



ACES IN THE Church

A ZINE FROM UNDER THE ASEXUAL UMBRELLA
ABOUT EXPERIENCES WITH(IN) MODERN CHRISTIANITY

EDITED BY COYOTE
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Too often, non-aces will speculate about what it's like to be ace under the gaze of one of the most politically powerful religious groups to date, making assumptions about what we do or don't face, without asking those of us who have the relevant experience. This zine, "Aces in the Church," was created to be a compilation of ace experiences with & within Christianity, to bring our stories together into one place and close the door on any need for speculation.

Content warnings are primarily provided on a per-contribution basis. Blanket content warning for mentions of heterosexism, rape culture, and anti-gay sentiment throughout this zine.

Some contributions have been minimally edited for punctuation, spelling, and integration of notes. The opinions expressed within these pages do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editor.

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Snippets

my religion teacher once told us in class that if we don't marry and have kids we would all go against god's will and that the only "way out" was to take the cloth and become a nun or priest

-Anonymous

[**cw:** parental abuse]

a few years back when I was 15 I once accidentally stayed over at my boyfriend's house because I simply couldn't get home. the next day when I finally managed to get home my father who is a deacon started yelling at me about me losing my worth (wft) before marriage so I yelled back at him that I haven't had sex and wasn't even interested in it and - after he hit me straight in the face - he told me that not only am I a whore but a liar as well. he separated me from my boyfriend & all my other friends and made me spend every free minute at church to beg for Jesus's forgiveness.

-Anonymous

I'm fairly confident in my sexual identity but from time to time I still wonder if my asexuality roots in Christian beliefs of virginity even though I don't like the way the church values virginity

-Anonymous

General Narratives

from inquisitivespirit:

So... recently I went to World Youth Day, a Catholic event for the youth of the Church. And it was awesome. So so awesome. It was awesome to have so many young people cheering at the Pope speaking of making the world a better place. I was part of pilgrimage group of about 40 people. 40 really nice people. And I felt really comfortable with them. Mostly.

You see, I'm aro ace, so definitely not straight. The church says that we're supposed to either get married or become a religious person such as a nun or priest, and I really have no interest in being either.

Anyway, back to the World Youth Day pilgrimage. I felt comfortable with these people and completely trusted them to accept my "Catholic" self that I usually keep hidden. I could not say the same for the other parts of me that I tend to keep quiet, such as being aro ace.

The thing about hiding part of yourself is that it really isn't fun. It's stifling. And knowing how liberating it feels to be myself with the few people that actually accept me for who I completely am, the want to feel that freedom ends up at war with the fear of how people will react. So I began subtly testing the waters.

- I ask a guy if he considers himself a feminist and starts spouting some rubbish about feminism going too far these days - he doesn't sound too open-minded...

- A group of people talks about how contraception is terrible and how sex is only for procreation- wow, old fashioned... definitely not telling them...

- One person seems to accept my opinion of the Church being unreasonable with the contraception thing – maybe I’ll be able to tell them?

The same person mentions how marriage is a vocation as well as being a “holy person”- hmm... maybe not...

- And many other moments of picking up subtle signals, most saying that I should stay silent about my orientation.

I still don’t know if I’m welcome to completely be who I am in the Church. I’m “supposed to” be welcome, but with the Church being completely bigoted not too long ago and people being slow to change, it’s uncertain whether that’ll end up being the case. So for now I’m going to play the “good straight Catholic girl” and avoid finding out.

from Anonymous:

I was raised in a southern Baptist church in East Texas, and as a queer person of color, that has been difficult since I was about 13. My church was filled with old white people who had never left East Texas and all the bigotry that often comes with that. While I hated being there, I mentally separated that group of people from my religion somehow and held on to Christianity as being a major part of my identity.

I started out as a very invested ally on the internet. When I had just turned 16 first heard the term asexual and immediately started to identify as ace. I accepted that realization happily, and comforted myself with the thought that I was heteroromantic, so it wouldn't be an issue with my family. I personally don't think being queer is a sin, but it's also not something I directly have to confront. I won't be sleeping with anyone, so any possible sexual immorality that would have been an issue had I been planning to have sex is something I can happily ignore. I started dating a Christian man a month after finding the term who I came out to very early in our relationship. He assured me this wouldn't be a problem and I was overjoyed. We could compromise and I could still have the romantic, heteronormative life I wanted. I spent the next 2 years being abused by him, and sometime in there I no longer wanted biological kids, I couldn't compromise on sex, and I reidentified as panromantic.

By the time I moved to Austin for college I was very angry at my old church. They were a hateful group that I was happy to leave behind. I threw myself at the closest church with a rainbow logo. The people there were kind, and it was amazing to see openly queer people in a Baptist church, but the content wasn't a good fit for me. I eventually found a church that was similar to what I grew up with, but radically different at the same time. The people were kind and genuinely friendly. I've been going there for 2 years now and they haven't wavered in their kindness. The church is mostly made up of single college students, and dating is a topic rarely brought up, so the heteronormative push is much less overbearing. But at the same time, it is in the background. Church leaders are there with their families, and the expectation that we will all marry the 'opposite sex' and have 2-4 children eventually is there.

