, but he hasn't ever taken me up on this offer (since I came out to him

“Listening back to my 11-year old self”

For a few years now, my little step-brother has been wondering if he might be asexual. It's not a new thing and he's only 14. (He's also been wondering if he might be gay since he was about 9, and he's still questioning.)

I don't know if he's been exploring ace information online. I know he has access to computers so he could if he wanted to, and there's a lot out there now to find. I don't think he's especially interested in that right now— he's more interested in programming robots, doing improv and reading fantasy— but I'm glad the information is out there if he were to go looking for it.

I'm also worried, though, about what else is out there... how people treat young people who are earnestly saying young-people-things, and whether people acknowledge the gap between adults and young teens.

I rarely observe people talking about how they've changed and where they started out. The ace meta-community is so new that not so many people have really had a chance to grow up in it, and most people who come to ace communities don't tend to stick around long enough to do much “growing up” here.

I've watched a lot of people come and go on the ace community merry-go-round of self-discovery. Many people seem to be just looking for answers and validation, and carry on with their lives after they discover that they're not broken, or after they pick up the tools they need to make sense of their experiences and relationships. I think proportionally few people are looking to ace spaces for long-term, sustained community connections. And that makes sense.

Spending time with my little step-siblings reminds me how much I've changed since I was their age. It reminds me how important it is for them to be able to see that all the people they currently look up to— the people who are and do things they dream of being and doing someday— started just where they are now. But for them to be able to see that, we need to show them.

I remember being 11-years old and writing a poem articulating to myself, in the only way that I could, how I emphatically wasn't into the romance-and-sexuality thing but how everyone else was (or was starting to be).

Omnes et Nihil

Bio:

I'm a 31-year-old queer asexual non-binary freak of the (sort-of- Jewish) white person variety, and enough of a hard-hitting feminist to get regularly called a bitch. I'm in the *really* dark grey zone of the aromantic spectrum to the point of being aroace. I don't do the romance / dating thing and I really never have. I hail from a large Canadian city where I spend a lot of time alone with the cat who claims me as her person.

as ace). I do admit this is quite a relief, as I am currently not interested in sex in general. I feel awful about this, because when I was on my past medication, I had a raging libido and was very sexually active. I was usually the one to initiate sex.

Right now I have no interest in engaging in any sexual behaviour and he tends to be a passive person, so our sex life has completely dried up. He seems to accept this is just how we are right now, and is very respectful of my boundaries.

I do experience sensual attraction (only towards him), and like to kiss and cuddle. I feel very strongly towards him, though I am unsure if it's strong enough to be considered demiromantic, as he is the only person I have had these type of feelings towards.

Hypersexuality has emerged twice in my life, both under the influence of medication (one being an antidepressant, and the other being a mood stabilizer). Being an aromantic, hypersexuality did not lead me to desire romantic relationships or even sexual relationships.

As I mentioned, my current partner was supposed to be a one-night stand because I was tired of self-pleasuring myself. The partner prior to him when I was on the other medication, was my only other sexual partner. So what I take from both of these experiences, is that medication caused me to have a libido, which caused me to be sexually active.

Despite my past sexual history, my local ace community has welcomed me with open arms. I feel I belong here, I and I *know* I am ace aro, so I am glad they accept me, though I question my validity being here.

I am glad they don't question me, because for the first time in my life, I am not the only non binary and/or binary trans person in the group. It is also nice to be around people who have similar feelings towards sex and romance. Most importantly I have allowed myself to speak. I have broken my self-imposed silence. I have a voice, and it is heard.

Sebastian Grace

Bio: Sebastian Grace is a romantic, asexual, transracial adoptee. They are of Chinese descent, but grew up in England. Sebastian now resides in a large North-American city where they are a student and a writer.

cw: body dysphoria; dieting and other body issues; cisentrism; sexual contact; societal racism; mention of abuse

This sort of thing is really common in 101 materials about asexuality, at least in those made by individuals, particularly those that become popular on websites like Tumblr. 101 materials are often people's first introduction to asexuality, and first impressions die hard, making it even harder to correct misconceptions than to have introduced people to the correct definition in the first place.

To finish up, I'd like to mention that I'm not saying that gray erasure and community division is representative of all the ace community. In fact, there are many ace communities that are devoted to inclusion of all people on the spectrum and support our diversity of identification and experiences. The problem is that ignorance and intentional silencing do exist in other ace communities and intentional and unintentional erasure and division can cause harm.

This is my plea to people to look into themselves and question their desire to oversimplify and to divide people into boxes, as even the best of intentions may make things harder for the people they are trying to help. Listen to the voices of gray people and acknowledge the diversity of how we identify and experience our sexuality. Don't push people where they aren't comfortable going.

And to those within the ace community, welcome gray people when they want to join in, because there are a lot of ways to define asexuality and to find its concepts useful. Remember, gray visibility is ace visibility! I know gray areas can be scary, but many of us find them immensely helpful in understanding ourselves and the world. Sometimes we don't fit cleanly into definitions. Deal with it.

Olivia also writes the zines (meta)paradox, Anecdota, Psychometry, and others.

She can be found at <http://paradoxnow.tumblr.com/> and her zine blog, <http://oliviaszines.tumblr.com/> .

areas, but the right thing to do is not to omit the gray but to acknowledge that human sexuality is complicated.

When gray-asexuality / the wider ace spectrum is omitted in educational materials for non-aces, odds are that the writers just wanted to simplify the information they were presenting. And to some people, the simplification of asexuality requires omitting the gray areas. But no matter the intentions, oversimplification has consequences.

By leaving out grayness as an over-complication, you create a hierarchy in the ace community. Some people become more and less important, more and less visible, and there is an implication that those who overcomplicate things should just accept this for the greater good of asexual awareness.

