

## **Lessons from bisexual erasure for asexual erasure**

**Abstract:** In the absence of research into the specific motives for asexual erasure, the motives for bisexual erasure as theorised by Kenji Yoshino are appropriated for that purpose. The motives to 1) preserve the stability of sexual orientations 2) preserve sex as an important distinguishing trait and 3) preserve norms of monogamy, identified as underpinning bisexual erasure, are each applied to asexuality. The conclusions reached suggest that motives 2) and 3) to erase bisexuality could theoretically be strengthened in the case of asexual erasure, and motive 1), while not logically applicable to asexuality, nonetheless suggests an additional potential reason why asexuality is erased.

Keywords: Asexuality, Bisexuality, Erasure, Kenji Yoshino, LGBT+ discrimination.

## **Lessons from bisexual erasure for asexual erasure**

Erasure is often cited as being the primary challenge facing the asexual community in its efforts to establish a position for itself next to the other “mainstream” sexual orientations. Asexual awareness movements, to borrow from Andrew Sullivan (1996) are “less a matter of complaint than of pride”. And the desire for pride is not easily dismissed as trivial. Yet neither is pride easy to cultivate. This is the challenge of asexual erasure and as challenges go it is a substantial one. However, as with all challenges in life, there is no better advice than to understand the challenge before confronting it. Understanding is what this essay sets out to achieve.

Kenji Yoshino’s (2000) article *The epistemic contract of bisexual erasure* inspired me to do so and supplies the content of this essay. Until I came across Yoshino’s work one could have argued that I did not understand why erasure takes place insofar as I did not fully appreciate how it can function as a defence against the “threats” posed by an aberrant sexual community. Thanks to Yoshino’s analysis of the threat of bisexuality (and hence its erasure) I decided to investigate whether asexuality presents similar “threats” and if so whether it is erased on similar grounds. Yoshino describes three shared political motivations heterosexuals and homosexuals might have to erase bisexuality; these are the motives to 1) preserve the stability of their sexual orientations, 2) preserve sex as an important distinguishing trait and 3) preserve norms of monogamy. On the basis of these shared motivations Yoshino argues that heterosexuals and homosexuals - in a rare instance of cooperation - have unconsciously entered into a stable, epistemic contract of bisexual erasure. If similar political motivations to erase asexuality exist, we might be able to say

that there also exists an epistemic contract of asexual erasure as entered into by allosexuals, a definition which includes heterosexuals, homosexuals, bisexuals and pansexuals. My means of investigating this possibility is, I hope, relatively straightforward to follow. Below, each of the three motivations for erasure is addressed in order and a different conceptualisation of them, as determined by the realities of asexuality, developed. It is in this way that I hope to shed some light on the nature of asexual erasure.

I believe that there must somewhere be some value in what I have written insofar as those groups erasing asexuality are in large part the same as those groups erasing bisexuality, and so if Yoshino's scholarship has our total trust, this essay deserves a small portion of it. I therefore hope that my own conclusions might help asexual and aromantic identified people better understand allosexual people's attitudes towards them, provoke useful debate about erasure and of course combat that erasure. The more aware people are of the motivations underlying their discriminatory attitudes the more distance they might gain from their fear and the more favourable they might become towards the asexual community.

### Preliminaries

Yoshino begins his discussion with two preliminary remarks. Adapted these are required before this investigation begins. The first is to ask whether asexuals benefit from being grouped together under one term. Asexuality is certainly an umbrella term which harbours just as much if not more diversity than those falling under the allosexual umbrella. Where allosexuality harbours heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality and pansexuality, asexuality

harbours an equivalent four romantic orientations as well as aromantic asexuals, grey- and demi-asexuals, libidoist and non-libidoist asexuals, sex-positive and sex-repulsed asexuals, and autochorissexual asexuals. Clearly to talk of asexuals as a homogenous group is to neglect asexuality's inner diversity, as indeed it is to talk of allosexuals. Nonetheless, I would urge that the ostensibly simplistic label of asexuality - and its opposite, allosexuality - is not without use. Given its position within society in contrast to the position of allosexuality, treating asexuals as a homogenous group is a necessary means to the end of greater awareness and acceptance of the fact that a percentage of the population, however diverse it might be, does not experience sexual attraction. Whether it will always be necessary to utilise the label once full awareness and acceptance is achieved is a moot point, but for now uniting under a label seems to me to be incumbent on those wishing to improve this community's lot.

