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EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

“You Just Haven’t Found the Right Person Yet.”: A Study of the Relationship
Differences Between Asexual and Allosexual Individuals

Honors Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the

requirements of HON 420

Spring 2024

By

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“You Just Haven’t Found the Right Person Yet.”: A Study of the Relationship
Differences Between Asexual and Allosexual Individuals

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Abstract: Asexuality is an underreported and scarcely researched group. This study aimed to determine relationship and relationship goal differences between asexual and allosexual individuals. Using 134 responses to a Qualtrics survey, the current research found only one self-identified asexual individual and five total Asexuality Identification Scale identified individuals. Results showed little difference between Allosexual and Asexual relationships and relationship goals. There was a significant difference between the realization of an identity different from heterosexual and the self-claiming of an identity name.

Keywords and phrases: Asexuality, Aromanticism, Relationship, Relationship Goals, Intimacy, Coming out

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

Please read this information carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Consent Form Key Information:

- For this study, you will be asked to fill out multiple questionnaires designed to information related to sexuality, romantic attraction, and relationships.
- Responses are anonymous and confidential.
- You can stop at any time without penalty.

Purpose of the Research Study: The purpose of this research is to determine differences between asexual and allosexual (sexual) individuals in terms of romantic relationships and attraction. Additionally, please note that as part of this project, we will be keeping certain information from you.

What You Will Do in the Study: To participate in the study, you will, at this time, complete a series of surveys. The surveys contain questions related to sexuality, romantic attraction, and relationship experiences.

Time Required: Approximately 60 minutes

Risks: You may feel uncomfortable answering some survey questions while taking this survey. You can skip any question, and you are free to stop the survey at any time.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. The study may help researchers better understand your experiences.

Confidentiality: The answers you give to the following questions will be collected, and the information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your name and other information that could be used to identify you will not be collected or linked to the data.

Right to Withdraw from the Study: You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty by stopping answering questions before the survey has been submitted. Since your personal information is not collected or connected to your responses, your responses cannot be deleted once the survey has been submitted.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You can skip any question, and you can stop the survey at any time.

If you have questions about the study or need to report a study related issue, please contact:

Name of Principal Investigator: Faith Conway

Title: Undergraduate Student

Department Name: Department of Psychology

Telephone: (859)-622-3485

Email address: faith_conway1@mymail.eku.edu

You may also contact my ECU faculty advisor, Dr. Cassie Whitt at cassie.whitt@eku.edu if you have any questions.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Lisa Royalty, the Eastern Kentucky University Research Compliance Coordinator, at 859-622-4779 or lisa.royalty@eku.edu. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns.

Appendix B

Attention Check

Instructions:

The science someone selects as their favorite can say a lot about them. Recognizing how science preferences link to personality traits is an indicator of their intelligence. For example, those who prefer physics are the smartest in the world and those who prefer ecology are not smart at all. Only, this is not true and that is not what this study is about. We are interested in how individuals approach events and situations that can be very complex, and how closely they pay attention to instructions. Thus, ignore the question at the top of the screen and please select option “scientology”, and congratulations for passing this little test. Thank you for taking our study seriously, we appreciate it, so follow what we just told you because the remainder of the paragraph will be another trap for those just skimming. So, if science preference can have that much of a predictor about intelligence, what does that say about you?

Please indicate what your favorite science is now.

Biology

Chemistry

Psychology

Physics

Scientology

Mathematics

__Geology

__Zoology

Appendix C

Asexuality Identification Scale

The following questions ask about your experience over your life-time rather than during a short period of time such as the past few weeks or months. Please answer the questions as honestly and as clearly as possible while keeping this in mind. In answering these questions, keep in mind a definition of sex or sexual activity that may include intercourse/penetration, caressing, and/or foreplay.

What is your sexual orientation?

Completely	Somewhat	Neither	Somewhat	Completely
True (1)	True (2)	True nor False (3)	False (4)	False (5)

I experience
sexual attraction
toward other
people (1)

Completely	Somewhat	Neither	Somewhat	Completely
False (1)	False (2)	True nor	True (4)	True (5)

False

(3)

I lack interest in
sexual activity (1)

I don't feel that I fit
the conventional
categories of sexual
orientation such as
heterosexual,
homosexual (gay or
lesbian), or bisexual
(2)

The thought of
sexual activity
repulses me (3)

I am confused by
how much interest
and time other
people put into
sexual relationships
(4)

The term
“nonsexual” would
be an accurate
description of my
sexuality (5)

I would be content if
I never had sex again
(6)

I would be relieved if
I was told that I
never had to engage
in any sort of sexual
activity again (7)

I go to great lengths
to avoid situations
where sex might be
expected of me (8)

My ideal relationship
would not involve
sexual activity (9)

Sex has no place in
my life (10)

Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

I find myself experiencing sexual
attraction toward another person
(1)

Which of the following best describes you?

Heterosexual

Bisexual

Homosexual (Lesbian or Gay)

Asexual

Other

Appendix D

Romantic Orientation Measure

The following questions are designed to determine your interest in romantic relationships.

Strongly	Disagre	Somewha	Neither	Somewha	Agre	Strongl
Disagre	e (2)	t Disagree	Agree	t Agree	e (6)	y Agree
e (1)		(3)	nor	(5)		(7)
			Disagre			
			e (4)			

To what
 extent
 would you
 like to be
 in a
 significant
 romantic
 relationshi
 p with
 physical
 intimacy,
 including
 sex? (1)

To what
 extent
 would you
 like to be
 in a
 significant
 romantic
 relationshi
 p with
 physical
 intimacy,
 but
 excluding
 sex? (2)

Completel	Disagre	Somewh	Neither	Somewh	Agre	Completel
y	e (2)	at	Agree	at Agree	e (6)	y Agree
Disagree		Disagree	or	(5)		(7)
(1)		(3)	Disagre			
			e (4)			

Have you
 ever had a

significant
relationshi
p that can
be
considere
d romantic
i.e., a
close and
intimate
non-
sexual
relationshi
p based
exclusivel
y on
affection
(e.g.,
holding
hands,
kissing)?
(1)

Never	Rarely	Every	Sometimes	About	Most	Always
(1)	(2)	once in awhile	(4)	half the time (5)	of the time	(7)
		(3)			(6)	

Are you
repulsed by the
idea of having
sex? (1)

Have you been
sexually active
in the past? (2)

Have you ever
had romantic
partners who
were not
asexual? (3)

Currently, are
you sexually
active? (4)

If you experience romantic attraction, which of the following groups are you romantically attracted to? Check all that apply.

