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"It Feels Like I Don't Exist": An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of the Ace Citizen

Maya Wenzel

*Minnesota State University, Mankato*, maya.wenzel@mnsu.edu

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“It Feels Like I Don’t Exist”: An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of the Ace Citizen

By

Maya Wenzel

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Gender & Women’s Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato

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This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student’s committee.

________________________________
Dr. Maria R. Bevacqua (Advisor)

________________________________
Dr. Yalda N. Hamidi (Committee Member)

________________________________
Dr. Justin J. Rudnick (Committee Member)
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# Table of Contents

**Chapter 1: Introduction** ...........................................................................................................1
  Current Study .............................................................................................................................5

**Chapter 2: Literature Review** .................................................................................................7
  Acephobia in American Society .................................................................................................8
  Constructions of Sexuality .........................................................................................................15
  Conceptualizations of Sexual Citizenship .................................................................................24

**Chapter 3: Methods & Methodology** .....................................................................................33
  Methodologies ............................................................................................................................33
  Methods .....................................................................................................................................35
  Participants .................................................................................................................................38
  Reflexivity ...................................................................................................................................40

**Chapter 4: Results** ..................................................................................................................42
  Amatonormativity .......................................................................................................................42
  Allonormative Medicine & Negative Experiences with Medical Practitioners .......................50
  Acephobia ...................................................................................................................................56
  Exclusion from the Queer Community ......................................................................................64
  The Avoidance of “Coming Out” as Strategy ............................................................................69
  The Assemblance of the Ace Community ..................................................................................74
  Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................80

**Chapter 5: Conclusion** ............................................................................................................82
  Evaluating the Results ...............................................................................................................82
  Significance .................................................................................................................................91
  Future Studies & Goals ..............................................................................................................92

**Appendix** ................................................................................................................................94
  A .................................................................................................................................................94
  B .................................................................................................................................................96
  C .................................................................................................................................................112

**References** .............................................................................................................................127
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Abstract
Sexual citizenship is often used to enforce gender and sexual norms, to help construct the “Other,” and as a tool for national security. Because of the invisibility and invalidation of asexuality in the U.S., there is a lack of research on sexual citizenship discourses and a need for more research that utilizes intersectional feminism in asexuality studies. This master’s thesis uses an intersectional, transnational feminist, and queer lens to analyze how people who identify on the asexuality spectrum currently living in the U.S. are impacted by the concept of sexual citizenship. This research uses a qualitative survey, which 124 people, who were at least 18 years of age, completed. I argue that their experiences reveal the various ways they are made to feel invisible, alienated, and erased because of acephobia, amatonormativity, compulsory sexuality, and other systems of oppression. The findings consist of six main themes: 1) Amatonormativity, 2) Allonormative Medicine and Negative Experiences with Medical Practitioners, 3) Acephobia, 4) Exclusion from the Queer Community, 5) the Avoidance of “Coming Out” as Strategy, and 6) the Assemblance of the Ace Community. These findings demonstrate that many of them feel broken and outcasted from society unless they conform to systems like amatonormativity and allonormativity. While their aceness and other identities create unique forms of oppression that often deem them “noncitizens,” they are not victims who lack agency. Many of them also resist these systems of oppression through validation and empowerment from the ace community. This research aims to visibilize asexuality, highlight the voices and experiences of marginalized aces, and provide a space for aces to claim epistemic authority of their experiences. Thus, this thesis may also help others better understand some aces’ experiences and how to fight for social justice in a way that includes asexuality.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Asexuality is one of the most dehumanized sexual identities studied, and it remains largely invisible and invalidated (MacInnis & Hodson, 2012; Robbins et al., 2015). The absence of asexuality from many feminist movements is particularly concerning, especially with the rise of queerphobic legislation in the United States (Wenzel, 2022). According to the 2017 UK National LGBT Survey, people who identified as asexual were the most likely to have undergone or been offered conversion therapy (Jowett et al., 2021, p. 40). As someone who identifies as ace and as a feminist, these events are infuriating yet not surprising. “Our invisibility has created room for misrepresentations and misconceptions (both intentional and not) about our identities and realities,” which makes it imperative for feminists to empower the ace community and critically examine and consider the various nuanced experiences of aces (Wenzel, 2022, para. 6).

This onslaught of anti-queer legislation in the United States raises questions surrounding sexual citizenship, as the rights of many queer people are further restricted and called into question regarding queer expressions, medical care, reproductive justice, marriage, etc., and for many, their existence is denied and erased. Many scholars have contributed to discussions about the concept of sexual citizenship, which Richardson (2000, 2017) broadly describes as the intertwining of discourses about sexuality and citizenship, thereby socially constructing citizens (those who are members of a nation-state) and noncitizens (those who are seen as not belonging to the nation). Sexual citizenship may be conceptualized as a tool to discuss how rights may be granted or
denied to people based on sexuality (Evans, 1993; Monro, 2005), which citizens are able to participate as a consumer in society (Evans, 1993), and how the institution of marriage may determine a person’s sexual citizenship status (Aizura, 2006; Bell & Binnie, 2000; Taylor, 2011; Willse & Spade, 2013). Recent conversations also note how the social construction of the nation also plays a role in the concept of sexual citizenship and the need for transnational feminist theory in these discussions (Richardson, 2017). Some states may be constructed as progressive or backward (Calişkan et al., 2020; Grewal & Kaplan, 2001). Thus, under homonationalism and queer necropolitics (Puar, 2013, 2017), some queer bodies are deemed worthy of protection (citizens), while others are seen as impossible or disposable (noncitizens). What is commonly missing from these important conversations, however, is how asexuality—an identity that is often dismissed, erased, and, for some, denied—fits into these discussions. Thus, this thesis aims to help contribute to some of these gaps and utilize the concept of sexual citizenship to examine the experiences of aces in the U.S. context and explore how asexuality may complicate the concept of sexual citizenship as a theoretical tool in the process. I argue that respondents’ experiences reveal the various ways they are made to feel invisible, alienated, and erased because of acephobia, amatonormativity, compulsory sexuality, and other systems of oppression.

Because of the invisibility of asexuality, it is important to provide some background on a few key concepts that will be present throughout this research. There are many nuances to asexuality, and it might mean something different to each ace. Keeping this in mind, as generally defined in the U.S. context, people who identify as asexual—or
ace for short—do not, rarely, or conditionally experience sexual attraction (Chen, 2020). However, there are more nuances to asexuality, as this can be an identity label or an umbrella term. Asexuality operates on a spectrum ranging from experiencing no sexual attraction (asexual) to feeling sexual attraction (sexual) or the acespec (AVEN, 2023). The asexuality end can be thought of as black, and the sexuality end can be thought of as white. Thus, those who experience no/rare sexual attraction may identify as ace, those who sometimes experience sexual attraction may identify as graysexual/gray asexual/gray ace, and people who identify as demisexual/demi asexual/demi ace need an emotional connection to someone before sexual attraction is a possibility (Przybylo, 2019). All of these ace identities and more make up the acespec. However, allosexuals are those who experience sexual attraction (e.g., pansexual, heterosexual, bisexual, etc.), meaning they are not on the acespec (AVEN, 2023).

Przybylo (2019) also discusses three general dynamics among aces: sex-favorable (participating in/liking sexual activities), sex-indifferent (being open to sexual activities), and sex-averse (not wanting to participate in/not liking sexual activities), thus, there are as many ways to be ace as there are aces (p. 10). One’s sexual desires and behaviors do not equate to one’s sexual identity, notes Somerville (2000, p. 6). Thus, as Decker (2015) points out, “sexual orientation is not determined by whether someone has sex or who they have it with. Orientation is not a behavior—not for asexual people and not for anyone” (p. 6). These distinctions must be highlighted since there is a common misconception that asexuality automatically means not having sex or liking sex, and this assumption can harm aces who engage in sexual activities. However, while it is important to note this
nuance, it is equally important to acknowledge and validate that many aces will never want to have sex.