Seeing Christians who are genuine and kind makes a part of me want that. We recently went on a summer outing as a church and I enjoyed their company in a non-religious setting. I talked with the only other latino there and while I don't have a romantic interest in him, I liked our talk and for a second I could see myself having that future. I wanted a future partner that shared my faith with me, and it hurts knowing

that that is almost an impossibility. I won't compromise on sex, and if we did adopt, I wouldn't want a young child. Honestly, a few cats would probably be better than any children. I lean away from men now, which would be a requirement for any "good Christian marriage". I'm nonbinary, which would probably not be well received from a potential Christian partner; I'll never want to be a mom or a wife.

And if by some miracle, I found someone I loved whom these things wouldn't be a problem for, where would we fit in the church? Now I go to church Sunday morning, and Ace meetup Sunday afternoon. I keep these parts of my life separate. They don't know how to get along yet, but they are both parts of me that I can't let go.

from Anonymous:

In my denomination of the Christian church, there was never any discrimination against LGBT people. There are books in the children's library called "Asha's Mums" and "My Two Uncles". On the website, there's a rainbow flag on the bottom. We have an openly gay youth minister who tells us about his experiences with discrimination. And no one cares.

But coming out as asexual was hard. I hardly even came out. I was on a mission trip and I just kind of screamed it and then went to take a shower and came back. I can tell they didn't know what it meant. I think I said something along the lines of "I love you guys" and someone said "But you're asexual so you can't."

They just didn't understand it. I didn't blame them, they had no opportunities to be educated and no reason to be. They were never told of the importance. But I wish they had known.

from Martha:

[**cw:** mention of Hell]

I guess being in the church (and being a pastor's daughter, to boot) just made it harder to see myself as properly ace? My church and my family never put a lot of emphasis on the whole "be fruitful and multiply" thing I see in some other churches, but had a lot of emphasis on both sexual and mental purity. So when conversations about sex did come up, and I found myself uninterested, I just assumed that was because I wasn't watching porn like my lustful peers (yeah, I was a bit self-righteous about the whole sex thing in middle school).

It took me forever and a day to realize that there was something else going on. I got annoyed in books when the plot sidetracked to focus on a love triangle, where my friends were interested. My friends had crushes, I didn't. And when my (all-female) youth group read through a book on marriage and ended up talking about our ideal godly husbands, I realized I just plain couldn't picture one. (I figured that must make me lesbian, for a while, until I realized I didn't get interested in girls either.)

Whenever I try to tell people in the church this, I get one of a few responses. Some say, "Oh, well, that's probably a good thing at your age. You're not tempted!" In other words, you'll grow out of it. Any one who isn't completely cis or hetero has heard that tired explanation, and we all know it gets old fast.

Others, like one marriage-focused friend in particular, do get upset or respond with pity, and that's the worst. ("You'd make some of my Christian guy friends so happy!" she literally said once, while I inwardly screamed. "Have you ever read Paul's

position on singleness?" I asked her aloud. You'd think quoting scripture would work more often than it does.)

The last group of people say, "Well, maybe you're called to be single," and I guess that's the closest most of my conservative church friends are going to get to saying "Your asexuality is valid." I'd appreciate it more if it weren't the same thing they say to crush my lesbian friend, if it didn't put literally everyone who isn't going to be in a perfectly straight marriage into one box, but hey, you take what you can get, right?

If they think I'm uber-celibate or something, a model christian, because everyone knows sexual sin is the worst sin and if I'm not tempted I must have my life together (as I quietly crumple under the weight of doubt), well, it could be worse, couldn't it?

Better to be erased than to have my parents think I'm going to hell. (Right?)

from Jo:

I am a Christian who is church of England/protestant/Anglican (All different names for the same thing) who is Ace (Ace, Cupio-romantic).

I didn't really think much of the non-interest until I came across the identity of Ace, which I identified with, at that point I kept quiet until I felt comfortable putting a post on Facebook about it, most people just accepted it and it didn't need to be spoken about. Except my growth group leader who asked why I posted that and that I was getting strung along by extremists and I'll get lead astray, which was rather upsetting to hear from someone I trusted and looked up to, at the time. Other Christians who know seem to just accept it though, no fuss, just acceptance, which is nice.

from E.H.:

I am a Christian and a heteroromantic asexual (not out to anyone). One day I was in the car with someone I didn't really know that well. So we made some small talk. Somehow me being a Christian came up and he asked if I wanted my future partner to be Christian as well. When I answered that, yes, I would like a relationship with someone who is a Christian, he commented that there weren't a lot of people to choose from then (I think he said something about fishing in a small pond). At first I was like: there are enough Christian guys if you know where to look. But then I realised that the odds of me finding a partner who isn't just Christian but also ace, were really extremely small. It made me feel sad. Still does.

My faith is deeply rooted in my life and the choices I make and I really would like to share this faith with whoever I end up with, otherwise some things will get complicated and I will miss a certain understanding of what matters to me and why it matters. However, since I am most definitely sex repulsed, a sexual relationship is not an option. So yeah, a very, very small pond to fish in. Or more like: finding one of a few very specific fish in the enormous ocean that is humanity. So I pray for a miracle.

Abstinence-Only Education

from GB:

During one of my most religious phases, namely when I was 16, I was also in a relationship with a Christian boy. I don't remember if I ever believed in it, but I know that at least at this age and beyond I didn't think sex before marriage was wrong and

that I would definitely do-the-do before I decided to marry someone. I obviously didn't know I was ace then but let's continue the story.