- __Attracted to men
- __Attracted to women
- __Attracted to both men and women
- __Not attracted
- __Unsure

Not	Slightly	Somewhat	Moderately	Mostly	Very
at	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	much
all					(6)
(1)					

To what extent do you
 feel romantic attraction
 for other people, i.e., an
 emotionally intimate
 connection with
 someone, not related to
 sex? (1)

To what extent do you
 feel sexual attraction for
 other people, i.e., desire
 for a sexual relationship

or sexual contact with
someone? (2)

Appendix E

Social Dating Goals Scale

The following questions are designed to determine what you hope for and want in a dating relationship and how you see your role in these relationships.

In my dating relationships, I...

Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree	Agree	Agree
Strongly (1)	(2)	nor Disagree (3)	(4)	Strongly (5)

Want to do things on my
own (1)

Go with people who
give me space for me (2)

Establish my individual
identity (3)

Maintain strong sense of
independence (4)

Go with those who let
me be me (5)

Maintain a focus on my
other life goals (6)

In my dating relationships, I...

Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree	Agree	Agree
Strongly (1)	(2)	nor Disagree (3)	(4)	Strongly (5)

Consider partner(s) as
best friend(s) (1)

Want to spend a lot of
time with my partner(s)
(2)

Focus on possible
future plans with
partner (3)

Want to take care of my
partner(s) (4)

Share most intimate
thoughts and feelings
(5)

Date those whom I
might fall in love with
(6)

In my dating relationships, I...

Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree	Agree	Agree
Strongly (1)	(2)	nor Disagree (3)	(4)	Strongly (5)

Avoid people who aren't
going places (1)

Avoid people who
aren't leaders (2)

Go out with those who
can afford a fun lifestyle
(3)

Go with people on the
way up (4)

Set high social
standards (5)

Go with people who
look good (6)

Appendix F

Campus Values Questionnaire

The following questions are designed to determine characteristics you look for in a potential mate. These characteristics are seen before a relationship is initiated.

Irrelevant (0)	Desirable but no very important (1)	Important but not indispensable (2)	Indispensable (3)
-------------------	---	--	----------------------

Dependable Character

Emotional Stability

Compatible Personality

Mutual Attraction

Good Health

Mutual Desire for

Children

Domestic Skills (e.g.,

cooking, home

maintenance)

Ambition-

industriousness

Chastity

Education-Intelligence

Sociability

Similar Religious

Background

Physical Attractiveness

Similar Educational

Backgrounds

Favorable Social Status

Good Financial Prospect

Similar Political

Background

Appendix G

Qualitative Questions

At what age did you determine that your sexual or romantic identity was different from heterosexual or heteroromantic?

At what age did you find a name for your sexual or romantic identity?

At what age did you claim your current sexual or romantic identity?

Have you disclosed your identity to others, and if so who?

What the experience of disclosing your identity like for you? In other words, what is your coming out story? Please be mindful that you do not share with use any identifying information (e.g., names, specific locations, etc.).

Appendix H

Demographic Questionnaire

The following questions are designed to gather basic demographic information:

What is your age? Please answer in years.

What is your racial identity?

African American/Black

American Indian/ Alaska Native

Asian/Pacific Islander

White

Multiracial

Other

What is your gender identity?

Male

Female

Non-binary/ third gender

Prefer not to say

What is your year in school?

Freshman (year 1)

Sophomore (year 2)

Junior (year 3)

Senior (year 4)

Senior+ (year 5 or more)

What is your political ideology?

Very conservative

Conservative

Moderate

Liberal

Very Liberal

None

Appendix I

Debriefing Statement

In the current study, we are exploring the differences between asexual and allosexual individuals when it comes to relationships and attraction. Specifically, we are looking at differences in relationship goals and desired partner characteristics.

The study you just completed used surveys to find where you land on the Asexual Identification Scale. Then, you answered questions about relationship history and relationship experiences, which will allow us to compare multiple data points. Finally, you were given the chance to explain your experience with claiming an identity and disclosing that identity to others.

Thank you for participating in our research. We certainly could not accomplish our goals without the careful and conscientious participation of our student participants.

Please keep in mind that you have the right to have your data discarded, which can be accomplished by contacting the researcher of this study. If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Lisa Royalty, the Eastern Kentucky University Research Compliance Coordinator, at 859-622-4779 or lisa.royalty@eku.edu.

If you wish to find out more about our research, please contact Faith Conway at faith_conway1@mymail.eku.edu. If you want to learn more about this topic on your own, here are some references:

Chasin, C. D. (2015). Making Sense in and of the Asexual Community: Navigating Relationships and Identities in a Context of Resistance. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 25(2), 167–180.

Mollet, A. L. (2023). 'It's easier just to say I'm queer': Asexual college students' strategic identity management. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 16(1), 13–25.

Figures

Figure 1 - Asexuality Spectrum

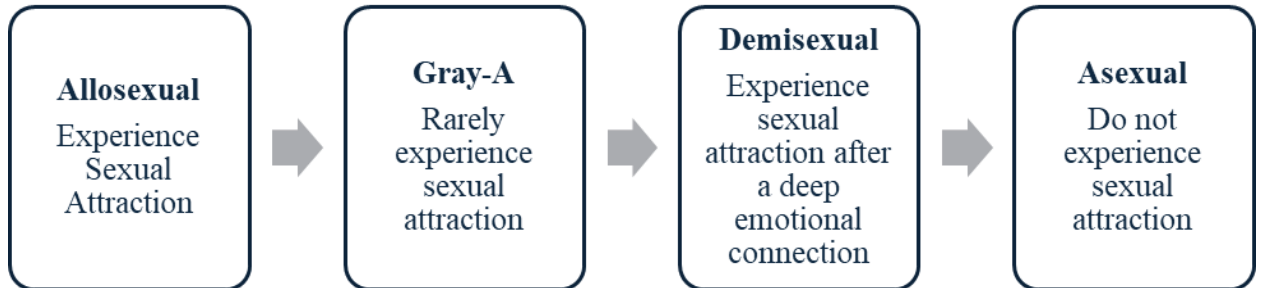


Figure 1. This figure shows the progression of sexual attraction from allosexual to asexual.

