

Rewriting Asexual Representation: Examining the Intersection of Asexuality, Gender, Race, and Disability through Critical Analysis and Creative Reimagining By Emma Bolch

Abstract

If I had seen an asexual character on TV as a child, I would have realized I was asexual much sooner. Unfortunately, most asexuals' experiences are similar, as they have to rely on informal internet research to understand their lack of sexual attraction. To address this representational gap, this research focuses on the depiction of asexual characters in film, TV shows, and literature while analyzing two written works. The works I chose are *Being Ace: An Anthology of Queer, Trans, Femme, and Disabled Stories of Asexual Love and Connection* (ed. Dyer 2023) and *Let's Talk About Love* (Kann 2018) to determine the difference between good and bad representation, arguing that additional dimensions of asexuals' identity need to be fully fleshed out. I propose a critical reframing of representations considered "bad": rather than disposing entirely of flawed characters, I argue that there is a great need to re-envision and enrich elements of their portrayal (disability, aromanticism, race). This study concludes with a creative writing exploration of what a realistic representation could look like, based on my lived experiences and addressing the intersection of underrepresented gender(s), race(s), and disability. Rather than erasing stereotypes, this research aims to find ways to create future portrayals that are relatable and informative while normalizing asexuality.

I. Introduction

Due to the growth of queer representation, people wouldn't need to look up on the internet to know what gay or bisexual means. However, if you heard the word "asexual," most people wouldn't even know what it means. This research examines the portrayal of asexual characters because representation is scarce, leaving many unaware that asexuality exists. When it appears, it is often inaccurate or based on harmful stereotypes. This study analyzes fictional works to show that asexual characters need more fully developed identities, particularly regarding gender, race, and disability. I propose a critical re-framing of flawed representations, as some of their elements remain valuable despite being flat or stereotypical.

This study concludes with a creative writing exploration of a more realistic and nuanced asexual character based on my lived experiences. Ultimately, I hope to answer how asexuality should be written in the future to help showrunners, authors, filmmakers, and others create accurate and positive portrayals to increase awareness and legitimize asexuality.

I use several terms throughout the paper. By *asexuality*, I mean a sexual orientation of little to no sexual attraction and I use *ace* as shorthand. Because asexuality is a spectrum, I also use terms such as *demisexual* (experiencing sexual attraction only after forming a close bond) and *graysexual* (experiencing sexual attraction infrequently). I use *aromanticism* to describe little to no romantic attraction, *aro* as shorthand, and *aroace* to describe someone who is both asexual and aromantic. I also use *biromantic* to describe someone who is romantically but not sexually attracted to two genders.

II. Literature Review

1. Gender

Most asexual characters in TV shows are men, such as Dexter (Manos, James, Jr., 2006-2013), Sheldon Cooper (Lorre, Chuck, and Bill Prady, 2007-2019), and Sherlock (Moffat, Steven, and Mark Gatiss, 2010-2017). Although the creators haven't confirmed these characters as asexual, it is still more common to find a male character in TV or movies who is hinted to experience low sexual attraction than a woman. In addition, sexuality researcher Tokheim argues this representation supports stereotypes of asexuality as these men are often depicted as being unemotional, autistic, and suffering from trauma (Tokheim, 2018). Since not having sexual attraction is an idea non-asexuals have a hard time understanding, they come up with reasons for asexuality, such as medical or psychological issues, creating the stereotypes that asexuals are "broken." One gap that Tokheim didn't consider, which I later address, is that some asexuals in real life are less sociable and have in fact experienced trauma. Despite that, he is right that these stereotypes are harmful because they make viewers assume that sexual attraction is linked with humanness and that those who do not experience sexual attraction are therefore abnormal.

In contrast, asexual characters in young adult and children's literature are predominantly female. Examples are Georgia from *Loveless* and Clariel from *The Old Kingdom* series. However, Hernandez noticed that these characters, similarly to male characters in the media who are asexual, are also usually white and cisgender (Hernandez 1). Most of these female protagonists are also aromantic. Always writing characters who are both asexual and aromantic implies that an asexual person is also aromantic and an aromantic person is also asexual. This is false, as asexuals can experience romantic attraction and aromantics can experience sexual attraction.

My theory as to why there is a lack of asexual women in film is that, for centuries, women have been sexualized, leading to a Western ideology that a female character who isn't a sexual or romantic interest serves no purpose in the story. Conversely, women are not often in production positions for this medium; instead, they are the majority of writers and readers of asexual literature, because most of these books, like *Loveless*, are written by women, who are more individual and have more individual freedom to tell their own story based on their own experiences. This is unlike TV creators, 80.6% of whom are male (Kuznikov 2024) and are limited in how they tell their stories as companies focus on gaining viewers through action or sex.

Unfortunately, there is also a lack of male asexual representation in literature. Researcher Hernandez explains the lack of male representation stems from the belief that men aren't "masculine" until they have sexual intercourse with a woman, unlike women who are discouraged from having sexual intercourse with multiple men; otherwise, she'd be viewed as a "whore." This also explains why it is "less likely (for a man) to identify as asexual because they fear having their masculinity challenged" (Hernandez 4), as according to the Asexual Community Survey, only "11%" (Winer, Canton, and Hannah 2024) of those identified as asexual are men.

2. *Race*

Across different media forms, Hernandez, Tokheim, Humphreys-Lamford, and Scherrer note that most asexual characters are white, reflecting stereotypes that portray white people, especially women, as "sexually pure," because society pressures them to be, and Black and Latino people as "hypersexual" (Hernandez 5).

These stereotypes may also contribute to the exclusion of non-white people from predominantly white asexual communities. For example, AVEN's community census found that only about 25% of respondents identified as Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, or another non-white identity. Similarly, Scherrer's survey, conducted from asexuality.org, found that 84 of 102 participants identified as white or Caucasian (Scherrer 2026). At the same time, non-white asexual people may also face homophobia and acephobia within support groups centered on their racial communities. Black women, in particular, often experience exclusion because of their long history of sexualization in film and magazines (Manzoor 2025).