I reject this way of thinking. The way I see it, this just leads to a lot of ace spectrum people being thrown under the bus. And if you think about it, when you create a hierarchy like that or divide up an already small community, the whole thing could end up destabilized. I don't think it's in any ace's best interests to ignore the gray side of the spectrum.

Gray erasure and community division can also be subtler and just as damaging as omission, even if said erasure is done in the name of asexual awareness. One way this occurs is the dissemination of incorrect and oversimplified definitions of gray-asexuality. I get that people want something simple and easily digestible in 101 materials, and it's tempting to try to put people into clear-cut boxes, but oversimplifying gray-asexuality misses the entire point of the umbrella identity.

It's a *gray area*, a catch-all for everyone who doesn't fit entirely elsewhere. Most commonly I see gray-asexuality reduced to "experiencing sexual attraction rarely." That doesn't even come close to describing the diversity of experiences of grayness, and defining it that way erases those of us who don't fit into that narrow definition and silences our gray voices.

How difficult can it be to say that gray-asexuality is the gray area of the spectrum, even if you have space constraints? I'm sorry (not sorry) if this upsets some people's plans for presenting asexuality, demisexuality, and gray-asexuality in a way that is more palatable for the consumption of non-ace people, but what you're really doing is spreading misinformation.

"Fashioning beauty and embodying queerness"

I have never liked my body. It is a short, brown body that houses reproductive organs I will never use, and that requires maintenance that is inconvenient at best and debilitating at worst. In this body, I have always felt conspicuous and out of place.

I learned very quickly that my body was under constant scrutiny and that people made judgements and assumptions about me based on it.

"Are those kids yours?" strangers would ask my white parents.

**My body isn't like the bodies of my parents;
it must be wrong.**

"You should lose weight."

**My body doesn't look like that of a happy & successful person;
it must be wrong.**

"But you're a girl!"

**My body doesn't look like a woman's body;
it must be wrong.**

"Asexuals don't dress like that."

**I don't look asexual;
I look wrong.**

All of these are comments that I have received. I internalised all of them and hated myself for it. I began to truly despise my body because I didn't think it reflected my gender, my desires, or my background. It wasn't a body that was destined to live out the narrative I wanted for myself. Trapped in my body, how was I supposed to access love, friendship, and success?

I grew up wishing I looked like other girls, which is what I thought I was at the time. I wanted long blonde hair, fair skin, and blue eyes. I wanted to be taller, thinner. I wanted to conform to the narrow standards of femininity that seemed so effortless for others.

In hindsight, I don't think I really wanted those things; I just wanted people to stop noticing my body. I didn't want to be "different."

When the romantic partners I later had told me that they liked my body, I was shocked. They said that they loved it. They loved it so much they wanted to touch it all over and never let it go. I knew that joining your body with somebody else's was the way to confirm a romantic relationship. I knew that when you had sex, you were supposed to feel elated, beautiful, loved. The things I had been craving my whole life. In pursuit of these goals, I initiated sexual contact.

To say that I was disappointed would be a gross understatement. I was **devastated**. Sex was painful and I couldn't stand being touched, a remnant of the abuse I suffered before I was adopted. I didn't feel wanted or triumphant; I felt dirty and exposed. Of all the times I had ever felt "different," this was the time I felt the most wrong.

I was supposed to enjoy sex. Everyone was, weren't they? Maybe if I had more of it, I'd get used to it. I fell into a routine of sex masquerading as romance, comforting myself with the thought of my partner's appraisal of my body. **At least one of us likes it.**

I tried to sculpt my body into a masterpiece, choosing clothes that captured the balance of masculinity and femininity that I wanted, and restricting my diet to lose weight. Maybe if I remade my body, I would like it. Maybe I would even be happy.

I failed. I didn't morph into the glamorous creature I hoped to become, even though everyone around me congratulated me for my efforts. According to my bathroom scale, I had lost one fifth of my starting weight, but according to the mirror, there were no changes and I was as undesirable as I was before.

When I look at photographs from that time, I hardly recognise myself. My cheekbones are prominent and my collarbones too. I am pressing my legs together, but my thighs do not touch. My stomach is flat; if anything, it is concave. Yet, I have no memory of ever looking like that. Today, I think, **that is the body I wanted. I was in it, and I didn't know.** Even if I had been able to see what I was, would I have been happy? **I highly doubt it.**

I decided that my body was broken beyond just its appearance and that I might be able to fix it another way. I typed "what does it mean if i dont like sex" into a search engine, and the word "asexuality" appeared.

I think there may be an underlying desire in some parts of the ace community to let gray people and their visibility be someone else's responsibility. And that makes me feel alone in my own community, like my ace identity isn't welcome in ace spaces and ace visibility work.

I also want to talk a bit about the words we use when we're talking about grayness in general. I've been purposely using "gray-asexual" here, because the emphasis is on gray ASEXUAL, as opposed to the word "graysexual" which seems to distance grayness from asexuality.

For those people who don't identify as part of the ace community, great! But forcing someone into "graysexual" or "gray blank-sexual" as opposed to "gray-asexual" can be a divisive act, like telling someone they don't belong to the ace community. So please think before you use the wrong term to define someone's sexuality.

This may just sound like pickiness, but I've seen these differences in terminology used to separate people from ace identity. If that's your intention in using a term for yourself, or you just prefer one of the other terms, good for you, but I ask you to think carefully about why you are using one or the other to describe other people.

Going back to 101 materials, I see the range of these terms sometimes being used interchangeably, which in my experience is not how all gray people use them, and doing so conveys the wrong idea, and sometimes can push the idea that gray people and demi people are or should be separate from the rest of the ace community. A better thing to do would be to acknowledge that people define their grayness in a variety of ways and may or may not identify with asexuality and the ace community.

Intentional erasure and division aside, what I see going on in the ace community appears to be a case of the road to hell being paved with good intentions. We have a lot of terminology created to be useful to people, but people often end up overloaded or underwhelmed, neither of which are positive for reaching out to non-ace people in the name of education.

