

**Toronto Aces & Aros Discussion: Being Aces & Aro in Our Everyday Lives
November 25, 2023 (6-8:30 pm)**

12+ attendees

Respect Guidelines

Land acknowledgment

Ice-breaker: excited by upcoming things!

- Upcoming Toronto outdoor market
- Joined a choir and exciting for upcoming Christmas concert performance
- Excited for the end of school semester
- Time off work next month / soon x2!
- Event about dealing with family conflict re: Hannukkah
- Upcoming Studio Ghibli movie with no idea what it's about!

Has being ace or aro come up in your life recently (some how, even if it's subtle?)

- Ace pin on back-pack for school and family members asking why does everyone need to know and being hesitant... "other people don't need to know that about you" but still on backpack and wanting to meet other ace folks in the world
 - Also covert flagging has always been a thing
 - Ace ring might be less well-known
 - Other people have ace flags, etc.
 - "bat signaled" asexuality on Discord with colours and lots of aces came out of the woodwork in response!
- Knowing lots of ace folks in everyday life! (and some people not knowing any!)
- So many artists selling various pride coloured things these days
- Not out to a lot of people in life—not something people will ask directly. Sometimes people ask about whether you have a partner to bring to events, don't necessarily disclose identity unless people probe
 - People are often less educated about aro ace identities, so need to do educational work when dealing with this
 - Burden of doing the education is reason why some people don't bring it up (because disclosing ace or aro stuff means having to take on the educating, and it can be easier not to)
 - Bringing it up with people who are already at least somewhat familiar. E.g., with Bojack Horseman
 - Some people *do* know what you're talking about but it doesn't necessarily come up often. Thankfully haven't had to do a lot of explaining, which has been nice
 - Easier to understand than people who make it out to be a Big Complicated Thing To Understand make it out to be

- You know that thing that lots of people do an experience... I don't do or experience that
- Pressure from parents to get married (or let them arrange a marriage)
 - Ideas from several sets of parents who are immigrants that they want to "keep up appearances" and not to do anything to mark self as "different"
- Aceness is a spectrum so being ace means different things to different people... and trying to explain that diversity can be difficult for a lot of people
 - Idea of sharing personal experience (if people are okay doing that) vs. giving an overview of more general information and diversity within the community
 - People often take personal experiences as a reason to ask invasive questions

Are there things you do or don't do because your aceness or aroiness?

- Going to be movies alone!
 - Can be awesome
 - All the popcorn!
 - No scheduling conflicts!
- Enjoying going travelling or to restaurants alone, etc.
- Idea that there are some activities that people aren't supposed to do alone (even if they're great to do alone) and other people's baggage and expectations about those things
 - It's their problems
- Sometimes you want to hang out with someone for a one-on-one hang out and they automatically invite their partner
- Friends partners can be great but it's a different thing if it was expected to be a group hang-out than springing someone on you
 - For example, can't just talk about video games for half an hour—I know my friend would enjoy that but I don't know if the partner would enjoy that and now have to navigate a completely different context
- Different sets of expectations for couple-norms
 - Maybe people want to hang out with their partners all the time? And people feel like their partner is an extension of themselves
 - Can be really destructive expectations that people limit their interactions to their partner / couple unit and that prevents more substantial relationship connections and keeps people isolated into these units that society is based on
- Going to try new foods for restaurants, difficult to find people who want to try the experimenting
 - With new experiences, wanting to see how it affects me and me alone
 - Not having to worry about other people's enjoyment or other people's schedules
- Taking self out for ice cream, etc.