Because some aces differentiate types of attraction (e.g., sexual, romantic, aesthetic, platonic, among others), some may also identify as aromantic (or aro), which generally refers to those who do not experience romantic attraction to anyone (Decker, 2015; Przybylo, 2019; Winer et al., 2022). The aromantic spectrum, or arospec, uses similar bones as the acespec. To discuss the arospec community and identities, one can replace “asexuality,” “asexual,” “ace,” and “sexuality/sexual” with “aromanticism,” “aromantic,” “aro,” and “romantic.” For example, if someone who identifies as gray-ace may sometimes experiences sexual attraction, then someone who identifies as gray-aro may sometimes experiences romantic attraction. If an allosexual is someone who experiences sexual attraction, then an alloromantic is someone who experiences romantic attraction. Aspec is short for aspectrum and collectively refers to the acespec and arospec. Thus, acephobia refers to “anti-asexual bias/prejudice” (Przybylo, 2019, p. 8), arophobia refers to anti-aromantic bias, and aphobia refers prejudice against aspecs. However, some people may use aphobia interchangeably with acephobia to refer to anti-ace bias.

Some aces may use terms like lesbian, gay, heterromantic, or even heterosexual to refer to their romantic identity. Some may also use similar words to describe the kind of sexual attraction they may experience if they are on the gray area of the acespec. For example, if someone identifies as demi ace, they may also identify as heterosexual to describe the kind of sexual attraction they would potentially experience after developing an emotional bond. Aces may also use those terms to describe with whom they would
prefer having a romantic/sexual relationship with. For instance, the words lesbian ace could be used to describe a woman who identifies as ace and that if they were to have a sexual/romantic relationship, it would be with another woman. There is no singular way to use and combine identity terms, thus, it depends on how the individual uses them to describe themselves. Thus, it is important my research utilizes a queer lens, particularly an ace lens, to better understand these experiences. Additionally, because some people use various words to describe themselves that dominant conversations and social constructions do not create space for, intersectional and transnational feminist lenses are equally important for my thesis.

While not every ace differentiates their attraction, this differentiation is important to note because society often automatically conflates these attractions, which invisibilizes aromantic identities and experiences. Because of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2021), it is important to highlight not only how things like race, religion, dis/ability, among others, can complicate one’s ace identity, but also aromanticism, especially since romantic identity is often excluded from discussions of intersectionality due to aro invisibility and this conflation. Thus, this research aims to include romantic identity when using the theory of intersectionality, especially since aces who also identify as aro will have different experiences compared to alloromantic aces. Because of the intersectionality of the people involved in this research, a transnational feminist lens is again vital to my research, as the positionality of the respondents must also be highlighted and considered.

**Current Study**
This thesis is composed of five chapters. Following the introduction, the second chapter will overview the existing literature on acephobia in American society, constructions of sexuality, and conceptualizations of sexual citizenship. In the third chapter, I explain my method of a qualitative survey. This chapter also discusses my methodology of using an intersectional, transnational feminist, and queer lens for this thesis, an overview of possible limitations, and a reflection on my reflexivity in this research. In the fourth chapter, I discuss the results of my analysis of respondents’ survey responses. In the conclusion, I summarize my findings, connect this research back to existing conversations in the current scholarship, discuss the importance and relevance of this research.

This research is inspired by and partly dedicated to the aces who have ever felt broken, invisible, alienated, or made to feel like they do not belong. These feelings are valid and equally unacceptable. Thus, the current research aims to provide space for some aces to share some of their experiences in their own words and claim authority of their stories. Using an intersectional, transnational feminist, and queer lens, this research analyzes how aces are impacted by the concept of sexual citizenship in the U.S. context.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This thesis aims to analyze how people who identify on the asexuality spectrum currently living in the United States context are impacted by the concept of sexual citizenship through an intersectional, transnational, and queer lens. Thus, the following literature review provides a discussion of acephobia in American society, constructions of sexuality, and conceptualizations of sexual citizenship. These topics connect to how describing asexuality from a white, male, able-bodied, and Western viewpoint leaves out the experiences and nuances of asexuality among marginalized communities. The first section includes the pathologization of asexuality, compulsory sexuality and amatonormativity, and misconceptions about asexuality. The second section discusses constructions of sexuality and includes the concept of the gold-star ace and Western social constructions of sexuality. Finally, the last section examines the concept of sexual citizenship and include various constructions of sexual citizenship.

In this thesis research, I use the terms “asexuality,” “asexual,” and “ace” to refer to those who identify with the asexuality spectrum or identify in a way similar to asexuality outside of Western constructions. Additionally, I use “queer” as an umbrella term to refer to LGBTQIA+ identities. This is because I believe queer is more inclusive than the acronym LGBTQIA+ as letters may easily be removed and excluded, to validate asexuality as queer, and to question the stability of identity categories. However, I acknowledge “queer” does not account for all sexual identities and experiences in the world and has limitations. It is simultaneously used to account for queer identities and experiences that exist in other cultures and languages and those that Western norms and
constructions of sexuality often deny and erase (Chiang et al., 2018; Grewal & Kaplan, 2001; Najmabadi, 2008, 2014; Pan et al., 2021; Valentine, 2007). These terms are used with care and caution as they may not be the best to use in certain contexts, do not encompass every experience, and they are still Eurocentric. It is important to remember more intersectional and transnational asexuality research must be done so we can listen to and learn with others who have experiences and viewpoints different from our own.

**Acephobia in American Society**

Like other queer folks, aspec individuals experience discrimination and oppression from social institutions. Unlike allossexuals, aces are not necessarily medicalized and pathologized *because of* their sexual preferences, but rather, their *absence of* sexual preference in a society that emphasizes sex and sexual relationships (Brown, 2022; Chasin, 2014; Gupta, 2015). This section will discuss the pathologization of asexuality, compulsory sexuality and amatonormativity, and misconceptions about asexuality as they relate to acephobia in American society.

**Pathologization of Asexuality**

Asexuality has a history of being pathologized in the U.S. context. “The modest attention human asexuality has received has come mainly from medical and psychological discourse, which has acknowledged asexuality only relatively recently, and then solely in pathologizing terms,” argues Cerankowski and Milks (2010, p. 653; Scherrer, 2008). For example, Brotto (2010) notes the addition of many sexual disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), such as Sexual Desire Disorders, Sexual Arousal Disorders, Orgasm Disorders, Inhibited Sexual Desire,
and Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (HSDD; p. 222). According to Brotto (2010), “the DSM-III-R defined HSDD as ‘persistently or recurrently deficient or absent sexual fantasies and desire for sexual activity,’” and later added distress or interpersonal difficulty in the DSM-IV (p. 222). While it is important to note the nuances of this experience, the fact remains that HSDD sounds so similar to asexuality (Chen, 2020; Decker, 2015; Przybylo, 2019) that an asexual exception was added to the DSM because of the advocacy work from the AVEN (The Asexual Visibility and Education Network) Task Force (Hinderliter, 2015). The AVEN DSM Task Force’s report argues that the DSM should exclude self-identifying aces from being diagnosed with HSDD (Hinderliter, 2015, p. 135). This ace exception was successfully included in the release of the DSM-V, which was a big step in working towards depathologizing and legitimizing asexuality (Brown 2022; Chen, 2020; Hinderliter, 2015; Przybylo, 2019). Not only was this significant in helping depathologize asexuality, but also construct it as an identity.

However, the similarities between HSDD and asexuality are still concerning, and this exception may not make much of a difference. Not only do these “sexual disorders”—intentionally or not—discriminate against aces, but they also do not consider the fact that some aces engage in sexual activity and that because of ace invisibility, some individuals feel distress from not experiencing sexual attraction simply because they do not know about asexuality. Additionally, like MacNeela and Murphy’s (2014) findings of the dismissal of asexuality, ace patients reported “high levels of doubt from [medical] providers” and that “physicians did not believe them when they disclosed their sexual identity, called them ‘broken,’ or encouraged them to receive unnecessary medical care,”
according to Puhl (2016, pp. 78–79). Consequently, this self-identified ace exception is not helpful for people who do not know about asexuality and are influenced by medical practitioners who identify them as in need of treatment, for medical professionals who do not know about asexuality, and even if the person knows they are ace, this exception does not make a difference if the medical provider does not know about or validate asexuality. “Saying that someone has HSDD unless they identify as ace is like saying that someone who experiences same-sex attraction has a psychiatric condition unless they happen to identify as homosexual,” argues Chen (2020, p. 90). However, it is not just the medical field that contributes to allosexism—the idea that allosexuality is the norm.

