ASEXUAL PERVERSIONS

By

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Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Critical Gender Studies

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Vienna, Austria

2021

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 20,348 words;

Entire manuscript: 22,286 words.

Signed **Evgenija Filova**

Abstract

Already in its linguistic formulation, asexuality is situated in a particular deviance and opposition to sexuality. The aim of my thesis is to investigate the negativity endogenous to asexuality and how it problematizes the sexual and the nonsexual. Looking at early theoretical work and academic articles written about asexuality, I use discourse analysis and close reading to question how and why has a negative assumption been made endogenous to asexuality at its epistemological construction. I am using visual analysis and auto-ethnography to interrogate particular positions and representations of asexuality which are intersecting with sexuality. My research includes theoretical work about sex and sexuality with a particular focus on the separation between the two and the function of sex within theoretical concepts of sexuality. I cover as well a literature review of queer negativity that has been a prominent concept within queer studies and which is particularly relevant to the study of asexual negativity since asexuality itself is partially situated with queer studies and sexualities. I use the theories of sex and sexuality and queer negativity to analyze a particular trend in asexuality writing that hails a radical potential within asexuality to destabilize sexual normativity. I investigate how is sexual normativity theorized and how the potential within asexuality is formulated as destabilizing and radical. Therefore a particular locus of intersection in my research becomes the problematization of the sexual and nonsexual evoked by asexuality. I finalize my analysis of the negativity endogenous to asexuality as a perversion of the nonopposition of the sexual and the nonsexual captured by the epistemological standpoint of asexuality.

Keywords: asexuality · queer negativity · sexual normativity · sex · sexuality.

Acknowledgements

This project has been a journey both through my own experience and relationship to Asexuality as well as my growing knowledge of Gender Studies. I would like to hence express gratitude to my supervisor Professor Hyaesin Yoon for providing me always with a clear guidance and feedback and fostering deep curiosity for my project that motivated me to continue working. I would like to express my gratitude to my second reader Professor Eszter Timár for introducing me to the field of Queer Theory and opening the space for asexuality. I would also like to thank Professor Nadia Jones-Gailani for pulling me out of great trouble and collecting me in pieces in the most precarious of times. My gratitude goes also to the Department Head Professor Francisca de Haan for supporting me since the very beginning of my studies. My gratitude is immense to the wonderful student community at CEU Gender Studies who have created for me the home and safe-space that provided the necessary confidence for my research work and politics. Thanks also to my fellow colleagues at Utrecht University and all professors and researchers I encountered at both universities that have shaped the researcher I am today and have inspired who I want to be in the future. Thanks to all my friends and family that are scattered all over the world and continue to be the driving force in my life. And finally, to Dominika Krejs, thank you is too small of a word to describe the importance of your presence and the passion you always have for all of my endeavors.

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List of Abbreviations

AVEN = Asexual Visibility and Education Network

BDSM = Bondage, Discipline, Domination, Submission, Sadism, Masochism

1 Introduction

Asexuality and sexual intercourse appear to be incompatible bed fellows. Perhaps they should try sleeping in separate bedrooms or mattresses. Nevertheless, my own journey with asexuality has brought me to some of the most sex-savvy places, for it is being said, nobody talks as much about sex as do asexuals. A disconnection with sex, an uncomfortable feeling, a being out of body and mind, a curiosity to understand what is a sexuality and what is sex, is perhaps the closest definition to any of asexuality. The place to find out most about asexuality is of course the Internet. A community of people who identify with being asexual and not experiencing sexual attraction to either gender started a larger social movement in the early 2000s. The anonymity and hyperconnectivity of online virtual spaces facilitated the growth of the movement and provided the necessary self-space for sharing personal histories and feelings. Claiming asexuality as an identity label, the asexual community reclaimed the term ‘asexual’ that was previously used to discriminate against people who did not conform to a compulsory sexuality. Asexuality challenged sexual normativity that presented sexuality and sexual intercourse as a universal and humanizing part of anthropocentric life. Asexuals firmly reaffirm that people can have pleasurable, happy and fulfilled lives with and without sex. Within less than a decade, kinky asexuals, as well as polyamorous, queer, trans*, intersex, disabled, and even hetero asexuals claimed an asexual identity and labeled their particular lived experiences (with sex, or not). The emergence of asexuality redefined how we think about intimacy, pleasure, desire, and the ways in which we relate to each other, and our bodies.

The first part of my research focuses on interrogating how asexuality as a theoretical field of study emerged in opposition and relationship to the study of

sexuality. Through discourse analysis and close reading of early academic literature written about asexuality, I analyze the postulation of the definition of asexuality and its reference to sexuality. The first empirical study of asexuality was conducted by the psychologist of human sexuality Anthony F. Bogaert (2004; 2006) in a gesture of tribute to the asexual community. In his expertise the asexual community was starting a significant social movement similarly to the gay rights movement of the previous decades. Bogaert's dedication to studying asexuality and the outcome of his extensive research (e.g. the publication of the book "Understanding Asexuality" Bogaert 2012) are regarded as the beginning of what can be called an area of *asexuality studies*. His early articles are hence a departure research site for my thesis analyzing the beginnings of the theoretical field of asexuality.

The definition for asexuality used in Bogaert's research—"Asexuality, the state of having no sexual attraction for either sex" (Bogaert 2004, 279)—has become the most commonly accepted definition for asexuality. I trace the roots of this definition as well to the prolific online space of the asexual community. In 2001, a member of the asexual community David Jay, launched the Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN): an online forum for everyone on the asexual spectrum and questioning (AVEN 2001b). Today AVEN is the largest database for information on asexuality and a major community meeting space. The definition of asexuality found both on AVEN and in academic literature is that "an asexual person is a person who does not experience sexual attraction" (AVEN 2001b; Bogaert 2004). My thesis therefore takes a particular interest in the definition how it conceptualizes asexuality within a negativity i.e. "not feeling sexual attraction".

Through discourse analysis and close reading of academic literature and visual analysis of graphic representations of asexuality in relationship to sexuality, I analyze

the negativity that I term *the negativity endogenous to asexuality*. This negativity within asexuality is an inherent part of asexuality that informs the epistemological and ontological questions posed by asexuality. Because of the negativity endogenous to asexuality, questions about the definitions and delineations of sex and sexuality emerge which the asexual community provides intriguing responses to thus problematizing the meanings of the sexual and the nonsexual. In my own experience with asexuality, I encountered a significant problem with recognizing my own experiences as asexual particularly because of the negative underpinnings of the definition of asexuality. Sociologist Kristin S. Scherrer conducted an extensive study of the early asexual community with the particular focus on the "coming to an asexual identity" (2008). She too emphasizes the puzzle of the negativity inherent to the recognition of the asexual identity based on "a lack, rather than a presence of a characteristic" (Scherrer 2008, 630). Nevertheless, this negative notion remans unexplored and unquestioned to date in research about asexuality and asexuality studies. To the contrary, in practice the negativity became a constant and a complementary part to asexuality and identifying as asexual. Focusing on what the negativity within asexuality does and how it is used within the community, I coined the term the negativity *endogenous* to asexuality. My main research question is consequently: *how and why has a negative assumption been made endogenous to asexuality at its epistemological construction.*

In my literature review of the further development of the study of asexuality, I have identified a line of scholarship and activism that associates asexuality with holding a radical and destabilizing potential to sexual normativity (e.g. Cerankowski and Milks 2010; Chasin 2013; Chu 2014). In the second part of my thesis I hence analyze *how and why is the radical and destabilizing potential of sexuality formulated*

and what is the corresponding role of the negativity endogenous to asexuality. I locate asexuality at the intersection of the sexual and the nonsexual, and in particular, in their nonopposition. In my analysis of the relationship between asexuality and sexuality, I look at research that theorizes the concept of sexuality itself, asking the necessary questions of what sexuality does and how sexuality functions in organizing bodies, pleasures and identities. I find it particularly important to study theories of sexuality to understand how the negativity within asexuality functions in opposition to sexuality (or not) and how can asexuality destabilize this relationship. Queer feminist research has a tradition of theorizing the spectrum of radical to conservative sexual practices and politics in its analysis of heteronormativity. Asexuality hence provides a platform to destabilize the assumptions within the theory and practice of radical sexualities because of it insistence on problematizing the sexual and the nonsexual challenging the conflation between sex and sexuality.

My particular interest is to hence draw a focus onto the function and role of sexual intercourse within the theories of sexuality. A common site of inquiry for the study of sexuality is the theoretical engagement with sexuality as a regulating mechanism for the control of bodies and pleasures. To this train of thought contribute Michael Foucault's history of sexuality (1988b), Gayle Rubin's sexual essentialism (2011), Ela Przybylo's sexusociety (2011) and Paul B. Preciado's pharmaco-pornographic politics (Preciado 2008; 2013). Foucault's work is fundamental in identifying the use of sexuality as a regime of governance and subjectivation of individuals. While Foucault theorizes the hegemony of sexuality as a historical construct, Rubin extends the analysis of the universalizing significatory value of sex as a sexual essentialism that presupposes sexual intercourse as the natural humanizing agent organizing bodies and pleasures. Within asexuality scholarship,

Przybylo identifies the omnipresence of sexuality and its tendency for oppressing and neglecting asexual experience as the sexusociety. Preciado's work is particularly relevant because of its analysis of the material reality of sex, the body and sexuality. Pharmaco-pornographic politics and countersexual theory (Preciado 2018) offer an inspiring insight into the function of sex within sexuality and the drawing of the boundaries between the sexual and the nonsexual. His famous proclamation "sex is over" (Preciado 2018, 66) informs the title for the last section of my thesis.

My own contribution to the domain of sexuality is therefore the theoretical intersection of the work of Preciado with asexuality studies. Since his work falls short of any analysis of the possibilities of asexuality, and asexuality studies falls short of interacting with the technology of sexuality. Through a visual analysis of Preciado's rich performative-textual practice and an ethnographic immersion in the corners of asexuality in pursuit of the sexual, I bring both theories together in two particular research sites: the sex-favorable asexual pursuing sex for pleasure and the masturbating dildo-fucking-with-vibrator. I articulate first through discourse analysis and a close reading of Foucault's work, which is background for the work of Preciado as well, sections in which he creates the gap between sex and sexuality, and then I proceed with sexual essentialism and how asexual subjects mobilize the "essential" for asexual visibility, leading to the possibilities opened by the radical perspectives of asexuality to reconsider radicality itself. I finally use Preciado's theoretical framework to analyze what I call a *perversion* of asexuality to emerge in the scandalous impossibility of the nonopposition of the sexual and the nonsexual.

* * * *

In 1977, feminist scholar Myra Johnson published the essay "Asexual and Autoerotic Women" (1977). She collected the letters of women to the editors of female

magazines who at the time were celebrating the sexual liberation of the 1960s and 1970s. The sexual liberation movement had for its goal the emancipation of female sexuality and the right for women to enjoy sex, and have a lot of it, shamelessly. Johnson identified a group of women who expressed a more nuanced and complex understanding of sexual 'liberation':

> "Please, would someone mention the fact that life can be beautiful, meaningful, rich and satisfactory with or *without* sex?" (Johnson 1977, 101)

To have a lot of sex—or none at all—to be *indifferent* to sex,[1] is what Johnson and the women whose stories she collected, believed to be the right for a complete sexual liberation.

I write because I believe in Johnson's politics that a sexually liberated woman is the woman who has the right to have a lot of sex—or, *not have any sex at all*. I write about the capacity embodied by asexuality to create a world of sexual politics *otherwise*, undoing forms of sexual normativity and populating the depths of the cosmos-to-be-sexuality, granting all women, and other genders, the right to refuse, dislike, be repulsed by and avoid, or simply not care about sex at all. It is asexuality's legacy that the landscape of human pleasures, attractions, emotions and relationships grew larger every time an asexual person narrated their story to the world. It is the gesture of asexuality to speak, to question, to scandalize, that informs the methodology of doing asexuality. In the negative assumption endogenous to asexuality, the "a-", the not wanting sex, the not having sex, the opposition to sexuality, to normalcy, I find a queer negativity *otherwise* particular to asexuality. Before I proceed to interrogating what has been discursively constructed as *asexuality*, I want to clarify once again that asexuality does not disclose nor discriminate against an

[1] For a compelling theory of asexuality and the right to "*whateverize"* sex see (Kasikci 2016).

individual's sex life. Asexuals have as much sex as anyone else—plenty, or none at all.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The study of asexuality and the right to be asexual

In 2004, a psychologist of sexuality Anthony F. Bogaert undertook the first study dedicated to asexuality as a sexual orientation (Bogaert 2004). Inspired to give voice to a minority organizing at the time claiming the sexual identity of asexuality, Bogaert's main aim was to determine "the prevalence of asexuality" in the general population (2004, 279). He conducted a survey using data from the national probability sample of British residents to measure sexual attraction. The participants were prompted to answer the question "I have felt sexually attracted to…". The options available for their answers ranged between only males and never females, to sometime females, both equally, to only females and never males. The last option given was, "(f) I have never felt sexually attracted to anyone at all" (Bogaert 2004, 281). Those who answered (f) were taken to represent the percentage of asexual individuals in the general population. The survey also included questions about the first sexual experience, partners, and sexual frequency (Bogaert 2004, 281). The outcome of the survey was that the percentage of asexuals in the general population was 1.05%, which coincided with the result for homosexuality of 1.11% (Bogaert 2004, 282). Notwithstanding the relative value of these percentages, the contribution of Bogaert's study was the academic rigor and commitment to studying asexuality as a sexual orientation. In his following articles (Bogaert 2006; 2008) and in his later book (Bogaert 2012), Bogaert distinguished asexuality from the pathologizing discourses of the sexual aversion disorder and hypoactive sexual desire disorder (HSDD), and argued strongly for asexuality as a sexual orientation.

Of particular relevance to my project is Bogaert's definition of asexuality, in particular how he defined asexuality and why he used that exact formulation at all. His first article clearly articulates the definition clearly in the opening sentence: "Asexuality, the state of having no sexual attraction for either sex" (Bogaert 2004, 279). Bogaert tracked this definition to research on sexual orientation that has "emphasized sexual attraction over overt behavior or self-identification in conceptualizing sexual orientation" (2004, 279). He drew a particular attention to the Kinsey Scale of Sexuality and Sexual Orientation that informed the design of his survey and the choice of questions and answers.

Sexologist Alfred C. Kinsey, together with Wardell R. Pomeroy and Clyde E. Martin, in 1948 and 1953, developed the theory of the spectrum of human sexuality—t e Kinsey Scale (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; 1953). The Kinsey Scale depicts a spectrum of sexual attraction from an exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual orientation, with most of the population anticipated to fall somewhere in between the two poles. As a supplementary remark to the scale, they included an "x" labeled as "no socio-sexual contacts or reactions" (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; Kinsey Institute 2019). In 1980, Michael D. Storms upgraded Kinsey's Scale to account for a spectrum of increasing (high) and decreasing (low) values of hetero- and homo-eroticism (Storms 1980). Storms' diagram had four quadrants: heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and asexuality. Asexuality he attributed to the values of low homo-eroticism and low hetero-eroticism (Storms 1980, 784)—the original "x" in Kinsey's report.

