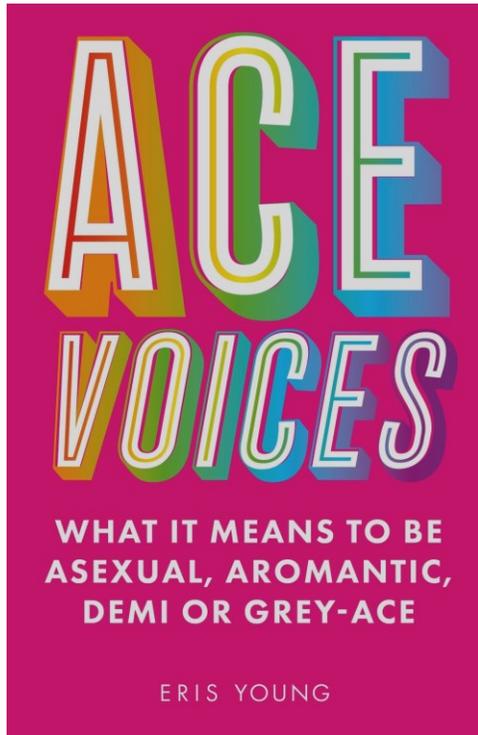


ACE VOICES



Book Summary:

Discusses ideologies involving gender and sexuality.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains references to sexual activities including BDSM; alternate gender ideologies; alternate sexualities; profanity/derogatory terms; controversial racial, social, political, and historical commentary.

Adult

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3 /5

Minor Restricted
BookLooks Review Rating

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11	Many people on the asexual spectrum spend much of their lives believing they are the only ones like this—the only person in the world who doesn’t want a boyfriend, who isn’t comfortable having sex with their partner even though they’ve been together for years, who can’t understand how others recognise that ineffable spark, romantic love.
12	We feel shame because we’re living in a world that hasn’t yet made room for us. We’re erased and marginalised because asexuality, aromanticism, demi and grey-a identities challenge the status quo.
13	Through laboratory observations of anatomy and behaviour, they sought to map out the physiological stages of human sexual arousal and intercourse. The major upshot of their research was that they developed a clinical approach to treating what they decided were sexual dysfunctions; in other words, anyone whose sexual “response” didn’t fit with the model they had derived from a small sample of mostly white, middle-class, heterosexual married couples. Thanks to the effort of the sexologists, asexuality was transformed into a formal diagnosis: “hypoactive sexual desire disorder”.
14	Like the Black and transgender communities before them, the fraught history between biomedical science and the ace community has led to a deep sense of mistrust.
15	But we’re marginalised not because there’s anything wrong with us—though many of us do have needs that differ from accepted norms—but because the very fact of our existence questions the legitimacy of established structures, from capitalism, monogamy and the nuclear family to white supremacy and heteropatriarchy: happy aroace women with no interest in settling down and having children give the lie to the lesson young girls are taught, that they should seek fulfilment in aspirations of having a husband and family.
16	It seems pretty clear that the traditional picture—media-driven and politically motivated—of love, sex, coupledness, of somehow finding your soulmate in a haystack of seven billion, with sexual, emotional and domestic compatibility paving the way towards a happily ever after, doesn’t actually work for most people.
23	JTS describes his greysexuality as a missing piece in the puzzle of his identity: I think it was gradual, but I knew since I was a child. The easiest thing was to find out I was not straight. The second easiest was knowing that I liked men. Finally, when I found out about the [ace] spectrum, I knew I found the missing piece of that puzzle that my sexual orientation seemed to be.
27	Again, visibility is the key here: because Yasmin didn’t have any positive asexual representation or role models to look up to—only strangers on the internet, if not totally faceless then almost always white—it took that much longer for her to be able to claim “aroace” for herself in a positive way.
28	The overwhelming perception of whiteness and Westernness—and online-ness—of popular images of asexuality means that Indigenous aces may struggle to, as Johnnie Jae puts it, be “seen and understood”.
31	When I found the terms “asexual”, “grey-aromantic” and “transgender”, it was like a door opened: I suddenly had the words to talk about how I was feeling—words other people could understand.
35	Not everyone I spoke to defined (sic) their asexuality in terms of sexual attraction, but everyone who called themselves “ace” or “asexual” included something about not wanting or feeling the need for sex with another person.