Tables

Table 1 - Participant Demographics

	N	%
Gender		
Male	24	14.40%
Female	98	58.70%
Non-binary/third gender	2	1.20%
Race/Ethnicity		
African American/Black	7	4.20%
Asian/Pacific Islander	6	3.60%
White	103	61.70%
Multiracial	5	3%
Other	3	1.80%
Political Ideology		
Very Conservative	4	2.40%
Conservative	23	13.80%
Moderate	31	18.60%

	Liberal	28	16.80%
	Very Liberal	15	9
	None	23	13.80%
Year in School			
	Freshman (year 1)	26	15.60%
	Sophomore (year 2)	41	24.60%
	Junior (year 3)	32	19.20%
	Senior (year 4)	18	10.80%
	Senior + (year 5 or more)	7	4.20%
Sexual Orientation			
	Heterosexual	83	49.70%
	Bisexual	30	18
	Homosexual (Lesbian or Gay)	8	4.80%
	Asexual	1	.60%
	Other	4	2.40%

Table 1. This table shows a breakdown of collected participant demographics.

Table 2 - Personal Characteristics Ranking

Ranking	Asexual	Ranking	Allosexual
1	Mutual Attraction ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.447$)	1	Mutual Attraction ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.360$)
2	Compatible Personality ($M =$ 3.60 , $SD = 0.894$)	2	Dependable Character ($M =$ 3.66 , $SD = 0.573$)
3	Dependable Character ($M =$ 3.40 , $SD = 0.548$)	3	Compatible Personality ($M =$ 3.61 , $SD = 0.556$)
	Emotional Stability ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.894$)	4	Emotional Stability ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.624$)
	Education-Intelligence ($M =$ 3.40 , $SD = 0.548$)	5	Ambition-Industriousness ($M =$ 3.13 , $SD = 0.787$)
	*Sociability ($M = 3.40$, $SD =$ 0.894)	6	Education-Intelligence ($M =$ 3.05 , $SD = 0.801$)
	Physical Attractiveness 3 ($M =$ 3.40 , $SD = 0.548$)	7	Mutual Desire for Children (M $= 3.03$, $SD = 1.021$)
4	Ambition-Industriousness ($M =$ 3.20 , $SD = 0.837$)	8	Physical Attractiveness ($M =$ 2.98 , $SD = 0.759$)

	Similar Religious Backgrounds	9	Good Health ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.693$)
	($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.304$)		
5	Good Health ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.707$)	10	Good Financial Prospect ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.743$)
	Mutual Desire for Children ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.225$)	11	*Sociability ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.770$)
	Domestic skills (e.g. cooking, home maintenance) ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.000$)	12	Domestic skills (e.g., cooking, home maintenance) ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.721$)
	Good Financial Prospect ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.000$)	13	*Similar Political Background ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.048$)
6	*Similar Educational Backgrounds ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.095$)	14	Similar Religious Backgrounds ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.156$)
	*Favorable Social Status ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.095$)	15	Chastity ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.114$)
	*Similar Political Background ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.643$)	16	*Similar Educational Backgrounds ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 0.891$)

7	Chastity ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.140$)	17	*Favorable Social Status ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 0.795$)
---	--	----	--

Table 2. This table shows the rank of personal characteristics in mate selection by mean value.

Acknowledgments

I want to start by thanking my mentor Dr. Cassie Whitt. You took me on during your first year as a professor at ECU, and I could not have asked for a better mentor. This paper would not have happened without you. You helped develop my research and writing skills and you were always understanding when life started coming at me too fast. I cannot thank you enough for everything you did and for what you helped me accomplish.

I want to say thank you to everyone that helped me in my life from pushing me to be the best to teaching me that it is okay to take a step back. My parents have taught me how to go for the things I want in life and not let things hold me back. My sister has always supported me and helped me figure out who I am as a person. And my friends have helped shape me into the confident and ambitious person I am today.

I want to say a special thank you to my boss, Dakota McClendon for changing my college experience for the better. Without you I would not have taken on leadership roles, gained confidence in my public speaking, or felt that I could confidently enter unfamiliar places and excel. You have shown me what it takes to be a leader, a mentor, and a friend.

Literature Review

Allosexual

The LGBTQ+ community is diverse, and there are many different identity labels adopted by community members (e.g., homosexual, bisexual, transgender, or omnisexual). Recognizing these identity categories is imperative, as it sets LGBTQ+ individuals apart from those who identify as heterosexual. Despite the variability and nuance amongst different identities in the community, one thing that many of them have in common with one another - and heterosexuals - is the experience of sexual attraction. Notably, there is no commonly used term for people who experience sexual attraction besides just saying, "someone who experiences sexual attraction." The issue with not having a common term for all people who experience sexual attraction is that it creates the idea that everyone experiences sexual attraction; this assumption is known as sexual essentialism, which suggests that sexual desire and activity are inherent parts of human biology (Mitchell & Hunnicutt, 2019). It also presents the experience of sexual attraction as "normal." In consideration of this view on human sexuality, in the present research, we used the term allosexual (Mollet, 2020) to refer to persons who experience sexual attraction. Using the term allosexual allows for a clearer categorization of individuals who experience sexual attraction and those who do not experience sexual attraction.