3. *Disability*

Tokheim says the media justifies asexuality by giving characters "nonnormative bodies, specifically fat, disabled, Asian, and nerdy bodies" (Tokheim 3). This reinforces the idea that asexual people cannot be attractive or physically have greater difficulty having sex.

Tokheim also notes the frequent association between autism and asexuality in fiction. Because autistic people may struggle with socializing or dislike physical contact, they are often stereotyped as asexual, reinforcing the misconception that asexual people are unsociable and uninterested in sex.

According to Gault's research, disabled people are similarly assumed to be asexual in real life. As a result, they are often excluded from comprehensive sex and health education because caregivers and educators feel uncomfortable teaching them (Goulden and Kattari 2023). This denies them information about safe sex, consent, boundaries, and healthy relationships (Gault 2023) increasing their risk of sexual or domestic violence.

However, these authors do not address the intersection between disability and queer identities, including asexuality. Both groups experience similar pressures surrounding compulsory heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, and coming out.

4. *"Good" versus "Bad" Representation*

Poor asexual representation often relies on stereotypes. However, increasing diversity doesn't mean eliminating white, male, and disabled asexual characters. Instead of giving fewer examples of what asexuality is, there need to be more examples in the media that are thoughtful and inclusive.

However, representation does become poor when it relies on common tropes. Of the approximately 42 traditionally published YA novels featuring asexual protagonists, about two-thirds use the "asexual exile trope" (O'Connor 2026), in which asexual characters are

ostracized or exiled for being seen as inhuman. While this reflects the real experiences of many asexual people living in a heteronormative society, the problem is not the trope itself but how often it is used and how it ends. If the character ultimately accepts their identity, the representation is positive. If they remain isolated and ashamed of their asexuality, it reinforces harmful messages.

Some critics also label representation as poor simply because a character struggles with their identity. Brown argues that Clariel, from *Clariel* by Garth Nix, is a poor representation because she fears how others will react to her lack of sexual desire, portraying asexuality negatively (Brown 9). Simelane disagrees, arguing that Clariel is a strong representation because her struggles with asexuality and desire for independence make her relatable to both asexual and allosexual readers (Simelane 81). I agree with Simelane. Expecting a character to immediately embrace a newly discovered asexual identity is unrealistic. What matters is whether they grow to accept themselves, making their representation ultimately positive.

Positive representation comes from avoiding harmful stereotypes—such as portraying asexuality solely as a response to trauma—while creating complex characters with meaningful flaws and growth. While stereotypes by definition aren't always harmful, they suggest that all members within a certain group share the same characteristics, whether by race, gender, or culture, which can lead to biases or misconceptions which are often untrue (Momentous Institute 2023).

Whether they are white, non-white, male, female, or disabled, well-developed asexual characters who learn to accept themselves can encourage greater understanding and acceptance of asexuality. However, scholars are right in their belief that stereotypes can be harmful, even if certain characteristics are important, since they reinforce misbeliefs about asexuality.

III. Theoretical Framework

1. Intersectionality

So far, I have discussed how race, gender, and other identities affect asexuality individually, but not their intersectionality (Kang, Miliann, Donovan Lessard, Heston, and Nordmarken 2017). Intersectionality helps explain how overlapping identities can increase the challenges of being asexual. For example, while people of color are often excluded from predominantly white asexual communities, women of color face additional barriers because of both race and gender. By contrast, white women may be more accepted within asexual communities but still face societal expectations to pursue romantic relationships. This reflects the additive model of identity, in which a person's experiences are shaped by both privileged and marginalized identities (Kang et al. 2017).

Asexual support groups should be welcoming, yet many remain exclusionary toward non-white people by either not allowing them to join in the first place or treating them differently than white members. More inclusive communities could foster cultural competence by bringing together asexual people from diverse backgrounds to challenge oppression such as conversion therapy (the discredited practice of attempting to change a queer person's sexual orientation or gender identity, often causing depression and isolation) and corrective rape (the sexual assault of

queer people intended to "fix" their sexual orientation, exposing asexual people to severe violence) (Slayter, Singh, and Johnson 2023).

However, awareness alone cannot eliminate structural inequality. Kang argues that achieving critical cultural competence requires self-reflection and recognizing one's own biases to promote equity (Kang 2017). This applies to both allosexual people, who must examine assumptions about asexuality, and privileged asexual people, such as white asexuals, who can help make asexual communities more inclusive.

If groups of different backgrounds came together, they can both obtain their goals on inclusivity, such as the queer and disability movement (Borum, Valerie, and Elspeth Slayter 2023). Historically, disabled and queer communities have supported one another because both have experienced discrimination through ableism and homophobia. This shared history has led to organizations such as the Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf (RAD) and Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR).

2. Crip Theory

Crip Theory argues that both asexual people and disabled people experience discrimination through compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness (McRuer 2026). Compulsory heterosexuality assumes heterosexuality as the norm within a patriarchal system, while compulsory able-bodiedness privileges able-bodied people over those with disabilities. These systems have also reinforced stereotypes linking asexuality and disability, including the belief that one causes the other. Gault argues that these assumptions make it more difficult for queer people with intellectual disabilities to come out because they may struggle to advocate for themselves (Gault, Wetmur, Plummer, and Findley 2026). Johnson and Sweet further note that women with physical disabilities are often stereotyped as asexual, while women with intellectual or emotional disabilities are stereotyped as hypersexual (Johnson and Sweet 2026).

Because the media frequently portrays disabled people as uninterested in relationships or sex, this makes them vulnerable to abusers when they are in relationships. Survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual abuse who are queer, non-white, and disabled are also less likely to be believed because of their intersecting identities (Gault, Wetmur, Plummer, and Findley 2026). Since asexual individuals with disabilities do exist, there is no issue portraying asexual characters who are also disabled, just as long as it's not implied that their sexuality is a result of their disability or vice versa.