However, I think that oversimplification is the main issue when it comes to asexual awareness in the wider world. Asexuality as defined by AVEN by itself may seem easier to understand and more "respectable" without exploring the gray

Another thing that gives me pause is when people seem so eager to subdivide our already small groups and separate gray people from the ace community through new terms and flags. People unfamiliar with the ace community may not be aware of this phenomenon, but recently there has been a proliferation of new terms created to define different parts of the ace spectrum, primarily different types of grayness, such as “cupiosexual”, “akoisexual”, “aceflux”, “aegosexual”, and more.

On its own, the creation of new terms to describe experiences is perfectly fine and desirable. That’s a part of what’s so great about the asexual community, how we’ve created new language to talk about experiences that went unspoken for so long. But what worries me is when these terms are used to separate gray people from the ace community.

This can happen when people are pushed towards identifying as one of these more and more specific, subdivided terms as their sexual orientation, sometimes at the expense of considering themselves asexual, if that’s what they desire. If someone wants to use one of these terms to describe their primary sexual orientation, I have no problem with that, but it does bother me when people are told that they’re not asexual or gray-asexual, but actually *insert new term here*.

I’m sure much of the use of new terms is innocent self-discovery, but it seems a bit iffy when each of these new identities is given a new flag and colors to represent it and cordoned off by itself. The ace community is already so tiny, so why the pressure to subdivide into this and that new identity and flag? I suspect that some of it may be due to a desire to keep gray people separate from non-gray aces. And we’re back to that desire for simplicity and putting people into boxes.

When I express asexual and gray-asexual pride, I use the standard ace flag, because it includes everyone on the asexual spectrum. It has a stripe specifically for gray-a and demisexual people. Yet there are separate flags that have been created for demisexuals and gray-asexuals...

I get that there are gray people who don’t consider themselves asexual or a part of the ace community, and these flags and separate identities can be useful to them, but I’ve also seen them used to divide us and keep parts of the ace community separate from each other.

The term clicked instantly. I knew exactly what it meant without having to read any further. It described me.

After becoming comfortable with the term “asexual,” I deepened my research and found the language and concepts that I would later use to articulate my identities and the structures that oppress them. As I reflected on the things that had been said to me about my body over the years and how those had shaped my relationship to it, I felt better. My body felt more like mine now that I understood what it was.

However, it still didn’t feel entirely mine. A problem remained: I hadn’t reconciled the way that my body looked with my gender, and with the way that society told me it should be. I had learned the term non-binary, and felt that it suited me better than “man” or “woman.” Yet, I still didn’t claim it.

I searched for “non-binary person” on the Internet and the majority of images that I found were of slender white people with short dyed hair. My heart sank – I still didn’t look like them and I was still wrong.

I went to Pride for the first time, where I saw white people holding signs that read: “this is what a queer looks like,” and “out and proud.” Those signs told me that queerness is whiteness. I couldn’t be queer, thwarted by the wrongness of my body once again.

Even the material I found on asexuality centred the voices of white aces. Interviews, media, personal testimonies: all of them featuring white people. I wondered if there were even asexual people of colour at all.

When I learned that there were asexual people of colour and that there were aces trying to tell their own stories, I became hopeful. I became comfortable with the idea that my body was already divergent: brown, not white; asexual, not desiring sex. Why, then, could it not be an expression of a non-binary gender?

I finally took up the non-binary label. It fit, in much the same way as “asexual” had done before. Non-binary, outside of “male” and “female.” I realised that no matter how I tried, I could never attain the white, cisgender standard of beauty. For once, the thought did not upset me; it empowered me. It was never possible, so why keep trying?

I tried a new way of reshaping my body. I tried out different styles, I cut my hair, I bought a binder. I diverted my attention away from my weight and focused on other aspects of my appearance. I fashioned my own beauty.

I still don't like my body. It remains a nuisance and does not behave the way I would like it to. However, I better understand that space that my body occupies in the world and how that space shapes my ideas and desires, the goals I once held (and sometimes still hold) for it. My body contains things I don't want or need, but it also contains the source of my life. It allows me to feel pleasure and pain. It allows me to interact with the world around me. It is capable of more wonders than I can appreciate.

I don't now if I will ever like my body. There are good days and bad days, but I have learned to respect it and to try to take care of it, as it takes care of me. Most importantly, I have accepted its wrongness. It's not really wrong; society is wrong. My body is not wrong — it is queer. Odd, strange, unconventional. **Queer.**

“Gray-A Definitions, Division and Silencing in the Ace Community”

Invisibility is a major problem for asexual people, but as time goes by I've seen more and more people become aware of the basics. However—despite the fact that it is a part of the asexual spectrum—a lot of people don't even know what gray-asexuality is, even among asexuals. Sometimes I feel really isolated and silenced in the ace community by the way that gray-asexuality is (and is not) talked about.

The simplest example is when gray-a people are simply left out in ace discourse and 101 materials. I've lost count of the numbers of times when I see ace 101 materials being circulated on Tumblr that mention asexuality and (maybe) demisexuality but fail to mention that gray-asexuality is a thing and that asexuality is a spectrum. Sometimes it makes me want to scream.

When gray-a people, an important subset of the ace spectrum, get left out, there are consequences. People don't consider us valid, or claim we're not really asexual. When we aren't mentioned, this contributes to our invisibility, even within the ace community.

Even when gray asexuals aren't completely invisible within the community, it is all too common for asexuals try to separate themselves from gray people—including demisexuals—by saying that though they may be “on the spectrum,” they aren't really asexual and shouldn't be allowed to use that word to describe themselves. This is the most blatant way I've seen people trying to cut off gray people from ace community, but not the only way.

In saying this sort of thing, non-gray ace people are asserting that one definition of asexual (lacking sexual attraction) is the only valid definition and that people couldn't have other reasons for finding the world useful, as well as categorically denying that people can be asexual and gray-asexual simultaneously (which is how I identify).