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39	EP, who is bisexual and demi-or aromantic, says: "I've always been sexually attracted to all genders. But I don't get interested in people. Or if I do, it's this once-in-a-decade feeling."
47	Friends B and C and I—a motley collection of queers—exchanged surreptitious glances. I spoke up, tentatively, suddenly afraid of being too aggressive with my suggestion. "It kind of sounds like you're demisexual?" ...My friend said, "So I've been looking into demisexuality, and I think it fits."
52	Speaking more generally, I've noticed over the last few years that a surprising number of my friends and acquaintances have come out (or at least described themselves in passing) as demi, especially demisexual.
58	This refers to someone whose sexuality or romantic orientation fluctuates or changes over time or in different environments, while generally staying within the ace spectrum. ...An aegosexual person is someone who may enjoy or be aroused by sexual content, masturbate or have sexual fantasies but has no desire to have sex with someone or get into a sexual relationship with another person.
59	Apothisexual This is another word for sex repulsed. This describes a range of different experiences: a sex-repulsed person may be comfortable engaging with or encountering sexual content "in the wild" but not want to have sex themselves, or they may be totally revolted by anything sexual whatsoever.
60	LGBTQA Wiki defines cupiosexuality as "someone who does not experience sexual attraction but still desires/ likes a sexual relationship. Cupiosexuals are commonly sex-favorable but they do not have to be."
61	According to LGBTQA Wiki, a QPR "bends, changes, and challenges Western culture's understanding of monogamous and committed relationships." It questions the rules for telling apart romantic relationships from non-romantic relationships. ...AB describes her first relationship as queerplatonic (though she didn't use the word to describe it at the time): "We were just close friends who enjoy spending time together, cuddle and occasionally kissing each other."
67	There's a long history, in the West at least, where the person who writes something down owns it, from monks dropping Christian themes and values into pagan tales to the doctors who turned asexuality into a disease by giving it an entry in the diagnostic manual.
68	Terms such as "hypoactive sexual desire disorder" have been, and still are, used by medical professionals to take away our sexual and bodily agency. ...But knowing the complex history, in which my identity—asexual—has been turned into a dictionary entry, and in which people like me have been displayed on TV to entertain an audience, I've become wary of dictionaries and what they represent. I can't help but draw a parallel in my mind between a dictionary—in which each subcategory of a-spec experience is pinned down, neatly bounded by a concise definition—and a display case, a cabinet of curiosities, where I and everyone in my community are arranged for the delectation of an allo public.
69	The community itself is keenly aware of the difference between labels that we have claimed for ourselves and labels that have been put on us without our consent: just look at the creation of "aegosexual" in response to "autochorisexual". ...In creating language to use amongst ourselves we aren't "making up labels"; instead,

