

KEIN BOCK.

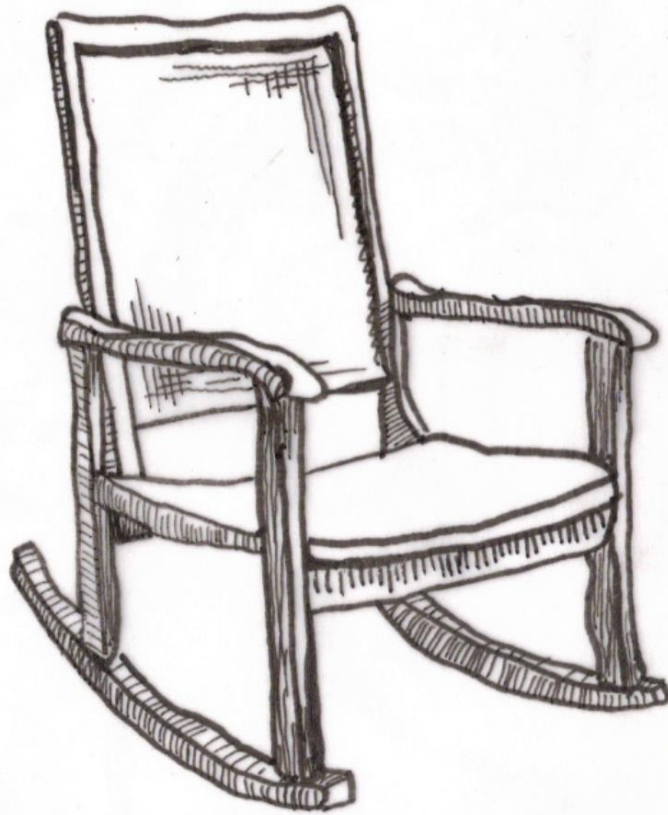
A ZINE ABOUT



NEIN

**SAYING NO
TO SEX
AND ROMANTIC
LOVE**

**& ABOUT
ASEXUALITY
& AROMANTICISM**



**MAY 2023 (french original: december 2017)
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Coucou!

Wow, someone opened this zine! Cool.

Welcome to the INTRO AND NOTES ON TRANSLATION!

This zine is a mix of a translation of a French zine called "L'amour, le sexe, pourquoi j'ai déserté" (Love, sex, why I deserted/quit/abandoned it), a translation of a list from a pamphlet called "Suis-je asexuelle/aromantique?" ("Am I asexual/aromantic?") and of parts of text that I added to put it all together in a way that makes sense and to add my own perspective.

WHY?

Because I found the zine I mentioned at the beginning in the toilet in our house, and that caused a complete reconstruction of my brain. But in a good way, I felt so so so relieved, even though the text could be seen as really depressing and pessimistic in places. It made me grin and laugh out loud. I recognised myself.

I've known the word asexual for a long time but had never found myself in it. I probably thought the definition was surely too narrow to even start thinking if that was me. I've always had an awkward and complicated relationship with sex, but in the months leading up to the discovery of the zine, it had gotten worse. I wanted intimate relationships with people, but what exactly? I wasn't sure, maybe just closeness without sex? I then called this friendship crushes and cuddly friendships, but I was still confused. And right in the middle of this situation the zine burst into my life, already when I saw the name...it stood out to me. And after reading it twice, I sat down and translated it within 3 days and devoured everything I could find on the subject in different languages; podcasts, zines, films, books...and I'm still at it.

But unfortunately, there's not that much. Especially when I looked for german zines and political reflections on the topic, I found almost nothing. Maybe they're just not on the internet, that's ok, but in the queer spaces, where I've been going in and out for years, I haven't noticed much either... That's why I made this translation and this zine.

Because I hope it will give others the chance to feel as relieved as I do. And because I'm really grumpy that I didn't understand until now that “no means no” also means that always saying no is ok. I know that's included, but somehow the possibility of it has never been there in my head. Sigh. All the stuff I could have spared myself. GRRr.

Sigh, Grrr.

This zine is also interesting for people who don't identify personally with the ace spectrum. It is simply about breaking the standard of "compulsory sexuality", and by that, I mean this feeling that people have to have sex, otherwise something is surely missing or something is wrong. Depending on the age group, social group, skin colour, etc., this certainly applies differently. But I think in general this idea is strongly anchored in society. (Of course, some groups of people also have to struggle with the opposite, desexualisation, i.e. the denial of a sexuality. But that's not what we're talking about right now, even though it's just as important a topic).

NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

First of all, I recommend (to everyone who can) to read the original version as well. The partly flowery, quite repetitive way of writing just somehow makes more sense in french and it is impossible to translate all the nuance anyway.

In both translations asexuality and aromanticism are discussed simultaneously and the lines are often blurred. This is logical because the perspective is that of a person identifying with both spectrums. But it can also be confusing. Of course, a person may find only one of the two identities suitable for him or her or them. But it is also true that in our society romance and sex are so strongly linked that it is sometimes difficult to separate them mentally. (Not that it is impossible...)

A few details on terminology:

LGBTQIA+/tpg

In the French-speaking world, the abbreviation tpg - trans, pédé, gouine is often used instead of LGBTQIA+. This means trans, gay, lesbian and thus excludes asexual people. (and also e.g. bi people)

Asex = asexual = ace

Aromatic = aro

Aroace = person who identifies with both spectrums

Allosexual = the opposite of asexual, feeling sexual attraction and wanting to have sex.