I identify primarily as asexual, but also as gray-asexual. This is because I've never experienced non-ambiguous sexual attraction, so I can say I've never experienced (full blown) sexual attraction, but my experiences are still gray. It seems like there is a fear of over-complication and a desire to simplify things, to the detriment of the ace community.

Olivia M.**Bio:**

Olivia M. is a 23 year old US American cis female panromantic (gray) asexual. She is a college student currently studying computer science. Other identities that are important to her include: Latina, mixed race, autistic, chronically ill, and atheist. She loves reading and writing zines, programming, reading and watching science fiction and fantasy, making jewelry, dyeing her hair unnatural colors, and cats.

Editor's Note— Additional Definitions

Aceflux: experience that fluctuates around the asexual spectrum

Aegosexual: experiencing sexual desire or arousal with a disconnect between the target of that arousal and oneself (e.g., with no desire to act on the sexual arousal by having sex)

Akoisexual: experiencing sexual attraction and maybe liking the idea of a sexual relationship but the attraction stops or stops being enjoyable when it is reciprocated or when the person is actually in a sexual relationship

Aroflux: experience that fluctuates around the aromantic spectrum

Cupiosexual: not experiencing sexual attraction yet still wanting to have a sexual relationship

gemini**Bio:**

Ace, aromantic spectrum, white, adult, non-cis (a)gender-complicated but does not experience transmisogyny

cw: discussion of body dysphoria, body parts & sexualisation

Editor's Note— Additional Definitions

Multiple system: more than one entity or consciousness sharing one body— very broad term: multiple systems are diverse.

Median system: more than one entity or distinct facets / parts of an entity in one body— very broad term: median systems are diverse.

Single: someone who has one consciousness in one body— might have different aspects of self, but they're not really distinct or literal (i.e., a single is someone who is not multiple, median, plural, etc.)

“Median-Modes & Gender(s)”

I have two modes of being. I have for as long as I can remember. It wasn't something I ever talked about, or ever thought I could talk about. And it wasn't really something that anyone ever noticed, except maybe joking about how the whole gemini twin / duality thing suited me. My best friend in high school never really suspected, but she kind of picked up on something. She liked me better one way than the other.

I've had some body dysphoria since puberty, but I sort of chalked that up to being uncomfortable with people sexualizing my body and to society sexualizing breasts specifically... It wasn't until I was out of high school (and had discovered asexuality) that gender stuff caught up with me. I found the language to help me navigate that in the ace community and I sorted out an identity somewhere under the agender umbrella.

By that point, I had also come to think of my two modes as a gender thing. As in, I'm a little bit bigender, and the two genders have nothing to do with either the M or the F.

But it was important that the bigender-mode thing was never in conflict with the agender / non-gender thing. It was kind of like my gender (non)identity and my somewhat bigender modes were just on different dimensions. I don't know how I feel about that now.

I'm close with a multiple system (also ace, among other things) who has talked to me about multiplicity. (And it's not always an outcome of trauma.)

I was initially uncomfortable when tem suggested I might be a median system, like tem was reading tem's experience into mine. I felt like I wouldn't have any right to claim that experience even if it did fit because I'm so “passable” as... well, not as “normal” (for other reasons), but at least as a singlet.

I'm still struggling to understand what a “median system” really means. But the more time passes, the more it seems to fit. For me, there's a pretty profound change with particular patterns of how parts of me group together. From what I can tell, it goes beyond how everyone has many parts and facets.

A while back we were reading together through a really long list of gender identities on some website.

I have to be sexy in order to be an adult. I need to wear sexy clothing and participate in dirty jokes and check people out and have them check me out.

I can wear what I like and what's funny to me can be totally different and my face is up here, seriously. I'm looking at your face, your 'hot bod' might as well be a scraggly fern, to me, y'know.

No...what I want doesn't matter, I guess. I just... okay, if you say so.

No, seriously, let me tell you about being an ace ally, it's gonna be the new thing after being a fag hag. Sure, you can totally be both. There's bi, pan, romantic, aromantic, a whole range of orientations, really. No, gender's a whole other side of the story... uhuh, you want the long or the short version of 21st century sex ed?

Hit me up on the AVEN forum or the demisexuality.org forum where I'm “demiandproud” on both.

Or read my blog: <http://demiandproud.wordpress.com>

Maybe I won't ever want to have sex, but I don't feel like I can talk about it. Everyone says I should have it, I'm such a pretty thing, and it's healthy.

Maybe I won't ever want to have sex, no matter if I do or don't feel attracted to people occasionally. So I just... won't. You're welcome to ask me why, but it's my choice.

Look, I need to satisfy my spouse, alright? When you marry, it's part of the deal.

When I marry, I will love that person and remain loyal until I die, yes, but it's disrespectful to us both if I pretend to be someone I'm not and act against my conscience.

The pastor says that God says I must submit and have sex when I'm married.

God comes first, and I can have sex if I feel lust.

Having sex before marriage makes me a sinner. I mean, the church and the pastor and my parents have all talked to me about it. I don't really know what to think, but I guess I agree. I mean, I want to be loyal to my faith.

My body and its sexual acts are not community property and it's not up to my fellow believers to judge. Based upon what I believe to be God's will, I will do my best to do what is right. Whatever happens, I know forgiveness is a sure thing, as long as I ask and don't let others tell me I've committed unforgivable sins.

So after I say 'I love you', I feel like I need to let someone go all the way.

I give love, I give sex, and I receive them. I can neither take them nor should I let anything be taken.

I'm not really an adult before I've had sex, or had a relationship, or am in a marriage that's been consummated.

My place in society and the respect I'm owed is independent of my sexual activity and relationship status.