So I was at a ... place for pilgrimage with dozens other Christians, but my boyfriend wasn't with me because we just had gotten together shortly before the journey. On one day there were several presentations and events that emphasized the importance of virginity, one of them being that awful ripping-a-band-aid-from-one-person-and-putting-it-on-the-next-person-and-so-on-until-it-doesn't-stick-anymore-Story. I was really uncomfortable with all those people thinking it was ok shaming young people, especially women, for something like having sex. But what astonishes me most until this very day is that during all my opposition to those values I still thought to myself that I'll never have sex with my boyfriend. Ever? Ever, period.

[I'm nonbinary but identified as a cis girl back then. After a long struggle with my faith I became agnostic and now atheist.]

from Hannah F:

I'm an aromantic asexual, and I'm actually the worship leader of my youth group's band. My church teaches abstinence before marriage, and it's really not uncommon for me to lean over to my friends when and whisper "no problem" when we're being taught lessons about this. We did an entire bible study on abstinence and it was basically just me banging my head on a table the entire time.

from Arianne33:

[**cw:** trauma mention]

Growing up in church, I didn't know I was asexual. That realization came much later in life. What I did know from church (which I went to on average 3 times a week from the time I was a baby until 18) was that sex was bad, unless you were married. The funny thing is, there was so much talk of it during my teenage years, I began to wonder what the big deal was. I wonder how many teenagers became more curious about sex because of how often it was spoken of. I would say at least 0% of what was talked about during those teenage years was abstinence. I couldn't understand why we talked about it so much. It couldn't be that hard to remain abstinent. I certainly didn't want to have sex with anyone I knew. Nor did I want the possibility of a relationship where that other person wanted sex with me. Gross. Lol.

Being in the church that I was at the time, it was assumed that everyone was (or should be) a heterosexual with a sex drive and a biological/spiritual imperative to "populate the nations" and "rule the world" (with Christianity). I'm oversimplifying, but that's the gist. I had no such desire. I decided I would just have to marry a guy I can be friends with and maybe eventually I would learn to want those things. If I told anyone at church they told me things like "you should really pray about that, God must be waiting to send you the right one," "you are probably depressed, if you pray hard enough, and have enough faith, God will heal you, and then you'll understand," although Paul said that it was better not to marry, unless you couldn't control your lust, and then it was better to be married. I began to use him as an excuse, as if I was making a choice to be celibate (I wasn't), when other Christians and church members began to wonder why I wasn't interested in dating (why it mattered to them, I still don't know). There always seemed like there was some ridicule included in their questioning, which was hard to deal with as a teenager and young adult. Maybe there WAS something wrong with me.

Maybe I was broken. Maybe I was depressed. Maybe my self-esteem was too low. Maybe it was hormones and I didn't know. Maybe I was repressed. Maybe there was some childhood trauma I just couldn't remember... For that, and many other reasons, I quit going to church regularly. Every time I went I felt like there was something wrong with me. (I may have felt like this anywhere at this point in my life, but the questions seemed to happen more often at church than anywhere else.)

Fast forwarding a few years, I go to a different church now, one that's a progressive all-inclusive type of church. As an adult it seems like I still get that question of why I'm single, but when I answer "I'm just not interested", people are usually very accepting. Some may give me a look like they don't believe me, others get very curious and ask a lot of questions, but no one at this point has acted like my lack of interest in sex is something God should cure me from, so I am grateful to have found a church home where I feel safe.

from Kate:

[**cw:** condemnation to Hell, genitals mention]

A lot of the time, people assume that you're going to want to have sex, and they tell you that you will be tempted and will want to give in and blah blah blah... at which point you say that you're okay, you're chill, you don't want sex anyway. Then you get this look, followed by, "You're weird," or "Sure."

Like? What? You just finished telling me about how sex before marriage would burn my vagina or something like that. And now you're going to turn around and say that it's weird that I don't want it? What kind of double standard BS is this? Abstinence-only sex ed in the church was frustrating - not because I wanted to have sex and needed to know how to keep myself safe when having it, but because I knew there was more to it than, 'wait until after marriage.' Other people need to know this stuff. I needed to know it, if I ever changed my mind.

One time, I told a camp counselor at a summer camp. She pretty much did the gay terror thing and told me I was going to hell if I 'kept it up.' Knowing it was crap now has helped, but I was a fourteen year-old kid. Fourteen years old, and just told I would go to hell. For not having sex, which is treated with the attention and acceptance of an infectious disease. It made no sense then, and it makes no sense now. I've never dated anyone, but I get the feeling that people around me are expecting me to find a boyfriend or something. It isn't going to happen, and it's a yucky feeling, especially knowing there are many people who will also expect me to want kids. I don't. And people will only get more insistent the older I get.

Now, I just let it roll off my back. I figure that if it ever comes up, especially in regards to my religion, I can argue circles around everyone else.

from Ruth:

I'm a 15-year-old aromantic asexual girl and also sex repulsed. I was indoctrinated into Roman Catholicism but now I'm an atheist.

The lessons I got from the local Church and some of the school teachers were horrible. It scares me to remember that I once had the same mindset as the adults who were teaching us. Religion taught me that more than half of my classmates were 'bad girls' and sinful. All because they were open about talking about boyfriends and hot celebrities. Religion taught me that I and a few of my classmates were 'good girls'.

Teachers saw that we didn't have a 'dirty mind' and took that opportunity to make us promise that we would never have premarital sex or dress promiscuously, or even have a boyfriend before 18.