And finally, I would like to say that I have taken the liberty of translating the text as I understand it, and that is not necessarily how everyone understands it. Feelings are a very subjective topic and of course I have tried to convey the mood that the author conveys in the original text, but it is still filtered through my view. (as always with translation) For the list from the other brochure, this means that I also added sentences, because I thought some things were not clear enough, and also because the list is a bit out of context.





I imagine that everyone stops having sex.

Would the state start a public awareness campaign?

"Eat five vegetables or fruits a day, and don't forget the sex!"

Love & Sex & why I quit them



I got together with friends to write for ten days. This was an occasion for me to pull out many individual scraps of previously written text and write more to make this booklet with.

There was a moment years ago when I was looking for stuff about asexuality and aromanticism, about how to do relationships differently, how to build them differently. It was necessary for me to seek out these texts, to think about them, to understand better, without knowing what I was really looking for. But what I found did not satisfy me. I started writing myself, regularly, to empty my head. And because it helped me to be clear about things I wasn't hearing anywhere else. Since then, I've felt like publishing something on the subject, so that something exists. I don't really feel comfortable publishing texts, but I thought, at least there's no big pressure to repeat things I've often heard before. It scares me to say what I think and have others hear it. I am afraid to be offensive or hurtful. I'm afraid of regretting it or changing my mind.

But I told myself that if someone had written this zine before me, I would have loved to read it, so I hope that's the case for others now.

During the writing session, in order to have more structure, I answered questions. They are questions I was asked, new questions I ask myself and questions about other topics that would otherwise not come up. I also put in bits of text that I had written earlier when I felt like they fit the passage. I tried to bring in a bit of context.

Thanks to my friends for taking the time, coming back to me to talk about my texts, for being interested, asking questions in general. Thank you for helping me to find a thread and reformulating when something wasn't clear. Thank you for making me feel that it is worth the work.

Why do I use the word ace/asex/asexual (or not)?

Sometimes I call myself asex, sometimes not. Then I use other words: I don't have sex/share sex. Among asex people I find it easier to call myself asex. In other situations, it depends... With many people I'm afraid that they don't even know the word, don't know what it means. Also, in most of the mainstream stuff I've found online, the word asexual is defined as "someone who has no sexual desire, no libido". Something that humans don't decide, that is fixed since birth. I don't see my development that way because what bothers me so much about sex, and what is the reason I chose not to have it, is not sex itself. Which means, for example, that I do masturbate and I like that, as opposed to the social construction of sex and the place it has in our society. By that I mean for example the connections between sexual relationships and love relationships that are superior to others, and also the connection between sexuality and feeling sexy or attractive. The connection between sexuality and being special/unique/extraordinary. I don't want any of that. I want to get rid of it because I want being asexual to be something political, not an identity that is incorporated into this world without changing it.

Sometimes I find it difficult to call myself asex because there is so little written or said about it that I feel like people immediately label me without asking themselves, for example, if I'm more of such- and-such an asex person, or of which "current", because all these distinctions don't really exist for most people.

Sometimes the word asex helps me feel legitimate in a space because I am neither lesbian nor a woman. Even though since I've started identifying as trans at least that's easier, but still. In reality, it would take an A in the invitation more often. (Note: LGBTQIA+ is used less often in French than tpg- trans, pédé, gouine → trans, gay, lesbian) For me, being mentioned with an A shows a minimum of inclusion and reflection and that is rare.

Why do I almost never use the word aromantic?

Even though it really changed things for me, I was honestly excited for a few days when I discovered that there was a word for "someone who doesn't have love relationships" I almost never use it. I have to say that I knew people who called themselves asex before I stopped having sex, whereas when I stopped having love relationships for good, I didn't know that others did too, that it could be a political struggle, even though I was already living it that way myself.

So why don't I use the word? Well, already because nobody knows it, or almost nobody. And because I'm too lazy to use it and always have to explain it, I use other half-sentences to explain my approach to love relationships.

Another part is that it's a word that comes from English and in French, romantic (romantique) is not really used that way, we rather say "in love" (amoureux.s.e). And aamoureux.s.e, stick it, it's unpronounceable, even worse than asexual. (Note: L'asexualité and la sexualité sound exactly the same if you pronounce them in French) And romance just refers more to the culture around love relationships, valuing them strongly, a little theatrically, like singing serenades, bouquets of flowers for St. Valentine, etc. Many people don't find themselves in that, but are still down for their love relationships, and aromantic, that seems more like someone is against this very romance, but that says nothing about whether people have love relationships or not.

Why aren't you having sex?

Because the pressure is too big. Because I'm too stubborn to accept doing something when I feel I have no choice. In any case, when I don't really have to do it, especially if it makes me feel good not to do it. I have a mental block there.

Because I'm tired of hearing, directly or indirectly, that we all need sex, that it's good, liberating, an essential part of all of us. I'm tired of thinking it's natural and there's nothing we can do about it. Enough of thinking we all must have it to be happy, to be complete, to be fulfilled.

I don't believe in happiness, but I know that feeling good comes from being a minimum aware of what we are doing and doing at least a minimum of things that make us feel good. So, I don't see how doing a thing that we force ourselves to do because it's supposedly good for us is going to help.

Because it makes me so angry just to think that having sex would be like going to work, submitting, admitting defeat.

Because I don't feel like it. I don't think about it, I don't imagine it, I don't want to. I do other things, I'm busy elsewhere. Because it would be an effort to take the time, to be available, to just think about what I want and how I want it. And to be honest, I'm not up for that. Because even if I wanted to, it would be work to find a framework in which I feel good, feel secure enough. So that in itself is not very attractive.

