



# Aphobia: Common Attitudes and Expressions

**Aphobia** (prejudice against asexual and aromantic people) is extremely common, both from heterosexual and queer people. **Because it's so common, aphobia can be hard to recognize if you're not used to looking for it. So what does it look like?**

## ASPEC PEOPLE DON'T KNOW THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES

One of the most common forms of aphobia is talking about **aspec** people (people on the asexuality or aromantic spectrum) as not knowing or understanding their own experiences. Common expressions of this attitude include:

- Are you sure?
- You're too young
- You haven't found the right person yet
- You don't know what you're missing until you try it
- I knew someone who said they were asexual until they started dating someone
- You just haven't met the right person yet
- This is just a phase
  - You're just experiencing low libido
  - You'll grow out of it
  - You're just scared to come out as queer

Aspec people aren't confused or deluded – they simply have a different experience of attraction than most people.

There are five types of attraction. People who are **allosexual** (people not on the asexual spectrum) typically experience multiple types of attraction at the same time.

- Sexual: the desire to have sex with someone
- Sensual: the desire to have physical contact like hugs or handholding with someone
- Romantic: the desire to have a romantic relationship with someone
- Platonic: the desire to have a platonic attraction with someone
- Aesthetic: getting pleasure from someone's appearance, as in from beautiful scenery

Aspec people may experience only some of these types of attraction, or none of them. And just because their experiences are atypical does not mean that they are confused or that their experience of attraction isn't real.

## ASPEC PEOPLE ARE SUBHUMAN

Another extremely common form of aphobia is the belief that aspec people are less than human. Common expressions of this attitude include:

- There's no such thing as asexuality / there's no such thing as asexuality in humans
- Aspec people are inferior to allosexual people:
  - Aspec people are broken
  - Aspec people are aliens
  - Aspec people are robots
  - Aspec people are cold and emotionless
- Aspec people don't feel love
- Love/Sex is what makes us human

Having a different experience of attraction doesn't make aspec people subhuman or broken just as experiencing same-gender attraction doesn't make people who experience same-gender or multi-gender attraction subhuman.

Similarly, different experiences of love and attraction don't mean that aspec people are incapable of feeling love or forming attachments. Aspec people have rich emotional lives. Romantic and sexual relationships aren't inherently superior or more worthy than platonic relationships.

## ASEXUALITY IS MEDICAL CONDITION

Rather than being discussed as an orientation that comes with a different experience of attraction, it's common to hear people (especially pundits and media "experts") claim that asexuality is a medical condition that requires medical treatment. Common expressions of this attitude include:

- You should see an endocrinologist
- You need Viagra
- You should see a therapist
- If you can orgasm, you're not asexual
- Asexuality is a problem that needs to be solved

Asexuality is a valid orientation. People who are asexual do not need to be fixed, nor is asexuality a sign that something is wrong medically, psychologically, or emotionally with someone.

Furthermore, while some asexual people are disinterested in sex or actively repulsed by sex, there are asexual people who do have sex for various reasons – including being in committed relationships with partners who are not asexual. Asexuality refers to *attraction*, so someone can have (and even enjoy having) sex and still be asexual.

## THINKING ALL ATTRACTION IS SEXUAL

When asexual people talk about feeling attracted to someone, this can be used to claim that someone isn't "really" asexual. However, sexual attraction is not the only type of attraction that exists, and many asexual people *do* experience other forms of attraction. If an asexual person talks about finding someone platonically attractive or aesthetically attractive, that doesn't make them any less asexual.

## ASPEC PEOPLE AREN'T REALLY QUEER

It is very common for queer allosexual people to engage in queer gatekeeping by telling aspec people that they are not "really" queer. Common expressions of this attitude include:

- Why do you need to tell everyone you're not having sex? Keep it to yourself.
- Celibacy is a choice, not an orientation.
- Aspec people are actually straight.
- Queerness is about sex.
- Asexuality is a choice.
- Asexual people don't belong at Pride.
- Ace people are just in denial about being gay.
- You're just trying to comfort yourself because no one wants you.
- Asexuals should stop trying to pretend that they're special.
- Asexuals are trying to 'co-opt the movement'.