It stuck us how so many of the gender labels seemed to express general experiences of transness and body dysphoria... while at the same time going out of their way to avoid naming that. (It was striking to us because we are ourselves, tem and I, living various trans experiences.)

There were some other obscure gender labels that I kind of identified with on a metaphorical level... they weren't words that I would ever want to use for myself because I don't have those specific experiences. But I could understand how those abstract experiences could make sense as genders. Those were the same labels that struck my conversation partner(s) as being about experiences of multiplicity. That was uncomfortable, but it started a conversation and got me thinking.

I'm not a different person as time goes by, but I am a person differently.. It's not that I [subject] am different, but that I am [verb] differently. If you metaphor-shift that from a "how" onto "where", it's kind of like a body of water moving via the tide.

In my different modes, I think differently; I understand differently; I react differently; and I communicate differently. I have different strengths and I have different access to my own skills. Everything is always there, but has different relationships to me-as-subject. And that matters to how I interact with people and do relationships. (It matters to other more practical things too, like how my epic nosebleeds happen only in one mode... but that's another story.)

When I look back over my life, I've mostly started friendships when I was in one mode, and then really gotten close with those people in the other mode. Other things shift between the modes too. For example, one mode is completely aromantic and pretty romance-repulsed, and the other is greyromantic and kind of into the idea of romance (though really not into actually dating or doing romantic relationships).

When I think about that, it doesn't mesh well with how people talk about sexual orientations as stable, and the way they were born. People talk about "flux" but that doesn't express what I mean either. For example, when I've seen people describe being aroflux, I can't really relate. My experience doesn't fluctuate, I do. And I don't know if other people feel that way in the great big ace-verse.

I know there are informal networks of ace (and aro) multiple / median / plural systems. I don't know where to find them and I wouldn't if I could because I don't feel like I belong there. I don't feel like I belong anywhere because I'm just not sure where my experience belongs.

What I do know is that aceness helped me come to trans / gender stuff, and gender stuff helped me come to median stuff (and from what I can tell historically, multiplicity stuff and trans stuff have a longstanding connection). And all that matters to how I do relationships.

I don't have the language to talk about any of that, but it's a thing I need to talk about. Maybe other people do too. Relationships are complicated when how I am me cycles over time. I've never really been able to talk about that. Maybe now I can.

I spend money on dieting, I worry daily about the food I eat, rather than enjoying its taste. I exercise and choose a sport to manage my weight, not for energy or enjoyment or even physical fitness. I am in a perpetual state of doubt about my body and what I should improve.

I poke around little markets for simple, delicious meals and their ingredients. I shop around for a way to exercise that fits in my schedule.

I spend an hour or more getting ready for the day because I have a standard to achieve. My make-up and my hair and my clothes will all be judged... I need to make a good impression. My personality won't count until the second impression.

Depending on my mood, I spend anywhere between five and thirty minutes getting ready in the morning.

When a person cat-calls or makes sexual proposals, I feel a mix of shame and confirmation. I'm getting attention, but why doesn't it feel good?

When people yell crude come-ons, I laugh in their faces, ignore them or if I'm in a good mood, shoot a creative insult right back at them.

I wonder after which point I should give in and have sex with a person, whether it's after a drink, several dates or a number of months into a relationship.

I will have sex with a person when we both wish, or not at all. We'll talk about it and see.

I feel bad for still being a virgin. I need to have sex to be normal, right?

I have not wanted sex, therefore I have not had sex.

Sex is a natural thing to have, everyone wants it.

Sex is an action you choose, like any other.

I hope when I have sex my body will be alright, like... will my parts be good enough and will it all be exciting enough and will my performance be good enough?

I've wondered about sex so I've explored my own bits, read about it and figured out the mechanics. The rest I'll have to figure out together with my partner.

We cannot see people as only sexual objects. But we live as sexual objects, ourselves, and we hardly even realise. It's time that stopped. We are free to feel sexually attracted to others, or not. We have no responsibility for being seen as sexual in others' eyes, either. We are free to do, wear, say and be who we are without being discriminated against for our (a)sexuality.

Please understand... I do not advocate a sexless or sexual life, in appearance or actions. I advocate that we live our lives as subjects, and leave the responsibility of others' thoughts and actions where they belong, with others. I hope to illustrate how fundamentally that changes our thoughts and lives in this text.

“Objection Against Sexual Objectification”

I, sexual object

I, (a / gray / demi)sexual subject

I disengage from my own body and imagine how the skirt looks, how very much I differ from a skinny model when I gaze up at an ad... I buy so many clothes and products both because I like them and I think others might like them on me...

I gaze up at an ad and it's uninteresting. I determine that skirt's not in my budget this month and I'm fine with my clothes at home.

I cannot walk in certain streets, be in certain company, because that would make my body seem available.

I feel free to go anywhere and speak to anyone as long as I like the place and the people.

My place in the social order at high school is almost exclusively determined by how attractive my body is. Even as an adult, the more attractive I look, the more attention I get.

I seek out the people with mutual interests and make friends among them, happy to know them.

Annie

Bio:

I'm a white panromantic asexual cis girl in my early 20s.

cw: emotional mistreatment, self-effacement & self-hatred

What I'm trying to bring up in this piece is the way aromantic discourse can interact harmfully with misogyny if it's understood in a limited or distorted way. Women are often taught to devalue our own needs and desires in intimate relationships and to accept devaluation from our partners, and the discourse about deconstructing amatonormativity can be misused to disguise or legitimize that.

“Instructions on using a good idea to destroy yourself”
(For best results, be a girl.)

First of all, learn that dominant narratives about romance limit and impoverish your perception of your relationships, and that you can become a more free and accepting person by decentering romance in your life. This is the good idea.

--

Second, fall in love with someone who is aromantic.

When they say they still want to be with you, believe them. Tell yourself you believe them. Command yourself to believe them.

