

# Perceptions of Asexual People Based on Age, Gender, and Romantic Orientation

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## INTRODUCTION

Although people have been learning about asexuality more than ever before in recent years, this sexual orientation remains poorly understood or unfamiliar to most people. Due to the lack of awareness, many asexual people (also known as aces) discover their identity later than most sexual minorities do, as they are not aware that asexuality is a sexual orientation and instead assume that there must be something “wrong” with them (Robbins, Low, & Query, 2015). Unfortunately, this is only compounded by the lack of awareness and acceptance of others. Aces often receive negative responses to coming out, such as complete disbelief that asexuality exists or being told they need to see a psychologist, they simply have not found the right person yet, or that the person they are talking to can “fix” them if they sleep with them (Gupta, 2017). In addition, the responses to coming out as asexual typically vary based on gender, with men receiving more disbelief and women receiving more comments about needing to find the right person (Vares, 2018). Consequently, in this study I aim to assess perceptions of asexual people based on age, gender, and romantic orientation (i.e. who one romantically wants to date, separate from sexual attraction).

## METHOD SECTION

I created a Qualtrics survey set up to display a written scenario describing a hypothetical asexual person (though the term asexual was excluded). There were 8 different scenarios set to randomly display (1 per participant) that differed by the 3 independent variables, as shown in the table in the middle. Next, participants were asked to complete 7 fill-in-the-blank questions, 12 Likert scale questions, and 5 demographic questions. To recruit participants, I posted the survey to the Reddit group r/SampleSize and emailed professors at my institution to ask for their help in distributing the survey to students.

## Experimental Groups

AF1: aromantic (A), female (F), 23 years old (1)	RF1: romantic (R), female (F), 23 years old (1)
AF2: aromantic (A), female (F), 56 years old (2)	RF2: romantic (R), female (F), 56 years old (2)
AM1: aromantic (A), male (M), 23 years old (1)	RM1: romantic (R), male (M), 23 years old (1)
AM2: aromantic (A), male (M), 56 years old (2)	RM2: romantic (R), male (M), 56 years (2)

### Scenario RF2:

Taylor is a 56-year-old who works full-time at an office and spends her free time reading, riding her bicycle, and going on hikes with her friends. She is currently single, but she has tried dating in the past. She would like a committed romantic relationship, but she has never really felt turned on by anyone and does not want to have sex, which has caused her problems with dating in the past. She tried having sex twice but decided that she did not like it and does not want to do it again, and all her partners have broken up with her because her partners did want to have sex. Taylor would like to date again without having to have sex, but right now she is not looking for a relationship because of the problems she has had with her previous partners' wanting sex.

### References:

- Gupta, K. (2017). “And now I’m just different, but there’s nothing actually wrong with me”: Asexual marginalization and resistance. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 64(8), 991-1013. doi: 10.1080/00918369.2016.1236590
- Robbins, N.K., Low, K.G., & Query, A.N. (2015). A qualitative exploration of the “coming out” process for asexual individuals. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 45(3), 751-76. doi: 10.1007/s10508-015-0561-x
- Vares, T. (2018). “My [asexuality] is playing hell with my dating life”: Romantic identified asexuals negotiate the dating game. *Sexualities*, 21(4), 520-536. doi: 10.1177/1363460717716400

## RESULTS

There was a significant main effect obtained for the third independent variable, romantic orientation (i.e. whether they wanted to find a romantic partner) on two of the Likert scale questions. For the confused vs. confident rating, the aromantic group was rated as significantly more confident than the romantic group ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.238$ ). For the happy vs. unhappy scale, the aromantic group was rated as significantly happier than the romantic group ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.277$ ). Pearson correlations were also run on all of the questions (including demographic questions), and a few correlations of interest were found. The strongest correlation found was between the confused/confident scale and the happy/unhappy scale, with a significance of  $p < 0.001$  and correlation coefficient of 0.588. A significant correlation was also found between the open-/closed-minded scale and an attitude thermometer rating, with  $p < 0.001$  and a correlation coefficient of 0.498.

## DISCUSSION

The person in the aromantic scenarios were rated as less confused and more confident compared to the person in the romantic scenarios. The aromantic groups were also rated as happier. It is likely that the scenario portrayed a greater sense of frustration in those for the romantic groups. As both the confused/confident and happy/unhappy scales were significant on the independent variable of lack or presence of romantic attraction, it makes sense that there is a significant, moderate correlation between the confused/confident and happy/unhappy scales. It also appears that how open- or closed-minded participants saw the person as may have influenced how favorably they rated them in the attitude thermometer.

In future studies, I would repeat a similar design, except a new independent variable would be whether the term asexual was explicitly used in the study.

## References

- Gupta, K. (2017). "And now I'm just different, but there's nothing actually wrong with me": Asexual marginalization and resistance. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 64(8), 991-1013. doi: 10.1080/00918369.2016.1236590
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