The articulation and scope of the different representations and definitions of asexuality given by Bogaert, Kinsey, and Storms form the groundwork for my analysis of negativity in asexuality. In my thesis I analyze the kind of negativity represented in

each of the three definitions in conversation with contemporary representations of the definition(s) of asexuality. My aim is to show how asexuality embodies a particular kind of negativity, what I term a negativity *endogenous* to asexuality.

Prior to Bogaert there were other articles discussing asexuality. Perhaps the earliest focus on asexuality in academic literature would be Myra T. Johnson's "Asexual and Autoerotic Women" (Johnson 1977; in Owen 2014). Johnson's work examined letters of women to the editors of fashion magazines who at the time were praising the sexually "liberated" woman of the 60s and 70s. "Please, would someone mention the fact that life can be beautiful, meaningful, rich and satisfactory with or *without* sex?" complains one of the readers to the magazine editor (Johnson 1977, 101). Through the letters, Johnson analyzed the kind of oppression experienced by the women for not pursuing (or not desiring to pursue) sexual activity. She then proudly re-claimed the term "asexual", together with autoerotic, stripping them from marginalizing and pathologizing discourses of oppression. Writing with pride about women who have no interest in pursuing sexual activity, she hence affirmed the right to be asexual:

> "Asexual and autoerotic women seem seldom to have been accorded the equal right to be different, the equal right to celebrate their unique experiences in the world." (Johnson 1977, 104)

Later on in 1993 feminist scholars Esther D. Rothblum and Kathleen A. Brehony, published a work on asexuality and lesbianism (Rothblum and Brehony 1993). They focused on lesbian relationships that were not sexual in nature, exploring intimacy and connection in an "asexual" context. Their work, like Johnson's, was aimed towards affirming the right to live asexually in a sexually normative world were sexual interaction is a precondition for partnership.

In 2001, Maureen S. Milligan and Aldred H. Neufeldt wrote about the false inscription of asexuality onto disability (Milligan and Neufeldt 2001). They argued how through pathologizing discourse disability signifed an asexuality foreclosing the right of sexuality to people with disabilities. Their argument was constructed towards depathologizing sexuality in people with disability, and unfortunately though undoing efforts for disabled people to claim an asexuality.

In these early works on asexuality there were already different approaches to writing about and analyzing asexuality. Johnson, Rothblum and Brehony looked at the different accounts and life stories by people whom articulated a thread of asexuality. They analyzed the oppression their subjects expressed in the struggle to have the right to live rich and fulfilling lives regardless of their preferences to not actively pursue sexual encounters. The work of Johnson, Rothblum and Brehony identified the oppression against asexuality and affirmed the right to be asexual in a sexually normative world. Their work hence drew the boundaries of the perceived danger by sexual normativity—the lack of interest in sex that is the exact opposite of pathological.

The work of Kinsey and Storms, on the other hand, argued that a variation of a sexuality, called asexuality, is embedded within the currently accepted model for the spectrum of sexual orientation. Their contribution to the study of asexuality was that it opened the space to consider asexuality alongside the other sexual orientations, hetero-, homo- and bisexuality. The proposition that asexuality is equivalent with the other sexual orientations together with the identification of oppression against asexuality as falling outside sexual normativity, open a way for asexuality to be discursively flagged by the discipline of queer studies.

After Bogaert's original studies, research flourished in the field of what can be firmly named as asexuality studies. Most numerous were quantitative studies from

within the psychology of sexuality that aimed to quantity sexuality (e.g. Prause and Graham 2007; Brotto et al. 2010; Brotto and Yule 2011). In contrast, researchers such as Crystal Bedley and Kristin S. Scherrer looked at the community forming around sexuality (the same community that inspired Bogaert's work), to investigate how the collective identity of asexuality formed and what insights asexuality has for intimacy and emotional connections (Bedley 2009; Scherrer 2008). Both Bedley and Scherrer underscored the problematization of the boundaries between the sexual and the nonsexual inherent to the doing of asexuality.

Scherrer in her article "Coming to an Asexual Identity" (2008) analyzed the process of recognition through which individuals claim an asexual identity. Focusing on the rising minority of the asexuality movement that inspired Bogaert's study, she highlighted that the community behind the movement had to a large extent developed online (Scherrer 2008, 622). The surge at the time of internet forums, social media and other virtual communication platforms enabled users to exchange experiences and connect with others alike across the globe. Social media and the anonymity of the internet were already known to provide a functional safe-space for marginalized groups, and in particular sexual minorities (Scherrer 2008, 624).

In 2001 David Jay opened the landmark Asexuality Visibility and Education Network (AVEN), a forum which quickly became the hotspot for asexuals world-wide. (AVEN 2001b; Jay 2003). Providing the space to share related experiences and talk about most intimate topics under the obscurity of an internet avatar turned AVEN into a founding ground for all knowledge on asexuality. Definitions of what it means to be asexual, together with concepts that were re-thinking and re-writing relationships and intimacy were created on the forum. Participants for many studies of asexuality, such as for example Scherrer's and Bedley's research discussed above, were recruited

through AVEN. The sphere of knowledge and networking enabled by forums such as AVEN formed the backbone for the collective formulation of the asexual identity.

Asexual voices in academia contributed extensively to the diversity of methods and theoretical perspectives in asexuality studies (Hinderliter 2009b, e.g.; Cerankowski and Milks 2010; Chasin 2011; Przybylo 2011; Chasin 2013; Chu 2014). In 2014, Karli June Cerankowski and Megan Milks published the anthology *Asexualities: Feminist and Queer Perspectives* (2014). The collection featured essays and articles from cultural theory, feminist and queer studies, that write about asexuality and of asexuality in a myriad different ways. Topics included novel medical studies of asexuality, media representation of asexuality and literary theory about writing the stories of asexuality, the radical potential of asexuality to destabilize sexual normativity, race and asexuality, and disability and asexuality, queering and cripping asexuality. For my project particularly relevant is the strain of thought in asexuality studies theory that hailed asexuality as holding a destabilizing radical potential.

In 2010, feminist scholars Karli June Cerankowski and Megan Milks published the article “New Orientations: Asexuality and Its Implications for Theory and Practice” discussing the positionality of asexuality within feminist and queer studies (2010). Refraining from categorizing the theory of asexuality as either “decidedly feminist or queer”, Cerankowski and Milks underline that the study of asexuality can inform and is informed by queer and feminist scholarship (2010, 662). Whether asexuality is queer or not, according to their research, is a question that does not have a definite answer, with some asexual-identifying individuals describing their experiences as profoundly queer, while others refer to their asexual relationships as conventional and do not identify with queer in any way (Cerankowski and Milks 2010, 659–60). Focusing on the relationship queerness maintains with nonnormative sexual culture as a “principal

mode of [queer] sociability and public world making" (landmark queer theorist Michael Warner quoted in Cerankowski and Milks 2010, 661), Cerankowski and Milks propose that "asexuality as a practice and a politics radically challenges the prevailing sex-normative culture" (2010, 661).

Concurrently, Cerankowski and Milks become the first to articulate in theory a *radical* potential of counter-normative sexual politics inherent in asexuality. I analyze the work of a groups of scholars (Przybylo 2011; Chasin 2013; Chu 2014) who thereafter developed different approaches in theorizing the radical potential in asexuality. My main research questions in this section is to investigate how is the radial potential of asexuality discursively formulated and what is the corresponding role of negativity. These findings will then guide my discussion of the radical negativity endogenous to asexuality as an embodied concept.

Ela Przybylo is today the most influential scholar of asexuality studies, having recently published the book on asexuality called *Asexual Erotics: Intimate Readings of Compulsory Sexuality* (2019). The publication is focused on the potential within asexuality to rethink relationships, intimacy, and the erotic, inspired by Audre Lorde's feminist study of the erotic (Lorde 1993). A particular relevance to my research is Przybylo's earlier work, the milestone article "Crisis and safety: The asexual in sexusociety" (2011) that brought the term sexusociety into asexuality studies. In the article Przybylo coins the term to contextualize the discursive system of the contemporary sexual world against which asexuality is theorized to be holding a radical destabilizing potential. Przybylo's analysis highlights a particular path of theory through a Butlerian-Foucauldian discursive network of modernity to explain asexuality as a radical destabilizing force against sexunormativity i.e. sexusociety.

In “Reconsidering Asexuality and Its Radical Potential”, psychologist of queer and feminist (a)sexuality CJ DeLuzio Chasin analyzes different types of asexuality and experiences of coming to an asexual identity (2013). In close contact with the asexual community, Chasin’s research is situated within pathologizing discourse from psychologists of sexuality and feminist efforts to counter and undo such marginalizing theory. The aim of the article is to draw attention from an academic perspective to the already prolific activist politics of asexuality associated with ‘the radical potential’. Chasin’s approach is leveraging different modes of accessing ‘real’ or essential asexuality. Chasin’s work underlines the tension between satisfaction, dissatisfaction, acceptance and rejoice in defying the pathologizing concept of hypoactive sexual desire. In Chasin’s words, the radical approach of “[asexual] politics and existence” is to normalize not being interested in sex and interactions of sexual nature (2013, 421), a proclamation echoed already by Johnson in the right to be asexual (Johnson 1977).

In “Radical Identity Politics**:** Asexuality and Contemporary Articulations of Identity” Erica Chu articulates a “radical identity politics” that they associate with asexuality that belongs to the groups of political activisms that fight oppression on the basis of identity (2014). Deepening the interaction between queer and feminist studies, Chu is writing towards “an asexual-focused critique of the LGBQ movement” (2014, 83). They are problematizing the perception of radical sexual politics as one associated with overt sexual behavior which would render asexual radical politics not radical but conservative (Chu 2014, 84). Chu’s arguing instead for a radical asexuality that is founded upon asexuality’s approach to rethinking identity and subjectivation. I use this implication in my formulation of the radical negativity endogenous to asexuality. Asexuality’s greatest contribution to feminist and queer theory, and theoretical work in general, is its capacity for “a new theoretical vocabulary to

discourse on sexuality" (Chu 2014, 89). Articulating asexuality, or what I call speaking asexuality, claiming an identity that becomes recognizable as an asexuality, "the mere process of explaining what asexuality is" is what "radically alters the vocabulary necessary for talking about eroticism, sexuality, or sexual orientations" (Chu 2014, 89). Asexuality in its becoming then exposes bare the construction of sexusociety, for it becomes intelligible as such only through the visibility of sexu(al)normativity.

2.2 The history of queer negativity

The work of queer theorist Michael Warner *Fear of a queer planet: queer politics and social theory* (Warner and Social Text Collective 1993) referenced in Cerankowski and Milks (2010, 661) is often cited with crediting the meaning of queer politics and queer theory. "What do queers want?" is the opening of his book which sets queer theory within the field of critical theory articulating the struggles at the time, of our time (1993, vii). Warner is bringing together queer theorizing with feminist theory through the ways in which both articulate intersectional sites of oppression and use gender, sexuality and identity as analytical tools (1993, xiii–xiv). To be queer then is to be critical, opening up sites of political and social intersections of oppression.

Thus far many theorists of asexuality articulated a form of oppression in relation to asexuality. Early writers of asexuality, Johnson (1977) and Rothblum and Brehony (1993), working before asexuality was formally conceptualized in sexuality discourse by Bogaert (2004), had used oppression as a guiding principle in the legibility of asexuality. They had used accounts of sexual subjects, mostly women and lesbians, who expressed a stigmatization because of their behavior and preferences which were found to be in deviance to (sexual) normativity. The will of their subjects was for their lifestyles to be recognized , to be granted a right to being asexual, a right to asexuality.

Bogaert (2004), and earlier Storms (1980), positioned asexuality as one of the sexual orientations together with homosexuality, heterosexuality and bisexuality. In the research of Cerankowski and Milks, some asexual subjects identify with a queer lifestyle while others do not, and the authors themselves refrain from providing a definite answer (2010, 659–60). This leaves asexuality at the point of tension at the definition of queerness. According to Chu, the very definition of asexuality challenges the norms associated with sexual normativity and queerness (Chu 2014, 89). Constantly in questioning, asexuality is hence profoundly *queer*.

Negativity, as a form of resistance and oppression, has long informed queer existence, politics and theory. Most common approaches to queer theorizing of negativity begin by Leo Bersani's antirelational theory of sexuality (Bersani 1995); Lee Edelman's anti-futurity which has been criticized extensively for being racially blind (Edelman 2004); the now classic Muñozian queer negativity, an intersectional queer of color investment with utopia (Muñoz 2009); and Judith Halberstam's queer art of failure (Halberstam 2011). None of these abovementioned theories however are conclusive to the intervention asexuality is doing to sexunormativity.

Bersani's publication *Homos* (1995) was a landmark in queer theorizing with establishing the antirelational antisocial queer theory. Writing during the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States, Bersani was committed to exposing the bareness of gay and queer sexual life and the sexual vigor and deviance they stood for, against the horror unleashed by heteronormativity in response (or precisely the lack of response) to the epidemic. His vision for queerness, which he calls "homo-ness", stands for "a redefinition of sociality so radical that it may appear to require a provisional withdrawal from relationality itself" (Bersani 1995, 7). His writing is countering the thread in queer theory at the time working for gay community and gay

emancipation, as pivoted by the fight for gay marriage. Instead of the emancipatory project of a homosexuality (and one can read asexuality) being recognized as one of a sexuality, Bersani was interested in the rawness in the being on the opposite end of desirable. His work (see also Bersani 1987) invests in the negative as a source of conditioning and pleasure, theorizing a non-community that homo-ness represents.

In one of his most important works “Is the Rectum a Grave?”, Bersani opens his text with the provocative “[t]here is a big secret about sex: most people don’t like it” (1987, 197). With this bold claim he says that his intention was to underscore that most probably there never has been a sexual behavior poll that asked its participants if they like sex. Even through Kinsey’s Reports commenced a prolific field of inquiry into sexual behavior the assumption that everybody likes sex had always been taken for granted unquestioned. Furthermore, Bersani argues that among both sex-positive and sex-condemning audiences, there is an extent of “*aversion*” to sex (1987, 198). Regardless of whether sex is criticized for being violent to women or if it is celebrated for its subversive politics for emancipation, there is the undeniable need to reimagine sex, to *displace* it from its original meaning (“Displacement is endemic to sexuality.” Bersani 1987, 221). This Bersani terms the “redemptive reinvention of sex” (1987, 215) and underlines that its cause is the inherent, endemic *aversion* to sex—the not liking it. With his argument for the aversion endogenous to sex, Bresani reaffirms a negativity always already there within sex and sexuality. In his theorizing of the rectum as a grave he articulates the significatory power of anal penetration to “bury” the self and the masculine ideal (Bersani 1987, 222). His rectum is a grave to everything toxic masculinity and phallocentrism symbolizes. The closest Bersani comes to asexuality theory is in the shared postulation of *a displacement* within the relationship (theorized as “aversion” in his case) subjects have with sex and sexuality. His indulgence with

negativity however proceeds in the particular non-communal antirelational direction that he is famous for, and with which the asexual community bares little to no resemblance. The development of the negativity endogenous to asexuality, on the other hand, is to unsettle and emphasize the displacement within sexuality, sex and subjectivation.