- Going to an event or something with someone means having to focus on other people's enjoyment, etc.
 - Going alone means going at own pace, can leave if/when I want, etc.
 - Nice way to spend time and one less factor to balance in when spending time
 - Not necessarily conducive to maintaining friendships
 - Do need to spend time with people somethings
 - For some things, knowing I'd enjoy myself more by doing it alone but doing that all the time is not conducive to building or maintaining friendships
 - Issues of loneliness and can also be awesome to do things with others who would also enjoy them (especially after hitting middle age like a brick wall)
 - Happy to do things alone but want to do things with other people too sometimes
- Some people can generate relationships via groups but others can't do that and need some one-on-one time to build relationships
- Some people find groups a lot easier (even as introverts) because can just blend in
 - Find one-on-one really stressful / exhausting (vs. other people who need that)
- Want to be adopted by an extrovert who will handle lots of conversation
- Conventions!
 - Anime North; FanExpo and ComiCon
 - And smaller conventions that are a little more niche
 - Furrie conventions: Furnal Equinox and Canfurence
- Group of friends from high school
 - Different to build friend groups after that stage

Do you want your ace-ness or aro-ness to have more/les/the same amount of involvement in your life now?

- Do people feel satisfied by the level of involvement you have now?
 - Happy with who I am but can be difficult how other people respond to it
- One of those things that correlates to other things happening in your life
 - In a field where anecdotally people who aren't ace or aro to put off making decisions about partnerships or children, etc. until later a more established career
- Ever since decided to embrace concepts of aceness
 - So excited younger people are finding out about this before their 30s!
 - Really big part of helping me explain to self and others about who/why I am as I am
 - But... so now what?
 - How the rest of the world responds to it is also a trip... not on the same wavelength as a lot of people

- Often grappling with that, not sure if that's from being asexual or just being self, but often not in line with other people and don't know
- Powerful expectation that people go through life with a partner in terms of buying a house being possible, care-giver when sick, having kids to take care of self, etc.
 - Can't possibly afford to buy a house on a single income
 - Expectations of who it's even appropriate to buy a house with, e.g., with parents and other people reject that idea and find that weird, etc.
 - Multigenerational homes as opposed to everyone being individualistic
 - Idea of collective housing and people coming together to collectively buy a low-rise building for housing security as collective/co-op, etc.
 - Wanting to have specifically queer-affirming spaces, especially in assisted living facilities, etc.
 - Importance of community especially as people age
 - Idea of all-ace or all trans collective house; living with housemates intentionally as a "family"
 - Call for socialism and/or the end of for-profit housing!
- Involvement of aro-ness and ace-ness in life right now
 - Has a QPP who is also A-spec
 - Involved in local group (in a neighbouring city)
 - Have learned that lots of people in life are A-spec (e.g., close friends from high school, sibling, etc.)
 - Podcasts, people in life, lots of presence and learning
- People don't necessarily have the language for ace or aro stuff
 - Also can take a long time to make sense of that because it's default and people don't realise other people are *not* like that
 - For AFAB people especially, it's pretty normalized for people to not want to have sex and that being treated as normal
 - "just focused on school right now" or other rationalizing that it didn't seem weird
 - Maybe later, click into place about why never had much interest in dating, etc.
 - Saw a post online once about how I should have known I was ace when high school friends were talking about how hard it would be to wait until marriage for sex... and thinking, why is that hard?
 - Growing up in the church and they talk to young people about how hard it will be to wait for sex until marriage and weird demos (like crumple up a \$5 bill, who wants this? Have everyone bite a sandwich and who still wants this? licked cupcake, etc?)
 - Alienation from when Twilight was popular (in middle school) and why is everyone into that?
 - Into 20s at the time, and encouraged to read it and started it and found "Edward sounds like a jerk"
- Who was your gay awakening / who was your bi awakening concept and transform it: who was the person that everyone else was into that you weren't?

- Avatar the Last Airbender
 - Liking a character and feeling once the character got romantically involved with another character, feeling can't like him anymore because that would be rude... and other people insisting that's not how it works
- Experiences of loving cartoon characters!
- Being older and not having the language to describe feelings
 - Eventually led a very conventional, heteronormative life, and got married and learned later on that asexual is a thing
 - Pride sign "Why can't we just cuddle?"
 - At the parade, with child and that sign made a huge difference
 - And was able to learn about asexuality in a theoretical way and everything suddenly made sense! And disappointing to only find out about this in 30s but still very happy to have found out about it and having spaces to talk about it!