**Compulsory Sexuality & Amatonormativity**

While aces are affected by compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) like allosexual queer folks, compulsory sexuality more accurately encompasses the acephobia reinforced by social institutions. Przybylo (2019) describes compulsory sexuality as “the idea that all ‘healthy’ and ‘normal’ people have sex” (p. 8). Similarly, this term may also refer to the “assumption that all people are sexual and . . . describe the social norms and practices that both marginalize various forms of non-sexuality . . . and compel people to experience themselves as desiring subjects, take up sexual identities, and engage in sexual activity,” according to Gupta (2015, p. 132). Compulsory sexuality thus paints aces as having something wrong with them or broken. For example, the dismissal of aces and the constructed image of aces as “broken” can be seen in corrective violence against aces, in which perpetrators claim to “fix” or “cure” someone’s asexuality (Doan-Minh,
However, as I will discuss later, compulsory sexuality is complicated by a person’s intersecting identities.

This dismissal of asexuality can also be seen in how the knowledge production and experiences of aces are valued or not valued (Brown, 2022). According to Cuthbert (2021), “asexual people consistently had their accounts of themselves denied, dismissed, or overwritten by more ‘authoritative’ voices and discourses,” and these experiences are heavily gendered (p. 840). Due to systems of oppression like compulsory sexuality and heteropatriarchy, aces face epistemic injustice, with ace women and people perceived as women being impacted more than ace men and people perceived as men (Cuthbert, 2021). This is because heteropatriarchy devalues women and femininity and constructs asexuality as “an idea made up by misogynistic men to keep women from being sexually liberated,” thereby, depicting women as automatically ace (Chen, 2020, p. 57). Similarly, Brown (2022) argues:

Allosexuals feel entitled to attempt rebuttals against any claims we make regarding both our asexuality and the impact of acephobia on our well-being. Their self-imagined, self-appointed position as unchallenged epistemic authorities and our perceived lack of credibility as knowers gives them undue confidence in their ability to make determinations about our reality, even when they have nothing to couch their counterarguments in aside from personal bias, pseudoscience, and false superiority. (p. 21)

The right to epistemic authority is, therefore, an issue among aces. However, there may be places of resistance to this epistemic injustice. Scherrer (2008) notes that while
researchers often seek out academic sources, the internet has served as an important resource for the ace community to educate others and build community (p. 624), which may be a place of resistance to this epistemic injustice and lack of epistemic authority among aces.

Amatonormativity is another concept that contributes to acephobia in American society (Chen, 2020; Przybylo, 2019; Vares, 2021). Elizabeth Brake (2012) originally coined this term to refer to the assumption that “a central, exclusive, amorous relationship is normal for humans, in that it is a universally shared goal, and that such a relationship is normative, in that it should be aimed at in preference to other relationship types” (pp. 88–89). Similarly, Przybylo (2019) describes amatonormativity as “the organization of life and love according to a hierarchy that prioritizes sexual and romantic couples” (p. 5). Chen (2020) follows these views and calls it the “undeserved elevation and centrality of romantic love” and further notes that amatonormativity contributes to the gap in research on single people (pp. 127–128). Chen (2020) writes:

Amatonormativity, like every kind of normativity, erases variation. The erasure of variation means the erasure of choice and the triumph of stereotype and stigma. . . A person’s value and humanity . . . should never be dependent on either their familiarity with the very particular emotion of romantic love or their ability to inspire it in others. (p. 128)

Because of these norms and erasure of variation, aces are depicted as lonely and unable to find “real” happiness in other kinds of relationships. Some aces internalize this oppression and experience sadness, shame, and feelings of not belonging (Vares, 2021),
which demonstrates how amatonormativity and heteronormativity exclude and alienate aces.

Moreover, the intersection of compulsory sexuality and amatonormativity can be seen in the social construction of marriage in the U.S. “Sexologists and psychoanalysts, beginning in the late nineteenth century in the West, began to see sexual desire as a positive and natural part of human existence and mutual sexual satisfaction as necessary for the maintenance of heterosexual marriages” and often pathologized sexualities that were not white or heterosexual (Gupta, 2015, p. 137). According to Gupta (2015), “views on the importance of sexual satisfaction for the maintenance of marriage were communicated to the middle-class public by marriage and sex manuals,” which contributes to the sexual aspect of marriage taking precedence over the sentimental aspect (p. 137). The compulsory sexuality and acephobia in marriage can be seen in the U.S. legal system, as some states require sexual consummation in order for a marriage to receive full legal ratification (Gupta, 2015, p. 138). Because of invisibility and acephobia in social institutions, this can lead to misconceptions about aspecs, especially aces, which my research aims to combat.

**Misconceptions About Asexuality**

There are many misconceptions about asexuality. A common myth about asexuality is the notion that it is a “new” or “online” sexual orientation. Asexuality is often excluded from discussions about sexualities, the queer community, and the history of queer sexualities. “This erasure leaves room for people to continually dismiss asexuality as merely an ‘internet orientation,’ suggesting that it has been fabricated from
thin air and only within recent years,” writes Brown (2022, p. 151). Brown (2022) argues that this lack of asexual history being taught and preserved does not mean it does not exist and found the presence of what is presently called asexuality dating back to the 1850s.

Alfred Kinsey’s hetero-homo spectrum from the 1940s and 1950s is one specific example of how this myth is untrue (Chen, 2020; Brown, 2022; Przybylo, 2019). In the 1940s, Kinsey developed a 0–6 continuum for sexuality, where zero was completely heterosexual behavior, and six was completely homosexual behavior (Drucker, 2011, p. 244). Drucker (2011) notes that no place on Kinsey’s scale was stigmatized, including the X category (p. 243). Individuals labeled as X did not have sexual feelings, engage in sexual behavior, and were often sexually unresponsive (Drucker, 2011, pp. 246–247). While he “did not pathologize those individuals as ill or abnormal” (Drucker, 2011, p. 247), his scale was not revised to include these people, and, instead, they were put into a separate category called “X,” which was mostly forgotten (Chen, 2020, p. 17). As Chen (2020) notes, the Kinsey Scale became a popular way of socially constructing sexuality in Western contexts (p. 17). The repercussions of excluding and erasing aces from conceptualizations of sexuality like Kinsey’s can be seen in the ongoing invalidation and pathologization of asexuality, as discussed earlier (Brown 2022; Chen, 2020; Decker, 2015; Hinderliter, 2015; Przybylo, 2019). Unfortunately, many misconceptions about asexuality permeate society. There is no one way to be ace, and there are as many ways to be ace as there are aces. Thus, an intersectional analysis of ace experiences is needed to combat these harmful misconceptions, and ace visibility must be emphasized, which is
what I attempt to do using a qualitative survey to give a platform to some members of the ace community.

**Constructions of Sexuality**

Asexuality and compulsory sexuality are complicated by intersectionality, and an evaluation of how this plays a role in claiming an ace identity is needed. While scholarship in the field has studied the intersections of asexuality and race (Brown, 2022; Chen, 2020; Owen, 2014, 2018; Wong, 2014; Zheng & Su, 2018), gender (Chen, 2020; Cuthbert, 2019, 2021; Gupta, 2018; MacNeela & Murphy, 2014; Przybylo, 2014), disability (Chen, 2020; Gupta, 2014; Kim, 2011, 2014), and other identities, the ace community is not immune to systems of power. Consequently, whitewashing, racism, ableism, ageism, among others, are not uncommon in the ace community (Brown, 2022; Chen, 2020; Kim, 2014), which can exclude many marginalized aces and contribute to harmful discourses about asexuality in the U.S. context. Moreover, these discourses and images are constructed based on Western-centric concepts of sexuality and sexual identity. This section will discuss the gold-star ace and Western constructions of sexuality as they relate to how asexuality is socially constructed in the Western context, which is an aspect of my research.