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	we're trying to create space where interstitial, undefined, transitory or fluid aspects of our experience can be allowed to exist.
72	<p>Unlike my nonbinary trans gender, which is pretty much obvious to anyone who looks at me—and which means that any conversation with a new person involves a “coming out” of sorts—my a-spec identity is mostly invisible.</p> <p>...Because we are often invisible, and people tend not to readily believe in things they can't see, for a-spec people it's not always as simple as saying “I am aromantic” or “I am demisexual” and leaving it at that: the reality is often much messier.</p>
74	<p>Once you've embraced your own a-spec identity, if you've been raised in a culture (US-American, for example as I was) that normalises and places huge social value on the romantic-sexual nuclear family, asserting that part of yourself to others becomes more than a simple disclosure: it can become a battle to convince people that you exist.</p>
78	<p>Jules' is an example of a perspective often overlooked in Western, English-language discussions of a-spec identities, namely perspectives acknowledging that experiences of living within amatonormativity are not the same all over the world. Non-Western a-spec perspectives complexify our picture of the ways that history and politics have shaped romantic and sexual norms—and a handful of these perspectives I will explore in the section on “Cultural background and racialisation”. Often, these are ignored in favour of “party lines”, the mainstream narratives that allow us to present a unified front as a community. But it is because the language and political movement of asexuality has mostly been articulated by people from Western and Anglophone countries—often countries that were themselves perpetrators of colonialism or imperialism—that it's important for us to listen to the perspectives of a-spec people from outside the Anglophone world.</p> <p>An exclusively Western perspective fails to take into account the mitigating context of culture and history: in this case, the effects of intergenerational trauma on our ideas about sexuality. For older people who have lived through war or colonialism, understanding the nuances of asexuality or aromanticism may be a hard task, in a different way than they are a hard task for an American or British older person to understand. Considering that a-spec identities are so often articulated only in English, it's not hard to see how they might even be perceived as Western imports. In these cases, when coming out, the most productive or responsible thing to do might not be to cut off one's family, but to be mindful of where they are coming from, and to trust in their capacity to learn and grow.</p>
80	<p>The idea that something previously (though not always!) thought to be biologically essential, hardwired and universal might actually be fluid or socially constituted—that the hierarchies our society rests upon might in fact be made of sand—can inspire fear and confusion, which in turn can inspire exclusionary politics that can put a-spec people, indeed all LGBTQ + people, in danger.</p> <p>Online (at least in the UK) this reactionary politics is most visibly popular with TERFs, or trans-exclusionary radical feminists, many of whom are vocally uncomfortable with the kind of fluidity and egalitarian use of language that is common in both the a-spec and trans communities.</p>
81	<p>The environment of hostility created by TERFs and “gender-critical” ideologues has led many of us to feel trepidation around publicly identifying as “more than one thing”, as if identity labels were gaudy parade medals and not a simple attempt to put words to feelings.</p>

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87	Conventional sex education takes as a given that pupils will both want sex and form heterosexual couples—these two behaviours go hand in hand in the world of sex ed (and heteronormativity), and deviation from this norm in any way is rarely acknowledged.
88	I myself had never heard the word asexuality until I entered what would become my first queer space, Tumblr, in the early 2010s.
90	And even if we set aside the criteria of shared struggle, with many questioning if “suffering” and “oppression” should be the basis on which we decide entry to these communities—there is still a lot to unite them.
91	None of us knew each other very well and so in the absence of common ground, the conversation turned to kink and sexual preference.
92	As much as I didn’t want to sit through a long and graphic conversation about other people fucking each other, the idea of outing myself to the whole room, the prospect of having to explain myself and have everyone walk on eggshells around me for the rest of the evening, was even worse.
94	A great deal of this comes from the history of the gay rights movement, and from the way that sex and sexuality have been policed, weaponised specifically against allosexual LGBT + people throughout Western history. Queers have been fined, imprisoned or even killed because of who we have sex with, since even before “homosexual” or “queer” were constructed as identities. The ability to fuck in peace and safety has been a rallying point—often a life-or-death struggle—for the queer community for as long as that community has existed, and despite the victories of decriminalisation and marriage equality in many Western countries, there are still many places in the world where homosexuality is punishable by fines, imprisonment or even death. And just as the assertion of women’s sexual agency, and the status of a woman as sexual in her own right regardless of the presence of a man, has been a cause around which feminists have organised for decades, demands from the queer community to be able to love who we love, and fuck freely in safety and dignity, have created within most LGBTQ + spaces an atmosphere of radical, often compulsory, sex positivity.
95	In many queer spaces—especially the clubs and bars around which so much of queer culture has by necessity coalesced—there’s an implicit, or even explicit, assumption that if you are not actively loving (or fucking) queerly, you do not belong.
98	When for such a swath of history sex was criminalized, I can understand holding sex up as a tool and symbol of freedom.
99	The heteropatriarchal system demanding we all must and may only have hetero-, married, vanilla sex also says men are men and women are women, and never the twain shall meet. It is the system that says you must couple up, it must be with the right people, and it must be within a socially and legally validated contract.
100	One of the most important lessons I learned while putting this book together was that ace-spectrum identity is highly intersectional—in other words, a person’s individual experience of being ace, aro, demi or grey-a can be very different depending on all the other facets that make us who we are. Because I am white, and because I was very online when I first started getting to grips with my (a) sexuality, it was relatively easy for me to access the language of the community, and to start seeing myself as part of it. ...But for Yasmin Benoit—the aroace activist and model I mentioned in the chapter on