Continuing Bersani's investment with the antirelational refusal of sociability by queerness, Lee Edelman formulated his queer theory (2004) around a refusal of futurity altogether. He read futurity as represented by assimilation into (hetero)normativity, what he calls "reproductive futurism", and thus marriage and parenthood. His vision was for a queerness that is "queerest" in the "willingness to insist intransitively—to insist that the future stop here" (Edelman 2004, 31). He articulates the antisocial theoretical project as the "negativity of a jouissance" (Edelman 2004, 45). His investment with queer negativity is one of a continuous rebellion against normativity to the point that it denounces any relationship to linearity and hence futurity.

Edelman's work nonetheless landed a fierce critique for its lack of an intersectional race, class and gender analysis. Queer of color and crip queer critique have been vocal about how for queer kids of color and disabled queers, futurity was never granted (see for example Muñoz 2009; Halberstam 2011; Kafer 2013). Edelman's work was criticized for representing a potentiality granted only to socially mobile, white, gay men. To everyone else, his project remains unfathomable, and a refusal of a futurity that was never there impossible.

Perhaps the most notable scholar of queer negativity today is José Esteban Muñoz with the publication of his book *Cruising utopia: the then and there of queer futurity* (2009). Responding to his predecessors, he proclaimed that "queerness is not

yet here", it is a "think[ing] and feel[ing] a *then and there* […] a doing for and toward the future" (Muñoz 2009, 1). His project for queerness was to vacate "the here and now of straight time for a then and there that might be queer futurity" (Muñoz 2009, 185). For Muñoz, queer negativity still maintains a potentiality within albeit a utopian one. Muñoz's writing was inspired by the queer of color drag and performance scene (see also Muñoz 1999), and his queer theory was profoundly a queer of color theory with a strong focus on class and race. Through his theorizing of queer utopia, Muñoz gained recognition for investing in the project of "queer temporality" which was developed further by his successor Kara Keeling bringing it together with Afrofuturist (queer) temporality (see Keeling 2019).

For the purpose of my research is particularly relevant Muñoz's reflection on (radical) negativity. In response to the antirelational queer theory he proposes instead a "radical negativity" that offers a starkly different mode of understanding negativity from the negativity proposed by the queer antirelationists: the negative for Muñoz becomes the resource for queer *utopianism* (Muñoz 2009, 14). Negativity and queer utopianism are intrinsically related in his work, queer negativity is queer utopianism, queer futurity, and queer temporality. The negativity endogenous to asexuality is through Muñoz's theory the potentiality within asexuality to rethink the vocabulary of sexuality and sex despite insisting on their negation. Nonetheless there remains a distinction between the project for queer utopianism and asexuality. Muñozian queer negativity is profoundly a "hopeless hopefulness" (Muñoz 2009, 183), and while it is a hopefulness that is generative that circulates within asexual spaces, asexual negativity is in no figuration a *hopeless* one. Much more applicable to asexuality is instead the direction Muñoz discloses towards the theory of radical negativity proposed by Shoshana Felman—a radical negativity that belongs to *scandal* (see Felman 2003; in

Muñoz 2009, 13). And it is in Felman's work in particular that I find the potential to capture a radical negativity that belongs to asexuality.

Felman's publication *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J. L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages* (2003) ties together Austinian speech-act-theory with Don Juan's seductive erotics of speaking. Analyzing the literary text on *Don Juan*, Felman articulates a 'scandalous' concept at the heart of speech (and speaking). What comprises the scandal is precisely "the untenable", the act of promising and its impossibility (Felman 2003, 111). Felman's theory of the performative linguistics and its potential for scandal deals with the "*doing*" of words or what she identifies as a "seduction" (2003, 48). She finds seduction in the act of promising, or what Muñoz would refer to as the potentiality. What I find particularly intriguing is the extent to which the scandal of asexuality belongs to its utterance, to laying the claim 'I am asexual'. Since asexuality is an identity formulated through absence, the act of speaking out is particularly relevant for its 'discovery'. Through Felman's work I emphasize the centrality of speech in the discourse of asexual visibility and subjectivation.

Felman defines the radical negativity which belongs to scandal, the scandal of the nonopposition of the positive and the negative, normality and its outside (2003, 102–5). Radical negativity is "fundamentally fecund and affirmative" (Felman 2003, 104) alike the generative queer utopianism of Muñoz. And unlike Muñoz's theory, Felman's radical negativity is "*that which escapes the positive/negative alternative*" (Felman 2003, 104). Muñozian negativity, on the other hand, very clearly distinguishes itself from positivity and aligns exclusively with the potentiality within negativity. The positionality of queerness in always an opposition to heteronormativity forecloses any possibility for queerness to disidentify with heteronormativity. Asexuality, however,

embodies a different potential within its particular asexually endogenous negativity that is more accurately captured by Felman's narrative of a radical negativity. Because of what "history cannot assimilate", the negativity embodied by asexuality of the displacement within sex/uality and subjectivation "splinters the very structure of the negative/positive alternative" (Felman 2003, 105). Through Felman's analysis of the indispensability between negative and non-negative (non)opposition, I argue the possibility of sexuality within sexusociety. How asexuality becomes visible within sexusociety is indeed a scandal that asexuality as such is produced within. Arguing across Felman's radical negativity and the material reality of sexusociety and pharmaco-pornographic politics, I discuss the negativity that is endogenous to asexuality that belongs to queer negativity, but is a negativity otherwise.

3 The negativity endogenous to asexuality

This chapter presents an analysis of the context informing the emergence of asexuality in academic literature concurrently to the popularization of the asexual social movement. Main analytical focus is to examine how and why asexuality emerged in the particular form and definition that it became recognizable by in contemporary academia and the public. I particularly use the term “emergence” since in the history of asexuality the developments in discourse, activism and community organizing mark the early 2000s as the beginning of the contemporary notion of an asexual person as “a person who does not experience sexual attraction” (AVEN 2001b). This most commonly accepted and circulated definition of asexuality is the main subject of my research since it underlines a concept of negativity endogenous to the formulation of asexuality. In this chapter I examine how and why the negative assumption has been made endogenous to asexuality at its epistemological construction. I am hence looking at the academic context surrounding the area of human sexuality studies that first began studying asexuality which gradually became its own area of asexuality studies. The very first empirical research on asexuality (Bogaert 2004) was particularly influential in popularizing asexuality within academia and it was inspired by the visibility of the asexual movement and organizing. The asexual movement furthermore shared the affirmation by academic inquiry resulting into a collective production of the definition of asexuality. The focus on the experience of not feeling sexual attraction was popularized within asexuality organizing but derives from and thrives within academic discourse on human sexuality. In human sexuality studies, a person is postulated to be attracted to a particular gender.

Asexuality emerged to destabilize this concept of compulsory coupling and mandatory sexual attraction.

3.1 The emergence of asexuality

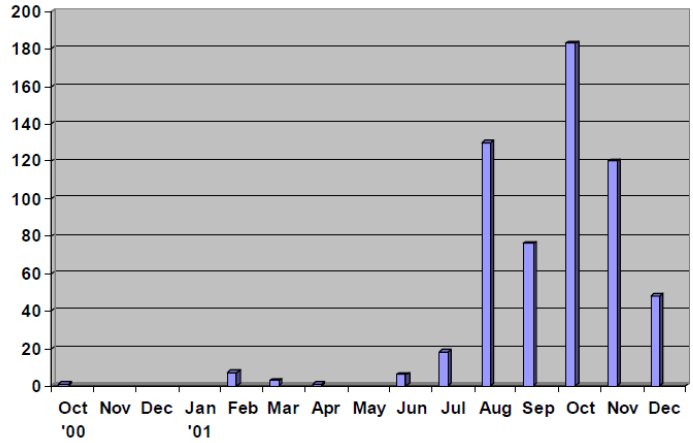


Figure 1: "The sudden emergence of asexuality on the internet" (Jay 2003, 5).

The contemporary concept of asexuality emerged in public discourse, community organizing and academic inquiry in the early 2000s. The term 'asexual' had been used previously, albeit in a discriminatory and derogatory manner, to denominate a person who has no interest in sexual intercourse and sexual contact. 'Asexual reproduction' is a technical term stemming from genetics that refers to a type of cell division and is used exclusively in cell biology and reproductive systems. It was the notion of asexuality as a non-pathologizing and non-distressing human sexuality that gained frequency in the 2000s.

In *Figure 1: "The sudden emergence of asexuality on the internet"* a data analysis tool recorded the mentions of "asexuality" on the internet during the crucial 2000s (Jay 2003, 5). Asexuality, quite visibly, peaked as a trending term online in the summer of 2001. At approximately the same time David Jay launched the Asexuality Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) a forum and a meeting point for people who identify with asexuality (AVEN 2001b). The goal of the project was to "create[e] public

acceptance and discussion of asexuality and facilitat[e] the growth of an asexual community" (AVEN 2001a). Today AVEN is the largest community network worldwide with information on asexuality and a focal meeting point for asexual-identifying individuals and allies. Prior to AVEN, there were other much smaller online groups and instances when people would publicly express not feeling sexually attracted to neither men nor women, but they were isolated and lacking a larger coherent network (Hinderliter 2009a). There were also few articles written by feminist and scholars of sexuality that analyzed the accounts of women and lesbians that lived content and fulfilled non-sexual lives (Johnson 1977; Rothblum and Brehony 1993). But it was the surge and scale of the internet, and the partial anonymity it granted, that provided the right conditions for the formation of the community that began the asexuality movement (Scherrer 2008).

Early discussions in the asexual community involved the definition of asexuality—what asexuality really is—the relationship asexuality has to sexuality, and its prominence as a sexual orientation alongside the usual and insufficient choices of homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality. In the beginning not everyone knew what it meant being asexual, but they felt drawn to the term and the potential it presents to have. Until today still most of the posts on AVEN are of people joining in and narrating their story coupled with the question "am I asexual?". Some of the definitions include "not being sexual" and the more popular "not feeling sexual attraction". The concept of sexual attraction was developed from the other sexual orientations i.e. being attracted to the same or the opposite gender or both. But what asexuals shared in common was the feeling that neither of the already existing labels fit. Hence asexuality populated the place of a sexual orientation and an identity.

In the article “Coming to an Asexual Identity: Negotiating Identity, Negotiating Desire”, Kristin Scherrer examined the formulation of asexuality as an identity during the first years of the movement (2008). She undertook an online survey of individuals who identify with asexuality following existing discourse in sexuality studies on the topic of sexuality and identity politics. The conceptualization of asexuality as an identity is particularly relevant to the formation of the asexual community separately from pathologizing discourse. Asexuality, or more accurately an asexual behavior (i.e. low interest in sex), was stigmatized as a disease in the psychiatric context of sexual behavior and pathology. Scherrer was interested in interrogating the circumstances behind the process to which her participants came to recognize themselves as asexual.

Prior to Scherrer, Bogaert in his pioneering work on asexuality argued against the medical diagnosis of the Sexual Aversion Disorder and Hyposexual Desire Disorder and defended the existence of asexuality as a non-pathological form of being (Bogaert 2008). In his original study, which was the first empirical study on asexuality done in history, he affirmed asexuality as “the *absence* of a traditional sexual orientation, in which an individual would exhibit little or no sexual attraction to males or females” (Bogaert 2004, 279). He took asexuality to signify “the state” (Bogaert 2004, 279) in which his participants marked in the survey that they “have never felt sexually attracted to anyone at all” (Bogaert 2004, 281). His motivation was as withstanding as to quantify the percentage of asexuality in the general population thus affirming the common occurrence of asexuality. In fact, his results matched the percentage of homosexuality that appeared in his survey (Bogaert 2004, 282). His incentive as a psychologist of human sexuality was to draw attention and give voice to the sizeable minority which was at the time starting a social movement alike the gay

rights movement of the previous decades (Bogaert 2006, 247). Even though his research did not necessarily include participants that identify with asexuality, his discussion demonstrates a broad and complex understanding of what asexuality could be. His analysis draws particular attention to the formulation of sexual identities and the difference between sexual attraction and sexual behavior:

> "Note that the definition of asexuality here concerns a lack of sexual attraction to either sex and not necessarily a lack of sexual behavior with either sex or self-identification as an asexual." (Bogaert 2004, 279)

Scherrer's article, on the other hand, focused particularly on the identification with asexuality—what I term *"becoming asexual"*. Analyzing the rising minority of the asexuality movement that inspired Bogaert's study, she underlined previous findings that the community behind the movement had to a large extent developed online (Scherrer 2008, 622). At the time the community formed there was a surge of internet forums, various forms of social media and other virtual communication platforms which enabled users to exchange experiences and connect with others alike across the globe. Social media and the anonymity of the internet were already known to provide a functional safe-space for marginalized groups—and in particular sexual minorities (Scherrer 2008, 624). Taking into account the contested relationship between medicalization and homosexuality, asexuality shared more than one element with other queer sexual and gender identities (Scherrer 2008, 623). Her findings reveal how the definition for asexuality is closely linked to the strong influence of AVEN, but nonetheless there remains no single uniform version for an asexual identity shared by every single one of the participants in her study (Scherrer 2008, 626). Instead, Scherrer uncovers a landscape of meanings penetrating the definitions of sex, desire, relationships and intimacy that all inform an asexual becoming.

There are two particular conclusions that Scherrer makes about the process of becoming asexual that I would like to pay special attention to: the problematization of the sexual and nonsexual and the role of language in the formation of an asexual identity. Scherrer highlights that in her observation it was particularly important for her participants to consolidate a certain relationship of sexual and nonsexual behavior and desire. Emphasis was thus given by her participants on "defining the boundaries between physical affection and sexual interactions" (Scherrer 2008, 627). A lot of asexuals would refrain from some behaviors and desires while preferring others. Especially relevant intersection is the issue of masturbation, or solo sex, and this has been already addressed in Bogaert's earlier study as well, that a lot of asexuals indeed engage in masturbation (Scherrer 2008, 628). Scherrer suggests that on the topic of masturbation asexuals make a particular "disconnection between masturbation and sexuality" (2008, 628). Notwithstanding the individual categorizations of particular activities as sexual and others as not, a key point is that the formation of the asexual identity happens at exactly the making and unmaking of these boundaries, between the sexual and the nonsexual.