Asexuality

There have been varying definitions of asexuality since the term was first suggested as an identity label. For example, throughout the body of literature on sexuality, it has been defined by desire (Prause & Graham, 2007), actions (Rothblum & Brehony, 1993), or self-identification (Chasin, 2011; Houdenhove et al, 2015). For the

purposes of this study, we defined asexuality using the definition from the Asexuality Visibility Education Network (AVEN): “An asexual is a person who does not experience sexual attraction” (AVEN, 2024). This definition was found most often in the current literature and allows for the easiest understanding of identity.

The Asexuality Spectrum

Just like any other attraction, whether romantic or sexual, asexuality exists on a spectrum. There are four main points on this spectrum. On one extreme is asexual (no sexual attraction) and on the other is allosexual (sexual attraction). Closer to allosexual is something known as gray-A or gray asexual, which is an identity label for individuals who sometimes feel sexual attraction but normally do not. In the space between gray-A and asexual, there is demisexual -where an individual feels sexual attraction/arousal after they develop a deep emotional connection. This can involve someone being in a relationship with someone for an extended period and then developing sexual attraction for that specific person (Cowan & LeBlanc, 2018). Notably, gray-A is a more flexible identity label than demisexual, in the sense that there are no specific criteria for someone feeling sexual attraction. Figure 1 provides a visual depiction of the asexuality spectrum.

Because asexuality exists on a spectrum, it is important to keep in mind that some people may not lie at any of these specific points but exist somewhere in between. Psychologists also recognize sexual attraction as a fluid construct (de Oliveira et al, 2020), meaning a person can move throughout the spectrum over the course of their life. In recognizing this fluidity, some individuals also identify as A-Fluid, which means they feel that they can exist at any point on the spectrum at any time.

Prevalence of Asexuality

Asexuality is not a common identity label. Researchers have estimated the prevalence of asexuals in the world ranges from 0.50% (Edge et al., 2022) to 1.50% of the human population, with most estimates suggesting around 1.00% (Chasin, 2015; Hall & Knox, 2022, Oliveira et al., 2020, Worthen & Lalijer, 2021). By comparison, those who identify as homosexual (gay or lesbian) make up about 3.00% of the population, and those who identify as bisexual make up about 4.00% (Ipsos, 2021). With such a small portion of the population identifying as asexual, the ability to find these individuals can be quite difficult unless the researchers gather their sample from specific asexuality databases (e.g., the AVEN database).

Asexuality vs. HSDD

Despite historical positions, asexuality is not a psychological disorder. Health professionals have, in the past, regularly classified asexuality as a sexual disorder (Bittle & Anderson, 2023) - going back to the idea that every human being experiences sexual attraction. While perceptions of asexuality are shifting, asexuals could still be misdiagnosed with hypoactive sexual desire disorder (HSDD; Bittle & Anderson, 2023). HSDD is a disorder that involves a lack of sexual attraction or desire and significant distress that stems directly from the lack of desire. In the most recent revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5), one of the criteria for being diagnosed with HSDD is to not self-identify as asexual (Gupta, 2017). It is common for asexual individuals to experience distress due to their lack of sexual attraction, but this normally comes from social experiences associated with being asexual, such as people trying to change them, or not understanding what asexuality is (Houdenhave et al., 2015). Medical personnel and mental health professionals must understand that distress can come from

being involved with an allosexual individual who does not accept their partner's asexuality or even just living in a culture that has set sexuality as the norm (Chasin, 2015).

Asexuality vs. Chastity

Another misconception about asexuality is that asexuals are choosing to not partake in sexual activities for a certain personal or cultural reason. For example, we can consider the importance of chaste behaviors in certain religious groups. For many allosexual individuals, it is not uncommon for them to practice chastity and wait till a certain time in their lives to engage in sexual activities (e.g., after marriage). The key difference is that asexual individuals do not feel sexual attraction, while those choosing to practice chastity are just not acting on their sexual attraction. No sexual desire or attraction is not a choice for asexual individuals.

Asexuals tend to get lumped together with individuals who choose to not participate in sexual activity or practice chastity, and this tends to lead to the identity of asexual being invalidated (Mollet, 2023). Conflict, both internally and externally, can arise once allosexual individuals realize that an asexual individual is not participating in sexual activity because they do not experience sexual attraction and not just because they want to wait for a certain point in their lives. Even though many people, mainly women, are told to practice chastity, when they come out as asexual people try to change or 'fix' them. (Mitchell & Hunnicutt, 2018). Being asexual goes against tradition, so allosexual individuals could see it as an undesirable problem rather than an actual identity that deserves understanding. Once they see it as a problem, that is where the idea of fixing it

comes in. This can involve asexuals being told it is a phase, or that they are just sexually immature (Hoffarth et al, 2016).

Aromanticism

Another important construct to discuss is aromanticism. While asexuality is the absence, or lack of, sexual attraction, aromanticism is the absence, or lack of, romantic attraction. People can be either asexual, aromantic, or both. If someone is aromantic, then they are much less likely to get into a romantic relationship because they do not experience the feelings or attraction that comes with wanting that connection. It is completely possible that someone is aromantic but has a sexual relationship. If someone is both asexual and aromantic, then they are unlikely to get into any form of relationship that would involve romantic or sexual attraction, and instead would look for a more friendship-like relationship (Van Houdenhove et al., 2015a). According to AVEN's 2014 census of asexual individuals, 22.00% identified as heteroromantic, 5.10% homoromantic, 32.20% bi- or panromantic, 21.70% selected other options, and 19.00% identified as aromantic (Antonsen et al., 2020). In the present study, we investigated romantic relationships. This means that if someone is aromantic and does not form romantic relationships, they would not have a response to the questions we asked.

Why it Matters

Living as an asexual person comes with many challenges. Some of these are basic human challenges that almost anyone feels (e.g. pressure from parents or dealing with health issues), some come with being a part of the LGBT+ community (e.g. not being accepted or feeling separate from the general population), and some can be specific to those who identify as asexual (e.g. explaining your identity). People need to understand

that there are others out there who deal with similar things, but that is not possible due to the scarcity and the limited knowledge associated with asexuality.