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	visibility, who had never met another Black a-spec person until an in-person LGBT Pride event—things weren't so simple.
102	Because of the way sex especially has been policed and politicised, particularly over the last few hundred years, stereotypes have emerged—or been created—that paint certain demographics as more or less “inherently sexual”, in spite of the obvious fact that sexuality is individual.
104	<p>JK spoke about the ways Black sexuality has been constructed in popular consciousness (which includes a-spec spaces), and the ways the language of asexuality has been shaped specifically around a white ace identity:</p> <p>I do identify as part of the African diaspora and that certainly interacts with my a-spec identity because I come from a group of people often oversexualized or desexualized as a result of the history of being enslaved and so that kind of continues to impact how people see people from my diaspora to this day...</p> <p>I often find myself understanding my a-spec identity differently because of my cultural identity and have less patience for some terms and understandings of sexuality that come from white aces as a result.</p>
105	<p>If it's not specifically for Black aces... I don't really care to be there. Or at the bare minimum—ace people of colour, but even then... I would demand specific places for Black aces there too.</p> <p>...More involvement in connecting Black aces together. And connecting aces of colour. Otherwise, the white people need to get their racist ass behaviour together. But I'm not expecting that to happen any time soon.</p> <p>Xyr hopes for the community centred around connection and coalition between Black aces and aces of colour, and xyr words suggest a perception that the racism within the community is too entrenched to truly be rooted out.</p> <p>This perception of whiteness—and the presence of racism—within the community is not a coincidence.</p> <p>...From its beginning, the language of asexuality and aromanticism, the language I use and celebrate in this book, have been mostly articulated within spaces that are white and Anglophone. This is because the spaces where our terminology started to come together for the first time in their present form were spaces that, considering the distribution of internet access in the 1990s and early 2000s, were already predominantly white and economically privileged.</p> <p>...Out of the slew of daytime talk show interviews with ace people that took place in the early 2000s, the vast majority were white, and today, most mainstream pop culture representation of “asexual” people—from BBC's Sherlock to Sheldon from Big Bang Theory to “that one episode” of House—is white as well.</p> <p>So despite the egalitarian atmosphere within our spaces, our language and community were only accessible to a limited subset of people from the outset—which means that today, the visible face of the a-spec community is a white, technologically literate one. There is still a strong perception, both inside the community and out, that asexuality is a “white thing”.</p>
107	It was through reading and listening to the words of BIPOC a-spec people, and those from outside the Anglophone West, that I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the ways a person's background can influence everything from what is expected of them romantically and sexually by others in their community, to how and when they are able to explore and