The second conclusion by Scherrer that is particularly relevant to my work is the role of language in defining and coming to the asexual identity. Many of her participants in the survey expressed a certain quality of "finding the appropriate language" in coming to their identities (Scherrer 2008, 630). For many asexuals the label 'asexual' gave them the words to express their feelings and relationship to sexuality. As I have previously discussed, in the very early online asexual groups that formed on the internet, participants were drawn to the term without entirely comprehending the meaning of the word 'asexual'. As Hinderliter points out in his historiography of the early asexual community, it was often that participants asked for

an explanation of the term which was then suggested by one of the other participants and then collectively discussed and agreed upon (Hinderliter 2009a). In fact this is still a common feature of AVEN, that participants collectively discuss the definition and the becoming of asexuality. In its very construction AVEN is a forum-type of a web platform that is designed for an exchange of interaction and public discussion. Asexuality emerged within language and with language. In the following section I will now argue into greater detail the particular definition of asexuality and the role of language.

3.2 The definition of asexuality—what for a negativity?

I would like to begin this section with the highly influential research of Bogaert (2004; 2006; 2008; 2012) which established the foundation for the study of asexuality and what today can be named the discipline of asexuality studies. In his very first study "Asexuality: Prevalence and Associated Factors in a National Probability Sample" (2004) which is namely the first empirical research of asexuality, Bogaert uses a very clearly articulated definition of asexuality in the very first sentence of the article:

> "Asexuality, the state of having no sexual attraction for either sex" (Bogaert 2004, 279).

Bogaert emphasizes the particular wording of his definition against the currently existing discourse on the Sexual Aversion Disorder and the Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (HSDD) (2004, 279). In the HSDD diagnosis, which he actually disputes and dismisses in the name of the asexual identity (Bogaert 2008), he highlights the presence of "sexual orientation" against which the diagnosis was established when expectations for sexual activity were not met by one of the members of a couple. Instead, he argues, "[a]sexuality, in contrast, can be defined as the *absence* of a traditional sexual orientation, in which an individual would exhibit little or no sexual attraction to males or females" (Bogaert 2004, 279). Scholarship in sexuality studies

and psychology of human sexuality at the time defined sexual orientation under the model of “sexual attraction” (Bogaert 2006, 242). A sexual orientation, such as homosexuality, bisexuality, heterosexuality, was (and still is) defined as *experiencing* sexual attraction towards a particular gender. The space for asexuality hence opened when individuals, like in the previously discussed early online groups of the asexuality movement, recognized that they are *not* experiencing sexual attraction at all towards any gender.

Bogaert’s close knowledge of the asexual community is also reflected in his later publication in which he specifically defends asexuality as one of the non-heteronormative and heteronormative sexual orientations (Bogaert 2006, 247). He justifies the urgent need of “categorizing asexuality as a unique sexual orientation” to the existence of asexuality as a social movement and a community of individuals who “consider themselves to be unique and as having a separate sexual identity/orientation. (Bogaert 2006, 247). He credits the aim and size of the asexuality movement as “akin to the gay rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s” furthermore bringing asexuality into the focus of non-heteronormative and heteronormative sexual orientations and sexual identities (Bogaert 2006, 247). The use of the definition of an asexual person as a person who “does not experience sexual attraction” is prominent in AVEN’s website as well, and many of the AVEN members are aware of Bogaert’s research and refer often to his contribution to the recognition and visibility of asexuality as an identity and not a pathology. Consequently, a conclusion can be drawn that this prominent definition of asexuality had taken place between the asexual community and research.

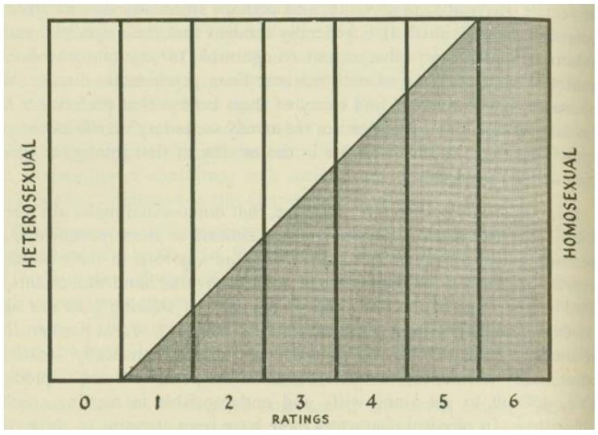
Bogaert himself however reflects a much broader understanding of sexual orientation, attraction and identity, and refers to the chosen definition of asexuality as

practical and necessary for the recognition of asexuality—but also as relatively narrow. He elaborates “the narrowness” of the definition against a much broader and diverse landscape of the perception, experience and enactment of a sexuality (Bogaert 2006, 244). In his opinion the sexual attraction model based solely on the gender of preferred partners is a rather “traditional view” for sexuality and he articulates a more complex understanding of the dimensions of sexual interests and attraction, such as the various power and impact play, Bondage, Discipline, Domination, Submission, Sadism, and Masochism (BDSM) practices (Bogaert 2006, 244). In his writing, asexuality is persistently in opposition to traditional forms of sexual orientation to the extent that even homosexuality and bisexuality are to be understood as normative for their use of sexual attraction towards a particular gender as a defining model for a sexuality. Nonetheless, the definition as narrow as it is it already questions the model for sexual attraction since it presupposes its absence. Its practicability, clarity, and resonance with the definitions of the other sexual orientations, canonized the model for asexuality as *not having sexual attraction* in both theory and activism.

In this definition, which is widely accepted today to (re)present asexuality, I would like to highlight two important steps through which asexuality *becomes* asexuality:

1. not having
2. sexual attraction

It is through thee two points that I formulate the first part of my guiding research question, namely: how and why has a negative assumption been made endogenous to asexuality at its epistemological construction. In the upcoming pages I would be looking at the 'nature' and origin of the negative assumption, what is it and how does it function in the formulation of asexuality. Finally I will be exploring the potential of a negativity that is endogenous to asexuality as an epistemological concept.



Rating | *Description*
0 | *Exclusively heterosexual*
1 | *Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual*
2 | *Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual*
3 | *Equally heterosexual and homosexual*
4 | *Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual*
5 | *Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual*
6 | *Exclusively homosexual*
X | *No socio-sexual contacts or reactions*

Figure 2: Kinsey's Scale (Kinsey Institute 2019), originally published in (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; 1953).

Bogaert in his early research credits the theoretical approach to the definition of asexuality to Alfred C. Kinsey's reports on human sexuality (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; 1953). Kinsey's reports also figure prominently in the asexual community especially in conversations about the origin of asexuality and the recognition of asexuality as a sexual orientation. The Kinsey Institute for research on human sexuality, that Kinsey was originally part of and following his death was named after him in his honor, also funded some of the early research on asexuality following Bogaert's breakthrough findings (e.g. Prause and Graham 2007; Brotto et al. 2010; Brotto and Yule 2011). The Kinsey's Report is famous for the construction of the Kinsey Scale which represented the spectrum of human sexuality (Figure 2).

Kinsey and his colleagues constructed a model of the spectrum of human sexuality as a sliding scale from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual. Most of human kind they propose that actually has a sexuality that is best described at a point somewhere between the two poles of the spectrum. The report was developed through a large scale research project consisted of interviews with individuals about their sexual lives. Findings clearly indicate that human sexuality is not a one-dimensional vector of sexual attraction but rather a spectrum of attractions towards different genders. The scale ranging from zero to six represents the frequency of homosexual and heterosexual attraction and sexual contact that the participants reported in their interviews. Kinsey's Scale was influential in establishing homosexuality and heterosexuality (and consequently bisexuality) as equal variations of human sexuality, neither more 'natural' nor human than the other.

Particularly relevant for the study of asexuality is the "x" that stood beside the scale rating representing a cluster of interviewees who reported "no socio-sexual contacts or reactions". For many asexuals in scholarship and activism, Kinsey's "x" was taken to be the first sign of recognition for asexuality and confirmation of asexuality as non-pathological. Since the "x" figured at equivalent grounds to the homosexuality and heterosexuality indicators, it can be concluded that the authors of the Kinsey's report did not see the lack of sexual contact as an anomaly but rather as complimentary to the spectrum of human sexuality. Even though the Kinsey's Reports rocketed in popularity during the sexual liberation of the 60s and 70s, no particular attention was given to the category of the "x" at that time.

Looking at the Kinsey Scale diagram in Figure 2, I am particularly interested in the qualitative value ascribed to asexuality i.e. the "x". In the spectrum diagram on the left hand-side, homosexuality is represented as an exact equivalent to heterosexuality,

shaking off any criticism of homosexuality as a pathology as early as the 1947 when the first report was published. Heterosexuality and homosexuality mirror each other as two binary opposite sexualities. The position of bisexuality, or pansexuality for the matter, is somewhat more ambiguous as it is implied in the spectrum between the two poles. A bisexual person in the Kinsey Scale would be someone with a combination of the two sexual attractions homo- and hetero-. Asexuality, on the other hand, figures independently, not as a numeric value, a quantity of each of the homo- and heterosexuality, but as neither. It's ascribed value is not a numeric between zero and six, but it is an alphabetic "x" sign. Henceforth, asexuality becomes a category to an extent distinguishable but unmeasurable. It is not in opposition to homosexuality and heterosexuality for they are already each other's mirror images, but it is precisely in their '*nonopposition'*.

I take the concept of *nonopposition* from Shohana Felman's "*radical negativity"* (Felman 2003, 104). Felman in her book *The Scandal of the Speaking Body* theorizes a negativity that is "fundamentally fecund and affirmative, […] *that which escapes the negative/positive alternative*" (2003, 104). Her radical negativity is acutely linguistic and performative, it materializes in the act of speech and the act of speech solely. Her work is developed across J. L. Austin's influential speech act theory (see Austin 1962) and the literary figure of Don Juan. Austin's legacy in studying the performative of speech informs Felman's reading of a 'negativity that belongs to *scandal'*. A radical negativity is hence a quality to be neither of two polar opposites, as presupposed by the function of negation. It is fundamentally that which "splinters the very structure of the negative/positive alternative" (Felman 2003, 105).

Asexuality in its function as “x” in the original Kinsey’s reports is endorsed with a negativity that is neither in opposition to sexuality nor aligned with it. The measurable ambiguity of the “x” testifies to the impossibility of the uniform concept of sexuality. The existence of the “x” and the need to mark the “x” as separate from but concurrently within the structure of sexuality is the product of a particular impartiality of sexuality as a coherent concept. As a regulatory mechanism, sexuality functions to control bodies and pleasures, but the inevitable disposal of the necessary “x” attests to, what I call a *negativity*, that accompanies the impartiality of sexuality. The term asexuality captures the meaning and function of this particular radical negativity that exposes the inconsistency within sexuality.

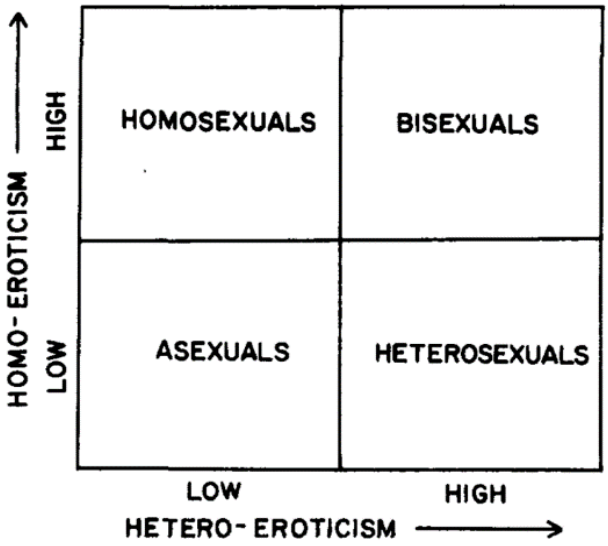


Figure 3: Storm’s adaptation of the Kinsey’s Scale (Storms 1980, 784).

Few decades after the original Kinsey Reports, Michael D. Storms developed an upgraded model of the Kinsey Scale that included asexuality written within the four sexual variations (Figure 3). Storms measured fluctuations of homosexual and heterosexual attraction that were represented in the original scale of six values by Kinsey. He termed these fluctuations as homoeroticism and heteroeroticism and ascribed each a spectrum value of low to high attraction levels. The gesture enhanced the graphical potential of the scale from one-dimensional to two-dimensional

representation of human sexuality. This allowed for bisexuality, for example, to figure at a sovereign standing alongside homosexuality and heterosexuality, and not implied within their opposition as it was the case in the original Kinsey Scale. Nevertheless, this also meant that if bisexuality were given a high coordinate value of both homoeroticism and heteroeroticism, an equivalent position would be liberated for a low coordinate of both homoeroticism and heteroeroticism. This position, which corresponded to Kinsey's original "x", was labeled by Storms as *asexuality*.

Storm's version of asexuality represents visibly a more direct relation to a negativity. Since in his diagram asexuality figures on the coordinates low-low it characterizes a negative value relationship. However, an opposite to asexuality in this diagram would be neither homosexuality nor heterosexuality, but bisexuality. This is perhaps uniquely the sole example of asexuality that is standing in direct relationship to bisexuality. In asexuality organizing and theory, bisexuality figures together with homosexuality and heterosexuality, and never on the same side as asexuality. The acknowledgement of asexuality as the same as bisexuality complicates the relationship of negation that the "a-" in front of "sexuality" in asexuality presupposes. Moreover, it is worth noticing that a certain intensity of eroticism is a representative value of sexual orientation in the diagram. Homosexuality, heterosexuality and bisexuality all feature a high erotic value of either homoeroticism or heteroeroticism or both. Asexuality, on the other hand, features a low value of both homoeroticism and heteroeroticism. Nonetheless, since asexuality is taken to be equally as of a sexual orientation as the other three categories this results in a conflation of the two concepts of sexual orientation and intensity of eroticism. Further questions arise from this positionality of asexuality as to the extent of overlap and exclusivity between eroticism, intensity of eroticism and what constitutes a sexual orientation. Storm's diagram does

not in any way delineate between a cluster of homosexuality, heterosexuality and bisexuality and a separate cluster of asexuality. In the graphical representation it is very clearly implied that there is no greater difference between asexuality and homosexuality than between homosexuality and bisexuality for instance. Within an affirmation of asexuality as a variance of the kind of bisexuality, the prosthetic inscription of the “a-” becomes divorced from an antithetical symbolic value. Asexuality hence maintains an opposition, albeit not in a dichotomous model, but within a larger framework that further complicates the uniform coherency of a sexuality as a whole.