**The Gold-Star Ace**

Asexuality is often invalidated because of acephobia and compulsory sexuality. However, this is complicated by intersectionality and other systems of oppression. For example, disabled people (Chen, 2020; Kim, 2011, 2014), white women (Chen, 2020; Cuthbert, 2021), Latinxs (Chen, 2020), Asians (Chen, 2020; Lee, 2020), Indigenous
people (Chow, 1996), and Blacks (Brown, 2022; Chen, 2020; Owen, 2014, 2018), among others, are desexualized and/or hypersexualized in the U.S. due to ableism, patriarchy, and racist stereotypes like the Jezebel and China doll. Additionally, asexuality is whitewashed and often seen as a white sexuality. This is because many of the ace spokespeople are white and much of ace culture is infused with white culture. The association between purity and whiteness is another contributing factor as well (Brown, 2022; Chen, 2020; Owen, 2014). For example, one Black ace says that “their asexuality—or rather, the way that asexuality is considered white—has made them feel alienated from both white and Black communities” (Chen, 2020, p. 79). On the one hand, they are alienated from the ace community because of their Blackness, while on the other hand, they are alienated from the Black community because of the whitewashing of asexuality (Chen, 2020, p. 79). This exclusion in the ace community because of systems of power can thereby result in a feeling of “homelessness” (Bardwell-Jones, 2017) or “culturally homeless” (Chen, 2020) for some marginalized aces. These factors can also make it harder for marginalized aces to claim an ace identity and increase the chances of their ace identity being invalidated as it could be dismissed and accredited to a consequence of systems of oppression like white supremacy, patriarchy, ableism, and more. “It’s hard if you confirm a stereotype and it’s hard if you violate a stereotype and it’s hard if you think you’re violating the stereotype only because you hate it so much,” writes Chen (2020, pp. 77–78). Consequently, this creates an internalized image of the “ideal” ace while systems of oppression construct the gold-star ace. The concept of the gold-star ace refers to the “perfect” way to be ace in a society where being ace is not ideal
in the first place (Chen, 2020). Gold-star aces are white, healthy, young, cisgender, beautiful, neurotypical, able-bodied, not religious, have never had sex, have not been abused, and do not experience any sexual attraction. Essentially, there must be no “causes” for their asexuality that others can use to invalidate and misrepresent this identity (Chen, 2020). While there is some intersectional scholarship on asexuality, particularly on Black and disabled communities (Kim, 2011, 2014; Owen, 2014, 2018), more research and a deeper analysis are needed on asexuality (Guz et al., 2022). For example, a transnational feminist lens reveals that the social construction of women from the Global South must also be examined when considering compulsory sexuality and the gold-star ace. This is vital to my research as there may be participants from various parts of the world currently living in the U.S. who will have experiences different from aces from the Global North.

The socially constructed image of women from the Global South as victims in need of saving can invalidate one’s asexuality through desexualization. Western feminisms that see sexual liberation as the key to freedom may impose their own ideas of feminism onto others, enforce compulsory sexuality, and invalidate asexuality, which can be very harmful to aces from the Global South. As Mohanty (1984) theorizes, women from the Global South are socially constructed as a homogeneous powerless group by certain Western feminisms. The image of women from the Global South thus depicts them as victims of male and colonial violence, sexually repressed and oppressed by their religion and culture, in need of liberation (Mohanty, 1984), and victims to be saved from
brown men by white men (Spivak, 1988). They may also simultaneously be considered a threat to national security (Shakhsari, 2020).

Consequently, this image desexualizes women from the Global South because of the assumed sexual violence they experienced, and, supposedly, their traditions and religion depict them as sexually inactive and undesirable (Zakaria, 2021). “The burden of having to prove myself as non-sexually repressed—and thereby earning the label ‘feminist,’ worthy of respect and a voice in the room—sat wooden and unrelenting on my shoulders,” writes Zakaria (2021, p. 109). Zakaria (2021) further argues:

   Even if I had been able to explain how asexuality helps underscore the lost anti-capitalist potential of a heterosexuality immersed in consumerism, I would have been too afraid to bring it up. Poor her, my colleagues might think, all the repression of her culture has left her an asexual. In this equation where sexual empowerment equaled all empowerment, there was no room to consider the weight of compulsory sexuality. (p. 109)

Validating Zakaria’s experience, Chen (2020) writes, “as a Muslim feminist, an identity that some foolishly see as incompatible,” it was hard for Zakaria to make it clear she was not opposed to sexual pleasure “but to the way that it has been constructed and the stories about sex that have been taught” (p. 60). Therefore, this harmful construction can further complicate one’s identity if women from the Global South identify as ace because it could be dismissed as them just being sexually repressed by their religion and culture, which are also constructed as naturally queerphobic and oppressive through the lens of culture (Çalişkan et al., 2020, p. 49; Grewal & Kaplan, 2001).
Furthermore, some feminisms enforce compulsory sexuality because they are saturated in sex-positivity. Because of this, sex is not only equated to liberation, but it has “become feminist” (Chen, 2020, p. 54). According to Milks (2014), sex-positive theory and politics, which dominates modern feminist and queer sexual politics, dismisses asexuality as a consequence of being sexually repressed by systems of power (p. 101). “In this pervasive view, asexuality is constructed as an immature, underdeveloped, and incomplete form of pre-sexuality suffering from stunted growth,” and it is only when aces “discover their authentic sexual selves can they become fully whole, and finally autonomous,” argues Milks (2014, p. 101). Under these discourses, if a woman identifies as ace and/or is not having sex, she cannot be a feminist (Chen, 2020; Milks, 2014).

Because of this harmful image of women from the Global South, a transnational lens is needed when discussing and deconstructing the gold-star ace. However, while the nuances of the gold-star ace are important to note, they are still based on Western constructions of sexuality, particularly the Western construction of ace identity. **Western Constructions of Sexuality**

To avoid enforcing and exporting Western norms and dominant constructions of sexuality—specifically asexuality—in my research, these concepts must be analyzed and deconstructed. Western bodies are considered the “normative body,” argue Grewal and Kaplan (2001). Different contexts may have different words or concepts, some people find Western sexuality labels offensive, Western labels may have different meanings in different contexts, and some contexts do not have names for certain identities or concepts (Najmabadi, 2008, 2014; Valentine, 2007). For example, Najmabadi (2008, 2014)
explains how gender, sex, and sexual identity are complicated in the context of sex-reassignment surgery (SRS) in Iran. Some people considered “lesbian” or “gay” may be pressured to undergo SRS because of heteronormative and homophobic discourses enforced by the medical field and the government. There are many nuances in this discussion, but this is often done to “cure” their sexual desires, erase queer sexualities, and enforce the gender binary, thereby blurring the “lines” of gender, sex, and sexuality in the process (Najmabadi, 2008). Valentine (2007) found similar nuances regarding the term “transgender” in the context of some communities in New York. “The category of transgender is (as much as the category of ‘homosexuality’) an effect of the distinction between what ‘gender’ and ‘sexuality’ have come to mean,” writes Valentine (2007, p. 132). These distinctions between gender, sex, and sexuality in the U.S. context are complicated by the fact that there are racial and class differences in who uses or relates to the term “transgender,” with white and middle-class people being more likely to identify as transgender (Valentine, 2007). Thus, identity categories hold various meanings to different communities because of systems of power. To impose terms on those who we believe to be part of socially constructed communities like “transgender” or “asexual” is to enforce dominant constructions of identities, erase their complexities, and deny the agency of people to describe themselves. Savcı (2020, 2021) also highlights the importance of addressing power dynamics in language as much of the literature in queer studies is English-centered and do not acknowledge that some words are not translatable. El-Tayeb (2006) echoes similar sentiments and notes that if queer minorities do not
conform to the dominant white, homonormative queer identity, they are seen as backward and deviant.

Similarly, Chiang et al. (2018) argue that queer studies is still largely Eurocentric and often “delinks” trans identities from sexual identities, which can exclude various experiences in which gender, sex, and sexuality are inseparable, such as some Asian contexts (p. 309). Winer (2022) found that about a third of the aces he spoke with experience what he calls “gender detachment.” This refers to “individually-held beliefs that gender presentation/identity is irrelevant, pointless, or even oppressive” (Winer, 2022, para. 5). Thus, some aces revealed they only gave a gender identity when asked because “they don’t feel they have a choice” (Winer, 2022, para. 7). This further demonstrates that constructions of gender, sex, and sexuality can be complicated and interconnected even in contexts where dominant Western constructions of sexuality and gender are the norm. Consequently, while gender, sex, and sexual identity (and romantic identity) are often separated as Euro-American social constructions, these concepts are not so simple, depending on the context and people’s experiences. Furthermore, if sexuality is understood and studied only in Euro-American terms, it can contribute to the perpetuation of American sexual politics and exclude people who identify outside of these constructs.