Tell yourself they still love you, in their own way. Tell yourself they love you. Tell yourself they love you. Tell yourself they don't have to say so. Tell yourself it's wrong, to need them to say so.

--

Perceive all of your desires in that relationship as "romantic," because that's how they feel to you. Wanting to talk to them is romantic. Wanting to see them is romantic. Even the smallest things you want from them are a product of amatonormativity. You want them to be "romantic" with you. You're not supposed to want that. You're not supposed to ask for it.

Ignore every signal that you've missed the point. Ignore every signal that you've got the whole thing backwards. Twist that first lesson around until it's ugly and cruel, and totally unrecognizable. There. That's more like what you're used to.

--

Try to stop wanting things.

Tell yourself you are proud of how far you've come. Tell yourself this is an act of acceptance. Tell yourself this is an act of love.

--

Want things. Want things until you're ready to scream.

--

Don't scream.

--

Demiandproud

Bio:

Greetings reader, well-met. I am a twenty-something demisexual, Christian Dutchwoman, who's still figuring out the intricacies of non-sexual attraction, romantic orientations and the plethora of identities possible in the asexual community. And y'know, words. I hope I've made this piece as widely applicable as possible, but a clear bias remains in the object / subject's perceived gender and religion, female and Christian, because those factor heavily into how body image and sexual objectification work.

cw: sexual objectification & expectations, street harassment, body image & weight issues, sexual contact

Demisexuals cannot really comprehend sexual objectification, it's one of the features that puts us on the asexual spectrum. It's often expressed in the asexual and demisexual forums and testimonials as "Sex scenes in movies or books are boring" and "I think people are beautiful, but I don't get why that makes them attractive" and "I don't really understand flirting or why people approach me"...

Many times we've said "When other girls/boys started talking about kissing/dating/sex, I didn't really understand." We need to know a person and then, maybe, maybe they might become sexually attractive, but they remain a person first and foremost.

...that estranges us from our social group. What diminishes and endangers us is when our own bodies become objects, sexual context or not. Sexual harassment, objectification and body image can be larger issues for us because we've been taught to feel all of the insecurities, but we won't see others in that light.

Footnotes

- [1] <https://asexualagenda.wordpress.com/2014/05/02/asexuality-islam-and-queerness/>
- [2] <http://loveinshallah.com/2015/09/09/im-queer-grappling-with-orthodoxy-as-an-asexual-muslim-woman/>
- [3] <http://ace-muslim.tumblr.com/post/93892421366/my-no-is-not-a-passive-yes-patriarchy-and-the>
- [4] <http://quran.com/4/34>
- [5] <http://ace-muslim.tumblr.com/post/86904762317/islam-patriarchy-and-the-recalcitrant-asexual>
- [6] <http://ace-muslim.tumblr.com/post/123560285666/potentially-asexual-women-in-early-muslim-history>
- [7] <http://amzn.com/0199640165>
- [8] <https://asexualagenda.wordpress.com/2014/05/23/why-i-no-longer-engage-the-are-aces-queer-question/>

Avoid reading aromantic discourse. You don't want to be reminded how wrong and narrow-minded your feelings are.

Avoid reading aromantic discourse. You know that's not what you'll see. You know that this is not what it's supposed to feel like. You know that this was not what that first lesson meant. You don't want to be reminded of that either.

Keep getting it wrong. Get it wrong on purpose. Shred the ideas to pieces and tape them back together, crumpled and full of holes. This way you can use them to justify someone treating you like you don't matter. This way you can use them to stay.

You have to believe that this would work if you tried hard enough. This is all your fault. You have to believe that.

--

Ask if they still want this, if they still want you to stay. Ask if you are just an obligation for them. An annoyance. A chore. Act like you understand when they say yes to both.

--

Remember that they want you to stay. Remember that they are glad you are staying. They have thanked you for staying. It would hurt them so much if you left. Cling to that.

Try not to notice that they only like the "staying" as long as you don't ask for anything. Try not to notice that they like you best when you keep quiet and leave them alone.

Try not to notice that your absence and silence is more valuable to them than you are. Try not to notice that the only thing they seem to like about you is that you're *theirs*.

When you notice anyway, tell yourself it's normal. Tell yourself you can be small enough for them. Tell yourself it doesn't hurt. Or at least, tell yourself it shouldn't.

--

Tell yourself to be "open-minded." Tell yourself to be "patient." Tell yourself to be "accepting."

Never say the words "chill girlfriend." Never say the word "clingy." Never say the word "crazy." Just feel them skulk in your stomach and stick in your throat.

--

Want to leave. Hate yourself for it. Want to stay. Hate yourself for it.

--

Feel neglected and ignored. Feel desperate. Feel hurt. Hate yourself for it.

--

Feel angry.

Hate yourself for it. Hate yourself for it. Hate yourself for it.

I want to be able to talk about these issues in Muslim spaces and add to the growing Islamic feminist dialogue [7] on domestic violence and the legal tradition.

I also want to be able to talk about coerced sex and domestic violence as asexual issues and as **queer issues**.

The topic of whether asexual individuals can or should use the label “queer” for themselves is one that come up in recent years in some online spaces such as Tumblr [8]. I believe this debate is based on overly narrow definitions of what it means to be queer.

When we understand queerness solely as the experience of same-sex desire, asexuality is not queer in and of itself. But if we consider queerness to include the absence of cross-sex desire and the failure to adhere to the norm of heterosexual behavior, then we open up the possibility for asexuality to be queer on its own terms.

And when we recognize my experience as an asexual woman who rejects sex with men as queer, then we must also recognize that some queer experiences are distinctly gendered. In Islamic orthodoxy, asexual men would face few of the issues I have described here, because of the patriarchal authority that this orthodoxy grants to men.

Much of the discourse about queerness that I have seen in these online debates seems to be rooted in the experiences of men (specifically of gay men) and I do not believe it sufficiently takes into account the distinctive issues that queer women may face.