- For so many people, there's an experience of finding the language or representation as finding the identity
 - Also feeling suddenly weird/isolated (fortunately don't feel that)
- Before coming out, went to a lot of medical professionals with husband trying to "fix" this and not one suggested that asexuality might be a possibility
 - Eventually coming out and having a really positive experience of support
 - Initially, it almost felt like a failure to not be "normal" but now feels very okay and had to journey to being happy (and it's okay if it takes time to get there, especially in this very heteronormative and amatonormative society)
 - Came at the time it needed to, can't be angry it didn't happen earlier
- Finding the joy in being asexual?
 - Didn't feel particularly thrilled when I first encountered the word for it
 - More recently pondering whether might be aromantic too
 - Trying to find the joy in it has been a struggle, especially with loneliness (especially since COVID)
 - This society is not built for this!!!

- “this isn’t about sex!” “everything is about sex!” “no it’s not!”
 - Realise that you’re not broken—this is a totally natural way to feel, even if it’s not widespread. It’s completely okay. But still have the rest of the world pushing back against that? (And try pushing back against it)
- Personal journey of being happy learning about the term
 - Finally- I don’t need to memorise a whole narrative to tell everyone to explain, I can just tell them the work (except it turns out that didn’t work either)
- Never had a different idea of how life would be—never assumed would do marriage, etc. but still finding joy in finding the word!
- Some still processing the pain of being different—I’m not in on the joke, I really am different from most people, etc.
- K-pop and different versions of the song (one version about love and the other version is about sex and very much not love)
 - A lot of things go over head unless it’s explicit
- Joy and possibilities of being aroace when people know that, opening space to build friendship intimacy without people assuming I’m coming on to them or expressing romantic interest (because getting to know people is often complicated by romantic or sexual subtext)
- Putting out “back off” vibes so people don’t approach me for dating or sexual interest
 - Several people share that experience... some people don’t but want it!
- Difficulty engaging with make-up, fashion or fitness domains because of how those things are marketed
 - As for finding a partner, etc.
 - Not engaging with make-up when younger because framed in terms of attracting a partner... and just don’t now
- Fashion maybe different (like wearing clothing or make-up for self-enjoyment) but this is often still marketed as being for others
 - Want people to want to approach and know I exist!
 - Getting into playing with self-presentation older too
- Exercise for mental health benefits (even if it’s marketed for “being attractive”)
- Also discussion of ways of self-presentation to avoid sexual attention or to attract sexual attention, but also, there’s no way that people can dress that will attract or avoid the kinds of attention that are un/desired
 - So much of the sexualized attention is not on the basis of what people want for themselves – we don’t live in a consent culture (we live in a rape culture and there is a lot of culture violence, including street harassment from strangers)
 - And there’s nothing people can wear that will “protect them” from unwanted sexual attention (or guarantee the attention people want if they do)
 - And how people are perceived plays out in specific ways re: age, gender, race, body size, etc.

- Often public anonymous sexual attention is from men toward women (or people perceived as “women”... whether or not they are the “owner of boobs”)
- Some conversation about strategies for deflecting street-harassment type attention or demands from strangers for contact info
 - Asking “why” with earnesty
- Check-out question—something taking from today
 - Happy to be here; sharing the ease and happy that there **is** community and hoping to reach out again
 - Importance of sense of community
 - Going to be more likely to go places alone in the future!
 - Grown to assume that I would be alone, not part of a community and made peace with that, BUT realizing there are a lot of avenues for life/community and really thankful for that!
 - Feeling less alone, or feeling like I don’t have to be alone if I don’t want to just because of how I am
- Sidenote: questions of Black Friday (history of the name as when stores went from being in the red to being in the black in terms of turning a profit)
 - Now pushing consumerism, etc.