3. Media Studies

George Herbert Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism suggests that media influences human behavior, meaning greater asexual representation can increase public acceptance (Sylvia 2024). Agenda-setting theory also suggests that media shapes what people think about, so increased representation could help questioning asexual people discover their identities and encourage closeted asexual people to come out. Television is especially influential because, since

the 1950s, it has informed audiences about social movements such as the Civil Rights Movement and LGBTQ rights (Sylvia 2024). Unlike books, television reaches broad audiences simultaneously, and many young people rely on it for information about sexuality. In fact, "two-thirds of adolescents turn to the media first when they want to learn about sexuality" (Sylvia 2024).

However, television, publishing, and other media are not always accurate, making careful research essential for creators portraying asexuality (Sylvia 2024). Public advocacy is also important because production companies often hesitate to include asexual characters, believing that "sex sells," which can result in straightwashing, where asexual characters are rewritten as heterosexual.

Most research on asexuality has focused on television, such as *BoJack Horseman* and *Sirens*, while fictional literature has received less attention. This study addresses that gap by analyzing two literary works through the lenses of intersectionality, Crip Theory, and media studies. I first examine *Being Ace: An Anthology of Queer, Trans, Femme, and Disabled Stories of Asexual Love and Connection* to examine the intersections of disability and gender with asexuality, as well as how to create three-dimensional asexual characters whose identities extend beyond their sexuality. I then analyze *Let's Talk About Love* by Claire Kann to explore how race, gender, and romantic attraction intersect with asexuality through a biromantic Black woman.

IV. Analysis of Literature

Book 1: Being Ace: An Anthology of Queer, Trans, Femme, and Disabled Stories of Asexual Love edited by Madeline Dyer

What is Being Ace?

Being Ace contains fourteen short stories by authors including Kat Yen, K. Hart, and Jas Brown. Its introduction is written by Cody Daigle-Orians, also known as Ace Dad on YouTube, who reflects on his journey of discovering his identity. At 16, he identified with the character Paul in *A Chorus Line*, whose fear of his parents' reaction helped him realize he was gay. Nearly twenty years later, he discovered he was also asexual through Tumblr. This experience inspired him and the anthology's contributors to help questioning readers better understand their own identities through these stories.

Although my research focuses less on the variety of individual asexual experiences, it shares this goal of educating readers about asexuality and exploring its intersection with race, gender, and disability. Like the anthology, I aim to portray asexuality realistically by showing both its challenges, such as ostracism for rejecting sex or relationships, and its joys, including finding support and embracing one's identity.

The Lack of Masculinity

In the introduction, Daigle-Orians notes that *Being Ace* has no cisgender male main characters. The only cisgender male characters are side characters: Dale in "Nylon Bed Socks"

by Madeline Dyer and Felix in “The Hazards of Pressing Play” by Lara Ameen. He explains that this lack of asexual masculinity is partly because he was the only cisgender male author in the anthology, and the 2019 Asexual Community Survey found that only 13.9% of respondents identified as male (xi).

Daigle-Orians connect this to the idea discussed earlier: Many men struggle to come out as asexual because of the misconception that asexuality is “unmasculine.” Rather than being more common among women, men are often unaware of asexuality due to the lack of education and representation, and may feel pressured to remain closeted. Most main characters in the anthology are women, aside from a few non-binary and agender characters. The small number of openly asexual men—especially authors—helps explain why asexual masculinity remains limited in literature.

Why is Everyone a Teenager?

All of the main characters in *Being Ace* are around 18 years old or attending college. This reflects a larger trend in which many queer characters, not just asexual ones, are teenagers. While many people discover their sexuality during adolescence, this is not true for everyone. Some people realize their identities later in life, as shown by Ace Dad, who did not discover he was asexual until his late 30s due to the lack of awareness and information about asexuality when he was younger.

Despite this experience, none of the stories depict someone discovering their asexuality later in life. This is likely because the anthology, like many books about sexuality, is YA, and readers may prefer characters closer to their own age. However, future stories should include older asexual and queer characters and expand beyond the YA genre. Otherwise, the media may reinforce the idea that queerness is limited to teenagers or is only a phase. In addition, it may benefit teenagers to read stories about older queer characters to gain insight into how they may struggle as queer individuals as they get older, such as dating and experiencing possible discrimination. Adult queer books might also appeal to older audiences. Queer adults who might have struggled with their identity in the past would appreciate stories with characters like them who grew up in an environment less accepting of queerness. These books may also help older heterosexual readers understand queerness by reading the point of view of a character their age instead of a teenager.

Invisibility of Race

Most of the authors do not explicitly state the main characters’ races. The characters whose races are mentioned are Xianying in “How to Love a Sidewinder” by Kat Yuen and Nee-chan in “Moonspirited,” by Anju Imura who are Asian; Cass in “Give Up the Ghost” by Linsey Miller and Violet and her girlfriend Nova in “The Hazards of Pressing Play,” by Ameen who are white; and Felix in “The Hazards of Pressing Play,” who is Egyptian American but only a side character.

Although explicitly stating a character’s race is not always necessary, describing physical

features such as skin color can help make racial identities visible. Without these details, readers may default to assuming characters are white because of the prevalence of white characters in mainstream media.

When race is implied, it is through names, such as how Latinx characters are given Spanish first and last names or how Indigenous characters are given Indigenous first and last names. Xiangying and Nee-chan, who are Asian, were the only characters in *Being Ace* to have an implied race due to their names. If these characters live in their ethnic regions, like how Nee-chan is implied to live in Asia, then it is understandable to use ethnic names. However, constantly giving people of color ethnic names, even when they are American or do not live in their region, can unintentionally characterize these characters as being the “Mexican character” or the “Asian character” instead of allowing the audience to see their other characteristics that do not involve their race. While there is nothing wrong with ethnic names, more should be done to imply what a character’s race is without making them stereotypical racial representations.

Sexuality Beyond Asexuality

One area of diversity that these stories handle well is showing characters with sexual and romantic orientation beyond asexuality. Many characters have additional identities, such as Xianyong and Orion, who are aromantic; Freya and Violet, who are biromantic; and Cass and Dallas, who experience romantic attraction. While aromanticism is still represented, these stories effectively show that asexuality and aromanticism are not the same identity.