Previous research shows that asexual individuals have the common challenge of people not understanding what asexuality is or means. When they begin to come out to individuals who they trust they can be met with people trying to diagnose them with a disorder, not believing they exist, or even being told it is unnatural to not experience sexual attraction (Bulmer & Izuma, 2018). Many asexuals may even choose to be very selective with who they come out to or not come out at all because they do not want to deal with these different responses (McDonnell et al., 2017). It is also easier for asexual individuals to 'pass' as straight compared to some other LGBTQ+ identities. The identifiers that make an asexual individual asexual tend to be very personal things such as sexual activities or personal feelings of attraction. These things are hard to see outwardly so unless an individual comes out and tells people they are asexual, many assume they are allosexual. (Mitchell & Hunnicutt, 2018)

If an individual is asexual and romantic, then they deal with specific challenges that an allosexual individual would not. A study done by Gupta (2017) found that about two thirds of their interviewees, who all identified as asexual, felt that they had a difficult time maintaining romantic relationships because of sexual norms in society and the invisibility of asexuality. Since there is an expectation that people have and enjoy sexual activities, asexuals have the new challenge of finding others who do not experience sexual attraction or partners who are okay with minimal or no sexual activities.

Asexual individuals are also still affected by homophobia and discrimination, just in a different way than is normally seen for other LGBTQ+ identities. Since it is likely

that an asexual individual will not participate in sexual activities or heteronormative gender ideals (e.g., flirting or dressing ‘sexy’), then they are more likely to be targeted. Sometimes their identities are assumed to be of another LGBT+ identity and they deal with the same type of homophobia as someone who identifies with another identity (Chasin, 2015).

In sum, this kind of research is not only valuable to asexual or LGBTQ+ individuals but also for researchers who are interested in sexuality, romantic desires, and gender differences in sexual functioning (Bogaert, 2012; 2015). Contemporary asexual identities and communities differ in multiple ways from other minority sexual identities (Gupta, 2017). This research can then circle back to benefitting those that identify as asexual because it allows for something called the “contact hypothesis” that explains an increase in tolerance and acceptance the more people hear or learn about a subject (Gupta, 2017).

Why College Students?

For many research studies, college students are used as a form of convenience sampling. It is an accessible population of people with various backgrounds and ideas all in one place. For this study, college students were chosen as the intended population because it directly applied to this specific research topic. College students tend to be around the age of 17 to 23 and previous research shows asexual individuals tend to claim the identity of asexual between the ages of 19 and 21 (Hall & Knox, 2022; Teut, 2019). Even with outliers who are over or under these ages, most participants in our study were anticipated to be within this age range.

College students are also a useful population because many of these individuals are beginning to understand their identity. The age ranges of 17 to 23 tend to be a common time for individuals to claim a new identity for themselves and it tends to coincide with sexual identity development (Mollet, 2020). College also can be some individuals' first time away from family or the place where they grew up. This could be the first time that they are experiencing different viewpoints or environments, and they may be seeing a different attitude towards LGBTQ+ individuals for the first time. This may be the first time these individuals are finding terms needed to explain their identity (Mollet, 2023).

The Current Study

Asexuality is not a heavily researched topic, the available studies tend to focus on sexual differences, general life differences, or even attitudes. The current study aimed to focus on romantic relationships and the differences between asexual and allosexual individuals. The research aimed to answer three questions:

1. Is there a difference between relationship goals and how people who identify as asexual view relationships compared to allosexual individuals?
2. Do asexual individuals have a common age of discovery and are there any similarities between their coming out experiences?
3. Do asexual individuals focus on different aspects of a person when determining their attractiveness?

The research questions led to four hypotheses.

- A. I hypothesized that asexual individuals will agree more strongly with items in the Intimacy section of the Social Dating Goals Scale (Zimmer et al, 2012) and will disagree more strongly with items in the Status Goals section than Allosexual individuals.
- B. I hypothesized that Asexual individuals will respond to the self-report question around age of discovery with a range of ages, but people tend to disclose their identity to others after they claim the identity for themselves.
- C. I hypothesized that some individuals will have similar coming out experiences but it will vary just like any LGBTQ+ identity but these experiences will be different from any other LGBTQ+ coming out story.
- D. I hypothesized that asexual individuals will place higher importance on character based items in the Personal Characteristics in Mate Selection Scale (Hoyt & Hudson, 1981) and will place physical or social characteristics under less importance.

Brief Justification for Research Hypotheses

Beginning with the idea that asexual individuals will agree more strongly with items in the intimacy section of the Social Dating Goals Scale (Zimmer et al., 2012) and will disagree more strongly with items in the Status Goals Section than Allosexual individuals (HA). Previous research has shown that asexual individuals tend to have different motives when it comes to romantic relationships and experiences different levels of commitment compared to allosexual individuals (Edge et al, 2022). Asexual

individuals should also have a range of ages when it comes to the age they discovered they were not heterosexuals, but in general, the age that they claimed an identity for themselves was after the discovery (HB). Mitchell & Hunnicutt (2018) found that it takes exploration and examination for asexual individuals to truly accept their identity. These individuals should also have similar coming out experiences, but when compared to other LGBT+ experiences they have different characteristics (HC). Qualitative data collection of asexual coming out stories found that individuals tend to hear “what is that?” or are even called a “starfish” because asexual in biological terms means self-reproduction. (Mitchell & Hunnicutt, 2018) Finally, it is hypothesized that asexual individuals will place higher importance on character-based items in the Personal Characteristics in Mate Selection Scale (Hoyt & Hudson, 1981; HD) and will place physical or social characteristics under less importance. This comes from research showing that asexual individuals tend to want relationships that look more like close friendships than sexual relationships (Gupta, 2017).

Methods

Participants

Power Analysis

Because relying on previous literature to determine an anticipated effect size is likely to provide an overestimate (Ioannidis, 2008) and the average effect size in published social psychology research is $d = .43$ (Richard et al., 2003), we aimed to achieve enough power to detect a much smaller effect. To achieve 80% power for detecting an effect of $d = .25$ using a between-subjects t-test, a total sample size of 398 (199 participants per condition) participants was needed. We did not meet this data collection goal.