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	<p>unpack their own sexuality and orientation, to how they are permitted to engage with sexuality and desire within a globalised system of white heteropatriarchy.</p> <p>...For many people, these factors determine not only when and if they are able to find their way to the a-spec community but also how their a-spec identity is received by the people around them, and at what point that identity becomes (if it ever does) not just a description of experience but a place of marginalisation.</p>
109	<p>LG, for their part, had a rather glib take on Christian ideas around chastity, summing up the inherent contradiction at the heart of Christian purity culture, and the pointlessness of trying to equate chastity and asexuality: “I’m not religious but sometimes I like to laugh at the idea that me being a forever virgin would make me extra pure in Christian eyes. Too bad I masturbate though RIP guess I’m a slut after all.”</p>
111	<p>I get the same feeling of discomfort when I see other LGBT + people say ridiculous things like “If you keysmash, you’re a bottom”. Like are we really creating stereotypes based on behaviour the same way cisstraight people create gender stereotypes?</p>
114	<p>The authors draw a direct link between institutional racism in the United States and the experiences and values of Black Americans surrounding family and coupledness: “Culturally, Black Americans have long highly valued romantic partnerships, marriage, and children. However, institutional and structural barriers often prevent them from being able to realize these values.” In other words, America’s history of white supremacy plays a heavy role in shaping Black Americans’ experiences of romance, sexuality, desire and family-building. It’s not much of a leap to surmise that this history and context might provide an additional barrier to Black a-spec people, such as Butler, in discovering and expressing their identities, especially if that expression involves rejecting the trappings of marriage and nuclear family.</p> <p>In the AceCon panel about the experiences of Indigenous a-spec people in North America, one of the audience questions was: “Have there been differences in the way the wider dominant (read: white) culture has dealt with your asexuality versus your specific Indigenous cultures?”</p> <p>Johnnie Jae’s answer to this question consciously linked her community’s history, of violent colonisation at the hands of white settlers and the US government, to her experience as an asexual person in that community today:..</p>
116	<p>Racial justice activist Paul Kivel writes, “Whiteness is a constantly shifting boundary separating those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation and vulnerability to violence is justified by their not being white.”</p> <p>One of those sets of privileges has long been access to sexual and reproductive agency. In her essay “On the Racialisation of Asexuality”, Ianna Hawkins Owen unpacks a particularly pertinent and far-reaching example: American chattel slavery.</p> <p>Through looking at the twin stereotypes of the sexually aggressive, dangerous “Jezebel” and the desexualised-and-therefore-safe “Mammy”, Owen explores the way “asexuality”, not as an identity but as a quality of sexual restraint, has been positioned as a characteristic of whiteness, associated with concepts of “purity” and “refinement”—in contrast to Black people, who were characterised as “hypersexual” as justification for denying them autonomy and self-rule. This denial, like the rest of the transatlantic slave trade, was economically motivated: controlling the sexual agency of enslaved people, who represented a self-reproducing source of free labour, was a question of finances. With this in mind, Owen traces “the crafting of a sexualized racial threat”, in the form of, for</p>

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	<p>example, caricatures of Sarah Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman trafficked to Europe and displayed in highly exploitative and sexualised “exhibits”—and culminating in the creation of “Jezebel” and “Mammy”.</p> <p>Owen concludes with a look at the current-day ramifications of this history. She explores how modern representations of asexuality, commonly seen as a “white thing”, influence how white asexuals are treated and perceived, and the relative invisibility of Black asexual people.</p>
117	<p>An aromantic Black woman might find her identity weaponised against her, in the form of accusations of “promiscuity”. A demisexual Black woman trying to date may find that, more so than a white demi woman, others are likely to disrespect her boundaries around sex.</p> <p>...In her essay “(Re) sexualising the Desexualised Asian Male in the Works of Ken Chu and Michael Joo”, Joan Kee states, “The Asian or Asian American male is perhaps best known for his absence in the colonizer’s sexual hierarchy.” In other words, under the white gaze, Asian men regularly find the existence of their sexuality dismissed, and themselves denied the possibility of possessing romantic or sexual desire, painted as undesirable and therefore undesiring.</p>
118	<p>It is this dynamic that writer and performance artist Alok Vaid-Menon writes about in their essay “What’s R(ace) Got to Do With It?: White Privilege & (A) sexuality”: “Part of white supremacy as I understand it is the privilege of being a subject of desire: one who can feel in control of one’s desires and one who has more agency to act on said desires.”</p> <p>...As Angela Chen puts it in <i>Ace</i>, marginalised people “can find it very difficult to claim asexuality because it looks so much like the product of sexism, racism, ableism and other forms of violence”, or in the words of Vaid-Menon: “my asexuality is a site of racial trauma”.</p>
119	<p>Assumptions around sexuality were baked into the racial hierarchy from the start, right alongside ideas around characteristics like skin colour or hair texture. The sexual dimension cannot be separated from the way race has been constructed, because, from the beginning, sexuality and reproduction have gone hand in hand with racist ideas about self-government and “fitness to rule”.</p>
120	<p>As long as white a-spec people uncritically assert their right to not bear children without acknowledging the privilege allowing them to do so, or claim the language of asexuality without knowing where it comes from, our community cannot truly be said to be a safe and inclusive one.</p> <p>...I rely on catch-all terms and signals of political solidarity—trans, nonbinary, queer—but I’ve given up trying to decide if a word like “genderfluid” or “neutrois” is more accurate. Agender might be the way to go, but if I’m honest I’m not even sure that I don’t have a gender—it’s more that I just don’t know what that gender, if it exists, is. Perhaps I should say “quoigender”, if such a word exists, or use JK’s evocative “gender fugitive”.</p> <p>“Gender” as a concept isn’t much use to me. For all intents and purposes, my gender only exists as far as it unites me and identifies me with others in my community—that’s why “trans” is my favourite word to use, even though it is the broadest term.</p>
121	<p>As a nonbinary person, I’m “outside” binary gender, one of the most powerful systems acting on all of us, shaping the way we live our lives—and as an a-spec person I’m outside another, closely related system: (compulsory/ hetero) sexuality. Without these systems, and without the social scripts that go along with them—telling us who is supposed to</p>