For example, in Ameen’s story, the protagonist Violet is asexual and biromantic and is in a romantic relationship with Nova, who is also asexual. Representing asexual characters who experience romantic attraction is important because it challenges the assumption that all asexual people are aromantic. Although some asexual people may face challenges in relationships, such as Halcion’s abusive relationship with Chris, who criticized them for not wanting sex, asexual people who are not aromantic can still form romantic connections and relationships.

Addressing Serious Issues

Another strength of these stories is that they are not solely focused on asexuality but also explore issues such as sexual assault, drug addiction, eating disorders, and abuse. Importantly, these topics are portrayed without suggesting that asexuality results from trauma, a common misconception about asexual people.

For example, in Dyer’s story, Amelia faces multiple struggles. While her boyfriend tells her he can “fix her” for lacking sexual attraction, she is also bullied for her weight and told by him that she would be “so much hotter if (she) lost weight” (75). These experiences contribute to her eating disorder, hospitalization, and suicidal thoughts. Some may argue Dyer’s portrayal links asexuality to trauma, but she is learning that Amelia’s asexuality is a part of her identity, not a result of trauma.

Disability

One common stereotype is that asexual people are more likely to be disabled. However, the disabled asexual characters in these stories, such as Sylver's character Orion, who is autistic, and Ameen's character Violet, who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair, are not defined by this stereotype. In "The Third Star," the author Sylver presents Orion struggling with autism-related sensitivity to sound but learns that it is not a weakness because it allows them to hear things others cannot, such as the Fenris Stellaris. By hearing the wolf's cries, Orion discovers that the station's dark matter harvesting is harming it and warns Cadet Vela to stop. Although Vela refuses, resulting in the station's destruction, Orion's ability to communicate with Fenris Stellaris helps save them and their friends. While disability should not always be portrayed as a strength, as disabled people also face challenges and need support, like how Orion receives support from his friends, Sylver shows Orion overcoming obstacles while still acknowledging their struggles.

Orion's asexuality and aromanticism are also explored separately from their disability. When Leo and Brenna fight, Orion fears losing their friend group and being alone because they are asexual and aromantic. However, their friends reassure them that they will always be supported. This is an important message because many asexual and aromantic people fear isolation without romantic relationships, despite many maintaining long-term friendships and queerplatonic relationships.

Although asexuality and disability are sometimes connected through stereotypes, Sylver's portrayal of Orion shows that these identities can be represented together as long as they are explored individually.

Asexuality Across Genres

The stories by S.E. Anderson, S. J. Taylor, and Emily Victoria explore asexuality in different ways. In some, a character's lack of sexual attraction is central to the conflict. For example, in "Smells Like Teen Virgin" by S.E. Anderson, the main character Artemis is forced to lose her virginity because, as a monster hunter, her virgin blood attracts monsters and threatens her family. Anderson writes, "But when you're a young, virginal Slayer like moi, it has the bonus of making you smell like a total snack to every monster within a hundred-mile radius... the further we get into adulthood with our V-card still intact...the better we taste" (139).

However, as a sex-repulsed asexual, Artemis struggles with the expectation to have sex: "But, I happen to be an asexual Slayer, more specifically a sex-repulsed asexual Slayer, which means the very concept of sex is more disgusting to me than dismembering and burning a Hellhound" (139).

Even when she tries to have sex with Brett to break this curse, she freaks out and tells him to stop even though she notices he is attractive: "Despite Brett hitting every aesthetic point on the supposed checklist...it's not doing anything for me (139-140)".

She then reflects on how it feels to be asexual, especially when the rest of her society and family expect her to lose her virginity: "It's difficult, not knowing what sexual attraction feels

like. Just how much control you lose when caught in its web. Some days, I want to feel that want, just to understand it” (141).

Anderson’s story is compelling not only because of its fantasy elements, but because she realistically depicts the experience asexuals go through with the expectation to lose their virginity. Due to this being a fantasy set in modern times, the author does use the word asexual, and asexuality is the main theme of the story as Artemis is forced to lose her virginity to break this curse. However, instead of having sex, Artemis challenges the council and scares the monsters away, showing that there is nothing wrong with being asexual and that nobody should have to have sex if they do not want to.

In contrast, stories that are also fantasies set in more historic times portray asexuality more subtly by not mentioning the word “asexual” and choosing not to center conflict on asexuality. For instance, S.J. Taylor’s “The Witch of Fresta Falls” is a fantasy set in pre-modern times in which Briga is ostracized by her town for not being in a romantic relationship, with people claiming she traded “natural desires” for magic (308). Although the main plot revolves around stopping the fossegrim that killed Briga’s cousin Runa, her representation is meaningful because Briga’s lack of sexual or romantic attraction does not prevent her from being important to the story. She is essential to saving her village, challenging the idea that characters without romantic or sexual roles lack purpose.

However, some stories do not clearly indicate that their characters are asexual. In “Sealights” by Emily Victoria and “No Cure for Doubt,” by Jas Brown, there is no mention or suggestion of asexuality, meaning readers would not know these characters are asexual without knowing “Being Ace” is an anthology about asexuality. In other cases, asexuality is introduced abruptly. For example, in Imura’s “Moonspirited,” Nee-chan’s frustration about the “laws of companionship and touch” (210) appears suddenly and is not connected to the story’s earlier focus on protecting her sister and resenting the gods who abandoned them.

Another important aspect of representation is explicitly using the word “asexual.” While this may not always fit fantasy or historical settings, modern stories should not avoid the term. Naming asexuality helps audiences understand that it exists, normalizes the identity, and may help closeted asexual people feel more confident coming out.

Friendship over Romance

A common misconception is that asexual and aromantic people will eventually end up alone and that friendships cannot replace romantic relationships. However, these stories included in Madeline Dyer’s *Being Ace* challenge this idea by showing the importance of platonic relationships.

In Rosiee Thor’s “Well Suited,” Brindle’s friend Fig supports her throughout the story. When Brindle does not want to find a romantic suitor because she is asexual and aromantic, Fig creates a suit of armor named Sir Guy to accompany her to the ball. When Sir Guy later attempts to assault Brindle, Fig protects her and destroys the armor despite risking their own safety. Fig explains that they and Brindle are “meant for a life together—not romantically, not physically,

but platonically” (48).