In contrast to the monochrome formulations and representations of asexuality in sexuality studies diagrams in the 60s and 80s, asexuality today is, frankly, a very prolific and colorful cosmos (Figure 4). In the Figure 4 is an illustration of the spectrums of asexuality which are being created and popularized within the asexual community to guide each individual in their particular relationship to asexuality (and sexuality) and the broader context of relationships and pleasures. The colorful illustration is representative of two main characteristics of asexuality today: the creative and welcoming community that encouraged the prioritization of diverse experiences of asexuality, which then resulted in the sheer diversity of the many different asexualities, a fraction of which are depicted in the illustration. Each of the asexualities (and there

are many more) depicted in the figure derive their meaning from a plethora of different variations of the qualitative experience (and non-experience) of sexual attraction.

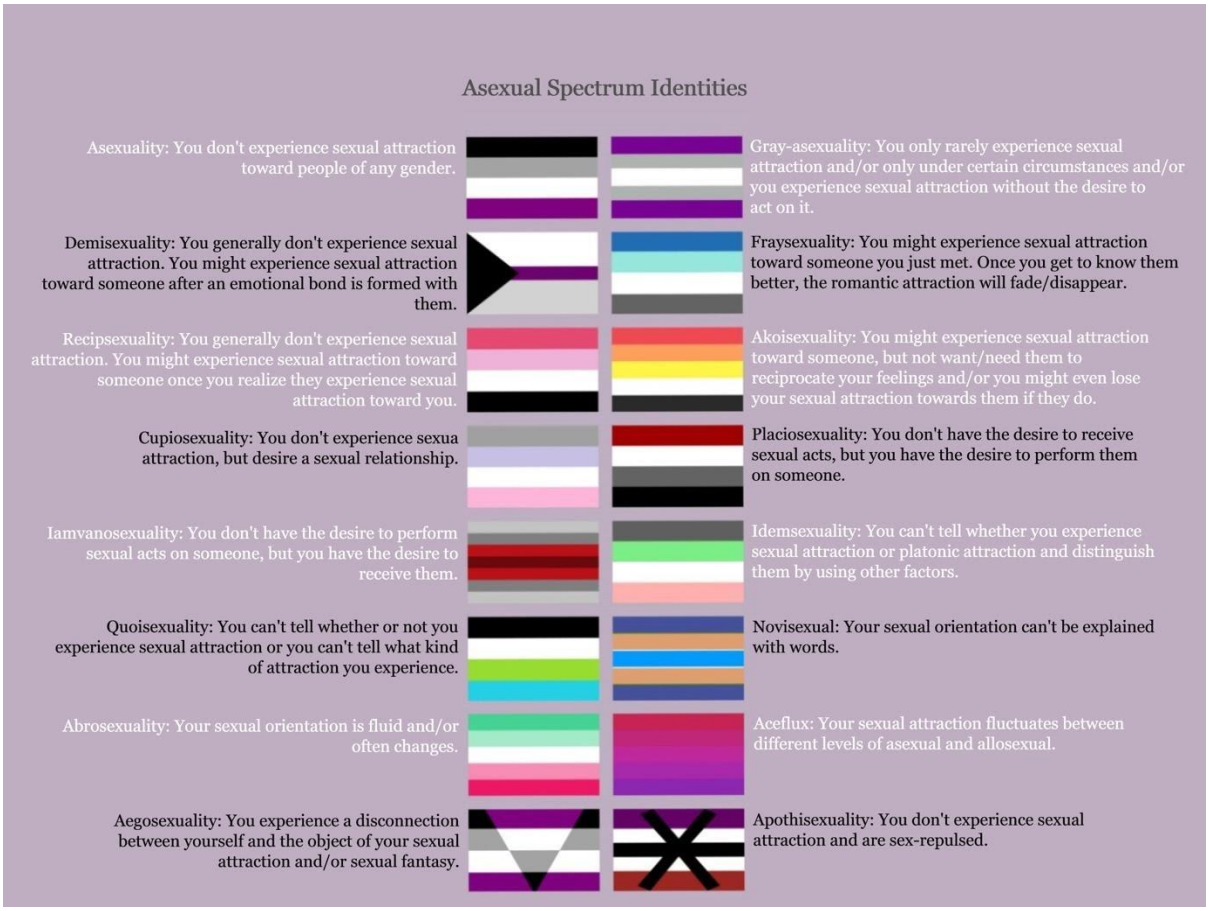


Figure 4: Asexual Spectrum Identities by the Asexual ACES (Awareness, Community, Education & Support) ("Asexual Spectrum Identities" 2020).

The main difference between the early depictions of asexuality by Kinsey and Storms and the community-derived forms of asexuality can be described by a quantitative versus a qualitative experience of sexual attraction. In Kinsey's and Storms' diagrams, asexuality was depicted in a unilateral relationship to not having sexual attraction or potentially low and seldom experience of a sexual attraction. In Figure 4: Asexual Spectrum Identities by the Asexual ACES ("Asexual Spectrum Identities" 2020) many nuances can be observed relating to the contextual circumstances of when and how sexual attraction surfaces or is receding. For example, an apothisexual identifying individual consistently does not experience

sexual attraction and is also sex-repulsed. An aceflux asexual however experiences a changing sexual attraction fluctuating between perceived asexual and non-asexual (allosexual) characteristics. A recipsexual might experience sexual attraction but only in the circumstance they realize someone else is mutually sexually attracted to them. And a fraysexual person experiences sexual attraction only to the extent their object of desire is not an acquaintance. In the cases of recipsexuality and fraysexuality the resurfacing and decline of sexual attraction is depended on the particular relationship with the individual the asexual is attracted to. Already from these four examples it can be observed that low sexual attraction is not a constant but rather a fluctuating and changing experience with time.

Further examples of asexualities denominate differences in sexual behavior, sexual fantasy, desires and relationships. Placiosexuals and iamvanosexuals differentiate between sexual attraction and sexual behavior and their definitions change based on whether one is willing to perform or receive sexual acts. Cupiosexuals identify a desire for a sexual relationship, and aegosexuals distinguish a disconnection between themselves and their objects of a sexual fantasy. And novisexuals clearly articulate that their sexual orientation simply cannot be verbally described. There exist also many other types of asexualities which delineate different kinds of attraction, not only sexual but also romantic, platonic, aesthetic, sensual, etc., and identify the fluctuations in experiencing them (or not). Labeling a not-experience in asexuality is also often accompanied by an explanation on the reflection of the exploration of the different ways in which (and how) the not-experience can be verbalized. This is another unique feature of the negativity endogenous to asexuality which never forecloses a negation but converts it into another form through an inquiry of how and why the negation became a negation. In the cosmos of asexualities is also

included the notion of the *allosexual* i.e. the not asexual. In asexuality discourse and the asexual community, the term allosexual has been used to label and identify the differences of experiencing sexuality and relating to the sexual world in the case of asexuals and non-asexuals. The term allosexual has been created to replace for non-asexual. The substitution of 'allo-' for 'non' complicates the antithetical dichotomy between sexuality and asexuality and emphasizes the nonoppositionality of the two. Overall, the plural diversity of *asexualities* discloses a complex landscape of sexual desire, fantasy, behavior, needs and expectations, relationships, potential partners, and of course attractions, that inform one's asexuality. The larger narratives and patterns of inquiry gravitate around concepts of pleasure and non-pleasure, feeling and not-feeling, an acquaintance or stranger, etc. Each cluster reveals a dichotomy (e.g experiencing and not-experiencing) that is used to qualitatively analyze the sensation (i.e. the affect) that the identity label is trying to capture. Verbalization and an exhaustive exploration of the understanding of the individual's desires, needs and pleasures, categorize the contemporary approach to describing the notion of sexuality as the pursuit of satisfying and consensual relationships with others.

Keeping the diversity of asexualities in mind, what can be said about the negativity endogenous to asexuality, what has become of it through each of these examples? In Kinsey's and Storm's diagrams (Figure 2 and 3) was reflected a negative positioning of asexuality. In Kinsey's version, asexuality was featured as an 'x' that belongs within but partially outside sexuality. It is a visible 'x', but it is a 'x' of a marker that refers to the impossibility of sexuality, an impossibility that is always already there within sexuality. In Storm's diagram lies a more direct association of asexuality with sexuality. Asexuality is there, an equivalent to homosexuality and bisexuality, but it inhabits a low-low decreasing value of a sexuality ceasing to be. In both versions there

is a negativity with(in) asexuality, a negativity formulated to be *endogenous* to asexuality. I refrain from referring to this negativity as a lack, for the concept of lack bears a genealogy in psychoanalytic and feminist theory (see for example the works of Melanie Klein (1994) and Julia Kristeva (1982)). I focus on writing about this negativity as *embodied* by asexuality, as a meaning that asexuality carries across theory. The colorful variations of asexualities, in Figure 4, in always plural form albeit the 1.05%, are a productive visibility of asexuality. The negativity endogenous to asexuality contributed to a prolific world-making project of many other negativities. In the different layers, forms and colors of asexualities, a negativity can be traced and labeled. In the flags of many asexualties negativity is profiled as an affectively *embodying* concept. The negativity embodied by asexuality gave rise to pleasures and sensations of the body (and the mind), attractions and significations, that were formulated in words by asexuals. The world of asexualities is a rallying "presence concealed as an absence" (Sumi Colligan quoted in Kim 2011, 487).

In *Cruising utopia: the then and there of queer futurity* José Esteban Muñoz writes about the project of queer futurity otherwise, "a potentiality in negative affects that can be reshaped by negation and made to work in the service of enacting a mode of critical possibility" (2009, 13). His project for queer futurity derives from the potential for radical negativity within queerness that he develops into a particular "queer utopianism" (2009, 14), which he gained praise for across the disciplines of queer theory and cultural studies. Muñoz locates a particular "something else" that he credits to Felman's work on radical negativity transforming previous discourse on queer antirelationality into a presence within an absence. Muñoz nonetheless never wrote about asexuality. Asexuality furthermore maintains a tense relationship with queerness, for queerness is already within sexuality, but asexuality is of something

that unsettles the very sexual in itself. I write in more detail in the next chapter about the troubled relationship between asexuality, the sexual and the nonsexual, for now I would like to focus on the project of radical negativity endogenous to asexuality.

Taking one step back from Muñoz's discussion of queer negativity and reading asexuality through Felman's work, not only the early narratives of asexuality capture a radical negativity endogenous to asexuality, but also the landscape of the many asexualities do so likewise. Focusing on the centrality of the linguistic within asexuality, the performativity of language had an unequivocal role in the becoming of asexuality and the becoming asexual. Looking at the two diagrams of Kinsey and Storms and the figure of the novisexual, asexuality surfaces and recedes within and out of language. In the very first image in Figure 1, asexuality quite literally 'emerged' in public discourse. Often asexuality can be presented as "discovered", and in the upcoming chapter I focus on the particularity of a discovery of a sexuality and the function this has in processes of subjectivation. In the previous section I underlined how for many members of the asexual community, finding the words to describe their (a)sexuality was central in their subjectivation as asexuals. The myriad forms of asexualities provide exactly the vocabulary and the language necessary for claiming an asexuality.

From an absence of sexual attraction, asexuality as a material-discursive project embodied a negativity which is essential and endogenous to its existence as asexuality. Asexuality is legible only insofar as it is attached to this negativity. The many asexualities modify and transform this negativity, tracing presences into absences and moving bodies, affections, objects and relations. The multiple becomings embodied by each of the asexualities are each a method of undoing, and what Felman calls "splintering" the very structure of a positive and negative. Because in the case of asexualties, the negativity is never really one in opposition to a positive,

but it is many different negativities each and every one engulfing what the positive used to represent. This negativity is hence neither positive nor negative, it is rather a negativity that is legitimate and recognizable on its own, and primarily through language. Felman terms this process the "*performative* dimension of a thought" which made history particularly out of the theory itself (2003, 105–6). The negativity endogenous to asexuality is hence a perversion of sorts, a perverse method of doing and undoing sexuality otherwise while continuously insisting on its visibility, existence and nonopposition.

4 Problematizing the sexual and the nonsexual

Asexuality has the capacity to analytically examine and delineate between sex and sexuality, the sexual and the nonsexual. A very common experience shared by all asexuals, and at times a definition for asexuality, is a particular *disconnection* with sex. Asexuals are often quoted for remarking how they do not comprehend sex nor know how to do it nor what it really is. Ontological inquiry is a constitutive process of becoming asexual. Questioning sex, and sexuality, highlights the displacement stipulated between sex and sexuality, illuminated by the negativity endogenous to asexuality, the negatively situated asexuality to sexuality. Asexual discourse hence reveals a conflation of sex and sexuality and an assumed separation between the sexual and the nonsexual.

In this chapter I am looking at different theories of sexuality to understand the displacement between sex, sexuality and subjectivity. Guiding research question for this section is to interrogate *how* sex functions within the (non)sexual world. I therefore first begin with the seminal *The History of Sexuality* by Michael Foucault (1988b) tracing the boundaries and definitions of sex and sexuality in his work. I will be particularly looking at sections of his theory that separate between the meanings and functions of sex and sexuality. I then proceed with Paul B. Preciado's (2008; 2013) contemporary theory of sexuality developed from Foucault's work to unpack the problematization between the sexual and the nonsexual world. Finally, I will introduce the concept of "essentially asexual" coined by Kristin Scherrer (2008) to analyze essentializing and naturalizing sexunormative discourse (Przybylo 2011; Rubin 2011).

4.1 What is sex, actually?

> "Now it is precisely this idea of sex *in itself* that we cannot accept without examination." (Foucault 1988b, 152)

Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* laid the ground work for all future writing in the theory of sexuality and queer studies. Nevertheless, his work features only peripherally within writing on asexuality. My attempt is to analyze how in fact his contribution creates a space for asexuality. My aim is to show how Foucault's luminous work on sex and sexuality is already accounting for asexuality long before the asexual movement took place. His attention to the difference between sex and sexuality and his aim to scrutinize what sex represents and how sex circulates in modern societies opens an opportunity for prolific interaction with asexual theory.

Foucault's work came out during the times when technology and modernity were seizing over the present and were evermore codified into the public consciousness. Sex and sexuality were at the fold that was opening between modernity and history. Tracing the development of sexual behavior and sexual culture, Foucault analyzed the secrecy surrounding sexual practices, both in pre-modernity and in modern times. His famous conclusion predicated that sex was commonly (and mistakenly) believed to be *repressed*. The compulsion to liberate sex and sexuality was the groundwork for his "repressive hypothesis" (see Foucault 1988b, 10). The modern man belonged to the public, but sex only to the depths of his bedroom.

Sexuality in Foucauldian theory figures as the central pillar of the regime he terms power-knowledge-sexuality:

> "Sexuality is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp […] [but] the formation of special knowledges (Foucault 1988b, 106–7).