That I am not only asexual but socially classed as a woman under patriarchy matters to how I understand my queerness. That I could face coerced sex and domestic violence because of my queerness matters. I want a discourse that acknowledges that.

Without such acknowledgment, I feel erased and silenced, unable to articulate my experiences in a language that others recognize. That I am not straight has had a profound effect on my life and I need to be able to talk about that.

Islamic feminists and other progressive Muslim scholars today have argued that the normative example of the Prophet Muhammad, who never hit a woman, should be taken as the definitive interpretation of the Quran.

However, the consensus of the traditional scholars is that hitting is allowed and that a wife's refusal of sex constitutes recalcitrance and thus is worthy of punishment.

In addition to the options of verbal admonishment, separation from the marital bed, and hitting, traditional legal scholars also allowed a husband to cut off the financial maintenance (housing, food, and clothing) that he is otherwise legally required to provide to his wife. (This financial coercion has no basis in the Quran.)

On top of all of this, the traditional legal scholars placed significant limits on a wife's ability to seek divorce when she feels she cannot fulfill the role expected of her, or in cases of the husband's mistreatment [5].

Taken together, these rules create a regimen where an asexual woman would have little to no ability to construct a celibate marriage and where she can be subject to measures of entrapment, coercive control, and even physical violence if her husband deems her asexuality a form of "recalcitrance".

The stories of Sawda bint Zam'a and Rabi'a bint Isma'il[6], two potentially asexual women from early Muslim history, illustrate the vulnerability of the asexual wife and her dependence on her husband's willingness to refrain from using his patriarchal authority against her.

Both Sawda and Rabi'a sought to avoid sex with their husbands. Sawda's husband (the Prophet Muhammad) accepted this and sought to fulfill his sexual needs through polygamous marriages with other women. Rabi'a's husband, by contrast, persistently sought to coerce her into sex despite having initially agreed not to.

My own decision not to marry is based primarily on the fact that I think I'm much more likely to end up in Rabi'a's situation than in Sawda's. I just don't trust most men when they have that much power over me. The extremity of my vulnerability in an orthodox Muslim marriage gone bad scares me.

KK

Bio:

KK is a little ace autistic chick from down under who's survived a whole number of things. She's of Southeast Asian blood and has a love of literature, history, science and social justice. She hopes to be an activist and novelist when she is older. Her Tumblr username is kk-gunner.

cw: detailed emotional description of child on child sexual abuse & discussion of child abuse; discussion of bullying, suicide & traumatic ableism

“A Letter to Miles Edgeworth”

Oh, Miles Edgeworth. How have I longed to be like you. How have I wanted your endurance and unwavering resolve, your ability to stand under pressure, your strength in virtue. How I wished to be you.

Miles Edgeworth is a character from the game series Ace Attorney. He's a prosecutor of questionable morality stemming from his own traumatic past, but ultimately changes and becomes one of the fandom's most loved heroes.

And what does this have to do with aromanticism, asexuality, sexual abuse, autism and me? Simple. Aromanticism, asexuality, sexual abuse and autism are part of me. And I relate to Miles Edgeworth. I see myself reflected in him. He was crushed under the weight of grief, trauma and guilt for things he never did, just as I was. He didn't begin as a man of stellar virtue but developed, just as I hope to. I headcanon him to be ace and aro and with autism, and depression and PTSD in the first few games, just as I am also ace, aro on the spectrum and once had depression and generalised anxiety.

But most of all I loved him for his resilience, how his determination never withers, and how I wished, almost prayed to be like him, and how I realised I already was.

It's complicated. Oh, you wanna hear my tell that tale? Alright, you are received.

My story spans long across the 14, nearly 15 years I've been alive, but I'll start at the point I'm 6 years old. At this point, I'm being abused by my parents but considerably milder than I was before and after this age, and I began to be bullied. You see, I'm autistic. Undiagnosed of course, being a girl, but it doesn't change the fact I am; I'm sure of it. And as autistic people are infamous for their social unawareness, I had a hard time making friends, but, unlike the stereotype of us being uninterested in people, I really wanted to.

I don't know what compelled me tell them. Maybe I thought that friends were people you shared secrets with so if I told everyone a secret then they'd all be friends with me. Funny the way an autistic mind works (or any 6 year old's, at all, really).

“Coercion, violence, and queerness in the context of Islamic orthodoxy”

I have never experienced coerced sex or any other form of sexual or domestic violence. I chose the path of isolation 22 years ago and have strenuously avoided any kind of relationship, especially with cis men, where there might be any pressure on me to provide sex.

Since discovering online asexual communities three years ago, and especially since beginning to write about Islamic orthodoxy from an asexual perspective in the last year and a half, I have thought a lot about the likelihood I would have experienced one of those forms of violence had I chosen to marry.

When I claimed queerness for myself in March 2014 [1], it was not on the basis of same-sex attraction, although I am exclusively emotionally attracted to other women. Rather, it was on the basis of my rejection of sex with men and the way that Islamic orthodoxy marks me as deviant because of that [2].

Living in a context of Islamic orthodoxy as a woman who rejects sex with men means being marginalized, isolated, and excluded from communities when I choose to reject marriage, or facing the potential of entrapment, coercion, and even violence if I marry. Traditional Islam offers no third choice.

Starting around 800 CE (about 150 years after the establishment of Islam as a religion), Islamic legal scholars began to construct marriage as a contract for exclusive sexual access to a woman. Her sexual availability at nearly all times became a necessary condition for the validity of the marriage[3].

Framing marriage in this way allowed these scholars to justify the husband's control of his wife's ability to leave the house and even her voluntary religious observance. If she engaged in these activities without his permission, traditional Islamic law deemed her disobedient and subject to punishment.

The Quran itself grants husbands the right to take disciplinary action against wives they consider to be “recalcitrant” [4]. Disciplinary action can include verbal admonishment, separation from the marital bed, and hitting.