Because I don't like being desired, I don't know what people want from me. And I don't want to desire anyone, project thoughts onto someone, expectations, that makes me feel uncomfortable.

Carried by my enthusiasm and anger, most of the time I am sure it is good to have made this decision, but it still happens to me in moments of doubt to wonder if my discomfort might not be coming from the absence of physical contact. It's like my body is claiming to be acknowledged. It's hard to say goodbye to these long-held ideas that make having loving physical contact with people seem so necessary, almost essential to living.

It would be something to destroy this idea, at least to bend it. To not feel so shitty, to decide in peace, more at ease with oneself, to better resist the ideology of rape and abuse that is so often justified with this drive.

Quitting sex

I remember quitting love relationships and wondering about what to do with my sexuality. The question of whether I should also stop having sex did not arise. It seemed logical to me that to get by without love relationships and to find a balance, I would have to share my sexuality. Like I would die of thirst without it. So, I had a time in my life when I had sex when it suited me, without asking myself if I felt like it or how I actually wanted it, too relieved to find partners who were willing to spend a night with me without asking me the next day if I wanted to stay, or who wanted to build a love relationship afterwards.

Later, I met other people who stood up for not sharing their sexuality and did so of their own free will. It was a huge relief to know that that was possible. At first, I was afraid to recognise myself in it, to give something up. It's not easy to define yourself by the absence of something that is seen as so important. But in the end, it has been really good for me to find a space where there are no sexual prompts without that absence being seen as something bad. These spaces are valuable.

Quitting sex, quitting love relationships too. Not an easy thing to do. Not easy, even before you make the changes in real life, to even imagine that it can work. That it is possible. Especially when there are almost no examples, and we all have our heads full of talk about what we should do. Not easy to think of all that you lose when you don't yet know what there is to gain. To tell yourself that you can do it, that it is also possible for you, not only for the others. It's not easy to say goodbye to things that reassure us, even when they annoy us. We often think we are safer in a known evil. We often think we can lose more by doing what we want than by doing what we should. But

that doesn't get us to the same destination. And the more we go where we want to go, the closer we get to the things that interest us, please us, do us good. Often, it's not easy to tell ourselves that now is the right moment. We always think we have so much to prove: to be ready, to be sure. We think the others didn't decide it, it was always clear. We think in order to make decisions, they have to be clear, don't even really present themselves as questions. If you don't have love relationships, it's because you can't make it work. If you don't have sex, it's because it's too complicated.

What is it good for, making decisions, taking our lives in different directions? It's good for letting go of things that calm us down, even if they annoy us, to get into the habit of something new.

Meeting people, exploring topics, seeing other places, discovering other ways of doing things. It's good for knowing that we have the right to do that. Sometimes it means imagining the very things that no one has ever told us. Sometimes it's because of a phrase we heard one day, and our head does the rest. It means accepting perhaps losing one's social place, disappointing people. But others are surprised, they are interested.

It means rebuilding one's self-image. To ask oneself once again what defines us, what makes us us.

Often this means knowing the outside perspective, learning to deal with shame. To know in advance the pity, the contempt. Learning not to care about it. Learning to be proud. And in time, to thank oneself for the choices one has made, what one has spared oneself. To thank yourself for accepting yourself and taking care of yourself.

I remember coming into my room where I'd had a discussion with a friend with whom it is difficult. I just went to the bathroom for a moment, and I come back. And all of a sudden, I smell his smell, which I haven't smelled for so long because we haven't seen each other lately. There was too much fighting between us. I remember that smell jumping at me. I remember the stress I feel, the panic. Panic, for days, for weeks, for months, that the relationship will finally end, then, when it doesn't end, the feeling of being a bad person. I remember saying to myself "I want this to stop." And not being able to imagine for years that it was possible. Just because it's seen as a bad thing to end a friendship, you can always fix things, you just have to work for it. I remember the fear of the end and also of the opposite, that it won't stop being the way it is now. This fear makes me not express my anger, keep my doubts to myself, as well as my questions and the moments when I don't agree. I remember the fear of being alone and the relief at the moments when I am sometimes.

I remember questions running through my head that I immediately suppressed because they were unacceptable. Always this question about stopping.

And then when it stopped, I remember relief, for days, for weeks, for months, for years, often when I think back. And the anger at what we tell ourselves to do because we think it's good and right.

Physical relations, touching

I remember not being able to fall asleep. Feeling a friend next to me while lying in bed keeps me from sleeping. At the same time, I tell myself that I am lucky to share this intimacy with someone. All around, my friends often say that our society does not want intimacy to be shared outside of a love relationship, and that it is therefore important to construct other forms of intimacy. It's not that I disagree, I know full well that it's necessary to develop different ways, having never been in a couple myself. But now it is night, and next to this person I feel that I should be satisfied and reassured by the moment, even a little honoured to be so close to this person. But I can't fall asleep because I prefer to sleep alone. That's how I feel comfortable and good.

How do you see physical relationships with others? How do you deal with touch?

I have no problem hugging people sometimes. A friend I haven't seen for a long time, who gives me a hug, or if we do it at a moment when we've told each other something emotional, or are just happy to see each other, that's a clear way for me to convey affection. I understand it, this kind of affection. I know that the gesture is meant for me, and I know what it means.

On the contrary, for example this mode of "hanging around on the couch and groping each other", I don't understand that well and it makes me feel uncomfortable. I used to do that, and I think I got into it more because I thought it meant we shared a close, special relationship.

But it wasn't because I liked being touched, but rather because I liked being chosen. It was like a super precious place where I wanted to be.