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	propose to whom, who is supposed to be aggressive and who demure, who is supposed to do childcare—gender seems to have nothing to anchor itself upon.
122	Cisnormative society is obsessed with trans people’s genitals, for one thing: many of us are regularly asked if we’ve had “the surgery”, and most of the articles about trans people written by cis people have an inordinate and morbid focus on gender confirmation surgery. Trans women especially tend to be fetishised and overly sexualised in pop culture and media depictions, so it’s easy to see how, like an ace Black woman, an ace trans woman might find herself disbelieved in her asexuality, or her boundaries around sex disrespected.
123	<p>I’m a pre-op transgender woman. I have always felt completely asexual because of my body dysphoria. It just has felt like I couldn’t imagine being with anyone else or how my body would function if I was. But, all of this has started to change since I began hormones six months ago. Suddenly, I feel more “right” in my body, and even though I still have a *thing* between my legs that I don’t like, I somehow have a small desire to be sexual occasionally with a partner. I’ve basically gone from feeling like just asexual to grey-a, instead.</p> <p>...This experience actually complicates a commonly accepted idea about transition, which is that oestrogen and antiandrogens (the hormone regimen generally prescribed to transgender women) reduce libido, and by extension desire for sex.</p>
125	I think so much of how we think about being a woman is wrapped up in how we are supposed to exist in relationship to the heteropatriarchy. Very gendered clothing for women is meant to constrict and minimise the amount of space we take up (which also interacts for me with being fat), and is viewed through the lens of how we are perceived by men. I have always identified as a cis woman, but I’ve always been a little uncomfortable being perceived as a woman. I think a lot of that discomfort comes from being aroace. I have a hard time defining what womanhood is outside of its relationship to heterosexuality.
127	Before the European Enlightenment, it was thought that in order for a child to be conceived, both male and female partners needed to orgasm—and since the Church was generally adamant that all sexual activity ought to be for purposes of procreation, this meant that a woman’s participation, her consent and enjoyment, were considered a necessary part of any “correct” sexual conduct.
128	<p>The sexual revolution of the 1960s emerged against this backdrop of sexual disempowerment, and much of current feminist activism is based around challenging its lingering effects, many of which stubbornly persist to this day: under the male gaze, women are still simultaneously sexualised and seen as inherently less sexual than men, their sexual pleasure valued less than their ability to give that pleasure to men. One of the biggest feminist projects of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been to reclaim women’s pleasure and sexual agency, by asserting that women, too, desire sex and have sexual needs.</p> <p>The sexual revolution and the subsequent feminist “sex wars” have resulted in an environment where sex, sexuality, desire and pleasure are the most pertinent topics of conversation, and where sex positivity—an attitude that embraces human sexuality, taking it as fact that women are equally (and universally) possessed of sexual drive as men—is the norm in progressive circles.</p>
129	In this cultural context, ace women often find themselves obligated to perform sexually when they don’t want to, but also being told by older female relatives, who may have