Sexuality is but a technology of power. Power for Foucault is productive, it produces subjects. Through technologies of regulation and control, such as sexuality, individuals become viable subjects of power, to be oppressed, discriminated, marginalized. Subjects of sexuality, as well as subjects of any power-knowledge relationship, firmly believe that they are repressed and direct all their efforts towards liberating themselves from that condition. Sexuality, and sex, hence, as a function of power construct their subjects in a "negative relation" (Foucault 1988b, 83).

The negativity, the negative relation, postulated by Foucault functions differently than the negativity endogenous to asexuality albeit conditioning (and opening) the possibility for asexuality. The negative relation is directly expressed in the notion of oppression in sexuality. Foucault's special analytical focus was the concealment, denial and masking of one's sexuality as a sexual subject. Nonetheless, what a concealment always presupposes is that underneath what is originally concealed *there is something to be discovered*. A discovery of one's sexual identity, a 'coming out'. The discovery that such a *thing* called sexuality exists is exactly one of the technologies of subjectivation of the power-knowledge-sexuality regime. The naming of asexuality in its negative form happens precisely because of the compulsion to discover.

Naming the asexual thus becomes the point at which sexuality comes to being as a technology of subjectivation. The formulation of the concept of asexuality is not because of its negative relationship to sexuality, as a-sexuality, but because of its definition which is founded upon an absence. Going back to the definition "not feeling" + "sexual attraction", claiming an asexuality requires an identification with the absence of a sexual attraction. A self-identified asexual would thus ground their identity on the basis of a qualitative *non-experience*, by not-experiencing sexual attraction. Notably

though “not experience” is not the same as “not having” and there has not been any discourse that relates sexuality as “having had”. The greatest challenge in my autoethnographic experience of acknowledging my own asexuality was to identify with something that was for me incomprehensible and inconceivable. I did not know what the “sexual attraction” was that I was supposed to not-identify with. Naming asexuality was hence representative of opening a void.

To understand the compulsion to come out, even to come out as—bizarrely—asexual, it is necessary to look at Preciado’s work on subjectivation and sexuality. Continuing Foucault’s observations on the technologies of power-knowledge-sexuality, Preciado analyzes the “bio-molecular (pharmaco) and semiotic-technical (pornographic) government of sexual subjectivity” (Preciado 2008, 108). Writing from a discursive-material perspective, Preciado’s analysis is focused on the material ways in which sexual subjects perceive, experience and enact their sexuality. His work consists of reviewing the assemblage of biomedical and pharmaceutical technologies regulating sexual behavior. Analyzing the emergence of different technologies such as hormone treatments, sex toys and pornography, Preciado captures the technological fleshiness of power-knowledge-sexuality. His landscape of pharmaco-pornographic technologies sheds light to the material interactions—material reality—that make the ecology of a sexuality in a technical subjectivation:

> “it is glued, it is cut, it is displaceable, it is named, it is imitated, it is swallowed, it is injected, it is grafted, it is digitalized, it is copied, it is designed, it is bought, it is sold, it is modified, it is mortgaged, it is transferred, it is downloaded, it is applied, it is transcribed, it is falsified, it is executed, it is certified, it is exchanged, it is dosed, it is provided, it is extracted, it shrinks, it is subtracted, it is denied, it is renounced, it is betrayed, it mutates.” (Preciado 2008, 111)

The regulating regime of sexuality produces subjects whose embodiment is materialized through the enactment of a sexuality. Preciado firmly asserts that

pharmaco-pornographic politics does not produce things nor objects, but that its "business is the *invention of a subject* and then its global reproduction" (Preciado 2008, 108). The landscape of pharmaco-pornographic technologies he captures characterizes the technologies of the production and reproduction of subjects. Subjected to the technologies of subjectivation, the modern individuals become to recognize themselves and their bodies as fundamentally:

> "an individual=a body=a sex= a gender= a sexuality"
>
> (Preciado 2008, 112).

It is the discovery of *"a"* sexual identity that is the ultimate product of the pharmaco-pornographic regime. The very idea that there *IS* a sexual identity to be discovered is what enabled the emergence of asexuality as an identifiable and delimited sexual orientation. Asexuality in itself does not function outside the politics of discovery of a sexual identity. The negativity endogenous to asexuality is only discoverable through the perverse politics of the technologies of the self which necessitate an identification with the "not" (having)—the void wide open.

Going back to the very first question: what is sex, if sexuality is a technology of power, and what is the role of sex in the process of subjectivation? In the writing of Foucault I would like to draw a focus to the passages in which he differentiates between the terms sex and sexuality. Throughout his longer writing he uses the terms sex and sexuality interchangeably, but on few pages he delineates very clearly between the two, opening the gap that I see belonging to asexuality. What is sex:

> "the notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning, a secret to be discovered everywhere: sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signified." (Foucault 1988b, 154)

To use a ‘notion’ of sex is a particularly useful approach to describing the ‘nature’ of sex. Since sex is everywhere and anywhere, it is neither a thing, nor an active agent, neither a value, nor a process. Sex is an omnipresent *notion* that is able to function precisely of its use as a unique signifier and a universal signified. Feminist theorist of sexuality Gayle Rubin similarly argues that “[s]exual acts are burdened with an excess of significance” (2011, 149). It is exactly this excess of significance that constitutes the performative effect and power of sex. Sex is simultaneously universalizing as it is a universal notion, and it is exactly this universal of sex that is the subject of asexuality.

The omnipresence of sex has been theorized in asexuality studies under the term “sexusociety” (Przybylo 2011). Leading scholar of asexuality Ela Przybylo coined the term which became one of the founding principles of asexuality studies. In her work she examined the discursive system titled by Foucault as power-knowledge-sexuality. Since Przybylo was writing decades after Foucault, her analytical gaze shifted from modernity to the contemporary sexual world, similarly to the development present in Preciado’s work. She conceptualized the term sexusociety around the notion of the “sexual world”. The sexual world, she argued, embodied for asexuals the ferocity patriarchy holds against feminists and the heteronormativity that oppresses queers (Przybylo 2011, 446). The sexual is thus “an oppressive force” against asexuality and asexuals (Przybylo 2011, 446). Departing from the separation between ‘sexual’ and ‘a world’, Przybylo substituted sexusociety for ‘the sexual world’ to emphasize the omnipresence of sexuality in contemporary society—“sexusociety is everywhere, it is within us, it is us” (Przybylo 2011, 446).

Becoming asexual, and the becoming of asexuality, happen always already in a sexusocial space. Asexuality exists exclusively in relationship to sexusociety. It is

precisely in the continuous work of undoing the “excess of significance” burdening sex and sexual acts (Rubin 2011, 151) that the fictitious unity of sex becomes scrutinized. Foucault had as well discussed the function of sex within sexuality:

> “By creating the imaginary element that is ‘sex,’ the deployment of sexuality established one of its most essential internal operating principles: the desire for sex—the desire to have it, to have access to it, to discover it, to liberate it, to articulate it in discourse, to formulate it in truth. It constructed ‘sex’ itself as something desirable.” (Foucault 1988b, 156)

It is particularly this enforced desire for sex that elucidates asexuality as, frankly, *scandalous*! For what is a greater scandal in a universaly sexual modernity than the thought of not having sex, not engaging with sex, not desiring sex, not articulating sex. But asexuality is not scandalous normatively. It is quietly scandalous. It is scandalous in the way that it will never hold the grasp ‘queer’ has over popular culture—asexuality would never be popular. It is unfathomable that asexuality would become one day a party term. It is exactly in this proposition that sexunormativity is exposed bare, in the impossibility of not doing sex.

Asexuality operates precisely on the separation between sexuality and sex. Not experiencing sexual attraction, asexuals have the privileged position to acknowledge that sexuality does not proceed from sex and sexual behavior. The fact that many asexuals do engage in various partnered and unpartnered sexual acts confirm the assumption that sex does not equal sexuality. Furthermore, the process of becoming asexual presupposes doing the work of continuously asking: *what is sex, actually?* For Foucault sex is but a collective imaginary. For asexuality sex is the nonopposition between the sexual and the nonsexual. It is explicitly in the relationship sex has with sexuality that asexuality becomes visible.

4.2 “Essentially” asexual

Becoming asexual is, as I hope my discussion so far has stressed, a rather puzzling exchange between asexual visibility and subjectivation, shadowed by negativity. During the beginning of the asexuality movement, feminist scholar Kristin Scherrer studied the “coming to an asexual identity” (2008). She surveyed asexual-identifying individuals about their journey to claiming an asexual identity. Major finding from her research was that “[t]he construction of asexual identities problematizes the boundaries between the sexual and the non-sexual” (2008, 629). In the process of coming out as asexual her subjects had to undertake an examination of the boundaries of sex and sexuality, the sexual and the nonsexual.

The act of defining an asexual identity and claiming an asexuality necessitates a delineation of a set of limited social behaviors and interpersonal relationships as sexual or not. Scherrer meticulously observed that the process of identification with asexuality entailed for all of her research participants a process of “defining the boundaries between psychical affection and sexual interactions” (Scherrer 2008, 627). Asexual-identifying individuals have to work through normatively sexual acts and behaviors, such as kissing, cuddling, masturbation, etc. to reconcile with their own desires and needs for intimacy and relationships. Often times asexuals report that a lot of these normatively sexual behaviors are not sexual at all, such as the many asexuals who claim a strong preference for cuddling and holding hands. Nevertheless, becoming asexual always includes a dislocation of sex and sexuality challenging the boundaries of each one.

Asexuality emphasizes the nuances of sexual behavior and sexuality that create the landscape of sexual and nonsexual acts, desires and identities. To this extent, becoming asexual necessitates a position of constant questioning of the very

construction of a sexual identity and a sexuality. Becoming asexual in this sense comes with an analytical capacity of all the functions that make for an attraction, relationship and an identity that inform the definition of sexuality itself. Asexuality problematizes but also “challenges the sexual/non-sexual binary as it explicitly questions how and why certain behaviors are designated as sexual and others as non-sexual” (Scherrer 2008, 629). By disclosing the normative conflation of sex and sexuality and complicating the beginnings and endings of the sexual and the nonsexual, it is asexuality that is a measuring scale for sexuality, not vice versa.

Central to the problematization of the sexual and the nonsexual is the undoing of the normative assumption that sex and sexuality are ‘natural’, fixed, and socially desired. “Sexual essentialism”, a term coined by the influential feminist scholar Gayle Rubin, is “the idea that sex is a natural force that exists prior to social life and shapes institutions” (Gayle Rubin cited in Scherrer 2008, 629). Under sexual essentialism sex follows as a universalizing and a universal notion i.e. signifier and signified. Sex furthermore becomes classified as “a property to individuals” through the disciplines and institutions involved in the dissemination and the study of sex and the sexual, such as for example medicine, psychiatry and in fact academia (Rubin 2011, 146). Sexual attraction as a property to individuals and a signifier for sexuality had been developed through these disciplines and institutions. Under the disguise of measuring sex and sexuality, the concept of sexual attraction had been used for regulatory exercises of the body and its pleasures. Homosexuals and queers had been publicly persecuted for their sexual attraction to the wrong sex, and asexuality has been consequently erased for challenging the notion of sexual attraction itself. By claiming a lack or absence of sexual attraction asexual-identifying individuals undermine the sexual essentialism inherent in the concept of a sexuality.

Counter to the essentializing and universalizing discourse of sex as 'natural', Scherrer discovered in her participants a tendency to describe their identity and their experiences as "*naturally* asexual" (Scherrer 2008, 629). In response to sexual essentialism that argues that sex is primordial, asexuals claim that *not having sex* is likewise primordial. Many of the participants of the survey conducted by Scherrer made a strong claim that they were always "this way" (2008, 629). Even though the nature versus nurture debate has been divisive in the context of homosexuality and other queer identities, naturalizing is a particularly useful tool for asexuality. One of the most common ways to discriminate against asexuality has been to claim that asexuality does not exist. Following sexual essentialism, it is straightforward for sexunormative discourse to affirm a stance in which asexuality is unnatural or impossible to exist. Therefore, a lot of early activism in the asexuality movement had a strong focus on visibility, with the title 'visibility' forming part of AVEN's acronym. To achieve a total visibility and recognition of asexuality it is hence particular useful to take a stance towards the naturalizing discourse of asexuality as natural. This discourse of naturally asexual, on the other hand, further problematizes the division between the sexual and the nonsexual. Since the nonsexual had been defined in opposition to the sexual with the primacy of the sexual signifying a sexual essentialism, then naturally asexual disputes the role of the sexual because it attempts to reverse the sexual-nonsexual dynamic. Naturally asexual is paradoxically also undermining the meaning of sexuality whilst asserting its parametrical nonopposition.

Scherrer complicates this perverse position of asexuality on the relation between essentializing and denaturalizing sexuality and what she terms "'essentially' asexual" (Scherrer 2008, 629). The figure of the essentially asexual is particularly interesting because it essentializes the meaning of asexuality exclusively to the

negativity endogenous to asexuality. A naturalization and an essentialization of asexuality are conditioned to the radical negativity of asexuality and represent the most extreme form of such negativity. Essentially asexual, for example, reduces the spectrum of asexual identities to maintain the position of asexuality as negative to sexuality. Claiming an essentially asexual identity thus requires a strong insistence on the naturalness of asexuality. It actually enables and is partially dependent on the position of naturally asexual. Both identities nonetheless substitute the primacy of the sexual with the nonsexual. The nonsexual hence becomes the natural form identifying stronger the borderline with the sexual.

Becoming asexual and essentially asexual, according to Scherrer, happens precisely through “finding the appropriate language” (Scherrer 2008, 630). One of the greatest contribution of the asexuality moment is the extent to which asexuality created a vocabulary for new forms of feelings and relationships at the zone of overlap of the sexual and the nonsexual. Naming the asexual, claiming asexuality, thus represents a linguistic and essentializing function of sexuality. Naming asexuality is indispensable to the naming of sexuality. Essentially asexual is the process of becoming an asexual and claiming an asexual identity while navigating the colorful landscape of attractions, relationships desires and identities. Becoming ‘essentially’ asexual is to occupy the space of nonopposition of the sexual and the nonsexual in the intersection where the sexual ends and the nonsexual begins. The asexual is hence neither fully sexual nor fully nonsexual. It is particularly the nonopposition of the two, the impossibility of their mutual legitimacy.