A thing that is good in itself, that I just wasn't able to appreciate so much. Those were also moments when I felt particularly bad because I felt like there was no room to ask myself these questions about what I wanted. When you're doing so well, you shouldn't really ask yourself if you might not want something completely different. And that's quite a cheat.

This way of hanging out together and touching each other, it reminds me of all the things we do to feel important to others, all the things we do to feel less alone. The days of running around each other, always staying close, never getting off the sofa so as not to miss anything, even if nothing is happening. Being there. The evenings when I delay going to bed so as not to leave the others without me. It reminds me of this emptiness, this endless waiting for whatever. Of everything you do, not because you are interested in doing it, but because you are afraid of what will happen if you don't do it. Fear of being abandoned. Of missing the connection and feeling too much behind to catch up with the group or the person. It reminds me of those moments when you're afraid to be alone because you've forgotten what it was like, so you stay around until you can't stand each other anymore. Of all the little things we forget to do to integrate better, outside of the relationship of two, outside of the group. All the coffees I would have wanted to drink with others; all the people I finally didn't call. All the books I wanted to read. The walks. The projects I had been meaning to do for so long. And how I end up pissed at others, blaming them for not doing any of it.

It reminds me of the appropriation of our bodies. How in a public space (or in the presence of other people) physical attention, ways of touching, all that says: this person belongs to me: my friend, my lover, my son, a member of my circle of friends. I have a special

relationship with this person that you don't have. This war for space, where the field being fought over is our bodies, our lives, our time. It reminds me of how dispossessed I have felt at times, caught in the uncertainty of who I belong to now. Staying close to someone, even when I would actually like to go look at something else somewhere else. Not sympathising with others. Trying to not move away too much and guarding my space, with myself and with others.



Over the last few years, I have learned to give up being a favourite person. With the time, I'm beginning to understand that what I don't like in relationships is the stress, the panic, the insecurity. And what causes the most stress and anxiety in me is that I don't know if I am the most important person to someone. Whether there isn't someone else who is more important. The relationships where I don't feel stressed are the ones where I already know that I'm not the most important. Otherwise, I think it's not the case, without being sure, but I would much like to be the most important, or I think I already am and I'm afraid of losing my position. When I understood that, I asked myself what I actually want from relationships and what I have to do to make it work better, which of my expectations I have to give up. I thought I needed to be someone's favourite person. I thought to be important I needed to be most important. I thought I needed to be important. Not important in the sense of taking care of me, organising with me, but in the sense of my existence, my value in itself. When I think back, I no longer know why I thought that. The longer I know this, the more often it happens to me that I don't care at all whether I am important, the best friend/the dearest person. I am super satisfied to be loved, to be appreciated, and that's already great. I'm happy when I manage to build relationships that I find enriching, that help me to move forward, that I have fun in and don't worry about. And that doesn't have much to do with being the most important person to someone. On the contrary. I really value people when I look at them as they are, but if I try to keep them as close to me as possible, closer than everyone else, then I no longer have any perspective of valuing the rest. More than being important, I value spending good moments together and being interested. And that's not bad at all.

Desire

Desire is something that makes me really uncomfortable. The desire of others. I know that sensation of feeling good, of feeling valued by being desired. Like someone is giving you a point. And at the same time, for me, this feeling of being desired triggers a mixture of fear, intimidation and dependence. Fear that the persons impression of me is wrong, or that being desired will stop again. Intimidation of the image the person has of me, without knowing how they see me at all. Dependence, because it has to go on and on if it's worth something.

The fact of being desired by someone has always left me feeling dumped. Not understanding what the person is projecting onto me. Even though it's supposed to make you feel good, you never know what exactly the person likes about you, what you have to do to keep it going. In the desiring gaze, for me, lies the statement, "I know parts of you that you don't know yourself," and I don't understand that. I don't know who to believe anymore, who to exist for. So I start to exist for someone else instead of just staying on the ground and living my life. We never know what exactly the others want from us and in this question that always shines through, I lose myself completely. With it comes the feeling of insufficiency. Sometimes it complicates the questions I ask myself about myself, questions about gender and what I want to become. Because then I have to think about them in relation to someone else. And take into account what happens to that person if I change something. There seems to be a rule book for this somewhere, which the others know but I have never read. But they expect me to respect it.

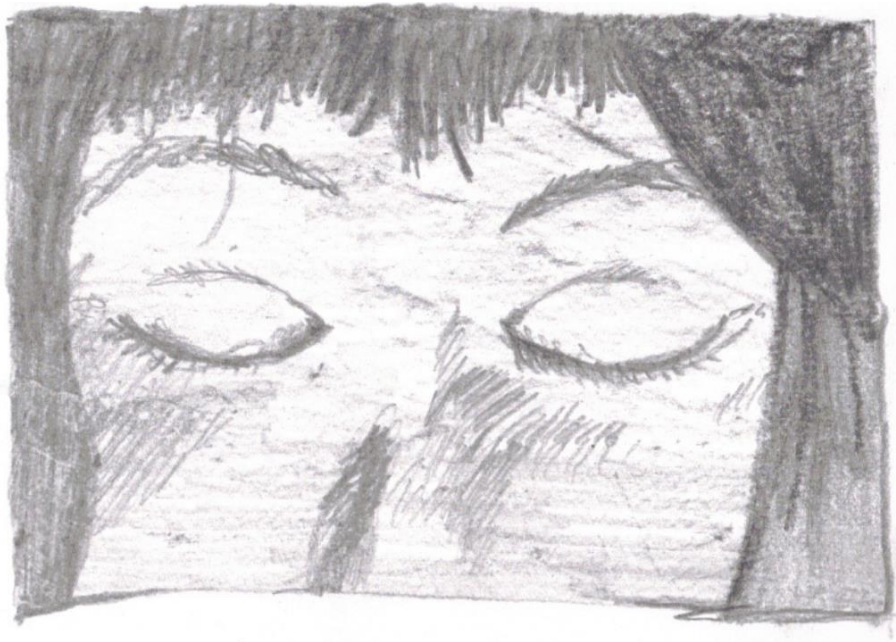
Why should it actually be so good to have someone next to you who has expectations of you? Who wants you to do things? Who has an idea of who you are?