Indeed, use of this label, if one projects into the future, is arguably beneficial for all sexualities. With a universally reduced emphasis on sex which might accompany asexual awareness could come less angst about sex and its lack in any given person's life. Asexuality could become a safe place for those who feel they "lag behind", since it is not just asexuals who are out of step but, I would hazard, an uncomfortable majority of all people. Awareness might also better equip people to understand and accept the nature of their relationships by normalising certain questions. Are their intimate relationships founded more on sexual or romantic attraction? Need the sexual aspect be so emphasised? Also, does one have aromantic relationships aside from one's romantic ones? Recognising them as such might make them even more fulfilling. Moreover, with less emphasis on romance might come, again, less angst, this time thanks to the reduced emphasis on avoiding celibacy. Sex research will be challenged to its

betterment as well. Most obviously, asexuality undermines what must be the major premise of that research: that we are all sexual beings. Parsing through the consequences of evidence to the contrary will undoubtedly call for a re-evaluation of many other associated assumptions in many other associated domains of humanistic and scientific thought. This is by no means a comprehensive list of the benefits which might cascade out from asexual awareness, however, its potentially liberating influence should already be clear. That being said, and without having even touched on the burden of erasure for asexuals, we can now see how discussing asexuality as a group is worthwhile and fighting asexual erasure more worthwhile still.

The second preliminary remark concerns what we mean when we speak of asexual erasure. It is useful here to reproduce Yoshino's description of the roughly three levels of bisexual erasure that exist. First, there is class erasure which in the case of asexuality would be statements that it does not exist as a concept. We hear this when, for instance, asexuality is described as an internet fad or as "a stupid thing to suggest"; more shallow dismissal than deep or challenging erasure, but a frustration for those wishing for some engagement with the matter. At this *class* stage, erasure is practically synonymous with disinterest or ignorance but it nonetheless must be said that it does betray stronger and more forceful sentiments revealed at the next stage.

This is individual erasure which charges the individual asexual as not being what they say they are. The self-identified asexual is not asexual but instead either lying to themselves, lying to others, repressing their true sexual feelings, hormonally imbalanced or some variation thereof. To borrow a phrase from Yoshino, asexuality is seen not as a "stable individual identity but a place from

which a stable [allo]sexual identity is acknowledged or chosen" (p.20). And indeed, it is when asexual erasure challenges the stability of asexuality that it has particular force: by demanding that asexuality pass as being stable a lack of sexual desire must be proven – however, one cannot prove a negative, only a positive. This alone is immutable. And as Yoshino points out with regards to bisexuality, if asexuality is not viewed as an immutable orientation, it can never be viewed as a valid one. And moreover, any attempt to make something invalid (non-existent) visible is necessarily doomed to fail. Individual erasure of the sort that challenges the stability of asexuality therefore poses an existential threat to the cause of asexual awareness; asexuals must either choose to fit into the sexual matrix, or else be pushed into it against their will.

The final level of erasure Yoshino identifies is that of outright delegitimation, or in more familiar terms, phobia. Asexuals being called "robotic" or "cold" is a common instance of this, while corrective rape is its most extreme instance. This constitutes erasure since it chills the expression of asexuality. Consider this as the worst form of asexual erasure since where *class erasure* might be the equivalent of refusing to have a conversation about asexuality, and *individual erasure* opposition within that conversation, *outright delegitimation* is abuse in response to the proffered conversation.

The preliminary remarks having been made, before we proceed to examine Yoshino's ideas, three qualitative statements must also be made about this essay. First, in reproducing Yoshino's arguments regarding bisexual erasure, I am not claiming that bisexuals are still similarly erased. I only wish to explore whether their political position as Yoshino analysed it in 2000 can still be usefully applied to asexuality. Second, this is not an essay which pretends that

everything it states is sanctioned by or of use to the asexual community. Given that my finger does not rest on the pulse of asexual politics or research, this essay has been written, as it were, in a vacuum. If anything written is inaccurate or problematic I apologise and invite anyone reading it to correct me. And finally, the labels used to categorise people by group in this essay, though used frequently, must of course be understood as porous containers for the individuals they pretend to hold. Talk of this or that type of sexuality is therefore in the abstract. Consider the conclusions this essay draws as being like those an economist might draw from a theoretical model of the stock market: fallible when applied to the real world, but nonetheless indicative of some general trend worth exploring further.

### 1. Preserving the stability of sexual orientations

The first motivation for bi-erasure Yoshino discusses is that of relieving heterosexuals and homosexuals of the anxiety of identity interrogation. Briefly, Yoshino begins by pointing out that a heterosexual identity assures privilege to heterosexual people, and that this privilege is founded on heterosexuality's stability as predicated in opposition to homosexuality. "[T]he denotation of any term is always dependent on what is exterior to it" (Fuss et al. 1991), such as the term "light" only being meaningful in opposition to the term "dark". Bisexuality undermining that otherwise clear distinction between cross-sex and same-sex desire (bisexuality encapsulating both) therefore attacks heterosexuality's stability. That is, any person exhibiting cross-sex desire, could at any point exhibit same-sex desire. Having complicated a valuable distinction, the erasure of bisexuality therefore becomes a live option.