Religion told me that girls who were open about their sexuality would have a life of misery and pain. I was told to avoid girls like these which accounted for more than half the girls I ever met. My best friend's mother wouldn't let her hang out anymore with a girl when she caught wind of all the ex-boyfriends she had. It's scary how once upon a time I viewed myself as superior to them. I blame the teachers, they were the ones who treated the few of us like we were special. I used to think that romantic or sexual feelings were easy to control because I didn't experience them, I thought that everyone else was weak for letting their feelings and urges show. Sometimes I thought that people were making up their crushes and obsessions with celebrities just to get attention.

Thankfully I quickly grew out of this mentality, partially thanks to our extremely open minded sex education teachers. They made me see my classmates and sex in a more positive view, the same could not be said for myself. I suddenly realized that people weren't faking it, that I was the odd one out. I felt especially left out when I discovered that even the so called 'good girls' had feelings, crushes and desires concerning the opposite gender, they just never talked about it.

I feel happier and relieved that I discovered the asexual and aromantic communities on the internet. However there are still the problematic mentalities that I come face to face with every once in a while. The religious people still view ME as the ultimate, pure 'good girl' example that every girl should aspire to be. It really hurts that some people wouldn't accept my friends just for the simple reason that they are open about their feelings. Thankfully this kind of mentality is slowly but surely fading into obscurity.

from JJ:

I went to the same church from age 5 to 18, and while not the most fundamental of places it was an Anglican Church with a touch of Evangelical influence, attempting desperately to grip to its reputation as Cool, Hip, and Totally In With The Kids. This meant Youth Group and Youth Camp and Small Groups and a Young Adults Service with a full band and upbeat music. It also meant that subtle homophobia of "they can't help who they are but definitely shouldn't act on their desires", the complete disregard for anything outside of the gay/straight binary, and an expectation that Issue of Same Sex Attraction was going to be an important one for Our Generation.

Of course, because of this either the youth group or affiliated small group I was a part of did a relatively in-depth discussion of Sexuality and Christianity at least once a year. These never intentionally went anywhere near asexuality, but when I was 18, I DId as Queer, and was fiddling with the concept of asexuality, two things stuck out to me as particularly odd.

Firstly, the assumption that it would be completely illogical for a queer couple to date and live together while also believing that sex between people of the same gender would be inappropriate, because that's just too much temptation. People can't be in any way attracted to each other and manage to live together without sex (or the promise of future sex). And people wouldn't be living together without that attraction.

This universalisation of sex, sexual desire and attraction, as well as the presentation of sexual desire as all-consuming and distracting is a common theme of Christian teachings regarding sex in general. The idea that everyone feels this attraction, and so we can all kindly but firmly rebuke anyone who gives into temptation, is probably comforting if you do find yourself distracted. But it is also factually untrue.

However, any suggestion I've seen made on the contrary has been met with a claim of naivety. The church as I've experienced it has definitely had a problem of twisting a desire to be engaged with the world into a desire to be perceived as cool. And in doing this it must distance itself from the profoundly uncool traits of prudishness and naivety. And so we reach a situation where purity doctrine is fine, as long as it is presented with a knowing smirk. And of course it'd be naive to assume a couple could be non-sexual.

The second argument used against me, which I was even more surprised to hear, surrounded the concept of singleness. I suggested that given Paul was so comfortable with (even preferentially favouring) perpetual singleness as a lifestyle, and this church had very actively supported that as a life choice, maybe that shows that there are life paths other than that mimicking Adam and Eve? Surely, I argued, if we can accept that some people don't have a compliment in the form of an individual of another gender, it isn't that far to recognise that some people find compliment in an individual of the same gender. This suggestion was met with a claim that still confuses me: a life of singleness was, like any imperfection in the world, a result of sin, and so in a sinless world everyone would have an other-gender compliment.

I'd particularly like to show that argument to anyone who claims that it's easy to be part of the church if you're ace, because apparently not only are we in need of fixing in a secular society, we're a symptom of a broken world in certain Christian ones. A group that declares that your identity cannot be found in other people, but in God alone, also claiming that each individual should have one perfect soulmate seems... ill considered to say the least.

Now, I identified as Queer before I considered a place under the ace umbrella, so that community, and having a place as a gray-a (ace and aro) person within it is very important to me. More importantly, so is the idea that if you're hurting them, you're hurting me, because this is in fact an "us". Now there is (sometimes) nuanced conversation regarding the place of the "A" in any LGBTQ+ space, but my stance on this issue is very much linked to my experience as a Christian Queer Ace. I'm still not out in that church. Primarily because if I came out as Queer then my asexuality would be completely dismissed, but if I came out explicitly as ace then the response would involve the condescension of "oh but you're not really One Of Them, what we say can't hurt you."

But even in a church that claimed to support indefinite singleness and the validity of not pairing up, the glorification of the heteronormative marriage still extends to the point of seeing singles as a result of brokenness. And in a church desperate to appear cool the invalidation of primary non-sexual relationships is par for the course. Where knowing that were I to get a girlfriend that relationship would make me "inappropriate to work with children" hurt me for my queerness, those arguments hurt me for my asexuality. But it has taken more time than I would like for me to consider the pain of both valid.

from Libris

Often, when I join in conversations about purity culture, I'll hear sentiments like 'oh, it must be so easy for aces'. It's not necessarily aimed at me - I'm cautious about outing myself - but nonetheless, it's dismissive of my experiences, in a very unthinking fashion - unthinking because this isn't hard. Because if I can try to appreciate the problems and trauma of purity culture in non-aces - as I'm of course assumed to do, and as is necessary in any work of understanding and solidarity - then it can't be that hard to see my problems? Maybe it is. Here they are.