Desire makes me either feel scared away or like I should adapt. Adapt to the expectations of the people watching me. To be good, to be a good student. And I know myself well enough to know that I can't keep up this game for long before I explode. Sometimes desire puts you on a pedestal. You stand on top. You have to know better, know more, be better than the others. You are asked to explain the truth you know so well. So you silence your doubts and explain things you don't understand, hide parts of yourself at the risk of disappointing. You start to be ashamed of everything that doesn't work about this image of yourself, to be angry with yourself for it, to no longer understand yourself.

What's so annoying about desire is that it's supposed to feel good. You're supposed to be satisfied when you're desired. So how can you make them understand that all you want is for the person to leave you alone? What's bad is that we've been told so many twisted stories about desire and being desired that if you reject a person, they'll think it's because they're not good enough, not beautiful enough, not interesting enough for you to be interested in them. They won't think that they're playing a stupid game that you won't play anymore. Desire is a game for power, for a place in the hierarchy. Who do I please in order to place myself, to move up the social ladder? Who pleases me and can move me further up the ladder? It is a game of testing and trying, if I please this person and that person, I can feel that I am worth something. If I don't please them, I feel bad. We often lose in this game.

We look for confirmation in others, for them to look at us as if we were who we would like to be. In doing so, we forget that we ourselves are the first person who can do that, that we have to do that for ourselves first. When you desire me, I feel like saying, "Hey, you're playing a game here where you're going to lose too, not just

because I'm not playing it. You will never find what you are looking for in this game." Sometimes it makes me sad that we are not able to seek affirmation differently, to do ourselves something good more easily.



I don't want to desire others any more than I want to be desired. It has always made me uncomfortable. Ashamed of the weight I put on them, the weight of expectations and attention. Ashamed of the stress I can't hide. I never wanted to. If someone interests me, I don't want to play that game, I don't want everything to become so much more intense by zooming in on the details. To focus on a place, a stage, a podium. I like a lot of people and I want to love them too, like they love me, respect them for who they are. Without making it about myself.



Talking about it

I write these stories because I feel a void. There are no stories about asexuality, or very few. There are no stories where the protagonist decides not to have sex, neither texts that talk about this decision, nor stories where it is a marginal element that is part of the characters relation to the outside world. There is no positive representation of asexuality. Often there are stories or representations of sexual unhappiness that tend to make us fall into the arms of the first person we meet so that we don't end up unhappy. I would really like us to grow up and live with the knowledge of this choice. I know that this choice will always be marginalised anyway, that it is a marginal choice, and that it is a difficult choice to make. But still, I would like that choice to exist.

I don't talk about these topics. Or really rarely. We talk about it briefly among people for whom it is also reality, in their own way. Without ever going into it too much. We sometimes tell each other bits and pieces of our careers, but never what it's like for us on a day-to-day basis. We don't manage to, we don't know how. We are stuck in our fears, never have enough confidence in front of others.

Not enough self-confidence. I have tried several times to gather people who live without sex or love relationships and have different approaches to it, more or less chosen. My idea was to become more than individuals, that surely there would be things in our experiences that are similar and that we could draw conclusions together. But the fears, the mental blocks and defences clashed in an uncomfortable way and amplified too easily. I always have this feeling of "not enough", not daring enough, not going far enough. There are only beginnings of failed attempts.

So I write. I write alone when it gets too much for me, regularly. And sometimes I let people read excerpts if they are interested and ask questions. With a lump in my throat and the feeling of showing myself defenceless, vulnerable, without knowing whether it will do me any good. I give away snippets of text by email, writings, that the other person might read alone in their corner. And strangely enough, it doesn't help to discuss it more easily.

Being in a writing workshop with others helps me to work on my stuff while others are working on other issues. It helps me to understand how much it helps and is good for me. How much it helps to read pieces of text directly, to ask myself questions, to have people who ask me questions and come back to my text. I realise how much what is in my head is trapped, doesn't come out. And that when it does come out, it has an impact, I am understood. That it gets through and resonates.



I remember the resignation, the giving up. Not one memory, but tons, thousands. Whenever I remain silent. When I tell myself it's of no use to open my mouth, it's not that important anyway.

When I don't feel like coming across as the funny guy on duty, the wallflower, the weirdo of the evening. When I don't want to hear the same questions every time I explain myself. The "Ah, I couldn't do that!". When I wait until it's over. All these sentences, these self-evident things. "But, you know, he never has sex." "Oh no, the poor thing!"

The moments when everyone talks about their love life, when everyone has something to talk about, to show off, to make themselves vulnerable. The sex jokes when you're not sure if anyone knows about you. The "And you, do you have a boyfriend or girlfriend?" The moments when your friends aren't around because they're dealing with their relationships. The LGBTQI meetings where they talk about how we live our sexuality, how we can build other forms of loving relationships. The moment at a party when you're standing on the dance floor and realise that everyone but you is about to hook up.