Could asexuality incite a similar motivation within allosexuals to erase asexuals? I believe not because, as seen earlier, one can only prove a positive (allosexuality) and not a negative (asexuality). One cannot easily doubt that one is allosexual and not asexual, but one can easily doubt that one is asexual and not allosexual. Therefore, in the abstract sense, it is asexuality more than allosexuality which struggles to guarantee its stability as an orientation. Indeed, the terms "allosexual" and "asexual" exist for the most part only within asexual circles and can therefore only be debated and doubted within those circles. Allosexuality's stability is not predicated on opposition to asexuality. Asexuality's stability *is* predicated on opposition to allosexuality, however. In contrast to bisexuality and heterosexuality then, it is asexuality more than allosexuality which we would expect to be motivated to erase the existence of its opposite (though this seems less likely to happen in practice).

So much for drawing parallels between bisexual erasure and asexual erasure. However I would nonetheless not take this early difference as a lost opportunity to understand asexual erasure, for it usefully highlights the chasm that exists between the potential symbolism surrounding allosexuality and asexuality. Asexuality being a negative, allosexuality must be a positive. Asexuality is nothing; allosexuality something. Asexuality is abstinence, death and obscurity; allosexuality sex, life and clarity. That being the case, we have perhaps identified an additional "threat", not identified by Yoshino, posed by the asexual community to the allosexual community: precisely its status as an obscure negative. We know that obscurity can invite the interest of few and the dismissal of many, and so it may be that asexuality is sometimes erased simply by virtue

of its unverifiability. Regardless of whether mysteries are solved every day as knowledge systems progress, the mysterious nonetheless always threatens the boundaries of the world we already know, and it persistently demands our acknowledgement. Such might be the case for asexuality, it, among the other sexual minorities, arguably standing the furthest outside those boundaries, and suffering the penalty of erasure for it. Until the boundaries are moved outwards, therefore, that penalty will continue to be exacted. This might be a symbolic threat more than anything else, but it is a threat nonetheless.

Next, turning to the more specific homosexual community's political motivation to erase bisexuality, Yoshino begins by describing how a stable gay identity provides homosexuals with the immutability defence required for their political mobilisation. This is required since if homosexuality is stable as an orientation then it is also immutable and one cannot charge the homosexual with having deliberately chosen their orientation. Consequently, there exists one less reason to penalise homosexuals and therefore more room for their political mobilisation. The bisexual possibility undermines this defence, however. In its presence one can never definitively prove that one is stably monosexual since one's activities are always compatible with that of a bisexual. With the bisexual possibility, all self-identified homosexuals therefore potentially have the choice to conform to the heterosexual mould, all of them potentially harbouring cross-sex desires. And with the return of choice returns moral culpability and consequent oppression and powerlessness. Yoshino notes from this point of view that it is better for the homosexual community that bisexuality be invisible.

Do asexual homoromantics pose a similar threat to the stability of homosexuality? Or rather (since homosexuality is addressed by Yoshino in this context as a sexual minority in need of the immutability defence), do asexual or grey-asexual homo/bi/panromantics pose a similar threat to the stability of each minority sexual orientation? Certainly each asexual who also identifies as having a minority romantic orientation has one foot in the asexual camp and the other in a minority sexual camp. However it is hard to know whether these sexual communities found their ability to mobilise politically on the stability of their members' sexual inclinations, romantic inclinations, or both. This is possibly because the question has never been asked. Would the case of the aromantic homo/bi/pansexual provide an answer to the question? No, for it is merely a variation of the question. From an abstract position then, we cannot say with certainty whether sexual minorities would be motivated to erase asexuality in the interests of preserving homogeneity. A pessimist might argue, however, that it is unlikely that the question of asexual homo/bi/panromantics and aromantic homo/bi/pansexuals would be uncontroversial within those sexual communities. It would not be controversial in the same way that bisexuality is for homosexuality, it bridging the gap between oppressed homosexuality and privileged heterosexuality, however, for some, it might all the same bring to bear unwanted associations between sexual minorities and the derided asexuality. Indeed, as pointed out earlier, that association would be stronger the more grey-asexuality homo/bi/panromantics express their identities. The more general topic of LGB+ motivations to erase asexuality will be broached in the conclusion (the "T" has been redacted here, a transgender orientation not constituting a reason to erase asexuality in this author's view).