According to Çalişkan and colleagues (2020), similar to people who identify as Muslim, countries in the Global South can be depicted as barbaric, backward, and oppressed by their cultures due to the intersection of racism, colonialism, Islamophobia, homophobia, and exceptionalism. Conversely, countries in the Global North (notably the
U.S.) and Christianity are seen as promoting freedom, democracy, and liberation.

Similarly, Grewal and Kaplan (2001) note that the U.S. and Europe are viewed as modern and progressive, while other places are seen as traditional (p. 669). This creates harmful essentializing discourses about culture and religion in the Global South, and people may perceive the consequences of asymmetrical global power systems as barbaric cultural practices (Çalişkan et al., 2020). Thus, countries that are not “progressive” are that way because they are naturally “primitive,” and the U.S. and Europe are seen as places of freedom and democratic choice despite there being many instances of homophobia and transphobia (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001, pp. 699–700). Çalişkan and colleagues (2020) note that similar to women’s rights, gay rights have become a marker of how progressive a country is (p. 45). However, this is often without recognizing that much of the homophobia across the world is a result of colonialism and other systems of power. Therefore, people from the Global South are often “used as pawns to confirm the progressive politics of nation-states that need excuses to trigger wars and invasions in the name of sexual liberation,” argue Çalişkan et al. (2020, p. 44).

Jasbir Puar’s (2017) concept of homonationalism is a term used to help theorize these intersections of racism, colonialism, Islamophobia, homophobia, and exceptionalism. “Homonationalism refers to patriotic claims by members of the LGBTQ+ community that migrant (racialized) people are homophobic, that Western society is not, and that, therefore, justifies racist and xenophobic policies, especially against Muslims,” write Çalişkan et al. (2020, p. 41). Thus, under homonationalism, immigrant others are depicted as naturally queerphobic because of culture, which Global
North countries use to justify war, militarism, occupation, and violence in the name of sexual liberation (Puar, 2013, 2017). Consequently, to be considered worthy of protection, some sexually marginalized refugees must adopt Western sexuality labels and fit a coming out narrative, note Çalişkan et al. (2020), Grewal and Kaplan (2001), Hodge (2019), and Murray (2013). In turn, this reproduces and enforces state-produced sexual identities that divide people into “good gays” the state must protect and “bad queers” that are disposable (Çalişkan et al., 2020; Grewal & Kaplan, 2001) under homonationalism and queer necropolitics—the valuing and dismissal of certain queer lives (Puar, 2017, p. 36). Furthermore, this reinforces the free and liberated image of the Global North, and countries like the U.S. may be considered a safe haven for sexual minorities (Çalişkan et al., 2020).

This exportation of Western constructions of sexuality is just one danger of understanding sexuality solely in Western terms. While there is some intersectional research on asexuality, more research is needed that critically analyzes these intersections and uses a transnational feminist lens. If my research does not acknowledge how asexuality is a socially constructed Western identity, I run the risk of exporting these Western social constructions of sexuality and centering the voices of those who identify within these constructions at the expense of those who do not. Moreover, my data will come from aces with various experiences, global systems of power will be at play, and some responses may have homonationalist undertones. Thus, my research is influenced by transnational feminist theory and utilizes an intersectional feminist lens to better analyze the data and contribute to and expand ongoing conversations in the field.
Conceptualizations of Sexual Citizenship

As I use the concept of sexual citizenship in my research, it is important to evaluate the ways this concept is constructed. To start, Richardson (2000) notes that citizenship has often been defined in relation to national identity. Citizenship is “a set of practices which define social membership in a particular society or nation-state” (p. 72). Thus, a citizen is constructed as someone who belongs and is a member of a nation-state (Richardson, 2000, p. 72). Richardson (2000) argues that those who are seen as not belonging to the nation are noncitizens and are “denied the right of membership of, or belonging to, a particular community with a shared identity” (p. 72). Therefore, broadly defined, sexual citizenship refers to how discourses about sexuality and discourses about citizenship are brought together (Richardson, 2017), or, as Monro (2005) sums up, it can “describe the sexual rights of groups, as well as access to general rights, and the impact of these rights on sexuality” (p. 153). According to Richardson (2017), sexual citizenship can be an abstract concept that is viewed and constructed in various ways, with some scholars preferring the term “intimate citizenship” to account for a broader range of ideas and experiences not often considered sexual. However, Richardson (2000) notes that these concepts raise the question of how nationhood and the nation are socially constructed. Moreover, as discussed earlier, transnational sexuality studies is largely Western-centric. “As such, sexual citizenship research . . . would be remiss to proceed from the presumption that gender and sexuality categories are always analytically and experientially distinct,” note Pan et al. (2021, p. 1063). Thus, this section will discuss the
various constructions of sexual citizenship through a transnational feminist lens to better understand the ways it could impact aces currently living in the U.S.

**Sexual Rights: Granted or Denied**

First, sexual citizenship may be used as a theoretical tool to discuss access to rights granted or denied to people based on their sexuality (including expression and identity). For example, according to Evans (1993), the London Gay Liberation Front (GLF) in the 1960s and 1970s included “statements of basic citizenship intent” in their advocacy via the extension of rights and freedoms to people who were not heterosexual (p. 110). The London GLF’s demands included a variety of rights, such as the abolition of discrimination against all gay people in general, the right for gay people to not feel guilt or shame about their sexuality, making the age of consent for gay people the same as heterosexuals, the end of police brutality against gay people, the right for gay people to display public affection like heterosexuals, for homosexuality to stop being treated as a mental illness or a disorder, among others (Evans, 1993, p. 112). This example of “gay citizenship” connects to Puar’s (2017) concept of queer necropolitics. Many of the London GLF’s demands were related to the safety and life of gay people because their lives were often disregarded. For example, Gould (2009) argues that the U.S. government often did not acknowledge the harm of the AIDS/HIV epidemic and did very little to help the gay and lesbian communities (who were disproportionately impacted) until these people fought back. This intentional disregard for the lives of gays and lesbians in these contexts demonstrates that the nation views these people as disposable and, therefore, noncitizens.
Bevacqua (2004) makes similar arguments of how the legalization of same-sex marriage in the U.S. is an important aspect of gaining equal citizenship status for queer people. Bevacqua (2004) prioritizes “the removal of all formal inequalities” as “the exclusion of a portion of the population from a major social institution creates a second-class citizenship for that group,” she writes (p. 37). Monro (2005) similarly argues that studies of citizenship often leave out gender and sexual minorities, and “‘the citizen’ is generally assumed to be a white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied person,” thereby excluding these identities from conceptualizations of citizenship (p. 147). Bevacqua (2004) emphasizes the importance of legalizing same-sex marriage so queer people are granted the same rights as heterosexuals and, therefore, a step toward becoming citizens rather than second-class citizens. While the rights of queer people are still denied, gay rights are currently seen as a marker for progress (Çalişkan et al., 2020). Consequently, the good gays are considered citizens, however, asexuality is still often seen as an illness similar to how homosexuality was (Brotto, 2010; Evans, 1993). This highlights the need to evaluate how aces are impacted by this construction of sexual citizenship = equal rights for sexual minorities. If asexuality is often invisible and/or invalidated, the sexual rights of aces are consequently denied, thereby excluding them from sexual citizenship.

The Consumer

Second, some conceptualize sexual citizenship as being able to participate as a consumer in society. Evans (1993) writes, “sexual citizenship involves partial, private, and primarily leisure and lifestyle membership,” and that for sexual minorities, “commitment to their sexual citizenship rights is chiefly expressed through their ‘out’
participation in commercial ‘private’ territories” (pp. 61–62). We must come to terms with the commodification of sexuality because we are consumers who express our various identities (e.g., sexual identity) through the purchase of commodities, argues Evans (1993, pp. 43–44). Evans (1993) claims the state thereby uses the commodification of sexuality—whose constructions change based on the needs of the market—to create more consumers and sustain capitalism. For example, male sexuality is commodified through goods that code women as sexual objects meant for men’s pleasure, such as pornography, prostitution, and ads that objectify women (Evans, 1993, pp. 47–48). Conversely, Evans (1993) argues that female sexuality is commodified through the social construction of women as “domestic consumers-in-chief,” and the idea of sexual liberation in which women have the right to sexual pleasure and independence (p. 48). Therefore, Evans (1993) notes, women can buy their sexuality by purchasing groceries for the home and/or birth control (which is complicated by the “amoral market” and “moral state”) as forms of sexual expressions (p. 48). Because of this, “the power that queer citizens enjoy is largely dependent on access to capital and credit,” argue Bell and Binnie (2000, p. 96), as they will be able to perform their sexuality via the purchase of goods.