It's never bad at that moment, always just a bit annoying, but well, I'm used to it. What's most annoying is when, after days and weeks in this environment, you start to think you have nothing interesting to tell. When you feel stupid, but you don't know why. When you feel like you are too much, or not enough. When you feel like you're not experiencing anything. That's when you realise that you leave less and less space for yourself, that you exist less and less. That you are no longer sure of what you are thinking.

Why do you want to be more visible as an asexual and aromantic person?

Because I'm fed up with people taking it for granted that everyone has sex or wants to have sex. Because I'm tired of people taking it for granted that everyone has or wants to have love relationships. I'm sick of the comments that it's obvious that it sucks not to have it. I'm tired of people feeling sorry for me, people being worried or sad for me. We should stop classifying each other to be more sure of who we are. Stop saying that maybe we're not straight, but at least we fuck. That we are more sexually free. As if freeing ourselves from restrictions has to happen through sex. Discovering your approach to sex can mean choosing not to have it.

I want my family to stop waiting for me to introduce them to someone.

I want to be visible because I know that visibility means that all this exists less. Not necessarily at the beginning, but the more we become, the more it becomes self-evident that there is no self-evidence in this topic. Because I want others to be visible, I want to hear their voices, to learn, to understand better. Being sure on your own is not enough.

Because I dream of complicity in these places. One day we will make jokes about the others, how weird they are.

Because I want us to be more. And for that to happen, it must be possible for everyone to ask themselves these questions to be able to reposition themselves.

Because it would have been so nice to have more choice and determination. To be able to stand up for myself earlier. To struggle less with it, shorter.

Because if I want to be understood, if I want you to know where I'm coming from, I always have to explain my deepest convictions, my self-evident truths, over and over again. Because this tires me so much that I rarely do it. Because I'm always afraid of being an alien or of upsetting people. Because it still doesn't feel legitimate to think what I think.

Because at the moment I still have the feeling of being super radical and like a caricature, of having nothing to do with reality, of demanding too much.

Because I think we should have a choice.

Because if we were more, I would have less the impression of having to be available for people when they need someone to talk about it. I wouldn't have to carry this issue for it to exist and I would have to feel less guilty if I didn't do it. Because then maybe I wouldn't have to write this brochure, and to be honest, it's quite a job.

I imagine my life as a journey. On this journey I make choices, I choose where to go. Sometimes there is a storm that takes me somewhere I wouldn't have gone on my own. And all around me are my friends, the people who are close to me, with whom I more or less often travel parts of the way.

And then there are my constant companions on this journey. I didn't choose them, we found each other somewhere, but I know that they will always be there, no matter what happens. Even if I would often like to get rid of them. We don't always get on so well, and at first, I found it hard to get used to the idea that they would always be there. More than my friends and the people close to me. One of these companions is the difficulty of not having love relationships. When I took the path of not having love relationships anymore, I met her by the wayside, and she joined me. I was very angry with her for that. Because of her, people thought I was weird. Because of her, it was hard for me to find balance in my relationships, my closest friends left me when they fell in love. So I ignored her at first. I convinced myself that if I just pretended not to hear or see her, she would go away on her own. She would understand that I didn't want her. But she stayed. So I cried, talked to people all around me, pointed out my companion whom I didn't want, whom I hadn't chosen. But nobody did anything, nobody could do anything, so she stayed, for the moment and forever. And the more I looked at her, the more I cried, the less I saw the rest, and she upset me more and more.

I didn't manage to get rid of her, and finally I understood that she would stay forever. With time I learn to come to terms with her, to understand how she works, to make the best of it for myself. Sometimes I am so angry and sometimes so sad. Sometimes I ignore her, almost forget about her, but then she always comes and jumps out at me when I'm not expecting her. These little travelling companions, I have others of them, I won't lose them either, so I organise myself to deal with them all in the best possible way and continue to follow my path.

CHECKLIST AROACE

This is a list of signs that the desire/ lust you feel comes from being raised to be heterosexual.

The point is not that with this list everyone can identify as ace/aro, but to help people who are aro/ace but haven't had any contact with it until now. As an ace person who doesn't know asexuality exists, you often feel compelled to perform allosexuality. And all the glorification of hypersexuality adds to the pressure.

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish what we have been taught to be right from what we really want. If you recognise yourself in some of the points in the list, it doesn't necessarily mean that this is because you have internalised and are performing heteronormativity. But if you recognise yourself in many of them, it can be good to ask yourself if you are maybe aromantic/asexual, or at least not straight.

Also, not all aromantic/asexual people who are not out necessarily feel these things with the same intensity. Some issues affect asexual people, some aromantic, some both, but they are still all shared feelings that can make you aware or help you deal with yourself or just help you feel legitimate about calling yourself aro/ace.




1. Only being attracted to fictional characters. These can be characters from films or series as well as celebrities who are unattainable in reality. This attraction is a way of "practising" the need to be interested in other people/the opposite sex learned by society in a less intimidating manner. But they remain crushes that do not require action.

2. Liking the idea of being in a couple, getting into relationships, liking that "aesthetic" but getting stressed out when it becomes too real and not wanting it anymore; feeling uncomfortable. It could also be that you have the impression of being sexually attracted to someone or being in love, but when you get to know that person better, or it seems like the feeling could be reciprocated, it disappears. Having an "intangible", "indefinable" sexual orientation.

3. Constantly assessing people's attractiveness and feeling you have to "decide" to crush on command. Developing feelings for others when you think it is necessary to have them. Suddenly being into someone or in love with someone when that person has made it clear that a relationship would be possible, even though you didn't feel that before. This can seem like you have low standards, like you take what you can get.