## 2. Preserving the stability of sex

The second motivation for bisexual erasure Yoshino discusses is that of preserving *sex* as an important distinguishing trait people have. *Having a sex* is viewed as important as the prerequisite for being considered human. Hence, for instance, the "neonatal psychosexual medical emergency" (Kessler 1998) that is the response to babies born intersexed. Moreover to be a sexed as male or female is widely accepted to imply being attracted to the opposite sex, or, failing that, to experience sexual attraction exclusively towards one sex. But bisexuals, in refusing that the desired object must belong to a particular sex, devalue sex. We have already seen how bisexuality destabilises sexual orientation, and now it similarly destabilises the primacy of sex, of course inviting a penalty.

We can immediately see how asexuals destabilise sex by a similar token. They do so not by opening up the possibility of sexual attraction to both sexes, but sexual attraction to neither. And one might argue that the destabilising potential here is greater than it is in bisexuality for two reasons. First, as Yoshino points out, the majority of bisexuals are not sex-blind in the sense that there is no difference between the sexual attraction they experience towards one sex as opposed to the other (Weinberg et al. 1994). This is a mere assumption on the part of non-bisexuals. Most bisexuals do distinguish between the sexes on the level of sexual attraction, though, granted, the sexes must have at least one more thing in common with each other for the bisexual than they do for the monosexual, that one thing being sexual attractiveness. Asexuals, however, and in particular aromantic asexuals, are more obviously sex blind when it comes to

the objects of one's attraction, that attraction being altogether absent. Asexuals do not refuse that a desired object must belong to a particular sex; they refuse that there must be a desired object at all. Asexuality is therefore more obviously destabilising for sex than bisexuality. It is also more radically destabilising, as we will see below. First, however, the claim of sex blindness must first be qualified at length in the case of those asexuals for whom attraction of forms other than sexual attraction exists, and also in the case of the autochorissexual asexual (defined below).

These other forms of attraction are romantic and sensual attraction. First, to state things baldly, pure romantic attraction is more complex than pure (or primary) sexual attraction since a greater proportion of romantic attraction than sexual attraction involves attraction to an object insofar as it is a person and not just a body. Pure instances of sexual or romantic attraction might be infrequent - the two often emerging together - however this contingent fact does not undermine the validity of the claim. I contend that it is not sex which is most important for romantic attraction - sex being a bodily phenomenon - but gender which, in being a social phenomenon, is intertwined with personhood. Romantic asexuals may not therefore be gender blind (though they might be if they are bi- or panromantic), but a case still exists for their being sex blind. Indeed, a very significant proportion of asexuals identify as gender non-binary (Brotto et al., 2010), perhaps a case of their sex blindness being directed inwards as well as outwards. To what extent this sex blindness destabilises sex as the term "sex" is defined when non-bisexuals defend it against bisexuals, or when allosexuals defend it against asexuals, is an open question. It will nonetheless be more destabilising than bisexuality is, however, because, although gender remains a

dimension along which people are found attractive, the sexual dimension in question remains less important.

And what of the sensual attraction some asexuals report feeling? That is, the "desire to engage in sensual acts with the person that the attraction is felt towards" (Asexuality.org 2006). This includes the enjoyment of tactile, aural, olfactory and visual interaction with an object of attraction. On the surface of it, sensual and sexual attraction seem very close to one another, the former being interpretable as a "softer" version of the latter. The boundary between sensual massaging and sexual petting, for instance, is not exactly clear. However, one can nonetheless argue that the boundary does exist. The asexual may well have a desire to explore their object of attraction using their senses, however sensual exploration is not a prelude to sexual exploration. For asexuals, sensual exploration remains sensual throughout. The asexual is therefore attracted to an object insofar as it is a non-erotic body.

Is this enough for the claim that the sensual asexual is sex blind to remain valid? We can say that although this asexual might find bodies of a particular sex attractive, that attraction is towards those bodies not as sex objects but merely as sexed objects. So certainly, the asexual is sex blind if sex is understood in the sense of being something which is necessarily linked to the sex act and the attendant sexual pleasure. But this would be a thin definition of sex. A thicker definition of sex which allows room for sex simply being a biological phenomenon, and not one with an erotic dimension, does not allow for the sensual asexual being sex blind. Nonetheless, the suggested thin definition has some merit, for it teases out an important difference between the asexual and