Gupta (2015) notes this link between sex and capitalism as well and additionally argues that compulsory sexuality is at play in this relationship. According to Gupta (2015), capitalism incites sexual desire as a marketing tactic and essentially uses sex to sell commodities (p. 138). “In addition,” Gupta (2015) writes, “the capitalist marketplace has an interest in cultivating a multiplication of sexual identities in order to establish
niche markets for targeted products and advertising” (pp. 138–139). Thus, corporations assume their consumers experience sexual attraction and advertise using sex, thereby, they are both influenced by and enforcing compulsory sexuality. Because many aces do not have romantic and/or sexual relationships with others and are often resistant to marketing that relies on sexual attraction to sell, asexuality may be deemed “unsellable” in a capitalist society, and, consequently, marginalizing aces from this construction of sexual citizenship.

The Married Citizen

Third, marriage may be another signifier of full sexual citizenship status. According to Aizura (2006), “marriage . . . gains its meaning and institutional power through heteronormative exclusivity,” and if it did not grant rights to some at the expense of excluding others, it would not hold as much significance (p. 301). Willse and Spade (2013) further note that marriage has been used as a tool to enforce racism, colonialism, xenophobia, sexism, and other forms of oppression in the US. Because of this exclusivity, gaining marriage rights can represent an identity being seen as “normal,” or, more specifically, a citizen of the state, note Aizura (2006), Bevacqua (2004), Taylor (2011), and Walters (2014). Chen (2020) also notes feelings of alienation among the ace community due to marriage. As discussed earlier, amatonormativity prioritizes romantic/sexual relationships—specifically monogamous heterosexual ones—over platonic relationships (Chen, 2020, Brake, 2012, Przybylo, 2019). Consequently, not only are aces made to feel broken and lonely, but many are excluded and oppressed by marriage laws. Bell and Binnie (2000) similarly note that marriage marginalizes
unmarried people. According to Chen (2020), there are over 1,100 federal laws that benefit married couples, and include benefits related to: health insurance; sharing military, social security, and disability benefits; making medical decisions; and bereavement leave (p. 131). Decker (2015) additionally notes that some states, provinces, nations, and other contexts have consummation laws that require the couple to have sex for it to be legally binding (p. 58). This not only discriminates against aces (or anybody) who do not want to have sex, but also serves as another exclusive barrier to normalcy/citizenship via marriage. Gupta (2015) similarly argues that these laws marginalize aces but further notes how amatonormativity and compulsory sexuality influence and are enforced through the social institution of marriage, as discussed earlier. Under this construction of the sexual citizen as the married citizen, the institution of marriage is therefore meant to exclude and alienate those the state considers noncitizens. Because of the ties to amatonormativity and compulsory sexuality, this construction is important to note, as some aces may be marginalized by the social institution of marriage.

**Sexual Citizenship & Nationalisms**

Fourth, the relationship between sexuality and nationalisms is another factor in constructing sexual citizenship. According to Richardson (2017), “a key focus is on how struggles for sexual citizenship have come to act as a performative of the nation-state; a symbolic marker of in/tolerant countries and constructions of ‘modernity’/’backwardness’” (p. 214). For example, Dreher (2017) explains that on the day New Zealand voted for same-sex marriage, a meme circulated on social media (p. 183). Overlayed on the image of a rainbow flag, the text read, “New Zealand made
history today. Let’s be on the right side of history too” (Dreher, 2017, p. 183). “In images such as ‘the right side of history’, same-sex marriage is assumed as natural, unremarkable and inevitable, marking the nation and its people as modern and tolerant,” argues Dreher (2017, p. 183). As noted earlier, the Global North is socially constructed as “progressive,” while the Global South is depicted as “backward” (Çaşkan et al., 2020; Grewal & Kaplan, 2001). Additionally, gay rights are often considered a marker for progress or freedom in a nation, while good gays and disposable bad queers are created in the process (Çaşkan et al., 2020). This creates “lines of fracture between presumably queer-friendly and homo-transphobic countries,” and the advertisement of queer rights may be part of a bigger political agenda, which Ammaturo (2015) refers to as the “Pink Agenda” (p. 1152).

This construction of sexual citizenship also ties back to the concept of homonationalism. Similar to Ammaturo (2015), Çaşkan et al. (2020) note that an increasing number of queer people support the war on terror (p. 44). Çaşkan et al. (2020) argue:

This not only recruits citizens—as well as those who are willing to stay silent and not critique the state—but also increases the legitimacy and capacity of the state to define which populations are impossible. Through its contract with new citizen categories, the state is able to legitimize the disposability of some populations. (p. 44)
Under homonationalism, some queers in the Global North consequently carry out queer necropolitics and a Pink Agenda, as “a defense of queerness is simultaneously a defense of whiteness” (Çalişkan et al., 2020, p. 49).

However, as Çalişkan and colleagues (2020) note, “some others other other others” (p. 52). By enforcing the oppression of other marginalized groups, people who usually have restricted rights can gain more power and worth. For example, Puar (2017) argues that “through the transnational production of terrorist corporealities, homosexual subjects who have limited legal rights in the U.S. civil context gain significant representational currency when situated within the global scene of the war on terror” (p. 4). Thus, despite being often excluded from constructions of citizenship, queer people are able to gain more status and be recruited as sexual citizens by the state by aiding in American exceptionalism, argues Puar (2017).

Consequently, while sexual citizenship can be a useful concept to understand the intersections of discourses about sexuality and citizenship and the marginalization of queer people, it is vital to use a transnational feminist lens to critically examine and expand this concept. Richardson (2017) argues:

Although sexual citizenship has brought into focus issues that had previously been taken for granted or ignored in accounts of citizenship concerning bodies, identities and relationships, it nevertheless retains and leaves unquestioned many conventional features of liberal western frameworks of citizenship. (pp. 211–212)

Thus, it must be discussed whether or not sexual citizenship is a “Western” concept, who it includes and excludes (Richardson & Monro, 2012), and how systems of oppression
construct the “typical” queer American citizen (Eng & Hom, 1998). Therefore, while my research will utilize this concept to understand some aces’ experiences, I will use it with the understanding of its limitations and to expand on this concept by utilizing an intersectional feminist lens and including some experiences of asexuality.

Conclusion

This literature review discussed three main areas: acephobia in American society, constructions of sexuality, and conceptualizations of sexual citizenship. These areas provide the necessary background knowledge needed to understand the purpose of this thesis and how this topic fits into the ongoing conversations in existing research. These texts also allow me to see what research has already been done for the ace community. While the existing research largely addresses the validation of asexuality and how it intersects with some other identities, intersectional research that critically analyzes asexuality and the use of transnational feminist thought is needed. My research aims to help fill in this research and methodological gap and examine how aces are impacted by the concept of sexual citizenship through an intersectional feminist lens, which builds off of these prior findings. This thesis aims to evaluate how aces currently living in the U.S. context are impacted by the concept of sexual citizenship and help raise the voices of aces, especially those often underrepresented, in the process. The next chapter includes the methodology of this research.
Chapter 3: Methods & Methodology

This thesis uses an online qualitative survey of people currently living in the U.S. context who identify on the ace spectrum to understand how aces are impacted by the concept of sexual citizenship. A qualitative survey allows these aces to add nuances to their answers and use their own words to describe their experiences. The purpose of this study is to answer if and how aces in the world are excluded from the concept of sexual citizenship. It is important to understand people’s experiences of asexuality through an intersectional and transnational feminist lens.

Research on asexuality is increasing, but there is still a need for more intersectional research on asexuality (Guz et al., 2022). In addition to this research gap, there is also a methodological gap because much of the research on asexuality does not use an intersectional feminist lens. While I considered interviewing aces for this research, a survey would increase my chances of reaching more people with identities other than white, cisgender, and able-bodied aces. These perspectives are important, but they are already represented in much of the research on asexuality (Brown, 2022; Chen, 2020; Kim, 2011; Owen, 2014). Additionally, previous studies are often done without a transnational feminist lens and may reinforce Western constructions of sexuality and not consider the positionality of the people in that research. Thus, this thesis aims to help fill the gaps in the existing research by analyzing how aces are impacted by the concept of sexual citizenship through an intersectional, transnational feminist, and queer lens.