4.3 Radical asexual potential

Since the “essentialness” of the asexual identity (Scherrer 2008, 631) captures (and materializes) the boundaries of the sexual and the nonsexual, there has been a

particular train of thought in asexual theorizing that has argued for radical asexual politics that can destabilize sexual normativity. The possibility of such an asexual potential was argued for the first time in the publication “New Orientations: Asexuality and Its Implications for Theory and Practice” by Cerankowski and Milks (2010). They situated the radical potential of asexuality at the intersection of feminist and queer theorizing on the topic of sexual liberation and a feminist practice of sex. They were studying the discussions on both sides of the anti-porn and pro-sex feminist ‘battles’ (popularly called ‘sex wars’) in the 1980s and incorporating a possibility of an asexuality within either side of the debate. Johnson’s article (1977), that I have previously drawn attention to, underlines a possibility of a discourse on asexuality within an even earlier period during the sexual liberation of the 1960s and 1970s that preceded the sex wars. Cerankowski and Milks limit their discussion on the period of the sex wars and exclude argumentation overlapping feminist and queer theory limiting their engagement with queer theorizing solely on the AIDS period (e.g. Warner and Social Text Collective 1993; Bersani 1995). Nonetheless, their initiative for a possibility of “asexuality as a practice and a politics [that] radically challenges the prevailing sex-normative culture” (Cerankowski and Milks 2010, 661) opened a window into future theorizing of asexuality with a ‘radical potential’.

Both within either side of the sex wars of the 1980s, and during the sexual liberation of the 1960s and 1970s, it was female sexuality that was situated as always already oppressed. The sexual liberation sought to liberate women from the position of either a “sex-object” or a “child-bearer” (Johnson 1977, 98), and women were encouraged to live and practice their sexuality freely. Through the years, the lifestyle of the sexually liberated woman monopolized into two camps of anti-porn radical feminists and pro-sex sex-positive feminists. Radical feminists argued for a female

sexuality free from phallocentrism and male violence, while sex-positive feminists were in support of a subversive liberatory female sexuality (Cerankowski and Milks 2010, 656). While anti-porn activists saw female sexuality as oppressed by patriarchy, pro-sex activists saw female sexuality as oppressed by sex-negativity (Cerankowski and Milks 2010, 656). Either way, it was female sex and sexuality that were always already in need for liberation.

Looking at portrayal of asexual and autoerotic women who refused 'sexuality', Johnson underlined that when refusing to perform sexually women were stigmatized as either "ascetic" or "neurotic" (1977, 97–99). As neurotic, women's sexuality was medicalized and deployed to the cure of compulsory heterosexual sex under patriarchy. The position of female asceticism, however, was defended as a position of salvation, and for women to become worthy (like men) they must belittle themselves under a disposition of religious piety, poverty and celibacy (Johnson 1977, 98). Nevertheless, the possibility that women might *prefer* to live a life free of sex was seldomly examined (Johnson 1977, 99), and asexuality was inferred as either "inherently repressive or dysfunctional" (Cerankowski and Milks 2010, 656).

During the times of the queer liberation movements, and especially during the period of the AIDS epidemic, when queer sex was particularly stigmatized as 'infectious' and death-breeding, queer sexual culture became a "principal mode of [queer] sociability and public world making" (Michael Warner cited in Cerankowski and Milks 2010, 661). Because of the sheer public aversion and aggression towards gay and queer sex, queer sex took a central role in both queer activism and theorizing. Practicing (safe) queer sex—a lot of it—became a primal pillar of sex-positivism and queerness. Abundance of queer sex and promiscuity were hence recognized as a symbol for queerness and a mode for queer sexual normativity. Queer sex become a

political strategy necessary for labelling queerness, hence foreclosing any possibility for not desiring sex to be part of radical queer culture (Cerankowski and Milks 2010, 661).

With the emergence of the asexuality movement, the possibility to have a feminist and queer life *asexually* had been introduced. Asexuality challenged the framing of female sexuality as always already oppressed, concurrently revealing a queer (and feminist) normativity conditioned by a compulsion to perform sexually:

> "By its very definition, asexuality brings a focus to the presence or absence of sexual desire as a way to queer the normative conceptions about how sex is practiced and how relationships are (or are not) formed around that practice." (Cerankowski and Milks 2010, 660).

Cerankowski and Milks therefore suggest a potential within asexuality to propose not desiring sex as a radical sexual politics.

Similarly, Chasin (2013) articulated a radical potential within asexual politics and existence against sexunormative discourse that is medicalizing and pathologizing the lack of sexual desire. The article illustrated four different asexual experiences that are challenging the Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder diagnosis (2013, 411–14). Acknowledging that sexual desire might either recede or increase during a person's lifetime, some individuals would respond negatively to the change while others could be rather indifferent and happy about it. Borrowing from feminist and queer discourse Chasin highlighted that a dissatisfaction with one's sexual life should not pathologize the subject and result in an exclusively medical treatment. Within feminist studies it has been analyzed how heteronormativity and violence against women forces many women into unwanted sexual contact. This can gradually become a cause for great distress which also ends up being medicalized and frequently treated with anti-depressants and other mood inhibitors (Chasin 2013, 415). Likewise, queer and gay activists have long since argued that homosexual subjects experiencing distress about

their sexual interests must not be treated with conversion therapy (Chasin 2013, 417). The treatment in both cases of emotional suffering should be focused on the power structures and societal oppression which are the source for the discontentment. In the context of asexuality, the attention falls on unveiling structures of oppression directed at persons who experience low sexual desire and lack interest in pursuing a sexual activity (as previously highlighted in Johnson 1977; and Rothblum and Brehony 1993). A radicalness within the decades of asexual existence and politics would then be the achievement of "a place where it is now acceptable for some adults to be uninterested in sex and sexual relationships" (Chasin 2013, 421).

In a rather more complex argument, Chu (2014) problematizes the dichotomous discourse of radical and conservative, capturing a radical potential within asexuality to deconstruct the binary opposition of radical and conservative sexuality that is conditioning queer sexual normativity. As I have discussed previously, hostility and violence toward sexually deviant lifestyles enabled queer sex as a rallying point of action for the queer movement and politics. In the context of queer struggles and liberation, heteronormativity became canonized as conservative, defining queerness as inherently radical and particularly so in the context of queer sex. The dichotomy of radical and conservative sexualities was according to Chu a product of the division between gay social respectability and the anti-assimilationist camp (2014, 80–81). Gay respectability activists were advocating for gay marriage and other institutional rights alike that would grant homosexual couples the privilege of a heterosexual middle-class normative family. For the anti-assimilationists, the gay respectability was limited in terms of race, class and ethnicity for such aspirations were representative exclusively of a white and middle-class privilege. To position themselves in opposition to gay mainstream politics, the anti-assimilationists relied on vibrant queer sexual practices

establishing a polar opposition between conservative and radical queer sexuality dependent on sexual exuberance (Chu 2014, 82–83). Asexuality and its negative relationship to sex hence necessitate a critical focus and "a reassessment of how assimilation, the conservative, and the radical are conceived" (Chu 2014, 83).

Asexuality therefore undermines the assumptions within the projects for liberation of both feminist and queer movements and exposes the social institutions and power structures maintained within queer and feminist politics. Both camps structured their struggles around a discourse of liberation pathologizing in the process particular kinds of female and queer modes of sexual sociability. Centralizing their politics and activism on the visibility and subversiveness of sexual culture, both feminist and queer activists and theorists forefront sex as handmaiden to queer and feminist subjectivation. Feminist and queer subjectivity is henceforth formulated as always already sexual, foreclosing any possibility otherwise. This type of queer and feminist normativity was identified through the introduction of asexuality as a sexual orientation within spaces of feminist and queer discourse.

The postulation of asexuality as a radical queer practice scrutinizes the formulation of conservative and radical sexual politics and questions the very category of radical itself as well as the meaning of sex-positivity. In the construction of conservative and radical sexual cultures, radical is associated solely with explicit and vibrant sexual lifestyles and sex-positivity signifies a right to have lots of (queer) sex as the only mode of queer sociability. The possibility of queer lifestyle outside sex as presented by asexuality underscores an implicit normativity in queer and feminist politics and practice. An acknowledgement of asexuality hence ruptures the significatory power of radical and conservative sexualities and reaffirms itself as the 'truly' radical practice. 'Truly' radical then asexuality continues the tradition of undoing

and restructuring social norms and institutions that delegate a correct and preferable sexuality. The possibility within asexuality to reconsider female and queer sexuality inclusive of a refusal to perform sexually is asexuality's contribution to destabilizing sexual normativity and problematizing the sexual and the nonsexual.

5 After the end of sex

After revisiting the meaning of sex and sexuality within asexual radical politics, I would like to now dedicate this last part of my thesis for the exploration of *the outside of asexuality*. I have thus far emphasized how asexuality questions sex and sexuality through the introduction of an affective distance, a dislocation, problematizing the sexual and the nonsexual. I would like to now turn to other (non)practices on the outside of sexuality and trace potential connections. Feminist scholar of embodiment Elizabeth Grosz (2001) offers a reflection on the meaning of the outside:

> "The outside is a peculiar place, both paradoxical and perverse. It is paradoxical insofar as it can only ever make sense, have a place, in reference to what it is not and can never be—an inside, a within, an interior. And it is perverse, for while it is placed always relative to an inside, it observes no faith to the consistency of this inside." (Grosz 2001, xv)

I hence dedicate this chapter to all the perversions that emerge on the outside of sexuality and asexuality in particularly the place after the end of sex. I will be looking at perverse sexual points of inquiry that bear no resemblance to the inside they are being faithfully conditioned by. I begin my analysis with Paul B. Preciado's *countersexuality* that declared "sex is over" (2018, 66) situated within the greater *postporn* movement that inspired his writing. In my insistence on postporn mode of inquiry I hope to find the points of consolation between asexuality and sex, on the outside of them both. The postporn movement grew during the 1990s and the early 2000s across the Atlantic in the United Stated and Spain gravitating further to the continental metropolises of Paris and Berlin (for introduction see Despentes 2009). A lot of postporn work is both a work of theory and art and many postporn producers and activists are also artists themselves (Preciado himself included). Doing postporn is not

about discourse after sex, but about making discourse *with* sex, using sex as an analytical tool and mode of inquiry.

5.1 "Who feels pleasure?"

Figure 5: Masturbating dildo (in Preciado 2018, 99).

I would like to being my journey on the outside by continuing the discussion about the radical asexual potential. My intervention lies in a proposal of a figure of asexuality not considered in previous research—the sex-favorable asexual who enjoys and pursues sex and sexual contact. Thus far in academic literature on asexuality, the discussion of the radical potential within asexuality has been focused solely on a monolithic representation of asexuality as associated with normalizing the desire to not have sex nor pursue sexual activity. This argument has been very influential in revisiting radical sexual politics and destabilizing sexual and nonsexual relations. Nonetheless, to bring the discussion even further, it will be necessary, in my

opinion, to look at the often overlooked position of a sex-favorable asexual. This position has remained out of the gaze of asexual theory because of its passing capacity within a sexunormative context. Should have this figure entered discourse earlier it might have undermined asexual efforts for visibility for it could have been recruited by the sexual assimilationists. The time has come now I believe to ask provoking questions on the outskirts of asexuality.

Passionately pursuing sexual contact renders the image of the sex-favorable asexual invisible to the sexunormative gaze enabling a vacant position from which to examine sexusociety. The figure of the happy asexual pursuing and enjoying sex would also bypass pathologization and any medical sexual disfunction diagnosis because diagnostic criteria is based on a subject's refusal to participate in any sexual culture. Associating with a lack of sexual attraction but deriving pleasure from sexual interaction furthermore complicates any underlining sexual-nonsexual relationships and assumptions. The position of the sex-seeking asexual delineates that there is a separation between sexuality and sex and emphasizes the performativity of the signifying force of doing sex itself. An asexual subject pursuing and enjoying sexual contact is a perversion of both sexuality and asexuality that exposes the scandalous impossibility of their nonopposition.

A particular case of sex-favorable asexual is the figure of the "Philoadavere"—drawing satisfaction from others being attracted to you. Encountered through an ethnographic research of discussions of sexual asexuals on AVEN, the term was coined by one of its members and an asexuality blogger. The author's incentive was to label the experience of a satisfaction rather than a repulsion when being the subject of someone's sexual attraction. Many asexuals report feelings of revulsion, disgust and confusion when on the receiving end of sexual attraction and this is a rather

frequent observation on the AVEN forums. In fact, being the subject of another person's attraction is a common fear among asexual individuals in a similar way to a fear of an incomprehensible unknown. Since asexual-identifying persons do not relate their experiences to a sexual attraction, their distress is expected when being in the position of an object of sexual desire. Nonetheless, there are of course asexuals who enjoy this perverse power dynamic and incomprehensibility. The figures of the Philoadavere and the sex-favorable asexual therefore articulate the displacement of sexuality in the context of asexuality.

To understand such perverse satisfaction of displacement, it is necessary to look at another theory on the outskirts of sexuality—the *countersexual* theory developed by Paul B. Preciado (2018). Countersexuality is a politics and a practice of doing sexuality otherwise. It does not denounce its strong connection to sexuality, in fact it thrives from all the affects, pleasures and bodies that were accumulated under the circulation of sexual universalism. Its point of tension is the sexual essentialism and the correct assumption that sex is everywhere. Countersexuality exploits the omnipotence of sex and further exacerbates the high frequency of sexuality. Its point of departure is that everything is always already sexual and from this position it attempts to analyze the order of bodies and pleasures.

The aim of the countersexual manifesto is to displace sexuality through "the end of nature as an order that legitimizes the subjection of some bodies to others" (Preciado 2018, 20). It exposes *sexuality* as a technology of control regulating bodies and pleasures. It derives from contractual social theory, such as the social contract (Rousseau 1923), the racial contract (Mills 1997), the sexual contract (Pateman 1988). Social contractual theories presuppose that there is an underlying assumption of an order of power (race, gender, etc.) that constructs sovereignty and subordination.

Sexual normativity likewise is constructed at the expense of certain bodies and pleasures. Countersexuality is a revolting and subversive politics that aims to end the naturalization of certain bodies and pleasures as ‘natural’ and hence ‘normal’ at the exclusion of others as ‘unnatural’ and ‘abnormal’. Countersexuality proposes that the concept of *sexuality* has been used for the governance of pleasures and bodies, and as such must be opposed—hence countersexuality:

> “It’s time to stop studying and describing sex as if it forms part of the natural history of human societies.” (Preciado 2018, 22)

Instead, countersexuality studies the points at which sex penetrates the mundane public consciousness and intervenes with a strong dose of humor and performativity to oversaturate the universal oversignification of sex. Countersexuality insists on the propagation and sanctification of the dildo as a status symbol to erase and replace phallocentrism and phallus-envy. Dildo envy is the next big thing, always hard and comes in all sizes! Preciado’s “dildotectonics” (2018, 41) might have been inspired from the postporn aesthetic he was immersed in during the contentious change of the millennium, but his analysis reveals a more complex biopolitical structure of bodily and sexual technologies of subordination. He traces the origins of the production of the dildo/vibrator “situated on the border of the body” to particular ”pleasure-producing and pleasure-repressing technologies” (Preciado 2018, 95).