One of the most common complaints about purity culture is that it shames teens for having sexual thoughts or impulses, telling them that these are sinful and a temptation to fight against. And yes, that's true, and it's awful. But the underlying assumption in these injunctions is that you *do* experience these urges - because of course you do, you're human, aren't you? It's not virtuous, the church insists, to give into these urges; instead, it's virtuous to resist them, to fight and struggle and overcome. Not having these so-called temptations? Isn't virtuous; the virtue is in resisting temptation. Isn't even real - everyone has those, you must be lying/immature/sick/just not old enough yet.

Growing up, I insisted that I did not want to get married, I did not want to have sex, I especially did not want to have children and be a stay-at-home mother. And while some of those insistences proved to have had unstated qualifications (if I'd known I could date or marry women, I would have specified that I didn't want to marry a man, for example; at the time, that was unthinkable), my ground assertions still hold true today. I am not, and cannot be, straight. I will not, and could not, have kids. And I am not, and cannot be, allosexual. All the while, however, I learnt that this wasn't acceptable - to be a good Christian, I had to get married to a nice Christian boy, have sex whenever *he* wanted (as long as we were married first, of course!), pop out kids whenever it was asked of me, and become a housewife. My assertions that this wasn't what I wanted out of life were dismissed; this was how to be happy, I'd think differently when I was older, this was how to be a good Christian.

Hold up, hold up, come the calls from listeners seeking an acceptable narrative to fit my experiences into, *you said you were gay, that's all just homophobia and misogyny*. And sure, homophobia and misogyny were part of this narrative - it's not easy to tease apart situations, arrange neat rows of *this was homophobia; this, misogyny; this, ableism*. Life isn't so clearly defined.

But all the while there was the incessant expectation that *one day I would have sex*. It's hard, nowadays, to express to people quite how much of an inescapable background horror that was for me growing up; every effort I took to secure myself a future always brought back the echoing reminder that unless I could be truly amazing, unless I could be a successful academic-career woman and be so exceptional that no one would ever question my dedication to my research above any personal life, then I would have to get married - and thus, have sex, have kids, and give up any hope of a career, job, or outside hobbies.

A lot of this *does* stem from misogyny, for sure - and the more blatantly misogynist elements are much easier to unpick. I've struggled at times with knowing that I *couldn't* be a housewife for anyone, even if I wanted to be, but there's a lot of resistance against the idea that women *should* be housewives, and thus I can surround myself with those messages and shrug off my conditioning with much more ease. But

the message that to be a good wife, a good partner, I should have sex whenever my partner wants regardless of my own feelings - that's a message that I run into over and over again, no matter which section of society I'm in. And consequently, it's that much harder to resist.

To add to the horror surrounding the looming spectre of sex, I was taught (of course!) that it was my responsibility to protect boys from being attracted to me - because if they saw me as sexy or sexually available, they wouldn't be able to help themselves and would of course rape me. And in that scenario, I would be at fault for allowing myself to be seen as sexual in any way. For tempting them - because the responsibility never rested on them to resist temptation, but on women to ensure that we never provide anything that could be construed as 'tempting', whether that's attitude, actions, clothes, figure, existence... (It's very reminiscent of Adam's frantic excuses after eating the apple in the Garden of Eden, actually.) We all know this story; it permeates our society, pooling and becoming more concentrated, more toxic in areas that encourage it further. Such as purity culture.

So, let me sum up: sex was mandatory and inevitable, whether I consented or not; it would hurt me and maybe defile me and any negative consequences from it would always be my fault - but I couldn't opt out of it, and wanting to made me less than human, less than Christian. And this is the culture that people say accepts aces?

There are no winners in purity culture. Not me, not you, not a straight woman who genuinely loves her husband and wants to raise children. No one is safe and unharmed, and it's important that we band together against it rather than turning inwards on each other, trying to judge who had it 'worse'.

Positive Stories

from Deanna:

I grew up Catholic which really had little to no impact on my life, but two years ago, I was invited to a Christian church for an Easter service and complied because I was asked by a family friend. I instantly fell in love with the people, the environment, and most importantly, Jesus. My life felt more complete than ever. I went on with my life for the next two years with ups and downs as any average person does.

As time went on, I found myself scrolling through some articles when I first read the word, "asexual." I had heard about that in biology a few years ago but didn't understand how it could apply to a person. I researched the topic and in the moment, something just clicked. Everything made sense as I realized there was a name to what I had always felt. I was ecstatic at the realization that I knew who I was but then realized, "oh, that's means I have to tell people."

I started small with some friends I had met via Internet. Then to people I knew in my real life. To my luck, my youth pastor had decided that the entire month of March this year, we would cover some trending topics of this generation. On day one, we covered sexualities. I was pleasantly surprised when the term asexual was brought up. Afterwards I went up to talk to him (mind you I am very close with him and his family outside of church was well). I asked him what he thought about asexuality altogether and he said he thought it was fantastic! He even went to show me a verse in the bible

that addresses asexuals and how they do magnificent works of evangelism. I told him that I was and he didn't react negatively. He didn't seem shocked or surprised but more taken aback by my sudden confession. He even asked me to put together a portfolio about the topic which I did.

Even though I haven't told more than 2 people at my church, I still feel strong in the fact that I'm accepted there and regardless of who knows I always will be. I love Jesus but I also love who I am and I wouldn't change it for anything!!