allosexual experience of the dimension of sex. The attraction the sensual asexual experiences towards a particular sex is importantly different from sexual attraction. In the same way that the difference between the appreciation of art and food is important. Where the appreciation of art is more or less wholly aesthetic and unconnected to biological compulsions, the appreciation of food, though often aesthetic, is very much governed by biological compulsions. In turn, sensual pleasures, such as those derivable from art as opposed to food, are pursued with less intensity than sexual pleasures. As a result, and despite not being sex blind on the thick definition if they identify as sensual, the asexual's perceptions of the two sexes must be significantly more similar to each other than the allosexual's. This may manifest itself in the asexual being less motivated than the allosexual to publicly defend sex differences, just like the art lover is less motivated than the food lover to distinguish between that which they like and dislike. If forced to eat repulsive food one is bound eventually to become much more demoralised than the other made simply to hang dislikeable art on their wall. Sex, on the thin definition, is less important for the sensual asexual and they are in turn closer to being sex blind than the bisexual is. I therefore argue that the sensual asexual remains more destabilising for the dimension of sex than the bisexual and ought therefore to invite more erasure.

We should finally consider the question of sex blindness in the case of the autochorissexual asexual. Autochorissexuality was first formally identified within the asexual community by Anthony Bogaert (2012) when he ascribed it to those people who experience sexual arousal by an object without any attendant sexual attraction towards the same object. Thus, there is what he calls a "disconnect" between an individual's sense of self and a sexual object/target", meaning the

autochorissexual has sexual fantasies or experiences arousal in response to erotica without any desire to take part in the sexual activities at hand. Assuming that a given autochorissexual's sexual arousal is in response to fantasies or erotica involving only one sex, the claim that they are sex blind might seem difficult to defend. Such an asexual will be likely to categorise members of one sex as arousing, and members of the other as non-arousing. Clearly, on the thick definition of sex as a mere biological phenomenon, this particular asexual is not sex blind. And on the thin definition of sex as something necessarily linked to the sex act and sexual pleasure, one could also argue that this particular asexual is not sex blind either since the autochorissexual derives sexual pleasure from a particular sex.

However, a similar move as was made in the case of the sensual asexual could also be made here since, although the autochorissexual experiences arousal, they do not experience attraction. The 'disconnect' between arousal and object of arousal makes for an important difference in the way in which the autochorissexual approaches that object in public and the way the allosexual approaches it. Notably, the autochorissexual theoretically has no compulsion to impose themselves on the arousing object (whether it be in fantasy or otherwise), whilst the allosexual does. The autochorissexual is able to remain privately detached whilst the allosexual must publicly engage, that is, initiate sex. Thus, once again, the importance of sex on the thin definition is less for the asexual compared to the allosexual. An analogy may help. If the autochorissexual is the art appreciator, then the allosexual is the art dealer, importantly invested and involved in the art world. The art dealer is dependent on the public distinctions made between different art forms, each art form

constituting a different product; and in the absence of such engagement, the art appreciator has such dependence only insofar as those distinctions impact their own private enjoyment. They therefore have less need to impose those distinctions on others since they can very well get along without reaching an agreement with others on the matter. Translating this into the sexual world, in the absence of similar levels of engagement with the arousing sex as the allosexual, the autochorissexual is equivalently less invested in publicly defending sex differences. They need only attend to them privately. There is much more to be said about the importance and meaning of this public/private divide for the dimension of sex, however I hope it is nonetheless clear that, due to it, and even despite the presence of sexual arousal, the autochorissexual asexual is closer to being sex blind than the bisexual.

The qualifications concerning sex-blindness now finished, in what way is the sex blindness of asexuals more radically destabilising for sex than the sex blindness of bisexuals? Yoshino points out that the distinguishing trait of sex is upheld as most important by society within the private realm as opposed to the public realm ("public" and "private" here signify "non-erotic" and "erotic" respectively for Yoshino, not "interpersonal" and "personal" as they did above for me). In fact, although the law attempts to eradicate sex differences as much as possible within that public realm (for instance, in employment), those efforts stop short of the private realm. Thus, while one cannot discriminate on the basis of sex as an employer, one may do so, and is in fact expected to, as a person seeking a sexual partner. Why this split? One reason may be because sex, on the thick definition, has its origin as a concept within the sex act. If there were no physical sex act in which two differently sexed bodies meet and, by and

large, ensure the survival of the species, those sex characteristics which serve to mark the difference between bodies would no longer serve any necessary purpose. They could only conceivably serve contingent purposes like those that exist when we playfully categorise people according to some arbitrary physical characteristics. If the sex dimension is to be preserved the sex act cannot become an over-regulated activity, but must remain free. Hence the law's laissez faire approach to the erotic realm. But, asexuals, not partaking in the sex act (at least not out of sexual desire), destabilise sex in the most radical way possible. They are indifferent to, and sometimes revolted by, the sex act, abandoning both the origin and much of the task of preservation of the dimension of sex as a thick biological concept. I say much of the task of preservation because, as we have seen, asexuals of the sensual and autochorissexual kind are not absolutely sex blind and therefore do, either in an aesthetic (as opposed to biological) or private (personal as opposed to interpersonal) way preserve the dimension of sex. But the most important point remains that the origin of the dimension is devalorised by the asexual and the practice which guarantees its existence undermined. Thus, for the two sets of reasons discussed, asexuality more thoroughly undermines the centrality of sex to human conducts than bisexuality and must therefore invite more erasure.