The product of the dildo/vibrator, for example, bears resemblance to both instruments that were used to prevent masturbation and instruments used to treat hysteria. Both of these technologies were used to regulate pleasure as the technology for subordination of bodies. The production of the dildo/vibrator is also historically related to surgeries of the genitalia used to correct intersex expression which were later on the source for knowledge on gender reaffirming technologies. The dildo/vibrator furthermore owns its industrialization to the development of prosthetic

technologies which originated after the First World War, to repair broken manhoods blown away by a shrapnel, a life-altering encounter which resulted in the amputation of a limb (Preciado 2018, 95). The dildo/vibrator is hence an intersection, a coming together, of the various technologies of the regulation of gender and sexuality i.e. the subordination of the female body and pleasure. Paradoxically and perversely enough, it is exactly the dildo and the vibrator that are the status symbol and a cult in the postporn, feminist and queer spaces countersexuality was born within. It is the masturbating dildo/vibrator that has the better sex.

Countersexuality and pharmaco-pornographic politics both theorize sex and sexuality as a technology (Preciado 2008; 2013). Sexuality as the "technology of the self" (Foucault 1988a in; Preciado 2018, 127) produces living bodies to understand themselves as living bodies only through "identity" (Preciado 2018, 77, 127). The concept of identity, and sexual identity in particular, is what countersexuality opposes as a mechanism of exclusion and subordination. Instead, countersexuality is invested in the 'unnatural' and 'abnormal' bodies, pleasures and sexual practices. Drawing from intersex, trans*, queer and BDSM discourses and theory, Preciado defines countersexuality as the "[i]nterruption of human history as the naturalization of oppression" (Preciado 2018, 38).

Preciado develops "countersexual reversal practices" (2018, 41–56) that function to displace sex within sexuality. Each of his practices (e.g. *Figure 6: "Total dildo" (Preciado 2018, 31)*) is a sex performance that uses parody, simulation and serial repetition to disassociate sexunormative formulation of permissible bodies and pleasures (Preciado 2018, 34). The performing subject is instructed to do a particular series of movements for a particular duration that simulate sex and pleasure. In the "Total Dildo" the body in its totality is at the disposal of the countersexual regime. The

proposition of the sexual reversal performances articulates the displacement between pleasure and sex, delinking one from the other. The reversal practices expose the absurdity behind the assumption of sex and sexunormativity that regulate bodies and pleasures. They are endorsed with a serious amount of *humor* mimicking the excess significatory power of sex. Using "sex as an object of analysis" (2018, 19), the goal of Preciado's work is to unveil the normative conditioning of a body = a sexuality = an identity. Sex within countersexual politics loses function: "Sex is over" (Preciado 2018, 66).

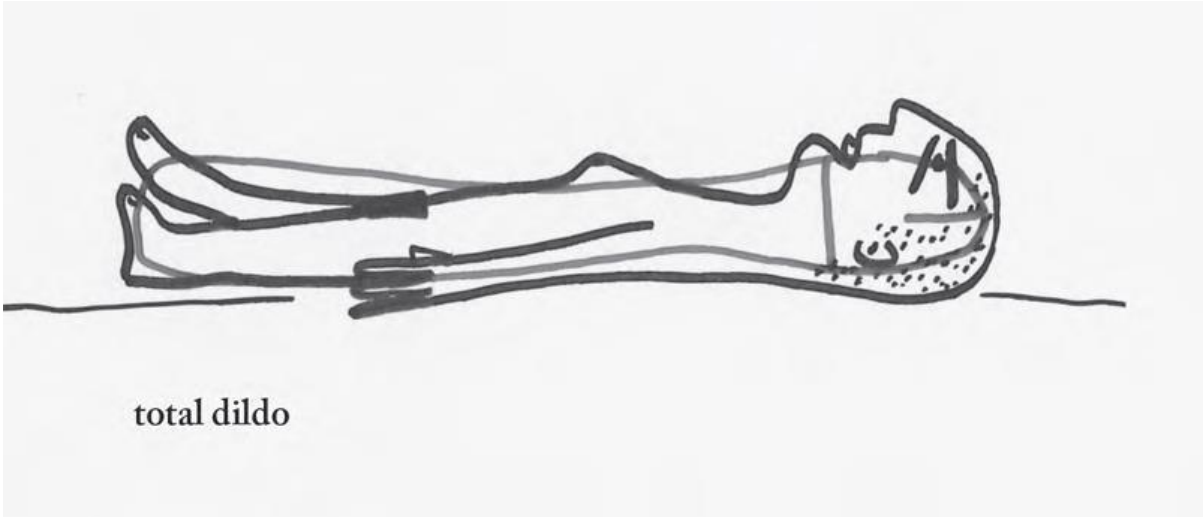


Figure 6: "Total dildo" (in Preciado 2018, 31).

The centrality of the sexual organs and biological sex (not sex as in sexual intercourse, but sex as a gendered quality of the human body) in heteronormative biopolitics developed a biomedical regime of cutting and piecing the human body. In fact, Preciado traces down the etymology of the word "sex" which in Latin and romance languages was used for naming "a cut" and "cutting". The cutting and piecing of the human body to conform to a compulsory heteronormativity, replacing the totality of the body itself, mark the pharmaco-pornographic technologies of sexuality. The cutting and piecing of the sexual organs—in replacement of the dildo/vibrator—function as *prostheses* in practices of queering gender and sexuality (2018, 74–140). Preciado's analysis is particular for the development of the concept of "soft technologies" (2013,

77; 2008, 110)—theoretical contribution that Jasbir K. Puar calls the "*in*habitations of the body" (2017, 57). The advancement of the technologies of the cutting of the body created technologies in the form of liquids and pills that are swallowed and work on the body from within. In contrary to the Foucauldian body inhabiting disciplinary spaces, the pharmaco-pornographic body is inhabited by them. The technologies of inhabitation of the human body is what Preciado analyzes as the technologies of the prosthesis.

Preciado traces the roots of the word "prosthesis" to the XVI century, when it was used in grammar to refer "to the supplement of a word with a prefix" (Preciado 2018, 131). The word prosthesis was thus used to denote "the addition of a letter or syllable at the beginning of a word" (Oxford Dictionary n.d.). The technology of the prosthesis is therefore the application of a "prefix to a word or to a body" (Preciado 2018, 131). Translated into grammatical terms, 'counter-' and 'a-' are prostheses to the noun 'sexuality'. Their prosthetic nature, signified by their displacement from sex and sexuality, enables both countersexuality and asexuality as sufficient analytical tools for the problematization of the totality of the sexual and the nonsexual.

But in both countersexuality and asexuality sex in itself also functions as a prosthesis. Returning to *Figure 5: Masturbating dildo* which is an excerpt from the *Countersexual Manifesto* (Preciado 2018, 99): "who feels pleasure?" (2018, 58). Mapping the landscape of pleasures created by different uses of the dildo/vibrator, Preciado asks the poignant question of how are bodies and pleasures created and constructed. Using the technologies of subjectivation, who feels pleasure: the sex-favorable asexual or their non-asexual partner, the Philoadavere or their opposite? If solely through sexuality do subjects understand, enact and perceive their embodiment, what kind of subjects and bodies are proposed by asexuality: desired by sex or

desiring sex? In the figure of the dildo fucking with a vibrator, sexuality is displaced *outside* sex. Pleasure takes place at the intersection of the outsides of both the dildo and the vibrator. Pleasures itself takes form as a prosthetic function to the body and sexuality. If pleasure is always already of the exterior, like the masturbating dildo in Figure 5, then countersexuality and asexuality capture that exteriority of sexuality that is the source of pleasure, the prosthesis. The sex-in-itself is then the prosthesis that detaches and is displaced, always already over.

5.2 Asexual perversions

Asexuality will never be hip. It will never be a party term. It is too unsexy for that. Yet asexuality remains profoundly scandalous. The visibility of asexuality in itself discloses the concept of sexuality as a technology to regulate bodies and pleasures. The radical destabilizing potential in asexuality affirms the right to not have sex and thus highlights the compulsion to participate in sexual contact. This compulsion which constructs a sexual normativity, even a queer sexual one, aims at discriminating against certain bodies and pleasures. Embodiment hence is formulated as a subjectivation that takes form across the conflation of sex and sexuality.

The negativity endogenous to asexuality, the ‘a-’, populates the displacement between sex and sexuality. In the many different significations this negativity takes from, as sudden emergence, a lack, a disidentification with sexuality, it is always a reflection of the nonopposition of the sexual and the nonsexual. The possibility of asexuality creates the field of countless variations of complicating the sexual with the nonsexual. This negativity is endogenous to asexuality and asexuality is recognizable only insofar as it is in direct relationship with the negativity in sexuality. Asexuality thus populates the displacement between sex and sexuality, and everything that is the result of the impossibility to delineate the sexual from the nonsexual. Asexuality

captures the affective interaction between sexual, nonsexual, sex and sexuality, embodiment and subjectivity. It locates the friction between embodiment and subjectivity, and most importantly, it underlines the project of the technology of sexuality. The negativity endogenous to asexuality is a perverse form of a prosthetic becoming.

Sex, under asexuality, is nothing but an infinitely mutable, repeatable, simulation. The nonopposition between the sexual in the nonsexual is, as articulated through asexuality, not a matter of sex, but of signification and subjectivation. The discursive difference between asexuality and sexuality, and asexuality as a sexuality, takes form irrespectively of sex. Sex only functions as a prosthesis to both sexuality and asexuality, as a dislocation of an excess of significance. The greatest scandal, or perhaps the most vicious perversion, is exactly the insignificance of sex between the distinction of sexuality and asexuality. As the figures of the sex-favorable asexual and the Philoadavere confirm, asexuality exists with or without sex. It is as a product of the technology of sexuality and the impossibility of the nonopposition of the sexual and the nonsexual that the discovery of the notion of asexuality emerges.

6 Conclusion

The question I would like to ask as a conclusion is again what is asexuality; and what is the relevance of asexuality for non-asexuals. As I hope to have argued successfully in my thesis, asexuality is more of a process and less of a coherent *thing*. Asexuality is a relationship between a subject and the sexual world. It is the point of intersection of the sexual and the nonsexual where it becomes difficult to tell one from the other apart. Asexuality represents our understanding of our bodies and desires and the pursuit of other bodies and desires. Asexuality is also a feminist space that reinforces the right for women, and other genders, to decline and/or prefer to avoid sexual contact. It normalizes that a sexual liberation must also include a desire to not have sex and celebrates the experiences of individuals and groups who do so. Asexuality is neither a choice nor a biological given, it is a reflection of the sexual world we live in where subjectivation happens through an identification with sex, and the doing of it. Asexuality is thus perversely situated between the sexual and the nonsexual emphasizing their nonopposition.

I began the search for my thesis in the puzzling position of an identification with asexuality through an absence. When I was trying to understand my asexuality, it was deeply unsettling that I must identify with something I do not comprehend. The precise definition of what sexual attraction is and what it represents was not in the least helpful in articulating my relationship to the sexual world. Eventually I found it easier to identify with a disconnect from sex, the ‘blank’ many asexuals describe to experience when put in a position of sexual normativity. Approaching intimacy, relationships and pleasure from this position gave me the insight to analyze the centrality of sex in each of these fundamentally human social experiences. Gradually I came jarring into the

question “but what is sex really?” over and over again. Articulating my experience at the separation of sex and sexuality, gave me confidence in defining my needs and desires and in pursuing them. Being perversely asexual enabled me to pursue sex (and not) passionately and consciously, with agency and not compulsion.

But this is only my experience. Many asexuals find confidence in a sex-free space. Many asexuals seek solace in searching for the definition that works for them and clearly affirming its boundaries. Others fiercely resonate with the experience of a lack of sexual attraction. I find the potential of asexuality within theory, others might find theory the least helpful of all. Many asexuals identify with the community asexuality represents and stands for. Others like the quirkiness of memes and puns and cake eating to be the most appealing of all. Some are absolutely repulsed by sex and avoid being in its near proximity, while others seek it passionately and derive great pleasure from it. Leastways, our asexualities represent the unfeasibility of the nonopposition between the sexual and the nonsexual.

In my thesis I argue across different bodies of theory, from the firmly established area of asexuality studies to earlier texts written on the topic, and most recent writing on asexuality. I go back to groundwork theories of sexuality searching for the meaning of sex and sexuality. I question across theories of queer negativity to find the place that belongs to the negativity endogenous to asexuality. My research has brought me to some of the most sexual works of theory from both queer negativity and sexuality studies. Hence I name my thesis *Asexual Perversions* for in something as bizarre and as scandalous as not having sex I find the potential to question the distances between sex and sexuality. In the end, my theory is not representative of everything asexuality stands for, and it need not be. Asexuality is many things, not one, and this is but one instance of it.

My contribution to the area of asexuality studies is to keep pursuing the unanswered questions. Asexuality is known to be doing the work of unthinking and rethinking our sexual world and it must remain so faithfully. My goal was to write in the direction of queer negativity and asexuality. Even though queer negativity theorizing is fundamentally a queer area of research, I would not restrict the study of asexuality to the queer domain solely. I wish to see in the future more research about the intervention asexuality does in the world of interpersonal relationships, intimacy, love and kinship. My writing will continue to be at the intersection of most dissonant of subjects, like the sex-pursuing asexual, because I believe in the potential of fruitful formulations exactly in the least comfortable of places, and the parts that do not quite fit together. In my analysis of the negativity endogenous to asexuality I wanted to introduce a dislocation from what concepts *are* to what concepts *do*. Asexuality *does* something as a theoretical and epistemological form of inquiry. My interest as a researcher will always been in concepts, notions, and what notions *do* in and *with* theory.

There are of course limitations to my own work. I am very aware that the asexuality I write about might not be the asexuality of other asexuals. Furthermore, my knowledge of sexuality and the history of sexuality across ability, race, class and gender must be intensified. I do not in the confines of this thesis argue the consequences of race to asexuality. To be able to continue studying the negativity endogenous to asexuality, race and ability must be at the forefront. The work of Ianna Hawkins Owen (2014) and Eunjung Kim (2011) that do not populate the pages of my manuscript is one of my deepest regrets and potentials for expansion of my work. The work of *pornoterrorismo* by Diana J. Torres (Torres 2011) and the greater postporn movement that inspired the work of Paul B. Preciado have yet to enter the domain of

interaction with asexuality. For my future work, and the work of asexual perversions, I would propose exactly an even closer work at *sex\uality: would we ever see the end of it?*

* * * *

I see asexual perversity, or being asexual perversely, as the vacant position from the deepest intimation with sex and sexuality. Only from depths so shallow, can one interact with sex prosthetically, play with it, simulate, repeat. For sex is after all at the most perverse when it is not desired.

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