Things I Would Tell My Younger Self

by Via Perkins, vialiveshere.tumblr.com

You love questioning things. Your senior paper analyzes every aspect of *Crime and Punishment*, you stay late at Bible study asking details about certain passages, and you wax poetic in your journal about the world and what it means. Sometimes you write about what your future husband might be like. No one told you that you'll get married one day, but you assume you will. You never question why.

The Sundays you spend at youth group and church camp learning about Biblical ways of dating, and the hours you spend at True Love Waits sessions will cause you to make certain assumptions about yourself, but they are not wasted. Their messages good, and are sacrificially taught to you by people who care and mean well. You just don't have the whole picture yet.

There isn't a section in the curriculum for you, the teenage girl who will go on dates with boys who ask her out, but finds Bloc Party concerts and blogging on Xanga much more exciting than sexuality. There are only paragraphs and speeches warning about the power of adolescent hormones, and how hard it is for teens to wait. But it's not hard for you.

With every romantic encounter, you think, "I don't want to have sex." This seems normal to you, and it continues, and continues, until everyone else seems to have sexuality in their lives, whether in or out of marriage. It continues until "I don't want to have sex" poses a problem. It continues until you finally stop assuming and start questioning.

You've never heard of asexuality, but you don't need to right now. It's not time to explore that part of your identity yet. For now, have fun dating casually and don't worry why setting boundaries with boys makes you feel comfortable. You'll find out you're not alone. I pray that one day there will be a section in the curriculum for you.

Roman Catholicism and Parenthood

by Rachel

I am apparently somewhat unusual amongst the asexual community in that I actually want to have biological kids. The problem is that I face several barriers to that as an aromantic asexual. Because it's much easier to have children when you have a man on hand, yet I doubt most men when would tolerate a sex-free, romance-free relationship with me. Yes, ace men exist, but they are scarce and I have no significant

access to any real-world asexual communities, and compatible orientation does not guarantee compatibility of things like interests, aspirations, values, etc. My aro ace self brings all the boys to the yard! What this means is that I'm pretty much stuck with solo parenthood if I want kids at all, with the help of Daddy Science. This is what being an aromantic asexual comes down to for me: being completely on your own with regards to everything you do in your adult life.

The other big problem is that I am Roman Catholic. While celibacy may be more validated in Catholic circles (so long as it's straight-people-celibacy and it's coded as a discipline and sacrifice, mind you), there's still plenty of heterosexual-marriage-and-kids rhetoric to go around, and plenty of restrictions about how said kids ought to arrive on planet Earth. My having kids, as previously established, would most likely have to be by scientific intervention, which the Church does not support at all. The Church officially disapproves of any scientific interference in sex and reproduction. It undermines my resolve toward this aspiration of mine, adding atop to my many other doubts and worries about becoming a parent (I do not at all relish the challenges of being a disabled single parent any more than I relish the challenges of being a "queer" single parent). I fear the potential sideways glances, invasive questions, and even outright scorn that may come with having biological kids without any husband (or, hell, even a boyfriend) in sight. I fear how the backlash could effect upon my hypothetical children, being born of "sinful interference" against God's designs for human reproduction. I fear the answers that I'll have to provide those hypothetical children some day: about why they don't have a daddy like all the other kids; about what it means for them to have a single, disabled, LGBTQIA, Catholic parent; and about why the Church disapproves of their entire family and existence so much. I fear.

The Trouble with Non-Existence

by Thylacine of AVEN

[**cw:** abortion mention, emetophobia warning]

I find that one of the biggest problems being an asexual person is the concept that asexuality does not exist, as is the opinion of society! And that is the main problem for asexual people and with our society in general. And the church just simply is an extension of our society.

In our society, the majority of people seem to believe that, "you're either straight or gay," and if you're gay, you just need someone to get you married and that will literally "straighten you out." People both in church and in society often seem to live in some sort of horrid fantasy world where they can "fix" people up and "get them married," and immediately after the person is married, all due to their "fixing," of course, the person that they "fixed" will then enter into some sort of heavenly marital bliss.

(Puke!)

This is a sad state of affairs for asexual people, because it causes people like us to have to hide from society the way gay people used to have to hide. Most people, both in churches and in society, have no idea what asexuality is, and if you tried to explain, it's quite possible they might not even believe you.

I don't tell very many people that I'm asexual because of the way that most people might react: shock and horror, that there is someone out there, in this big world, that does not want to have sex, or get married and have vast numbers of babies and change vast numbers of diapers... !!!

But once when I did tell someone, he actually asked, "Do you ever wonder why God made you this way?" And I was surprised, because that's not the usual reaction one gets when one says that one is asexual. You usually get this, "You just need a good man to straighten you out!" nonsense... but when he asked, "Do you ever wonder why God made you this way?" I could only say, "I don't know. I really don't know." I have never really thought of it before, but now I wonder: Why did God make me this way?

As a Christian, I am not supposed to believe in reincarnation, but sometimes I wonder about that, too... Maybe in a previous existence I lived a hedonistic life of excess, and came back to Earth wanting nothing to do with that type of life? Is there any other spiritual explanation?

Or maybe in another life I was a priestess of the ancient Roman Goddess Vesta, all dressed in white and tending the sacred fire in the temple? Without having a past life regression done, I'll never really know, will I?