Methodologies
My thesis is influenced by intersectionality theory, transnational feminism, and queer theory (particularly ace theory). The theory of intersectionality argues that people’s experiences and positions in the world are shaped by their multiple identities, not just one (e.g., gender; Crenshaw, 2021). My analysis takes into account that identities such as race, citizenship status, sexual identity, romantic identity, class, gender, ability, religion, educational status, and more are interlocking and cannot be separated. Going a step further, my research is influenced by transnational feminist scholars like Chandra Mohanty (1984) and Caren Kaplan (1994), who argue for the deconstruction of harmful hegemonic constructions of women from the Global South and a critical reflection and acknowledgement of one’s positionality in the global context, respectively. While this research uses transnational feminist lens, it is important to note that the geographical reach of the survey is not transnational. My research also uses a queer lens and is influenced by scholars like Ferguson (2003), Valentine (2007), Hames-García (2011), Cohen (1997), and Anzaldúa (2009), who highlight the ways race, class, gender, language, and other identities shape one’s sexuality and queerness. These identities cannot be looked at separately, or we risk erasing the existence and experiences of queers of color and poor queer people. More specifically, my research uses an ace lens, which “affords aces the ability to observe the rules of society from an outsider’s vantage and with an outsider’s insights,” highlight sexual norms that often go unnoticed, and “interrogate the ways that these norms make our lives smaller” (Chen, 2020, pp. 6–7). Chen (2020) further notes that “aces have developed a new lens that prioritizes what is just over what is supposedly natural” (p. 7). All of these lenses are essential to better
understand and analyze people’s experiences of asexuality as they will be shaped by their
interlocking identities and position in the world. These frameworks were also vital in the
construction of my research and methods.

Methods

For this study, I chose to use an online qualitative survey. Unlike quantitative
surveys, qualitative surveys use open-ended questions. Therefore, the data is in the form
of words rather than numbers. At the start of the survey, participants are first shown an
online anonymous consent form (see Appendix B) and are only able to take the rest of the
survey if they select “yes” and consent to participating. The survey consists of two
blocks. The first block includes demographic questions about age, socioeconomic status,
religion/spirituality, race/ethnicity, if they identify as an immigrant, gender identity,
sexual identity, romantic identity, among others. The second block asks questions related
to the construction of sexual citizenship, and the survey takes about ten to 15 minutes to
complete (see Appendix B). Participants were recruited through emails (see Appendix A)
and flyers sent to AVEN, the directors of the LGBTQIA+ Center and Women’s Center at
Minnesota State University, Mankato, professors at various universities in the U.S, on
social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn), and a Discord chat for ace/aro
scholars. Participants are a sexual minority and are, therefore, primarily accessible
through intra-group outreach. Thus, snowball sampling also occurred as this survey was
shared with others who might be eligible or who know people who might be. The survey
was open January 5, 2023, and closed on January 31, 2023. After data collection, I
qualitatively analyzed the survey responses for patterns, which I noted on notecards. I
then created larger overarching themes based on these patterns and further broke these
down into subthemes to examine the results more easily in my analysis.

There are multiple reasons I chose this method. One reason is an online survey would help me reach a wide range of people from various positionalities. According to Miner and Jayaratne (2014), online surveys allow participants more flexibility on when and where they want to take the survey, and internet respondents often represent a wider range of people (p. 311). Moreover, participants may feel more comfortable taking an online survey as they do not have to be in contact with the researcher (Miner & Jayaratne, 2014, p. 319). Additionally, the fact remains that I have more privilege than some of the people I want to gain insight from, and these power dynamics may deter or even prevent some people from participating if I used other methods, such as interviews. Another reason I chose to use an online qualitative survey is that (as discussed earlier in the review of previous literature) aces are often discredited as knowledge producers and face epistemic injustice, which is more common for marginalized aces (Brown, 2022; Cuthbert, 2021). By using open-ended questions that provide space for participants to share some of their experiences in their own words, participants might feel they have more authority over their stories. “Participants should be able to describe their experiences as they perceive them, not through the researcher’s preconceived notions about what their worlds are like,” argue Miner and Jayaratne (2014, pp. 303–304). Because of this, I want to include the voices of aces in the U.S. context and help give them a space to speak for themselves in their own words and resist this epistemic injustice. Thus, the use of block quotes in my results chapter is part of my methodology.
However, this research is not without limitations. For one, when utilizing an online survey, I must consider who does and does not have access to the internet. Those who have greater access to education, are middle-class, and live in urban areas are more likely to have access to the internet, and the environment in which participants take this survey will not be consistent or monitored (Miner & Jayaratne, 2014, p. 311; Pew Research, 2022). Moreover, while I used a transnational feminist lens to design the survey questions, the fact remains that this survey is in English. Thus, I must note the language barrier and English-centeredness of the questions. According to Savci (2021), queer studies scholars have only recently acknowledged the English-centeredness in much of the literature, despite the field critiquing universalism and highlighting the power of language (p. 11; Savci, 2020). Consequently, many concepts in queer studies “assume an unspoken universalism” (Savci, 2021, p. 11). Savci (2021) argues,

This is made possible in particular by failing to situate the terms in the English language and, therefore, assuming their translatability both linguistically and metaphorically. Such grounding of linguistic concepts in the materiality of language becomes especially important if we are to follow the queer theoretical proposal that language is not simply an expression or a representation but is constitutive of “the real.” (p. 11)

Thus, I must acknowledge that my research and the terms I use are English-centered and limited in their “translatability” (Savci, 2020, 2021), and this will add another barrier to who can and cannot share their experiences in this survey. To help remedy this limitation and avoid limiting the discussion of identities into binaries of traditional/modern,
global/local, West/East, colonial/authentic, etc., most of the demographic questions about identity are multi-select and include a text box option for participants to write in the term they identify with or use to describe their identity. At the beginning of the survey, there is also a disclaimer that highlights how the words “ace” and “ace identity” are used within the survey but may not accurately depict how some participants describe themselves. Additionally, there is a question that acknowledges people may understand sexualities differently and provides more space for participants to describe their identities if the previous questions were not sufficient.

Participants

The sample included 124 people who identified on the ace spectrum, currently live in the U.S., and are at least 18 years old. Identities in quotation marks are those that respondents wrote in. Participants described their sexual identity as ace (84), queer (50), demi-ace (37), gray-ace (24), aceflux (3), “aegosexual” (3), “questioning”/“I don’t know” (2), “gay” (1), “bisexual” (1), and “polyamorous” (1). Their romantic identities included queer (50), aro (38), demi-aro (30), heterromantic (27), gray-aro (21), homoromantic (14), “panromantic” (8), “biromantic” (5), “aegoromantic” (2), “gay” (2), “questioning” (2), and “lesbian” (1). Ages ranged from 18 to 62 years old. For education level, 53 had a bachelor’s degree; 36 respondents had a high school or equivalent diploma, some college, or associate’s degree; and 36 had a master’s, professional, or doctoral degree. About 42.74% of respondents lived in a suburban area, 41.94% lived in an urban area, and 15.32% lived in a rural area. Their religion/spirituality included Atheist/Agnostic (85), Christian (23), Jewish (7), Buddhist (5), “Satanist” (3), “Spiritual” (3), "Pagan” (2),
Hindu (1), "Celtic reconstructionist pagan" (1), "Pagan/Voodoo" (1), "Pagan, Witch" (1),
"Wiccan/Pagan" (1), "Atheist" (1), "Agnostic Universalist" (1), “Skeptical” (1),
"Unitarian Universalist / Star Trek" (1), and “Unsure” (1). Participants identified as
White/Caucasian (109), Latina/o/x (13), Asian (7), American Indian or Alaska Native (4),
Black or African American (2), “Honduran” (1), “Hispanic” (1), “Mixed” (1), and
“Jewish” (1). The states/U.S. territories in which participants currently live included
Minnesota (17), California (12), North Carolina (9), Illinois (7), New York (7), Texas (6),
Jersey (3), Virginia (3), Wisconsin (3), Arizona (2), Colorado (2), Iowa (2), Indiana (2),
Louisiana (2), Massachusetts (2), New Mexico (2), South Carolina (2), Tennessee (2),
Alabama (1), Connecticut (1), Georgia (1), Idaho (1), Maryland (1), Missouri (1),
Nebraska (1), Nevada (1), Oklahoma (1), Rhode Island (1), and Utah (1). About 3.23% of
respondents identified as immigrants, with two from Mexico, one from Honduras, and
one from Pakistan. Around 13.71% of participants identified their parents as immigrants,
with four from Mexico, two from Japan, two from England, one from Columbia, one
from Guatemala, one from Venezuela, one from South America, one from Argentina, one
from China, one from South Korea, and one from India, one from Bangladesh, and one
from Poland. Respondents’ gender identities included woman (70), nonbinary (33),
agender (23), queer (21), detached from gender (21), man (16), transgender (10),
transman (8), demigender (5), “genderfluid” (3), Two-Spirit (2), “questioning” (2),
(1), “genderqueer” (1), “genderfuck” (1), “bigender” (1), and “bisexual” (1). Regarding
their sex/sex assigned at birth, 102 people identified as female, 20 as male, two as transsexual, and one as intersex. Other identities some participants shared included “neuroqueer – autistic, ADHD” (1) and “plural” (1).