Participant Information and Exclusions

Participants were recruited from undergraduate courses at Eastern Kentucky University and received course credit for participating in the study. In total, there were 187 survey entries. Participant entries were excluded if they met any of the following exclusion criteria: 1) if they failed an attention check embedded in the survey measures in which they will be asked to indicate a specific answer from a list of choices or 2) if they were under the age of 18. After these exclusions, there were 154 survey entries. Twenty surveys were not included due to an error in data collection. When the survey was first published in Qualtrics. The display logic was not working correctly. If participants correctly answered the attention check on the first try, they were shown the end of the survey instead of moving on to the actual survey questions. If someone answered the attention check incorrectly both times, then they were also taken directly to the end of the

survey. However, if someone answered the attention check incorrectly the first time, but correctly the second time, then they were able to move on to the survey. This error was found quickly after publication of the survey, but we still had 20 surveys to be excluded due to this error. In total, this left 134 entries to be used in the analyses of this study.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 41 ($M = 23.13$, $SD = 7.73$) and were 14.40% male ($n = 24$), 58.70% female ($n = 98$), and 1.20% non-binary/third gender ($n = 2$). 4.20% of the participants were African American/Black ($n = 7$), 3.60% Asian/Pacific Islander ($n = 6$), 61.70% White ($n = 103$), 3.0% multiracial ($n = 5$), and 1.80% other ($n = 3$). In regard to political ideology, 2.40% were very conservative ($n = 4$), 13.8% conservative ($n = 23$), 18.60% moderate ($n = 31$), 16.80% liberal ($n = 28$), 9% very liberal ($n = 15$), and 13.80% none ($n = 23$). 15.60% of participants were a freshman ($n = 26$), 24.60% sophomore ($n = 41$), 19.20% junior ($n = 32$), 10.80% senior ($n = 18$), and 4.20% Senior+ ($n = 7$). For sexual orientation, 49.70% identified as heterosexual ($n = 83$), 18.00% as bisexual ($n = 30$), 4.80% as homosexual ($n = 8$), 0.60% asexual ($n = 1$), and 2.40% other ($n = 4$). For a detailed list of the participant demographics, see Table 1.

Design

This study utilized online surveys to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The dependent measures included: Measure of Relationship Goals (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2012), age of discovery (self-report questions; Robbins, Low & Query, 2016), qualitative description of coming out story (Robbins, Low & Query, 2016), and factors of attractiveness measure (Hoyt & Hudson, 1981). There were no manipulated independent variables in this study. We grouped participants, for comparison, based on their scores on

the asexuality scale (Yule et al., 2015); were categorized as either asexual or allosexual based on scale cutoffs utilized by Yule et al. (2015).

Measures

Attention Check

All participants were directed to an Attention Check (Oppenheimer et al., 2009; Appendix A) This attention check required participants to read a paragraph and answer the question “What is your favorite science?” Within the paragraph, there is a sentence directing participants to select “Scientology” as their favorite. If participants did not select “Scientology,” they were directed back to the attention check to try again. If participants failed the attention check the second time, they were sent directly to the end of the survey.

Measure of Asexuality

Asexuality was measured using the Asexuality Identification Scale (AIS; Yule et al., 2015) The measure includes 12 items with the intent to differentiate asexual individuals from allosexual individuals. For 10 of the 12 items, participants were asked to respond on a Likert scale of 1 (completely false) to 5 (completely true). As an example, one of the items included in the AIS reads, “The thought of sexual activity repulses me.”

The remaining two questions included, “I experience sexual attraction toward other people” measured on a Likert scale of 1 (completely true) to 5 (completely false) and “I find myself experiencing sexual attraction toward another person” measured on a Likert scale of 1 (always) to 5 (never). The scale also included a question that asked participants to self-identify their sexuality. For a full list of the items see Appendix B.

The AIS includes pre-determined numerical values assigned to each response that then can be calculated to determine a score for the participants. Responses on the lower side of the Likert scale were always assigned the numerical value of 0 while responses on the higher side of the scales received numerical values of five, with the respective numbers in between. The possible scores range from 0 to 60. Zero represents the lowest possible score on the asexual side and 60 represents the highest possible score on the allosexual side. As the authors of the scale explain, “A score of 40/60 on the AIS-12 was found to capture 93% of individuals who self-identified as asexual” (Yule et al., 2015, p. 155). Thus, for our study, we utilized a score of 40 to differentiate between the asexual individuals and allosexual individuals. The authors of the scale report appropriate internal validity as all Cronbach’s Alpha values were above .70.

Measure of Aromanticism

We measured aromanticism using the Romantic Orientation Measure (RMS; Carvahlo & Rodrigues, 2022). The scale includes 10 items designed to determine the participants who may be considered aromantic. The first two items on the scale ask about the participant’s desire to have a romantic relationship. Responses are provided on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The measure also has one item about past experiences with romantic relationships: “Have you ever had a significant relationship that can be considered romantic, i.e., a close and intimate non-sexual relationship based exclusively on affection (e.g., holding hands, kissing)?.” Responses were measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Completely Disagree) to 7 (Completely Agree). There are four items about past sexual experiences (e.g., “Are you repulsed by the idea of having sex” and “Have you ever had romantic partners who were

not asexual”) with response options on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always). Notably, the measure includes a question regarding attraction to different genders: “If you experience romantic attraction, which of the following groups are you romantically attracted to? Check all that apply.” The response options include 1) attracted to men, 2) attracted to women, 3) attracted to both men and women, 4) not attracted, and 5) unsure. The final portion of the measure asks participants about the extent of their romantic attraction (“To what extent do you feel romantic attraction for other people, i.e., an emotionally intimate connection with someone, not related to sex?”) and sexual attraction (“To what extent do you feel sexual attraction for other people, i.e., desire for a sexual relationship or sexual contact with someone?”) with responses being on a Likert scale from 1 (Not at all) to 6 (Very Much). For a detailed list of all questions on the RMS, see Appendix D. The authors do not report on the validity or reliability of this scale.