Another important friendship is between Halcion and Sinthe in Hart’s “No Such Thing as Just.” Halcion initially hides their asexuality because they fear Sinthe, their highly sexual best friend, will not accept them. However, after ending their relationship with Chris, Halcion tells Sinthe they are asexual, and Sinthe responds that they “don’t need fixing” and that she wants to remain their friend. When Halcion asks, “Just friends?” Sinthe replies, “There’s no such thing as just” (128).

These friendships emphasize that while platonic, they are still centered around love and can be just as valuable as romantic relationships. This is a message other people, regardless of sexual orientation, need to hear, because culture has emphasized that romantic relationships are superior to platonic relationships, which isn’t true and leads those who are single to feel alone.

Asexuals Need to Tell Their Stories

Cody Daigle-Orians emphasizes in the introduction that asexual stories should not only provide representation but also be written by asexual authors. This is important because asexual people are best able to share their own experiences and explain what a world without sexual attraction feels like. For example, in Yuen’s “How to Love a Sidewinder,” Xianyong struggles to hide her asexuality and aromanticism from her mother, who wants her to be in a relationship. The story is based on author Kat Yen’s own experiences as an asexual and aromantic person navigating a world that expects romance. While non-asexual authors can write about asexuality, it is more difficult to fully capture these experiences. Asexual authors are essential not only for educating others but also for sharing their own perspectives and showing how asexuality has shaped their lives.

Book 2: Let’s Talk About Love by Claire Kann

What is Let’s Talk About Love About?

“Let’s Talk About Love” by Clair Kann is a Young Adult (YA) novel centered around a biromantic Black college student, Alice. Throughout the book, Kann shows Alice’s troubles finding romance again after her ex-girlfriend Margot broke up with her for being asexual. At her library job, she meets Takumi and starts developing feelings for him. However, as they get closer, Alice struggles with whether or not to tell Takumi she’s asexual, as she worries that he’ll not only not understand but will be rejected for not wanting to have sex.

Race

The fact that Alice is a Black woman provides important representation, as most asexual characters in media are white. Kann’s novel not only explores the discrimination Alice faces for being asexual but also examines how race and asexuality intersect, making it more difficult for her to come out.

For example, when Alice’s ex-girlfriend Margot asks why she is uncomfortable with sex, Alice explains that she does not need or think about sex. Margot responds, “but you’re Black.”

(4) This comment is both acephobic and racist, as Margot dismisses Alice's asexuality while assuming that Black people are inherently interested in sex.

Alice also experiences racism unrelated to her asexuality. At a party, a man tells her she is "...pretty cute for a Black girl" (116), and she recalls a time when a roommate told her she would likely rank lower on dating apps because "Black girls and Asian guys are always ranked the lowest on dating sites" (146–147). Although framed as compliments, these comments reinforce the racist idea that Black women are less attractive.

Kann also explores broader experiences of being Black through Alice's family. After Alice decides not to attend law school and instead study interior design, her parents cut her off. Later, her father explains that they pushed her toward a stable career because "Black people have to be perfect, inhumanly good at everything, and even then we can fail, because that's how the system is set up" (258). His explanation shows how systemic racism creates pressure for people of color to work harder to succeed.

Gender

Another important aspect of Alice's identity is that she is a woman. As discussed earlier, film and television often portray men as asexual to make them seem mysterious or detached, while women are typically expected to serve as sexual or romantic partners. In contrast, asexual women are more common in literature, likely because many asexual women write these stories, such as Claire Kann, who is herself a Black woman.

While Alice's gender is not the main theme of the story, it is still significant. Her identity as a woman seems most evident in her sapphic relationship with Margot and in her interactions with men, such as when she is harassed at a party or approached for her number at the beach. If Alice were a man, these situations would likely play out differently, as the people pursuing her may be less persistent, as women are more likely to be sexually harassed than men. However, Alice's struggles being a woman are more subtle because it is not just because she is female but because she was also "black, female, and queer" (258). Due to these intersecting identities, she has a harder time fitting into communities both online and in real life. While changing Alice's gender doesn't seem like it would greatly alter the story, Kann's choice to make her a woman represents real-life struggles of both queer and non-white women not only having to deal with sexism but racism and homophobia as well, even sometimes from other women.

Alice's Love Life

Despite being asexual, Alice is not aromantic; she is biromantic. This challenges the stereotype that asexual people cannot have romantic relationships or sex. Alice has dated both Sam in high school and Margot in college. While some asexual people are sex-positive or sex-neutral, Alice is more sex-negative, which contributes to the end of both relationships.

Alice explains that her previous partners believed her lack of interest in sex meant she did not love them, but her understanding of love is based on emotional connection rather than physical intimacy. She describes love as spending time together, feeling comfortable, and

knowing someone will support you (9). This challenges the assumption that sex and romance are inseparable and shows that many asexual people value emotional intimacy in relationships.

After breaking up with Margot, Alice develops feelings for Takumi, recognizing his attractiveness through her (“Cutie Code™”). This shows that asexual people can experience aesthetic attraction and develop romantic feelings. Alice initially struggles to understand these feelings because she has rarely experienced crushes before and previously confused attraction with expectations from others.

When Alice discusses Takumi with her friend Feenie, Feenie suggests that Alice should have sex with him and consider whether she is graysexual (52). While questioning one’s identity is valid, Feenie’s suggestion that Alice needs sex to understand herself is harmful because it reinforces the idea that asexuality can be changed by finding the “right person.” Instead, Alice needs support and acceptance rather than pressure to prove her identity.

Alice is initially afraid to come out to Takumi because of her past relationships, but when she tells him she is asexual, he responds that anyone who sees her differently because of it does not deserve to be in her life (210). His reaction shows the importance of validating asexual people when they come out. Later, when Alice asks Takumi out, he hesitates because he is unsure if he can be in a relationship without sex (254). Although this hurts Alice, Takumi’s response reflects a realistic challenge between asexual and non-asexual partners: Differences in sexual needs can affect compatibility without making either person wrong.