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	grown up with different sexual politics, that it's "natural" for them not to want sex while their husband does. You need only look at American sitcoms featuring married couples, so many of which cast husbands as "horndogs" and wives as mildly unwilling or bored instruments for male satiation.
132	Interviewee Billy, for example, recalled as a teenager "playing along"—performing the role he was expected to, of the sexually desiring young man—with his friends, as they bonded while looking at pornography.
133	The smallness and exclusivity of the category are tied to the history of patriarchy, the way that sexual difference has been used to maintain the status quo and the traditional role of men as procreators.
137	When I was forcing myself to perform heteronormativity, and in that sense erasing my own identity by pretending to be straight, I caused myself a lot of anxiety, panic attacks and it worsened my depression.
142	...he falls into a very small category of people with whom I feel safe enough to have intimate physical contact, and since all intimate physical contact between "lying together on the sofa watching a film" and "penetrative sex" kind of falls within the same general category for me, it doesn't make much difference to me what variety of sensual intimacy we practise.
166	Regardless of whether they were homosexual or even homoromantic, Boston marriages were unequivocally queer: in their own time they subverted traditional gender roles and social expectations. By building these relationships for themselves, women were exercising agency over the shape of their lives that had for most of history been denied them—the same thing that a-spec people in queerplatonic partnerships are doing today.
185	In June of 2021, just in time for Pride season, a hallowed old argument started cropping up again on social media, about whether kink and BDSM paraphernalia should be allowed at Pride marches. One of the arguments made by the conservative "no kink at Pride" side of the conflict was the claim that seeing leather, bondage gear or someone in a puppy play mask constituted a non-consensual sex act, and that these should be banned in order to "protect asexuals". In response, a whole host of asexual people fought back, pointing out that no one actually in the asexual community was advocating against kink at Pride, and that, in fact, a-spec people of all descriptions had been part of the kink and BDSM scene for as long as there had been one.
187	<p>But because sex is highly political and politicised, oftentimes asexuals are cast into the role of "kink shamers", with (often straight, cis) "allies" pitting us against other groups that they see as "highly sexual". (Of course, "highly sexual" in these cases usually translates to "queer".)</p> <p>...When it comes to thinking about sex, it's important to remember that an asexual person's attitudes towards it are personal feelings and opinions—and so are yours. In the same way that a kink or fetish might make you uncomfortable but not actually have any real-world moral or ethical implications, it's important to learn to separate your own personal feelings toward difference from objective reality.</p> <p>And this parallel to kinks and kinkshaming goes both ways: just because aces as a group might not feel sexual attraction, or be able to empathise with your experience of it, doesn't mean that we're judging you, or trying to assert some sort of moral high ground by</p>