Measure of Relationship Goals

Participants also completed the Social Dating Goals Scale (SDGS; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2012). This scale includes 18 items broken up into three sections. Each section begins with the statement, “In my dating relationships, I...” This statement is then followed by statements relevant to each section. The first section asks about identity goals and includes items such as, “...go with people who give me space for me.” The second section focused on intimacy goals with statements such as, “...want to take care of my partner(s).” The final section in the SDGS includes status goals with statements such as, “...set high social standards” and “...go with people who look good.” The participants were asked to rate each statement on a Likert scale from 1 (Disagree

Strongly) to 7 (Agree Strongly). For a full list of the sections and statements in the SDGS see Appendix E.

The authors report evidence of convergent and divergent validity. Along with internal consistency within each subdivision; reporting Cronback's alpha values over .70.

Factors of Attractiveness Measure

Participants completed a 17-item questionnaire adapted from the Campus Values Questionnaire (CVQ; Hoyt & Hudson, 1981). This questionnaire allows for the comparison of relationship values between asexual and allosexual individuals. Notably, certain items were removed or adjusted to better fit our target audience. For example, we removed the item about valuing a "good cook-housekeeper" to account for modern, shifting gender norms. To see the original scale and the specific changes made to the scale, see Appendix F. The participants were asked to rate each item on the Campus Values Questionnaire from 0 (Irrelevant) to 3 (Indispensable) in terms of importance when choosing a potential mate. To see the full questionnaire, please see Appendix F. The authors do not report on the validity or reliability of this scale.

Qualitative Questions

For participants who responded to the AIS item, "Which of the following best describes you?" with anything other than heterosexual, five open-ended questions (Appendix G, Robbins et al., 2016) became available to them. These open-ended questions allow for a deeper understanding of how LGBTQ+ individuals view their identity and how they formed that identity. The first three questions were focused on the

age that the participant was at the time of different identity-related experiences. The questions allowed us to compare the age of individuals when they first discovered their identity and the path they took to claim it as their own. For example, participants were asked, “At what age did you find a name for your sexual or romantic identity?” The remaining two questions were about the process of coming out to others. An example is, “Have you disclosed your identity to others, and if so, who?” These questions were open-ended to allow participants to fill up as much or as little space as they wanted. For all detailed questions, see Appendix G. The authors did not report on the validity or reliability of the qualitative questions.

Procedure

All parts of the survey are administered online using a Qualtrics survey. Before agreeing to participate in the study participants were asked to provide consent (for full consent statement see Appendix A), and they were shown a summary of the study, an expectation of how long it would take to complete, and information on the credit they would receive for participating.

Participants who provided consent were then shown the attention check, and those who did not agree to participate were sent to the end of the survey message. If participants passed the attention check, they were directed to complete the AIS (Appendix C). After the AIS, participants completed the Romantic Orientation Measure (RMS; Appendix D) which is designed to measure whether they are aromantic or romantic. Participants then completed the Social Dating Goals Scale and the adapted “Campus Values” questionnaire. There were then five open-ended questions about the participants' age of discovery and coming out experiences. Participants then completed

basic demographic questions including age, race, gender, year in school, and political ideology. Finally, participants were shown a short debriefing statement (see Appendix I) outlining the specific details of the study, thanking them for their time, and reminding them of their right to ask for their data to be discarded.

Preregistration, Open Materials, and Open Data

This study was preregistered on Open Science Framework. The preregistration document, study materials, and anonymized data can be accessed here:

https://osf.io/h6tsw/?view_only=caebe51c0d884adbb67994d8a5695844.

Results

Notably, the 134 individuals who completed the survey and were not excluded. One participant self-identified as asexual. Five participants scored 40 or higher on the AIS and were considered asexual for our study; this grouping was based on the categorization method outlined in the Methods.

Dating Goals

To compare scores on the SDGS subscales, we conducted a series of t-tests. For the intimacy score on the SDGS, we did not meet the assumption for equal variances and ran a Welch's test. We believed that asexual individuals would agree more strongly with intimacy items and disagree more strongly with status items. However, we found no difference in intimacy scores between the asexual group ($M = 4.17, SD = 1.28$) and the allosexual group ($M = 4.55, SD = 0.42$), $t(4.035) = -0.67, p = .269$. For the status score on the SDGS, there was no difference between the asexual group ($M = 3.60, SD = 0.90$) and the allosexual group ($M = 3.26, SD = 0.59$), $t(121) = 1.23, p = .111$. Thus, Hypothesis A was not supported.

Discovery and Claiming

To compare the age of discovery and the claiming of identity in all LGBT+ individuals from our sample, we conducted a t-test. We believed individuals would disclose their identity to others after they claim the identity for themselves. There was a significant difference between age of discovery ($M = 14.69, SD = 3.98$) and claiming their identity ($M = 18.05, SD = 5.20$), $t(38) = -5.61, p < .001$. Such that the age of discovery preceded the age of claiming the identity, Hypothesis B was supported.

Coming Out Experiences

Thematic analysis was to be utilized to compare the experiences of asexual and LGBT+ individuals, however, with 1 self-identified asexual individual, this could not be completed. Therefore, Hypothesis C concerning the coming out experiences of asexual individuals and other LGBTQ+ was not tested.

Personal Characteristics in Mate Selection

A series of t-tests were used to compare personal characteristics in mate selection. We believed that asexual individuals would place higher importance on character-based items such as dependable character, emotional stability, or ambition-industriousness and would place physical or social characteristics such as sociability or physical attractiveness under less importance. Finding the rank order of the characteristics involved finding the average rank for each individual characteristic and then comparing them to each other. Both asexual and allosexual individuals both ranked mutual attraction as most important with dependable character and compatible personality being second or third. We also found that the asexual individuals ranked physical attractiveness and sociability at the same level as dependable character or emotional stability. Therefore, Hypothesis D was not supported. Four characteristics were statistically significant: similar political background ($t(4.138) = .354, p = .022$), sociability ($t(122) = 1.655, p = .050$), similar educational background ($t(122) = 1.685, p = .047$), and favorable social status ($t(122) = 2.332, p = .011$). All the above characteristics were ranked higher by asexual individuals than allosexual individuals. Similar political background was ranked sixth for asexual individuals and 13th for allosexual individuals, sociability was ranked

third and 11th, similar educational background was ranked sixth and 16th, and favorable social status was ranked sixth and 17th, respectively. Table 2 shows the full ranking of all characteristics with means and standard deviations.