Eventually, Takumi realizes that his feelings are not dependent on sex and tells Alice he wants to be with her even if they never have sex (267–269). Their relationship challenges the belief that love requires sex, showing that asexual and non-asexual people can have healthy relationships based on care, trust, and emotional connection.

Takumi is also notable as a Japanese-American love interest. Although he is not asexual, his character provides representation because non-white male romantic leads are less common in media. His relationship with Alice also offers representation of an interracial relationship between two non-white characters, which is rarely portrayed.

Personality

A common misconception is that asexual people are cold, aloof, and unsociable. However, Alice challenges this stereotype through her warm and affectionate personality. She is described as loving cute things, decorating, and enjoying affection, as “Alice (a steadfast believer in the power of hugs) loved affection” (7). This challenges the belief that asexual people dislike touch simply because they may not experience sexual attraction.

Alice also challenges the stereotype that asexual people are unemotional. She cries easily, such as when she is confused about her feelings for Takumi and when she cries after his rejection (Kann 30, 256). Alice not only challenges stereotypes about asexual people but also challenges stereotypes about Black women. Black women are often portrayed as loud or angry, reinforcing harmful ideas that women of color cannot be gentle or friendly. However, Alice shows that personality and kindness are not determined by race.

Other hardships

Throughout the book, Alice faces challenges beyond her sexuality and relationship with Takumi. These side plots are vital because Kann expresses that asexual people are not two-dimensional and have struggles other than being asexual. This way, the audience may relate to these characters whether or not they're asexual and therefore be more willing to empathize with asexuals in real life.

One major struggle is feeling like the third wheel between her close friends and roommates, Ryan and Feenie. Although they are some of the only people who know Alice is asexual, Alice often worries about being left behind when they spend time together as a couple. This fear began when Feenie chose to move in with Ryan instead of Alice and continues when Ryan and Feenie leave Alice alone at a party to have sex during their planned “Family night.”

After Alice begins spending more time with Takumi, Feenie becomes upset and believes Alice is choosing him over them. However, Alice feels that Feenie and Ryan have excluded her for years. She eventually tells Ryan, “You do. You have for years. I just don’t say anything because I don’t want us to fight, but the second I find an actual friend on my own, you two act like this” (201–202). This reflects a fear many asexual and aromantic people have of being left behind when their friends enter romantic relationships.

While Feenie eventually acknowledges that she hurt Alice and admits they did not spend enough time together (246–247), their conflict could have been resolved through better communication earlier. Feenie should have expressed her feelings instead of blaming Alice for spending time with Takumi, and Alice should have advocated for herself rather than taking responsibility for the conflict. Their storyline shows the importance of communication and boundaries in friendships.

Another major subplot is Alice deciding her career path while managing her family’s expectations. Throughout the book, her family pressures her to pursue law because they are a family of lawyers, even though Alice does not want that career. Although she wants to make her family proud, she knows she wants to follow her own interests. With Ryan’s encouragement, Alice realizes she wants to study interior design. However, when she tells her parents, they stop supporting her financially because they believe law would provide more stability.

Despite being hurt, Alice chooses to pursue her passion and creates a plan to support herself. Later, her father explains that their pressure came from their experiences as Black people facing greater barriers to success. Although her family did not initially understand her choice, they still loved and supported her, with her father offering financial help and inviting Alice and Takumi home for Christmas.

Hardships of being ace

While *Let’s Talk About Love* explores themes of friendship, family, and romance, its central focus is Alice’s experience as an asexual person. Before discovering her identity, Alice

often felt like an outsider because she did not experience sexual attraction. For instance, as a child and teenager, she pretended to have crushes to fit in:

In elementary school, while all of Alice's friends had talked about boys they liked, she had kept quiet. In middle school, she had pretended to have a crush on Patrick Furlong so she would have someone to talk about, too... In high school, Alice had gone all out, pretending to be hopelessly in love with Sam Oliphant. (31)

Like other asexual teenage girls, Alice felt like she had to lie about being attracted to others to avoid being judged and excluded from her friends: "Normal felt like a constant state of despair, but they had stopped teasing her. Had stopped giving her pitying looks, calling her 'innocent' and excluding her from sleepovers because she had nothing romantic to gossip about" (31-32).

However, even when she fitted in when she was dating Sam she still struggled figuring out why she was not having sexual attraction: "Alice had been trying to sort out the difference between romantic attraction (which she felt) and sexual attraction (which she didn't)" (31).

Eventually, as she started having sex with Sam, he started spreading rumors about Alice's displeasure with sex: "She's dumped with a new nickname. The Corpse. Because kissing him had been an ordeal to overcome. Because she never seemed interested in touching him... Because she had just lay there while Sam had sex with her, and he had told everyone" (32). Another instance of the rumors was "Francine Loren's mock whisper in the locker room: 'I heard she didn't moan. Not even when he went down on her'" (32).

However, Feenie defended Alice when someone mocked her, allowing Alice to trust her. Later, Alice "confessed she thought something might be wrong, so one day, after health class, they had talked to their teacher, who then said the word: asexual. Everything had finally made sense" (32). Feenie's showcase of support is important because many asexual people feel pressured to pretend to experience attraction, date, or have sex to fit in, while supportive friends allow them to be themselves. Alice's experience of finding out she's asexual in health class is also common, as many discover their identity through education and learning about different sexual orientations.

However, discovering her identity does not eliminate Alice's struggles. She previously hid her asexuality from Margot and had sex to please her, but Margot eventually asked her why she was uncomfortable with sex:

"Have you gone to a doctor?"...

"I don't need to."...

"Were you abused? Is that it?"

"No."...

"Are you saving yourself for marriage?"

"I hope that's a joke."

"It was," Margot admitted.... "Then what? Tell me. People don't just not like sex without a reason. It's kind of not natural, don't you think?" (4-5).