A photograph of three people standing on a grassy lawn in a park-like setting with large trees in the background. A woman on the left is holding a small rainbow flag. A man in the center is wearing a dark suit jacket over a light blue shirt. A woman on the right is wearing a patterned dress and holding a larger rainbow flag with the word 'JOSEFSTADT' written on it. They are all smiling and holding white signs with black text.

4. On the contrary to point 3: **feeling that you have too high standards**, that you will never find the right person because he/she is too concrete a mixture of ideas in your head.

5. **Asking yourself if you're not just afraid of the commitment**, that in time, when you're more mature, it will come. That you just need to make more of an effort.

6. **Being able to understand and appreciate a person's beauty and thinking this is sexual or romantic attraction**. Thinking you are in love with or sexually attracted to a person because you like their style, presence or humour.

7. **Liking the feeling of being attractive to others** because it gives you confidence. Wanting people to want to go out with you even if you are not really attracted to them.



8. Mistaking admiration or interest that you feel for a couple for desire.

9. Not understanding when people flirt with you.

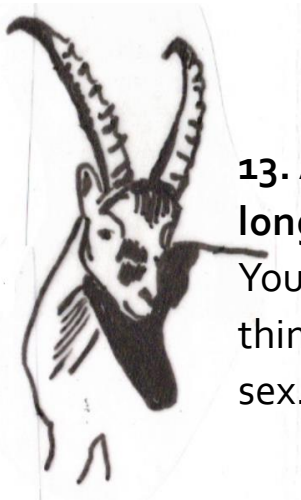
Feeling uncomfortable when you get it, blushing, stuttering because you don't like people coming so close to you and thinking that's a sign of being in love. (Thinking it's the butterflies in your stomach.)

Aromantic people, by definition, have little or no understanding of what romantic love feels like and can therefore simply ignore "red flags" in such situations because societies messed up representation of love makes them think it's normal. Being in love is a pleasant feeling! If it is really love, the stress may come from wondering what the other person thinks of you and if they like you, but at the same time you honestly feel like learning more about them and it is this desire to get closer that can be embarrassing or overwhelming. Being with a loved one is a beautiful thing.


10. Having the impression that it doesn't change sex if you try it with different people, that it doesn't matter who you sleep with. You have sexual fantasies, but no actual bodies appear, or they are without faces. Being sure that people exaggerate when they say how incredibly great sex is. Being curious about sex and thinking that this is sexual pleasure. This is the same idea as in point 9: Asexual people have little or no idea what sexual desire feels like and may confuse other kinds of attraction with it. If a person really attracts you sexually, it means you like to imagine and see their body. You like to fantasise about them and actively engage in sexual acts. They are not an anonymous body in your imagination, it is that very person you desire in your mind. This is not stressful or embarrassing (or only in terms of social norms), it feels good.

11. Being attracted to the idea of being in a couple, but the difficulties seem completely unconquerable. Seeing only limitations in couples, but still wanting to be in one.

12. Starting a love relationship but not feeling the difference from being single. Not understanding the difference between friendship and a love relationship.



13. At first, sex in a partnership is not a problem, but the longer the relationship goes on, the less you want sex. You force yourself to do it, it has become a burden. You think it would be good if your partner didn't want so much sex.

A photograph of two men standing in a garden. The man on the left is wearing a grey suit jacket over a light blue shirt. The man on the right is wearing a red and blue plaid shirt. They are holding three white signs with black text. The background shows green foliage and a wooden trellis structure. In the bottom right corner, the number '38' is written in a large, black, hand-drawn font.

14. Getting over the end of a relationship very quickly, as if you weren't really in love, or not very much.

15. Thinking that you should be sure if you are really feeling love or sexual desire. Telling yourself that you can certainly feel romantic love/sexual desire, that you **just haven't found the right person yet.**

16. Thinking if you were really aro/ace you would have realized sooner. (but no, because of all the reasons here).

17. Thinking it would be easier not to have a gender. Thinking that you are outside the woman/man dynamic. Not managing to conform to gender norms. Studies show that non-binary people are statistically more likely to be aro/ace than the general population. This is not automatic. (Just because you are non-binary doesn't mean you are aro/ace and there are also cis aro/ace women and men.) But it should be noted that gender identity is a construct that is strongly linked to heteronormative ideas of seduction and heterosex, so if you feel distant from these, it can raise questions and make you construct a gender role apart. (Which again doesn't mean that this isn't conscious or that it can't change again). This is neither a choice nor a consequence of a particular upbringing, but rather a consequence of the general perception of gender in our society. It is just an explanation why many aro/ace individuals feel this distance.



18. Having a trauma in your sex life (e.g.: assault or rape) and telling yourself that's where the lack of desire is coming from.

That the lack of desire or attraction is a disease and that you could cure it with therapy. This is a complicated question, and it is difficult for a person to find the "origin" of their asexuality/aromanticism, what factors played what role. Without wanting to apply simplistic explanations like "a missing/too present mother makes you gay": it is true that our sexual orientation can be shaped by events in our lives. **There is no "real" asexuality/aromanticism that was always clear, in contrary to a false one that has grown and may be reversible.** If you are not sure whether your feelings are symptoms or something "deeper", it is important not to put pressure on yourself, because whatever the situation, remember that **you don't owe sex to anyone.** Forcing or stressing yourself is never the answer. You are not hurting anyone by questioning yourself. It also doesn't hurt anyone if you call yourself aro/ace and are traumatised, even if you are not sure and think your mental state has an impact on your sexual orientation. Also, healing from trauma (meaning: the symptoms, flashbacks, dissociation, depression, nightmares become less frequent or more bearable) does not necessarily mean that your sexual desire will come back because sexual orientation is not directly linked to it. It can also be that the desire comes back but not the desire to act it out (because of the trauma or other reasons) and that can also be asexuality/aromanticism. Sleeping with people or being in romantic relationships is not an achievement in itself. Deciding to stop sleeping with people and not being part of a couple doesn't mean you can't also be cured.