Ironically, most of these common expressions of aphobia directly echo the most common forms of homophobia and queerphobia experienced by allosexual queer people through attempts to silence people who talk about different experiences, gaslighting or otherwise redefining someone's experiences, claiming that someone's orientation is a choice, or implying that someone's orientation is a character flaw.

## DEFINING ACE PEOPLE BASED ON THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

Because of the primacy our culture places on romantic sexual relationships, it's very common for asexual people to have either their worth or reality judged according to their relationship status. Common expressions of this attitude include:

- You're not asexual because you have a partner
- You're going to be sad and alone your whole life

People in relationships aren't inherently more worthy than those who are not in a relationship, nor are people in committed romantic sexual relationships inherently more happy than people who are not in such relationships. Additionally, someone can be in a committed relationship and still identify as asexual.

## ACE PEOPLE HAVE PRIVILEGE

One of the most common reasons that allosexual queer people who engage in queer gatekeeping will cite as a reason for their belief that aspec people are not "really" queer is that aspec people have "privilege" for being able to "pass" as straight – since our culture has a presumption of straightness until proven otherwise. Common expressions of this attitude are:

- Asexuals are lucky – they don't have to come out of the closet
- Asexuals aren't queer because they're not oppressed
- It's easier to be asexual

However, aspec people do experience marginalization because of their orientation!

Asexual people are very commonly dehumanized in conversation and in media, often being compared to animals, robots, or aliens due to their "lack of sexuality". There are also jurisdictions where marriage is defined around sexual relations, and marriages between asexual people who don't have sex can be legally invalidated. Such laws are still in force in England and Wales.

It is also common for asexual people to experience pressure to "fix" their asexuality. Doctors will often insist that asexuality is a medical condition rather than a genuine orientation. Asexual people are also often pressured to engage in sexual activity, and can experience "corrective" rape. ([A 2015 survey found](#) that 43.5 percent of the nearly 8000 asexual people surveyed had encountered sexual violence!)

Lastly, studies have shown that anti-homosexual prejudice correlates with prejudice against bisexual and asexual people. In other words, people who are prejudiced don't make distinctions between sexual minorities when engaging in discrimination.

## MISOGYNY + APHOBIA

Because it is common to associate active sexuality with men and sexual passivity with women, asexual women and femmes often experience a combination of misogyny and aphobia. Common expressions of this attitude can include:

- You don't experience attraction because you're a girl
- Women need sex to live a fulfilling life
- Women who don't have sex are actually sick
- You're not asexual, you're just fat and ugly

- I bet I can change your mind about sex (sometimes accompanied by more graphic threats and/or sexual violence)

## ABLEISM + APHOBIA

It's common for people to assume that someone who is asexual is that way because of past abuse, trauma, or sexual violence. Asexuality is a valid orientation that has nothing to do with trauma or abuse. Just as abuse can't make someone gay, abuse can't "make" someone asexual.

Another common form is the assumption that aspec people are actually autistic. The ways in which asexual people are dehumanized or seen as or less-than-human for their "lack of sexuality" closely mirror the ways in which autistic people are dehumanized for their "lack" of "affection". However, it should go without saying that divergence from a societal norm – whether that divergence is one of sexual orientation or neurodivergence – does not make someone less human.

## AROMANTIC DISCRIMINATION

Just as with asexuality, aromanticism (aro) is a spectrum encompassing many different experiences. However, people are often much less familiar with aromantic as an orientation. There are expressions of aphobia that are more common against aromantic people. These expressions can include:

- Aromantic is the same as asexual
- You're making aro up to get attention
- You're a psychopath
- You're just socially awkward

While some asexual people can also be aromantic, asexuality and aromanticism are separate and distinct orientations!

And just as with asexuality, lack of romantic attraction doesn't make someone less human or otherwise define anything about them as a person other than how they experience (or don't experience) attraction.