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	<p>“abstaining”. An ace person would have to be pretty disconnected from reality to consider an allo person weird, aberrant or otherwise exceptional for being allo.</p>
191	<p>Even though I’ve spent the last two years of my life working through all my personal baggage around sex, and coming to understand that having or not having sex is actually not that big a deal, I still often find myself thinking how much easier my life would be, how much less alienated I’d feel from most of my generation’s pop culture or casual conversation, if I was just comfortable having casual sex with strangers.</p>
192	<p>Among those who were sex repulsed, this repulsion could fluctuate over time, or vary both in terms of severity and what it was focused on; for example, a number of people expressed discomfort or disgust for certain aspects of sex or sexuality but not others, like being okay with viewing sexual content but not with being personally sexualised, okay with play above the waist but not below, and so on.</p> <p>...This ambivalence could also manifest as indifference towards partnered sex specifically: a trend that I was surprised by but probably shouldn’t have been, was the sheer number of people who said that, while they didn’t experience sexual attraction for other people, or had no interest in sex with partners, they did still have a libido, and might masturbate when they felt the need. When asked “What’s something that a sexual partner does, or can do, to make you feel safe and supported during sex?”, NT gave a somewhat tongue-in-cheek answer: “Turn off the lights and try not to interrupt my time with my vibrator by touching me... or speaking... or being in the room with me?”</p> <p>...Due to me being demisexual, I personally do experience a frequent impact on my ability to masturbate. When using pornography as an aid for masturbation, I often experience difficulty actually finding material to use for masturbation, the reason I believe, being my lack of sexual attraction (since I almost only develop such after a connection) to the people featured in pornographic movies.</p> <p>On the other hand, I’ve instead found that pornographic art, comics and writings featuring established characters from media (from books, movies, TV shows, etc.) has been more effective as an aid for masturbation.</p>
194	<p>A number of the people I spoke to mentioned masturbation; some preferred it as an alternative to sex with partners for whom they might feel deep love but not sexual attraction, while others rejected it as just another sexual activity they had no interest in.</p> <p>...While DC said her experiences of sex with this person specifically were generally positive, she also added, “Aegosexuality and kink align in some very interesting ways and as it turns out sometimes having an extra pair of hands available can make things easier.” This suggests that being physically intimate with another person might resemble assisted masturbation, more than our conventional ideas of partnered sex.</p>
211	<p>This is no coincidence: ace-spectrum people have been active in these communities for as long as they have existed, and despite the vanilla assumption that it’s just a kind of sex you wouldn’t want your grandmother to hear about, kink and BDSM are less about finding interesting ways to orgasm and more about power, pleasure and heightening intimacy between partners—all within a safe, mutually negotiated environment.</p> <p>To practise kink, it’s necessary to build trust with your partner(s), communicate actively about what you want and don’t want, and consistently respect your partner(s)’ boundaries. So it’s not surprising, perhaps, that there is considerable overlap between the two communities.</p> <p>...But not all kink is sexual and even when it is, in BDSM there is context and a culture that</p>

Page	Content
	respects boundaries and values consent so if aces want to explore things (or if they're just plain ol' kinky to be honest) they can do that in a place that feels safe. Or it might be that someone may not experience attraction or sexual desire unless there's kink involved. ...I don't experience sexual attraction, but I do experience pleasure in my brain in other ways and sometimes seeing someone all dressed up in harnesses or latex can activate my brain in the same way.
213	That "you always bleed because you break your hymen the first time" is a lie, for one! And that you shouldn't try to have sex if your vagina's dry and tight from lack of arousal (sorry for how graphic that sounds). That lube exists and is okay to use.
214	Never had sex, but once I learnt that the majority of women don't orgasm from penetrative sex, I lost whatever little interest I had left. I'll stick to my very hardworking vibrator.
227	Polyamory and relationship anarchy
229	I know I'm happy with my current asexual relationship, but I also know some people would not differentiate it from a partnership or friendship if I don't want to have sex with my partner nor want to forbid her from having sex with others... I don't know, it makes it weird for me.
230	This is where the concept of relationship "anarchy" comes into play: a philosophy of relationships built around examining—and, when necessary, setting aside—the social norms surrounding all aspects of intimate relationships. Coined in 2006 by Andie Nordgren, relationship anarchy is a style of being intimate with others that is adjacent to polyamory, but doesn't necessarily assume multiple partners—indeed, a hallmark of relationship anarchy is that it doesn't necessarily assume anything.
231	Because they're both based on an idea of active negotiation between partners to ensure everyone's needs are met, polyamory and relationship anarchy are closely interlinked: many people who practise ethical non-monogamy consider themselves relationship anarchists, and vice versa. ..."Love is not more 'real' when people compromise for each other because it's part of what's expected" reminded me of the people I'd spoken to who had worked so hard to, in spite of all the normalised expectations to "put out" or perform sexually for a partner, find partners who would respect their boundaries around sex or physical intimacy.
239	While the seat of my erotic does not rest on the legs of white supremacist cis heteropatriarchal allosexuality, there is indeed an erotic seat and it is indeed hot.
243	I'm a little suspicious of the word "identity". As a trans person, I'm used to it being used as something of a sop, with people referring to my "gender identity", while the cis people around me get to simply be a man or a woman.

Profanity/Derogatory Term	Count
Ass	2
Fuck	7
Queer	118
Shit	2