### 3. Preserving relationships

The third and final motivation to erase bisexuality Yoshino discusses is that of preserving monogamy as a norm. There is a highly prevalent stereotype of bisexuals being promiscuous, captured by Yoshino in the opposition between "the monosexual as whole and the bisexual as surfeit" (p.32). And one important result of this stereotype is those dating bisexuals experiencing jealousy. It

occurs because, out of a prejudiced belief in bisexual promiscuity, those dating bisexuals not only see themselves as being in competition with members of their own sex for their partner's favour, but as also being in competition with members of the opposite sex whose sexually attractive qualities are unattainable. Out of fear that they cannot satisfy all of their bisexual partner's desires, they therefore become jealous - a sentiment potentially one step away from hostility and erasure. As illogical and prejudiced the underlying assumptions are here they nonetheless persist.<sup>1</sup> Such is some people's sensitivity to the idea that their bisexual partner could at any time "go both ways", that to carry oneself as a bisexual constitutes a moral transgression. It is, Yoshino says, like transgressing the norm of courtesy which stipulates that in order to preserve a monogamous relationship one must not continue alerting one's partner to the different kinds of people one is attracted to. Thus understood, bisexuality is viewed as a threat to monogamy and therefore erased.

Is asexuality a similar threat to monogamy? No, it is rather a bigger threat to something larger. Where bisexuals are viewed by their sexual partners who see themselves as unable to satisfy all of their desires as threatening, asexuals are viewable as more threatening since one actually cannot satisfy any of their (sexual) desires because, by and large, they do not exist. The asexual is unattainable by those who are sexually attracted to them, not because they move too "easily" through the world of sex, but because they are not part of that world in which every member harbours some form of lust for the other's body. I contend that this provokes jealousy. Not jealousy provoked by those whom the

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<sup>1</sup> As Paula Rust (1996) notes, it is just as illogical to believe that your partner requires two lovers of two different eye colours if they find both colours attractive, as it is to believe that they require two lovers of two different sexes if they find both sexes attractive.

asexual might abandon one for, but provoked by the fact that the asexual will not join one sexually to begin with. The asexual sexually enclosed unto themselves, in the allosexual's eyes, forever satisfied by themselves, a competitor one can never ward off since the competitor and person competed for are one. And this is a more intractable moral transgression of the norm of courtesy not to alert one's partner to whom one finds attractive because carrying oneself as asexual is not only to symbolically signal the presence of a competitor but also to conjoin oneself with them and - to stretch this metaphor - commit adultery with them. Of course, the asexual does not deny their partner's, or potential partner's, wish to satisfy them sexually out of ill will. However, under the sway of an allosexual worldview according to which all people are lustful and are all potentially mutually attracted towards each other, the asexual is a maverick presence. Thus, if one views sex and sexual fidelity as central to human life, then the asexual is not just a threat to monogamy as the bisexual is, but also a threat to intimate relationships in general. That is, whereas the bisexual is viewable as willing to engage in an intimate relationship (just without adequate commitment), the asexual (particularly the aromantic asexual) is viewable as unwilling to engage in an intimate relationship at all. As all sexual minorities know, it is when viewed as an outsider in an important way such as this that oppression can take on its worst form. In the case of the asexual unwilling to respond to any sexual advances at all (let alone sexual advances from a specific gender) I would worry that corrective rape becomes a live risk for asexuals.

But here it must be clarified what is meant by "intimate relationship". It is meant in the narrow sense of an emotional commitment founded on sexual attraction to and enjoyment of another. Of course very few people would claim

that the sexual dimension alone is both necessary and sufficient for intimate relationships in general, however one needn't explore the discourse surrounding relationships for too long before encountering claim after claim that the romantic reaches its fullest completion in the sexual. Attack this claim, therefore, and one essentially attacks intimate relationships in all their most cherished forms. The asexual, though sometimes preserving many of the relationship's indispensable characteristics (romantic and sensual attraction chief among them), dispenses with its ostensibly most important one.<sup>2</sup>