Laura

Bio:

I'm a 42 year old white cis woman, a convert to Islam, and an aromantic, sex-averse asexual. I have never had a romantic or sexual relationship and do not plan to. I reflect a lot on the costs of that choice and the alternatives. I have an asexuality-focused blog on Tumblr and recently served as a monthly columnist for a Muslim relationships site.

cw: discussions of coerced sex & domestic violence and systems that give religious sanction to these actions

It wasn't really true, I didn't really have a crush on this boy. I couldn't even see myself having a crush, even as an adult, but after years of growing up on TV shows where everybody was happily coupled off, I didn't wanna appear odd. So I told the entire class I "loved" a boy.

What followed next was taunting and ostracisation that lasted until my graduation, all for a single sentence I uttered as a first grader. Between getting beat-up at school and beat-up at home, I was ready to off myself by the time I was 11. But wait, it gets better! (I'm being sarcastic, if you don't realise.) Another gentleman had to step in and sexually abuse me to add some more trauma to my already long list of them!

I still have trouble calling it abuse to this day. After all, he was another child; same age as me too. Maybe he was doing to me what had been done to him. Either way, it doesn't change the fact he did something and it hurt. Every week at my Sunday tuition, I had to sit next to an absolute asshole who did everything he could to tear me down.

Drawing was my escape from the horrors of my own mind, and he'd rummage through my books and tell me how terrible my art skills were, all under the guise of reasonable criticism. (Thank god he never found my writing. That was the only thing keeping me from suicide after he took my art from me.)

But it was when other kids went out for break that things got really bad. He'd get me against the wall or against the table or trapped between some shelves and feel me up. Usually he just groped my waist and breasts a few times and then left. He started to get more bold, though. It would be my buttocks. He tried to, okay, if you're queasy you might wanna to stop reading, but he tried to rub my clit through my clothing. He would chase me to remote areas of the playground just to mess with me.

I told my parents and they said I had it coming. I told my friends at school and they didn't react, or they got angry when I expressed sadness or any sign of trauma. I swear I did everything I could to avoid him. I wore a skirt that went past my knees, one that went past my ankles, I wore skinny jeans, loose trousers, pointy shoes to kick him with, school shoes when I thought high heels turned him on or something, then I ran out of ideas and felt completely helpless but simultaneously at fault for what he did.

I would've left the classroom at break like any other kid but if I did, he'd steal my possessions and I'd never get them back. The few times I went out, he chased me around the playground as I described. And one time he hid my pencilcase and somehow "forgot" where he put it. (I got a horrific lecture from my parents that night, because by their logic I am responsible for everything, ever.)

This went on, along with the bullying from school until I finished Year 6. I remember the blessed day of the farewell party, half-dazed from drinking too much cola and from the dancing, the lights and the loud music wondering if that was what it was like to be drunk, feeling absolutely nothing about leaving my primary school life behind me. Absolutely nothing. I got a huge stomachache and headache the next day, and wondered if that was what it was like to have a hangover.

I have to consciously remind myself that I'm not making it up or overexaggerating, but even if I trust myself I still wonder how others in my community will take it.

In the stretch between primary school and high school (in Australia, that's grades 7-12), I met a man who became my confidante and most trusted friend. I told him everything, far more than I've told you. And he told me I was incredible, a genius, someone even superior to him. This baffled me; as far as I was concerned I was an ordinary girl.

I reinvented myself during seventh and eighth grade with the new friends and new confidence I had found. I burnt myself out socialising, making speeches, winning debates, and trying to find things to say about everything. I found Ace Attorney in this time, and I fell in love with Miles Edgeworth.

I now let myself be restrained, saving my words for when I really need it. I like to observe the social manners of others then to participate in them myself, and see how silly yet fascinating they are. I let the vaguely British accent and complex vocabulary I've been suppressing for years show. I keep a calm or slightly amused expression on my face, braid my wild hair into two pigtails and don my glasses. I am a flame; I must not use my fuel up too quickly.

This year, my tuition takes place in the class where I was assaulted every week. The furniture was rearranged and the deco changed, so it wasn't that bad. Sitting there, I've decided I would hate it if anyone, especially a man, touched me like he did. I won't want anyone to give my loving words, nor would I return them. I simply didn't see people in that way and had no desire for sex or romance. Perhaps this is caused by my trauma, but I argue it's still perfectly legitimate.

The situation with my parents got worse. I had to fight for the glasses I don. I'm still fighting for an asthma puffer, treatment for anaemia, and the right to exist without physical or emotional pain. When I asked my mother what she'd do if I wasn't straight, she said she'd send me to conversion therapy. When I told her I was never getting married, she took away my clothes and makeup because I didn't need to look pretty for boys anyway. And through this, I thought of Miles Edgeworth, and how he didn't seem to want sex or romance(maybe except from Phoenix Wright) but still dressed pretty for some reason.

In the most recent incident of abuse, my mother told me I was stubborn and that I'd never amount to anything because I didn't obey her. I had learnt to shield myself against her a long time ago. I told myself that my stubbornness was the reason I strived to learn so much and became a model student, and that she was trying to break me by having my obedience. And then I had a glorious realisation.

I don't need to be more like Miles Edgeworth, I'm already like him. What my mother calls stubbornness is my endurance. She has tried to break my will since I was a mere infant to my current time as a budding adolescent, and has never succeeded. She's even told me to kill myself during the peak of my suicidality when I was 11, but some part of me said "No."

This voice inside of me telling me that she's wrong is my endurance; it quells my panic to a slight unease and turns me to observation and problem solving. It is the feeling I have as I face my mother, as Edgeworth awakes from a nightmare of his father's death, as a hero stares down the eyes of a wicked dragon. It is the feeling I'll have as I run far, far away in a few year's time.

From my confidante when I told him of this realisation: "Indeed. You are stronger than you realise."