CRASH COURSE ACE

The definition from the community:

"Asexual people feel little or no sexual attraction and/or desire for sexual interaction."

There are many different forms of asexuality, which is why we also speak of the A-spectrum. But there are certain common misconceptions, among others: Asexual people certainly cannot have sex, have no libido and do not masturbate. Asexual people cannot have orgasms or feel physical satisfaction and don't get aroused. Asexual people remain asexual throughout their whole lives.

Asexuality is understood as a sexual orientation like heterosexuality or homosexuality. The opposite of asexuality (not being sexually attracted to anyone) is allosexuality (being sexually attracted to people.) Sexuality is fluid, so it can change sometimes. This is especially important to give people the opportunity to recognise themselves as ace, even if they haven't always perceived themselves that way. The same goes in the other direction: people can have been asexual in the past and not anymore, that doesn't mean it was wrong. Asexual people can agree to have sex if they want to, that doesn't make them less asexual. Reasons for this can be that they want a child, want to make a partner happy, find sex pleasurable, etc.

There are equally asexual people who do not masturbate and find the very idea of sex extremely repulsive.

All ways of living asexuality are legitimate.

In our hypersexualised society, asexuality is also political and queer. There is a lot of talk and celebration of sexual liberation in queer subculture. Being able to recognise yourself or come out as asexual is part of this sexual liberation and is by no means a step backwards. It has nothing to do with being a prude and while it has overlaps in the experience of wanting to abstain, it does not have the same reasons as celibacy.

The portrayal of asexuality in the media, if it exists at all, is very narrow, which is also one of the reasons why many people can only identify at all with the term after extensive research.

To this I want to add these quotes on the topic of representation and identification from the book "Ace: What Asexuality Reveals About Desire, Society, and the Meaning of Sex" by Angela Chen.

She writes:

The notion that I might be asexual seemed laughable. I found Adrien Brody attractive and Channing Tatum less so and had a vulgar sense of humour, full of sex jokes and sly insinuations that made my more proper friends blush. I spoke of longing and listened intently to stories of sexual adventures, and never did it occur to me that my friends and I might be using the language of desire differently. [...]

Ten years after I first came across the term asexuality, I returned to the topic, wanting to figure out what I had misunderstood. I had long known that sexual attraction and sexual behaviour are not the same and that one does not necessarily limit the other. I knew that, generally speaking, sexual behaviour is under our control while sexual attraction is not. [...]

Reading more, I understood for the first time that it is possible to lack the experience of sexual attraction without being repulsed by sex, just like it is possible to neither physically crave nor be disgusted by a food like crackers but still enjoy eating them as part of a cherished social ritual. Being repulsed by sex is a fairly obvious indication of the lack of sexual attraction, but a lack of sexual attraction can also be hidden by social performativity or wanting (and having) sex for emotional reasons-and because the different types of desire are bound together so tightly, it can be difficult to untangle the various strands.

And with that I want to end now. On the following pages and on the internet you can find more to read and learn, but if I continue now, this is never gonna be finished. I also highly recommend the book I took this passage from. I hope you took something from this zine, at least you read until the last page... but well, that doesn't have to mean anything, I also have this habit of fast forwarding to the last page ... (;

More resources/ stuff to read, watch or listen to:

In English:

(A)sexual, not everybody's doing it, film

Undoing sex : against sexual optimism

In the magazine LIES, relatively academic

Podcast: Sounds fake but ok <https://www.soundsfakepod.com/>

Book: Angela Chen: Ace What Asexuality Reveals About Desire, Society, and the Meaning of Sex

Book: The invisible orientation

In French:

L'amour, le sexe, pourquoi j'ai deserté, trouvable sur <https://infokiosques.net>

Suis-je asexuel·le, aromantique, aroace ? GUIDE DE QUESTIONNEMENT

AUTOUR DE L'ASEXUALITÉ ET L'AROMANTISME, trouvable sur

<https://infokiosques.net>

Asexualité, autosexualité, antisexualité

... une émission de radio sur le site www.radiorageuses.net

La fabrique artisanale des conforts affectifs

Brochure sur comment on construit autrement des relations, trouvable sur

<https://infokiosques.net>

<https://elainevker.com/blog/2020/05/14/ressources-sur-asexualite/>

Podcast : Les Nouilles et au Lit, 4 épisodes sur l'asexualité

<https://podcast.ausha.co/des-nouilles-des-queues/des-nouilles-au-lit-claire-asexuelle-et-enervee-1-4>

Auf deutsch:

Zines: Wer A sagt muss nicht B sagen (schwer zu finden)

Podcast der deutschsprachigen A*spec-Community : <https://inspektren.eu>

Verein zur Sichtbarmachung des asexuellen Spektrums <https://aktivista.net/>

Contact:

sauterdansleau@riseup.net (original author of the French brochure)

inwasserspringen@riseup.net (translator and editor of this zine)



“Kein Bock” is german for “Nope, I don’t want to.”, “Not in the mood”,
it’s slang for “Keine Lust”, which literally means “No desire/lust”