However, more important than the asexual broadly understood, the aromantic asexual must of course be considered, for it is here that the attack on intimate relationships is most pronounced. Whereas the romantic asexual preserves some indispensables of the intimate relationship, the aromantic asexual could be interpreted as preserving none. The jealousy and attendant erasure provoked is therefore potentially much greater since it may seem as if nothing one has to offer the aromantic as a potential partner, be it sexual or romantic, is adequate. The aromantic attacks relationships as understood in a broader romantic sense by committing emotional as well sexual adultery. At most, the aromantic only preserves intimate friendship as a form of human connection - not its reified older sibling. Asexuality therefore not only threatens monogamy but also the preservation of intimate relationships - an institution of

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<sup>2</sup> As an aside, I wonder if many allosexuals might in fact welcome this change in emphasis were it applied to their own circumstances. Nonetheless, I simultaneously wonder whether such a change is really very far away, whatever the potential support for it there might silently exist. Here we must examine how valid the empirical evidence for the universal importance of sexual attraction and activity is, and in turn whether the rolling influence of the sexual liberation of the 1960s is thereby as helpful as first maintained. Now that the asexual possibility exists, the help provided by sexual liberation might for the first time be justifiably understood as having been in some ways excessive. Although the asexual movement (and many things besides) would not exist were it not for the LGBT+ movement which grew out of that sexual liberation, this does not preclude asexuals from fairly criticising certain aspects of it. We shall return to this in the conclusion.

obvious centrality within our society given its associations with procreation, family and property.

### Further considerations

Bisexual erasure is undoubtedly powerful; however, certain points made within this essay could lead one to conclude that asexual erasure must be even more oppressive. Asexuality does not stop at changing the rules of the game of sexuality as bisexuality does, but broadly refuses to even play the game. It is not that sex is undermined because the asexual is simply sex blind (a blindness which, incidentally, is greater than that sex blindness found in bisexuals); rather, sex is undermined since the private erotic realm that produces and sustains it does not exist for the asexual. And it is not so much monogamy that is threatened by asexuality (though the sexual dynamics within it are), but instead intimate relationships in general – a threat presented most acutely by the aromantic asexual. Such is the more important destabilising power of asexuality for the norms allosexuality would have preserved, and consequently greater is the erasure asexuality ought to receive.

Nonetheless, if we consider the first political motivation for bisexual erasure, asexuality appears much more muted as a threat. Asexuality is not a threat to orientation stability in the same way that bisexuality is because, since one cannot prove a negative, the existence of asexuals is very unlikely to call into question somebody's existing, positive sexual attraction towards others. Indeed, though this engenders no motivation to erase asexuality, it nonetheless makes it very easy to do so. However, the point we can draw from this

characterisation of asexuality as unverifiable which is that it stands for the mysterious – the disconcerting unknown which we would like nothing better but to disappear – must be remembered. I speculated whether this constitutes an additional threat to sexual norms, in addition to those identified by Yoshino with regards to bisexuality. Apart from the potentially positive world effects asexuality has been above-identified as having, its status as the mysterious, I argue, is an important reason for its erasure.

Before finishing I would not be satisfied unless I briefly touched upon four final points. The first three points are further ancillary lessons we might learn from Yoshino about asexual erasure.

The first point concerns the additional difficulties asexuals might experience in reinforcing asexual awareness even after that awareness is virtually won. Yoshino points out that it is difficult to communicate bisexuality, his example of this being that of a couple holding hands in public. Without devoting thought to what is actually the case when one sees such a couple, depending on their gender, one very often assumes that the members of that couple are either heterosexual or homosexual. Neither is read as being bisexual, a fact which entraps bisexuality in invisibility. The matching difficulty for asexuals is clear. It is that when holding hands with someone the asexual will be read as being what they, at least, call allosexual. And, of course, when holding hands with nobody, this is no indication of asexuality though it might in fact best symbolise it for some people. Thus, like bisexuality, asexuality is further hampered by, in addition to everything else, being physically invisible. This is a minor lesson but one I thought worth recording.

The second point Yoshino teaches again concerns grey-asexuality. One way in which bisexuality is erased on an individual level is by reading sexuality as a synchronic phenomenon. This reading conceptualises one's true sexuality as only being verifiable with reference to one's current sexual practices. According to it, past and future practices are of no consequence. Obviously then, unless a bisexual person does not concurrently have multiple sexual partners of two sexes, they do not exist as bisexual. The same trap might open for grey-asexuals, and moreover, if we recall the previous pitfalls to acceptance the grey-asexual faces, the threat of erasure here might be greater still. This is because the grey-asexual cannot, like the bisexual, concurrently have multiple partners of different sexes in order to "prove" their sexuality since it is not necessarily the case that the grey-asexual desires differently sexed partners (unless they are a bisexual grey-asexual). The grey-asexual merely sometimes desires a sexual partner and sometimes doesn't. A negative being unprovable, nothing can defend the grey-asexual's orientation against the synchronic reading of sexuality. The grey-asexual can only ever be allosexual.

