6.6: Different Types of Sexualities

Observing sexuality worldwide throughout history is extremely helpful in understanding the way human beings perceive different sexualities. As we have alluded to previously, there is not a universal attitude about different sexual orientations, but rather, the way in which sexual orientation is socially constructed based on a given culture’s attitudes and beliefs. Even within Western culture, attitudes have shifted over time. The early Greeks viewed same sex activity as just another sexual act, not linking it to any particular orientation. In the Medieval Period, sex that did not result in procreation was denounced, whereas the Enlightenment period created a shift that differentiated private from public life, making sex more acceptable. During the 19th century in the Victorian Period, people developed concerns regarding population growth, which led to governments and churches restructuring the narrative surrounding sex, in an attempt to reduce sexual desires throughout communities. Cultural perceptions of sexuality in Western societies were quite a bit more conservative in the 19th Century than they are now. The truth is that attitudes about sexuality are constantly changing. We might imagine that present day attitudes are very accepting and open of diversity, only to find that in the future, this era was seen as very restrictive.

With more than 200 sexuality scales developed by people to define sexual orientation, it is not possible to list each variant and again, these may change, become irrelevant or the names may be found offensive in the future, however; the list below defines 20 known sexual orientations in present day representative language (this information is also in the glossary):

- **Allosexual**

The term describes anyone who experiences any sort of sexual attraction. People who identify as Allosexual can be gay, pansexual, lesbian or any other sexual orientation because allosexuality is not connected to gender. Allosexuality opposes asexuality.

- **Androsexual**
Androsexual is a term that describes people who are attracted to people who present themselves as masculine. This type of orientation has little to do with biology, and more to do with the presentation of gender.

- **Asexual/Ace**

Asexual is a term that describes people who do not experience sexual attraction toward other people. People who identify as asexual are often able to feel romantic attraction towards people.

- **Autosexual**

Autosexual is a term that describes an individual’s sexual attraction to oneself.

- **Bi-Curious**

Bi-curious is a term that refers to people who are looking to explore bisexuality.

- **Bisexual**

Bisexuality can often overlap with pansexuality, however; the term describes a person who may be romantically, sexually, or emotionally attracted to more than one gender.

- **Closeted**

Closeted, or “in the closet” refers to anyone who exists within the LGBTQIA+ community but does not publicly disclose the truth. Many people who identify as closeted seek to avoid persecution or discrimination, based on their sexual identity.

- **Demisexual**

Those who identify as demisexual feel sexual attraction to people only once they’ve established a romantic or emotional relationship with, and even after they’ve formed this bond, sexual attraction does not always occur.

- **Fluid**

A person who identifies as fluid experiences a shift in sexual identity over time, rather than someone who experiences a singular sexual orientation.

- **Gay**

The word gay is used to describe someone who is sexually or romantically attracted to a member of the same gender.

- **Greysexual**

People who identify as greysexual experience limited sexual attraction, meaning that sexual attraction is rare.

- **Gynesexual**

This term refers to people who are attracted to individuals with more feminine gender presentations rather than androsexual identifying people who are attracted to more masculine presenting people.
• **Heterosexual or Straight**

These two terms refer to people who are only romantically, sexually, or emotionally attracted to people of the opposite sex (i.e. men who are attracted to exclusively women, and women who are exclusively attracted to men).

• **Heteroflexible or homoflexible**

A *heteroflexible* person is mostly heterosexual (someone who is attracted to the same gender), but can occasionally be attracted to the same gender or other genders. Alternatively, a *homoflexible* person is mostly attracted to people of the same gender, but is sometimes attracted to other genders.

• **Homosexual**

The term *homosexual* is a slightly outdated term; however, it refers to anyone who is attracted to people of the same (or similar) gender.

• **Lesbian**

A *lesbian* is a term that describes a female identifying person who is attracted to other women.

• **Pansexual**

This term refers to people who are attracted to someone regardless of their gender identity.

• **Queer**

*Queer* is an umbrella term that describes anyone within the LGBTQIA+ community. The dictionary defines the word as something that is “strange;” however, the term has been redefined and reclaimed.

• **Questioning**

This term refers to someone who is questioning their sexual preference or to describe someone who is curious about exploring their sexuality.

• **Sapiosexual**

Someone who identifies as *sapiosexual* is attracted to someone based on their intellect rather than the gender or sex of the other person.
Sidebar 6.2: A Deeper Dive into Asexuality

“Asexuality is like any other identity – at its core it’s just a word that people use to help figure themselves out, then communicate that part of themselves to others. If you find the word asexual useful to describe yourself, you may certainly identify as asexual. If you later experience things that indicate you’re not asexual, that’s fine as well.” - AVEN

Asexuality, or Ace (used interchangeably), is another sexual orientation and is known as an umbrella term. Specifically, however, asexuality refers to little to no sexual attraction towards others. Those who do experience sexual attraction to others are allosexual. Just as there is a spectrum with sexual attraction, asexuality has its own spectrum, with many different sub identities. Aces have different attitudes towards sex, with there being three different types: sex-repulsed, sex-indifferent, and sex-favorable. When one is sex-repulsed, they will not want to partake in sex at all. However, asexuality should not be confused with celibacy. Celibacy is seen as a choice to abstain from sex, whereas asexuality is simply a part of a person (AVEN). Additionally, one’s asexuality does not influence or determine their romantic attraction toward others. Some Aces do desire romantic relationships, and those who do not are aromantic.

It is important to note that people who identify as Ace are just as likely to participate in masturbation as non-asexual people. Not all people who identify as asexual masturbate, however; many people who do identify as asexual find pleasure masturbating. Many people view masturbation as a sexual activity, however, masturbating has various functions (see Chapters 4 and 9 for more on masturbation).

The non-sexual gratifying reasons for masturbation given are the same for asexual and non-asexual people. Stress, boredom, help falling asleep, and more are all reasons as to why a person might masturbate. In fact, asexual individuals who masturbate may or may not think of masturbation as sexual at all. People who identify as asexual might view masturbation as an act of self-care, or even an enjoyable task that stimulates their mind, just like all other people.

Asexuality, is a sexual orientation, like other orientations listed above. People who identify as asexual are not participating in celibacy, which is a common misconception. The lack of sexual attraction is not always associated with the lack of romantic attraction. Just like all sexualities, asexuality exists within a spectrum, and asexual people can
develop emotional attraction towards people, and they can be attracted to one, two, or even multiple genders that exist within the gender spectrum. And as we have already stated, sexual fluidity alludes to the fact that someone who is asexual now, may or may not be asexual at a later time. Asexual people hold healthy and long-term monogamous, as well as non-monogamous relationships.

Ace activists have brought attention to being asexual and the representation of media characters has also been slowly growing. David Jay is a prominent figure in the asexual community and creator of the website, The Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN). The website digs deeper into what being asexual means, and answers commonly asked questions. Aces also write their own accounts and stories under the “Asexual Perspectives” tab, and there are links to several forums and blogs that provide greater detail into the lives of asexual people.