


Chapter 4

Have Your Cake and Eat It Too: Supporting Asexual and Aromantic College Students

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ABSTRACT

This chapter offers an invitation to learn about and support asexual and aromantic (ace/aro) students. Asexual students and aromantic students are typically defined as students who do not experience sexual or romantic attraction, respectively. Despite the emerging visibility of this community across social media, college educators still have work to do to increase awareness of these identities and to make campuses affirming places. Using traditional academic citations and citations for sources that emerged from ace/aro community knowledge serves to further amplify the brilliance and labor of the ace/aro communities while encouraging academia to continue questioning our epistemic assumptions, particularly around student identities. This chapter provides foundational information about asexuality and aromantism, describes demographics of ace/aro students, shares about their identity development, and offers educators practical approaches for serving and supporting these students, which includes invitations for continuing learning and development on the part of campus administrators.

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OUR INVITATION TO READERS

Asexual and aromantic students remain largely absent from higher education literature, resources, and services (Mollet & Lackman, 2018). When they are included, their experiences are generally aggregated together with other students who have other minoritized sexual or gender identities, although not all asexual or aromantic people see themselves affiliated with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) community (Mollet, 2020, 2023). The continued erasure of asexual and aromantic people is perpetuated by many factors including individuals choosing not to become educated about these populations and instead basing their beliefs (if they have any) on stereotypes, misconceptions, and limited media representations. This chapter exists in resistance to these forms of erasure, invisibility, and invalidation often ascribed to asexual and aromantic people. We invite readers to engage this chapter not only as an opportunity to learn about others, but equally as an opportunity for introspection about personal beliefs, assumptions, and ways of being.

Although all three authors identify with asexual (ace) and/or aromantic (aro) identities, we view this chapter as an opportunity to honor, celebrate, and amplify the brilliance of asexual and aromantic people—particularly college students. Each of the authors came to understand their ace/aro identities as graduate students, but we are certainly not the only college students who have had that experience—fortunately, emerging generations of students are learning about their identities much younger than we did. We are not the originators of most of the language, definitions, and experiences of asexual and aromantic people. We are, however, people who have the educational privilege and social capital that affords us the opportunity to write this chapter and have our knowledge viewed with legitimacy.

Within this chapter, we will intentionally uplift members of the community who have contributed toward the knowledge generation about asexual and aromantic people, identities, and experiences. Much of this knowledge and many of these sources exist beyond traditional peer-reviewed sources used in academia. To honor and amplify the labor of those who have provided much of the foundational knowledge for this chapter, we intentionally connect to those sources and encourage readers to view our reference list as an invitation to explore and learn with those at the forefront of asexual and aromantic understandings. If you, as a reader, pause when considering Reddit or Tumblr as a resource, we encourage you to take that pause as an opportunity to consider the influence of academic socialization that prioritizes certain knowledge over others and the ways that these practices can limit the ability to truly learn with students.

CHAPTER CONTEXT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of who asexual and aromantic students are, their experiences, and their needs and expectations. Collectively, this amalgamation of sources, data, knowledge, and experiences can provide both breadth and depth in ways that resist norms, celebrate humanity, and provide education about asexual and aromantic students.

Chapter Language Decision

Before continuing, we want to clarify the ways that we are thinking about and using terms within the manuscript. Specifically, we will use ace/aro often within this chapter. We chose ace/aro to provide syntactical simplicity within the manuscript as opposed to specifying asexual spectrum and/or aromantic

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