Margot's belief that people do not dislike sex "without a reason" (5) reflects harmful misconceptions that asexuality is unnatural or caused by something negative. Margot finally says, "And I can't be with someone who doesn't desire me. You could never love me as much as I would love you. You understand that, don't you?"(5).

While Margot was not wrong for wanting a relationship with someone who shared her sexual interests, she should have respected Alice's boundaries rather than making her feel that something was wrong with her. She is also inconsiderate in thinking that Alice couldn't love her the same way she loved her just because Alice doesn't feel sexual attraction. This is false, as asexuals are capable of experiencing love like everyone else, whether romantic or platonic.

Because of these experiences, Alice becomes insecure about sharing her identity. When discussing her feelings for Takumi with Dr. Burris, she avoids saying the word asexual and instead explains her lack of attraction. Dr. Burris tells her that she may need to educate others about asexuality because many people do not understand it (81). Although Alice finds this frustrating, his advice reflects the reality that coming out as asexual often requires explaining the identity to others. Unlike more widely recognized identities, asexuality is often unfamiliar to people, making asexual individuals more likely to face confusion or skepticism. This helps explain why Alice only comes out to a few people and not her family.

Alice is a realistic portrayal of asexuality because she experiences both the challenges of coming out and the support of people who accept her. Her story shows the importance of respecting asexual boundaries, as she does not force herself to have sex to maintain a relationship. While it would have been positive to see Alice become more confident and open about her identity, her hesitation is also realistic, as accepting one's identity does not always mean being ready to share it with everyone.

V. Addressing Lack of Asexual Representation through Creative Writing

Introduction

Since there is a lack of asexual representation, especially asexual characters who are diverse, I wrote a fictional short story as an example of what realistic and positive representation can look like. The story is about a closeted asexual girl, Ailani, coming out to her boyfriend, Noah. Though fictional, this story draws on my own experience as a teenager-struggling to find information, worrying about acceptance, and fearing others' reactions. While every asexual experience differs, this piece may help spread awareness and help asexuals feel seen.

This creative writing is important for this research as it addresses the intersectionality I previously mentioned, such as how race, gender, and disability affect asexual representation and whether these representations are harmful or positive. This piece is also necessary because if more asexual representation is going to occur, writers and screenwriters need inspiration and knowledge about what asexuality is, the struggles asexuals go through, and how to create complex and interesting asexual characters instead of stereotypes. This short story is also meant to encourage other asexual writers to tell their own stories, as the only way more people are going to know what asexuality is is through awareness. While this work is prose, this could also be used as a basis for a TV/ Film script.

Creative Writing Reimagining

Ailani fiddled with her hands as she looked through the car window. The sun melted like honey over the ocean, the last of its rays gleaming on her walnut skin. Purple streaked the sky like paint, and gray ashen clouds drifted above. The sun was about to die. Tired of the cold air blowing raven hair in her face, she rolled the window up. Through the glass, she saw Noah's reflection. His coal-black ropes covered his face, unbothered by the wind. She needed to tell him. She turned around. While his eyes were on the road, he sensed her gaze. "Is everything alright?" He asked without looking at her.

"Yeah," she said, looking away, as she gripped her knees. She sighed. "Actually," she looked back at him, and his eyes followed hers. "I need to tell you something."

"Okay..." he turned the car. After parking it on the side of the railing by the edge of the cliff, he released the steering wheel and faced her. "What's up?" Ailani bit the inside of her lip as she held her hands in her lap. *Do I just say it or...* Her eyes wandered around the car. The crinkled open bag of chips between her feet. The Lakers sticker on the outside of the windshield. The dumb Hawaiian bobblehead whose head kept bobbling despite the car no longer moving. Anywhere but him.

"Is this about last weekend?" Ailani's eyes darted up. "I'm really sorry, Ailani. I didn't mean to—"

"No!" Noah startled, jumping back against the driver's seat. "It's not that...or actually..." She looked away. Last weekend they were hanging out at his place. They were in his room, one second playing video games. The next, lying in his bed talking about anime. And then they started making out when... Back in the car, Ailani stiffened, wrapping her denim jacket tighter around her waist.

That night in Noah's room, they were making out when...he grabbed her breast. She freaked out and pushed him off. Noah immediately started apologizing over and over again while she kept assuring him it was fine. *It wasn't*. She then made some excuse about forgetting to feed her cat Daisy and left. The next few days, her phone wouldn't leave her alone as Noah called her with non-stop apologies. But she kept brushing them off. Until now. Ailani exhaled as she looked up at the rear view mirror. Noah was watching her.

I'm asexual. He couldn't hear her thoughts.

She actually knew she was asexual for a while. Most of her friends were gay, so she was exposed to a lot of queer comics and TV shows in middle school. She figured she was just straight until being traumatized by Sex Ed in eighth grade. After that, she secretly started going through her friends' comics and YA novels to see if she could find anything to explain why she was so freaked out by naked people. Once while hanging out at her friend's place, Vivian ran out of the room to grab the pizza. She slammed the door so hard a book fell out of her shelf. With no one looking, Ailani picked it up and read: *A Guide on Asexuality*.

Most of her friends knew she was ace. She told her parents, but they just said that she's too young or that she hasn't found the right person. And then when she started dating, most of

the guys she saw said they were fine with her being ace, but when they wanted to get more physical and she didn't, they were no longer fine. When she refused to have sex with her last boyfriend, he told her something that still rang in her head today: *"No one is ever going to love you for being broken."* Four months later, when she'd met Noah at a party, she'd decided it would be best if he didn't know.

"Ailani?" Her head pivoted. Noah was staring at her. Umber eyes soaked her in. Her hands started to shake. She couldn't lie to him anymore. What was going to happen the next time his hands grazed over her? What was going to happen when he asked what was wrong and she said nothing. What's going to happen if she tells him? She studied the boy across from her. Trying to hold onto his oak eyes and the dimples on his cheeks. Instead, she saw the face of every other boy she's dated before, telling her she's broken.

"I'm..." she stammered. She grabbed the seat between her thighs, breathing in the salty air. "I'm asexual!" She covered her mouth. Noah stared at her, blinking for a few moments.

"Asexual?"