Or perhaps God made me this way because – and this is another theory of mine! – maybe it does a man good to have a woman ignore him? That is, perhaps it's good for a man's spiritual growth to have a woman ignore him sexually sometimes. I mean, girls fall all over guys and give them a horrendous ego. Being ignored might be good for a guy once in a while... maybe I'm God's instrument on Earth to take mortal men's horrendous Donald Trump sized egos down a few notches?

Why does there have to be a reason for it at all? Can't some people just be asexual the way some people have brown hair, for Pete's sakes?

But what is the point of all this raving?

I will tell you: I love my church. And my church has a ministry for almost everything. Once a year, some churches even have a special day for blessing the animals. There is a ministry for women who had abortions and now have regret. And there is even a group for gays called "Dignity." But there is No... I repeat, NO! There is no ministry for asexual people in my church. We are invisible in the church. Perhaps we are invisible in all churches the way we are invisible in society?

This is most likely because it is not even acknowledged by either society or the church that we exist. If something existed, then the church would have a ministry for it. But asexual people are not supposed to exist, so the church has no ministry for asexual people. This leaves us out as a group. By having a ministry for gays, the church acknowledges that gays do in fact exist. By not having a ministry for asexual people, the church inadvertently states our nonexistence. This makes people like me be seen as poor waifs who "need a husband" (or a wife if you would happen to be a man). Or perhaps being single they would think you "have a calling." But what about people who don't feel "called" to join the clergy and yet don't feel "called" to be married, either?

This is a problem that needs to be addressed, but I don't foresee it happening anytime in the near future. It's actually sad to see that the church has a day to bless the animals, where people drive up to the church parking lot and get out of their cars

and SUV's with their dogs, or carrying pet carriers containing cats, bunnies, and hamsters.

And yet, there is no ministry for asexual people.

Kind of makes one feel below the level of a golden retriever... And so the next time someone tells me I need a husband, I am going to say, "Woof!"

Postponement

by Coyote, theacetheist.wordpress.com

[**cw:** sharps]

Over in five minutes. Those are the words that I remember. A quote, in a "True Love Waits" publication, from a teenager who'd had premarital sex. That was part of her dismissive account to say that it wasn't worth it.

I remember teenage-me staring at that page, thinking—*five minutes?! Does it really go on for THAT long?*

It didn't occur to me, at the time, that was not a particularly heterosexual thought to have.

I had a promise ring. Yes. I'm one of those people. Still have it, in fact. No sex until marriage always seemed like a pretty good deal for me. That much has always been set in stone.

The question I actually wondered about—the part of my path forward that became unclear to me—was the question of sex *after* marriage. At some point, I remember I began to wonder if I could remain a virgin on my wedding night, if I could negotiate that with my hypothetical spouse at all, if anyone would "allow" it. I found myself drawn to the idea of continuing to postpone sex for a time even after I'd married someone. Maybe even indefinitely.

I never spoke about those thoughts to anyone.

It didn't occur to me, though, that that was not a particularly heterosexual thought to have.

You want to hear a funny story? Once upon a time, I believed propaganda that told me: don't kiss anybody for too long, as an unwed Christian. Not because kissing is bad, no, but because your hands will get bored and start to wander, and one thing leads to another—

Propaganda that told me: don't spend too much time alone with your girlfriend or boyfriend, especially not in a bedroom, because—

What it meant to say was: you do not possess mental restraint to match your innate sexual desire

What that meant was: *you possess overwhelming innate sexual desire.*

And how I perceived this message was, essentially: if you interact physically with your romantic interest for too long, you will activate a mind-altering substance; you will

awaken a malevolent spirit within you that will seize control of your limbs and take over your body to make you do things you never intended to do. Preempt this—ward yourself against possession.

I feared it. Yes. I feared being overpowered by feelings that were strangers to me, feared this violation I did not (could not) name as violation. I was taught the tricks of the trade to keep my supposed desires at bay, as if stringing up garlic to repel internal vampires.

Such a lesson does not involve proving that vampires are real.

I was never invited to assess whether that wraith in me, that spirit, that tricky soul gremlin, even took at all the shape that everyone told me it would.

The refuge I found in conservative Christianity was, first and foremost, conditional. It kept things from me, stunted me, and I stuck with it because it was the lesser of two evils for who I was at the time—which is *absurd*. I'm still angry when I think about that and the tragedy of circumstance. I grieve for selves that never got to be.

The alternative, essentially, felt like a debt collector. Like an immediate bill come due, in contrast to the "sexual purity" deferment program. The rhetoric of "sexual liberation" pushed me away from everything and anything even loosely associated with it, even the things I sorely needed to learn. Conservative Christianity has never been about challenging dominant paradigms in American society, even when it pretends to be. It feels ridiculous when I think back on the fact that I needed permission to be nonsexual so badly, exploitation of that need kept me away from everything else would have been good for me.

Under my conservative gender upbringing, I thought it "made sense" that women were more frequently sexualized than men in American media... because, in my head, I thought, "women are just more sexy than men are." It didn't occur to me, at the time, that that was not a very heterosexual thought for a supposed-girl to have.

Gray-asexual is what I call myself now. The only community that gets to claim me is the ace community, because the only community that has made me feel some semblance of safe and unconditionally welcome is the ace community. Other people have different stories. This one is mine.

My story is that, for me, the ace community has been sexually "liberating" in a way nothing else has.