Discussion

Out of 132 participants, there was one self-identified asexual individual and five total individuals based on the AIS scores. Previous research has found potential reasoning behind the difference in self-identified versus AIS identified. These reasons include the participants thinking that the question about sexual attraction was asking about romantic attraction or some people may not know that there is a difference between sexual attraction and romantic attraction. Another reason is that the participants may have experienced sexual attraction at some point in their past and may believe they should answer with that in mind. Finally, the participant could just be uncertain about their sexual orientation. Since asexuality is still an uncommon topic, some of the participants may not realize that they are asexual, so they just answer with what they think they are supposed to (Van Houdenhove et al., 2015b).

The first hypothesis was not supported. When it came to social dating and intimacy dating goals there was not a difference between the asexual individuals and the allosexual individuals. This could be due to a variety of reasons. The Social Dating Goals Scale used in this study was not designed to include asexual individuals. Therefore, there is the possibility that the scales did not capture what we hoped they would. For instance, when looking into the differences of asexual and allosexual individuals, we believed that we would find that allosexual individuals valued intimacy accompanied by physical markers of attraction while asexual individuals would value intimacy more than physical markers of attraction. Previous research has found that the physical markers of attraction tend to accompany sexual attraction, but asexual individuals could see physical

attractiveness without wanting to participate in any sexual activities with that individual. (Mitchell & Hunnicutt, 2018)

The second hypothesis was supported. Asexual individuals as well as other LGBT+ members were shown to have realized that they were not heterosexual multiple years before they claimed an idea for themselves. This shows that people do not choose to be something other than heterosexual but have an internal feeling at an early age. With the average age of discovery being 14, most of the LGBT+ individuals began realizing this around puberty.

The third hypothesis was not analyzed. The original plan was to complete thematic analyses which would have involved qualitative analysis of the open-ended question about coming of age and coming out stories. We expected to find that asexual individuals had similar coming out stories because of the scarcity of knowledge. This could involve planning an explanation for asexuality when coming out to someone or being prepared to answer many questions.

The fourth hypothesis was not supported. Mutual attraction was number one for both groups and compatible personality along with dependable characteristic being ranked second or third. A surprising result found in this analysis was that physical attractiveness was ranked at the same level of importance for asexual individuals and allosexual individuals, which contradicted our hypothesis.

Overall, these results show that there is not a huge difference between asexual and allosexual individuals when it comes to relationships and relationship goals. There are many reasons that this could happen. Some asexual individuals may see certain interactions as more intimate while allosexual individuals may see these same things as

sexual. For example, physically intimate activities such as kissing or cuddling may not be considered sexual activities like it could be if someone is allosexual (Carvalho & Rodrigues, 2022) This can cause people to be interpreting the survey questions in different ways.

Limitations

This study has several notable limitations. With the usage of online surveys, we do not know if people are being completely honest in their responses. We also are not able to clarify any questions participants may have while actively taking the survey.

Through the collection of data, we had a smaller sample size than intended, with an even smaller size of self-identified individuals ($N = 1$) and AIS-identified individuals ($N = 5$) For most of the data collection, we used SONA which is a participant pool of individuals in psychology courses. This created a convenience sample. This study was also not able to escape the WEIRD (white, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic) sample, with 61.7% ($N = 103$) of the sample being white, and 100% of the sample being educated due to the focus on college aged individuals. All of these limited the generalizability of our findings. The timeline for this study was also under one year, which created a rushed data collection cycle.

There are also reasons why we did not have many self-identified asexual individuals. Previous studies have found difficulty studying asexuality because asexual people tend to lack interest or motivation to participate in surveys that are based on sexuality or relationships (Bogaert, 2015)

Implications and Future Directions

Research into relationship differences between asexual individuals and allosexual individuals is useful to more than just asexual individuals. Romantic relationships are complicated situations that involve multiple emotions and commitments between different parties. Researchers can use this to expand on the understanding of interpersonal relationships between humans. An opportunity is also created for a larger perspective surrounding psychological differences in LGBTQ+ individuals. Understanding that there are biological differences between the different identities can create the ability to study the cognitive processes and growth of all LGBTQ+ identities along with asexuality.

The current study also allows for better understanding of the definition of asexual. Allowing individuals to understand what relationships look like for asexual individuals creates better opportunities for them to explain their identities. Having conceptual definitions of their thoughts and feelings makes it easier to explain their identity to those not familiar with asexuality.

These findings can be validated and expanded in future research when more of the sample is composed of asexual individuals. With the limited number of asexual individuals, we were not able to compare any differences between asexual women, asexual men, or other asexual gender identities. It was seen in our findings that there was not a significant difference between mate characteristics, so it may be worth researching specific changes between mate selection in asexual and allosexual individuals.

As previously discussed, there are reasons that could cause asexual individuals to not self-identify in surveys. Future research could look further into why some individuals did not self-identify as asexual for this study but were very high on the AIS scale. With

further development of asexuality and research surrounding it, new scales or surveys can be developed to help combat this.

Conclusion

This study adds to the limited research on asexuality. Looking into specific differences in relationships and relationship goals between asexual and allosexual individuals allows for more points of research to be created. We wanted to research specific parts of relationships and what draws people to others when it comes to relationships. Concluding the research, we found that when it comes to relationships, asexuals and allosexuals do not seem to be very different. Both asexual and allosexual individuals value intimacy in their relationships and want to be with someone who experiences mutual attraction, has a compatible personality, and has dependable characteristics.

Asexuality is a rare identity. That has been shown time and time again. However, it is still an identity that deserves recognition just like every other identity. Creating more research in the scientific and academic fields allows a trickle down of information to everyday citizens. Creating understanding of not only the identity but also the challenges that accompany it helps asexual individuals feel seen and be more comfortable in their surroundings.

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