"Yeah," she nodded. She pulled out her phone from her pocket and typed the word asexual. She showed him the screen. "It means I don't feel sexual attraction."

"Oh," he said, looking at the purple-black flag on the screen and then back at her. "Well...thank you for telling me! Did you just find out you were asexual?"

"Noo..." she said, lowering her phone. "I knew I was asexual for a while."

He tilted his head. "How long?"

"Like..." she brushed her braids behind her ear. "Five years." His face dropped. He didn't furrow his eyebrows or clench his jaw, but he became a statue. Blank and unmoving. She waited for him to say something, but he didn't. She started to hate the silence that stretched over them and wished he would just yell at her. Yell at her for lying to him. Yell at her for not being normal.

"Why didn't you tell me?" He asked.

"I... I wanted to but..." She looked out the window, watching the waves crush over the rocky shore. "I was worried that if I told you, you wouldn't want to be with me anymore." She couldn't look away from the window. Outside, seagulls were digging their beaks in the sand. Pulling out small clams and catching them in the air. A large wave hit the shore, chasing the birds away. They yelped, flapping their wings and hovering over the water. She wished she had wings to fly away.

"I'm sorry," she sniffed, wiping a tear from her eye. "I should have told you."

Noah frowned, but there was no anger in his face. "Look...Ailani," he placed his hand on hers. "I wish you didn't keep this from me, but..." he took both her hands and held them in his lap. "I love you. And I still want to be with you. Even if that means missing out on some things." Another tear fell down Ailani's cheek as she wiped it off. *He's not angry?* she chuckled.

"Wow. I think that's the first time you ever said you loved me."

"Oh." He released her other hand and scratched the back of his neck as his cheeks grew red. She leaned over the armrest and kissed him on the cheek.

"I love you too." The last of the sun's rays shone over Noah's braids as Ailani felt it too,

brushing the back of her neck. Around them, night started to fall. The last embers were fading over the horizon as midnight velvet stretched over the sky.

“So...” Noah grinned. “There’s still a lot about asexuality I don’t know. Can you tell me?” She smiled as she cupped his warm face in her hands.

“I will,” she said before kissing him.

Analysis of Creative Work

Ailani is a positive portrayal of asexuality for several reasons. First, she is a Black woman, which is a demographic usually excluded in asexual communities. While literature often portrays asexual women, most asexual representation in television and film features men. Ailani also challenges the stereotype that asexual people are automatically aromantic or cannot have relationships, as she is dating Noah and has had previous relationships. Additionally, she does not fit the stereotype of asexual people being cold or unsociable, as she has many friends and enjoys spending time with them.

However, what makes Ailani a strong character is that she has flaws beyond her identity. Her main flaw is insecurity, which developed after past relationships ended because of her discomfort with sex. Throughout the story, she must overcome her fear of coming out to Noah because she worries he will leave her if she does not want a sexual relationship. By coming out, Ailani becomes more confident in herself and strengthens her relationship with Noah, who reassures her that he loves her even without sex. Her insecurity is relatable because many people struggle with self-confidence, allowing even non-asexual audiences to connect with her. I also chose to write in limited third person to convey Ailani’s feelings and thoughts so readers can empathize with her insecurity about being asexual and fear of what will happen if she comes out.

To further develop Ailani, I could explore her struggles and interests outside of asexuality, such as her love for comics and video games. Overall, writers and producers should focus on creating characters who happen to be asexual rather than characters whose entire identity revolves around being asexual.

VI. Discussion of Results

While asexual representation is becoming more diverse, there is still a need for greater inclusion. For example, although previous research suggests that most asexual characters are men, the stories I studied mostly featured women, with all characters in my selected works being women except for non-binary and agender characters. Additionally, many male asexual characters in television are only considered asexual through audience interpretation rather than being canon, such as Sherlock from *Sherlock*, whose creator confirmed he was heterosexual (Moffat, Steven, and Mark Gatiss, creators 2010–2017). In contrast, *Being Ace* included more trans representation, such as Halcion and Dallas, who are non-binary, and Orion, who is agender. It also included disabled asexual characters whose disabilities were portrayed separately from their asexuality rather than being used as an explanation for it.

My research also supports previous findings that most asexual characters are white.

While Alice from *Let's Talk About Love* is Black, most main characters in *Being Ace* are implied to be white, except for Xianying and Nee-chan, who are Asian. More effort is needed from authors and creators to include asexual characters of different racial backgrounds. Additionally, many characters I analyzed were sex-negative, such as Alice, who does not want to have sex in her relationship with Takumi. While sex-repulsed asexual people exist, asexuality is a spectrum that also includes sex-positive and sex-neutral individuals, and the media should represent these different experiences.

This research has limitations because I could not analyze all asexual media due to the amount of existing representation. I also focused only on literature rather than television, film, or video games, where portrayals may differ. Overall, while asexual representation is improving and challenging harmful stereotypes, there are still areas for growth. Future representation should include more asexual men, non-white characters, and identities within the asexual spectrum, such as graysexual and demisexual people. More research should also explore aromanticism, as it appears to have even less representation and research than asexuality.

VII. Conclusions

Overall, asexual representation has grown through television, literature, and video games in recent years. However, asexuality remains widely unrecognized in society, causing both heterosexual and LGBTQ+ communities to sometimes question its validity. This lack of recognition can contribute to acephobia, leaving asexual people feeling isolated and increasing their risk of mental health struggles.

To increase awareness, education about asexuality must continue to spread in the following ways: (1) creating more asexual characters, (2) challenging harmful stereotypes that create inaccurate ideas about asexuality, (3) critically discussing stereotypes to help audiences understand why they are harmful, (4) including more diverse asexual characters and represent identities within the asexual spectrum, such as graysexual and demisexual people.

By increasing accurate representation, more asexual people can learn about and understand asexuality. This can help create more accepting environments for asexual people, reduce harmful practices such as conversion therapy and corrective rape, and encourage closeted or questioning asexual individuals to embrace their identities. Greater research and education, especially from asexual professionals and community members, can help society develop a more accurate understanding of asexuality.

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