The third point concerns what we can learn from bisexual erasure about the potential for grey-asexual erasure which inhabits the middle ground between allosexuality and asexuality, like bisexuality inhabits the middle ground between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Like bisexuality, grey-asexuality would be more likely to motivate erasure by both allosexuals and asexuals, since it undermines the distinction between sexual desire and no sexual desire. It threatens both with the possibility that they might be their opposites. Indeed, Yoshino's points out that that the lesbian community is potentially motivated to erase bisexuality because it introduces cross-sex desire and men into their otherwise exclusively homosexual and female realm. He argues that the

presence of cross-sex desire within the lesbian community signifies capture by the patriarchy and therefore motivates the erasure of bisexuals (the holders of cross-sex desires) by lesbians (those, in some respects, attempting to construct a male-free place of safety). If this is correct, the position of grey-asexuals might be better understood – grey-asexuals introducing sexual desire into the asexual community. I am not au fait with asexual politics (or indeed lesbian politics), but I nonetheless know that there exists in some asexual quarters a desire to construct what might be called sex-free places of safety. Of course, the exact different meanings of the terms male-free, sex-free, and places of safety in this discussion must be carefully kept apart. Oppression of lesbian women by a patriarchy and oppression of asexuals by an “allosexual ideology” are very different things and I do not wish to draw problematic comparisons between the two. There is one comparison which I do hope will be helpful for asexuals, however. Simply, in both cases, a sexual minority is oppressed by a distinct majority and seeks somewhere where it can escape that oppression. One possible reaction by lesbians to the patriarchy, Yoshino points out, is an intolerance of those who might bring lesbians closer to their oppressor, namely bisexuals. And, perhaps one analogous reaction by asexuals to the allosexual ideology is, or will be, an intolerance of grey-asexuals. We saw when discussing the first motivation for bisexual erasure that it was grey-asexuality rather than asexuality which had the most in common with bisexuality and so I will only warn that a similarity might exist here as well. The asexual community might only be very young and in the initial stages of developing a collective identity, however it is better to be forewarned about the potential for grey-asexual erasure within the asexual community than only to become aware of that potential after it has already begun expressing itself.

And finally, the fourth point I would like to touch on concerns some of my own thoughts as to why asexual erasure occurs. They are thoughts which, I believe, are more satisfyingly tailored to the asexual community than the conclusions I draw out of Yoshino's work are because, unlike bisexuals who experience erasure by other, similar allosexuals, I would contend that asexuals experience erasure by allosexuals necessarily dissimilar from themselves. In not experiencing sexual attraction of any kind, I contend that asexuality is consequently one important step further away from those who erase it than bisexuality is. As a result, (and I say this aware that the relation of asexuality to the LGB+ community is in some quarters under debate) the potential for an epistemic contract between other sexual minorities to erase asexuality is stronger. As the LGB+ movement gains more momentum it might be that the asexual faction wishing to claim a place within it is perceived by some opponents as pulling the LGB+ community's upward spiral back down again. That is, the ostensibly prudish behaviours of asexuals might seem to be a step back to a time when sex and sexuality were repressed. For instance, we could hazard that the silence which existed before the sexual liberation of the 1960s would not have constituted as big a problem for asexuals and might in fact have left them better off. That being the case, the LGB+ opponent to asexuality asks "are asexuals going to catch up with us or will we have to turn back for them?" The opponent is of course hardly likely to turn back given the struggle it has been to come so far, and so catching up is perceived to be the only available answer. That is, in order to nullify its threat to the LGB+ cause asexuality might be erased. I argue that this might be an added political motivation within the LGB+ community to erase asexuality.

Asexuality is not an identity which has aroused the attention it is due because to pay attention to it would be - to echo the earlier charge that asexuality is only a "place from which a stable [allo]sexual identity is acknowledged or chosen" - like trying to smell a flower before it has bloomed. If there is no fragrance there is no reason to try and smell it. This is erroneous reasoning, and the more asexuals share about themselves, the more erroneous I hope others will see the worldview behind that metaphor as being. Asexuality is not a stop on the way to something better, it is a proper destination in its own right. If people believe they are justified in comparing asexuals to flower buds, we could retort that they are standing in the wrong part of the garden. Find us, and the neglect we suffer is easy to see. I hope this essay may work towards bringing about that tipping point asexuality deserves.

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