Before shedding the identity of heterosexual, I felt chained to a dilemma of two strict narrative arcs:

1. you're a chaste Christian who feels consistent and relationship-motivating sexual desire, and you abstain from sex until marriage, at which point you have sex and you love it. Or,
2. you're a non-Christian of some kind or a more laissez-faire Christian who, either way, feels consistent and relationship-motivating sexual desire, and without marrying first, you have sex and you love it.

There was no version of the story, no romantic timeline I was ever told, no storyworthy arc for human life, that didn't include sex. There was no *if*, only *when*.

I still wonder how it could have been—still is—so easy to believe in. A gremlin that always gets its way. Without doubting this gremlin's existence, I wanted to fight for my autonomy back.

That was what the Church made space for. Postponement. Deferment. My avoidance of sex could be, for a time, conditionally acceptable.

Subtly (and not so subtly), I was always getting messages that my acceptability had a time limit. When my mom filled in as substitute teacher one day, my class watched a video on classical art that showed nude figures and sculptures, at which we middle schoolers made exaggerated noises of disgust and covered our eyes.

And my mom—my conservative, Christian mom, my mom who scoffs at women who wear shorts and skirts which she deems inappropriately short, my mom who lectured me on sexual purity, *my conservative, Christian mom*—showed annoyance with us for the disruptive, negative responses to nudity and deemed us not "mature" enough to handle it.

I remember reflecting on that for as long as I could bear but not daring to question it. I remember absorbing the idea that "mature" Christians didn't feel repulsed at the naked human form. I remember learning that my sexuality, my *real* sexuality, was something to be boxed and hidden away in the basement of my heart, if I was to be respectable and "mature."

I was baptized in the American Episcopal Church when I was four. In all the years that my family attended regular Sunday worship service, I never remember hearing anything about gay people. No sermons on the clobber verses. Nothing one way or the other. I won't say those churches weren't homophobic; I'm sure they were, in subtler ways. I'm just saying it's not a part of my memories of them.

What I remember is conversations about sex at home, starting with my mother giving me The Talk about what sex was and how it worked.

I was eight years old. She started by asking me if I knew what "sex" was.

I didn't, but I'd heard the word before, so I started attempting a description based on the associations I'd formed—while imagining, basically, a character like the make-over'd Sandy at the end of *Grease*. I made some vague hand gestures. "It's like this cool, bad—"

She interrupted me there to correct me. *Sex is not bad*, my ex-Catholic Episcopalian mother told me. That was the gist of her message, as important to get across as the technical aspects. *Sex is not bad*. At some point, for whatever reason, she started crying. I just remember feeling numb, and vaguely uncomfortable, as she explained the bare-bones process of reproduction. My mother passionately wanted me to understand that sex *was not a bad thing (in and of itself)*, and that it could be right and a good and joyful thing (*it is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere, to give thanks to You*, the chant of the congregation echoes in my mind—

sometimes I cannot separate out the sentiment from what the Church says about sex, a web of messages too complex for a parenthetical, and yet [and yet]).

On my blog where I write about asexuality and Christianity, my stats page sometimes reports some of the search terms people use that lead them to my posts. One of these search terms, from a couple of years ago, was the question "is sex aversion unhealthy or holy?"

Can you *understand* what would lead someone to ask a question like that?

Can you guess?

Coming, clearly, from a religiously-inclined viewpoint, and wondering whether one of their morally-neutral attributes is something sacred to be cherished or something vile and detrimental to be fought, condemned, resisted, and *repaired*.

I never learned who typed in that search term that day—but if I could have, I would have wanted to hold their hand, to walk with them at their side through the gauntlet that would have us see ourselves as simultaneously blessed and cursed, walking a razor's edge and trying not to bleed.

In 2014 I sent out over a hundred emails to different churches in a major city near me, asking their pastors what they thought of asexuality and marriages without sex. About a handful responded. Some—mostly the female pastors and pastors with LGBT-friendly indicators on their church websites—said they would welcome aces completely.

Others replied to me about the importance of procreative sex, the importance that married people have sex, and the importance of having and raising children. One quoted something that used the phrase "the sacred character of human sexuality." One called celibate marriages "oxymoronic." One said they would offer counseling to help anyone "fully experience sex according to God's design." One said that aces who've experienced trauma should "work through" their asexuality "toward a fuller life."

Several quoted the verse that says "male and female He created them," which doesn't even seem relevant to the subject, unless you understand that conservative Christians believe gender is a sexual role. Because they do. Conservative Christians look at gender as a sexual role: what parts you have and what parts to use them with.

None of that was all too surprising.

Even though my childhood churches never talked much about sex and sexual morality, the rhetoric those pastors used reminded me of the books of my mother's I would find lying around the house—and of the books and magazines that I read for myself.

In college, one of my professors had us analyze an ad for Viagra during class. The softspoken girl who sat to my right, a girl who carried prayer books to class and believed that physical illness was indicative of estrangement from God, was one of the students to

criticize the ad for its rhetoric—her criticism being that ad’s composition and language were *disrespectful* to the gift of sex.

I could have lied, I suppose, when my mother asked about my new black ring. I don’t like to lie. It’s one of the easier Commandments to get in the habit of.

I explained, or tried to. Voice and hands shaking. I don’t know why.

She asked me, “And... how is that different from chastity?”

Um.

I wonder, now, if she feels like she wasted her time, all those lectures on why I shouldn’t have sex before marriage. She had plenty of books on that. She didn’t have any books on this.

What is the difference between the asexual umbrella and “waiting”?

Better question: what’s the difference between procrastination and patience?