**Reflexivity**

According to Hesse-Biber (2014), reflexivity refers to how researchers acknowledge and understand how their various identities, background, and assumptions can influence their research (p. 3). Thus, it is important to acknowledge my positionality in relation to this study. As a woman who identifies as ace, this research is not only important to me as a feminist, but it is also personal. I experience marginalization because of my aceness, and during my teaching experiences, many of my ace students have shared with me their experiences of erasure and feelings of invisibility. Moreover, I most likely have similar experiences to some of the people participating in this research, may relate to their stories, or their experiences are things I may struggle with in the future. Because of my personal experiences, emotions will play a role in my research. Hence, I must practice emotional reflexivity and reflect on my emotions as “these feelings often tell researchers when something is being submerged or ignored, and needs to be examined” (Reger, 2020, pp. 98–99). This, in addition to identifying as a white, native English-speaking, first-generation, and low-income student from America, impacts how I analyzed and interpreted participants’ responses. While I have insight into issues like socioeconomic status, misogyny, and allosexism, I am privileged as a white person with U.S. citizenship. Additionally, I am from and live in the Global North, which global asymmetrical systems of power center and privilege over the Global South.
Due to my positionality in the world, there are struggles I have never and will
never face. In order to practice feminist research, I must acknowledge that how I
interpreted and analyzed this research would have been different compared to someone
with other experiences and identities. Additionally, it is important to note that the
responses of the participants are based on their own unique positionalities. Because I
must position myself, it is important that I position the people involved in this research in
this conversation as well. Thus, as part of my methodology, I describe the respondents by
some of their identities (e.g., gender identity, race/ethnicity, sexual identity, and romantic
identity) while discussing the results and include a chart of some of the identities of each
respondent (see Appendix C). Because of the historical racialization of Jewish people in
the U.S. context, I include this identity instead of the participants’ race when describing
them in the results chapter. Additionally, when relevant to the person’s response and/or
the theme being discussed, I include other identities (e.g., religion) in their description at
times. There are as many ways to be ace as there are aces, and we must constantly learn
from and with others who have experiences different from our own. The next chapter
evaluates my findings and includes my analysis of the data.
Chapter 4: Results

This chapter includes the results from my qualitative survey, which consisted of 124 participants who identified on the asexuality spectrum and currently lived in the U.S. In this chapter, I discuss the themes that were prevalent in participants’ answers: 1) Amatonormativity, 2) Allonormative Medicine & Negative Experiences with Medical Practitioners, 3) Acephobia, 4) Exclusion from the Queer Community, 5) the Avoidance of “Coming Out” as Strategy, and 6) the Assemblance of the Ace Community. As part of my methodology, participants’ responses are included verbatim, with minor edits for clarity.

Amatonormativity

One theme that emerged in participants’ responses was amatonormativity. To examine this theme, I will examine the marginalization of unmarried people, the prioritization of marriage and (monogamous) partnerships, and how sex is tied to marriage.

Marginalization of Unmarried People

Something that commonly appeared in participants’ responses is the idea that the social institution of marriage marginalizes unmarried people. For example, married people have more financial, medical, and social privileges offered to them. One Jewish transmasculine aro ace shares,
I live with a queerplatonic partner who is seriously disabled and applying for disability benefits, so we couldn’t get married even if we really wanted to (for financial reasons), and also it’s not particularly what we want, even if it has also made us feel legally disadvantaged at times (not being able to [file taxes] jointly, share a bank account, consider moving to another country together for a little while, etc).

Another Latina/o/x agender panromantic ace\(^3\) echoes these sentiments and says,

I don’t feel any way about marriage. As a polyamorous person, it’d be nice to have the option to marry multiple people, but I personally don’t place any significance on marriage past what it could do for me and my spouse legally and financially. I probably wouldn’t even marry someone I was romantically interested in.

What is interesting is that for both respondents, marriage is not something they are interested in, particularly because it is not an option for them because of disability and marriage being limited to two people, respectively. However, they both note they would consider it not because they necessarily value the institution of marriage themselves but because they recognize society values it, and they may need access to the privileges marriages affords for survival and to navigate their lives more easily. Furthering this point of the often-unrecognized privileges given to married couples, a white pan-oriented aro ace woman\(^4\) notes,

\(^3\) Participant 46
\(^4\) Participant 107
I’m romance averse, so no interest in marriage as it is generally understood in the US. I don’t have the same benefits as those that are married. Cost of living is more. I cannot fall back on my partner’s health insurance and can’t share living costs more easily. My car insurance is more expensive as a single. Things like that that people don’t think about.

Similar to the Latina/o/x ace’s\(^5\) statement about not marrying someone they are romantically interested in, the ace woman’s\(^6\) comment about not being interested in how marriage is generally understood (i.e., between two people who are in a monogamous romantic/sexual relationship) also highlights how some aces may disrupt or even be entirely excluded from the institution of marriage because they may want to marry someone simply for the legal benefits (either by choice or necessity). However, despite knowing these privileges, some participants had no interest in marriage at all and had feelings of disgust and anger toward the concept of marriage. A white queer arospec aegosexual\(^7\) writes,

> Personally, I’m happy being single, but I don’t think I can afford it, so I think if I had a marriage, it would be some atypical commitment. I get why people marry, and yet, ick. The laws affect me, because married people are entitled to benefits that I cannot claim. . . The way that Kennedy wrote the ruling of Obergefell to throw single people under the bus was infuriating.

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\(^{5}\) Participant 46  
\(^{6}\) Participant 107  
\(^{7}\) Participant 122
Thus, while many privileges associated with marriage related to finances, housing, medicine, etc., may be considered things many “people don’t think about,” this person provides an example of how single people are explicitly considered less-than in our society by those with more power and the message that married couples are more valued is enforced. Echoing these feelings of exclusion and alienation, a Jewish demi-aro ace woman shares,

I feel pretty alienated because marriage is supposed to be a “normal milestones” in life. As someone with no sexual attraction and limited romantic attraction, I do not feel marriage is essential to beibg [sic] happy. Yet, people/society say that I am broken for not participating in marriage/dating and I am constantly judged and excluded. . . I wish the concept of a platonic life partner existed so that it was more common to share your life with someone without having to marry them.

Similar to this person’s experiences, a white gender-questioning aro ace says,

It’s felt difficult for me, especially as an adult, seeing other adults with their spouse, children, etc. I just feel, a bit, like a failure as an adult, not having any of those things, as though I’m still a child compared to other adults, like others have treated or, mistakenly, thought I was.

These responses highlight the emotions many other participants shared in their responses: feelings of brokenness, being behind in or missing out on life, not being a proper adult,

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8 Participant 122  
9 Participant 13  
10 Participant 13  
11 Participant 10
and being treated like a child or thought of as immature, among others. In the process of privileging married couples, unmarried people are, consequently, further marginalized in society and made to feel like outcasts for not following prescribed dating/marriage norms. One Asian aro ace woman identifies that “Society and social relationships are structured around the assumption that everyone will get married and [have] family units, and as an aroace person, it makes me anxious about what my future will look like.”

Interestingly, participants identified that amatonormativity is built into our society and that other structures are formed around these expectations, thereby further enforcing amatonormativity as the systems surrounding it rely on its existence in order to function. These insights demonstrate what Chen (2020) refers to as an ace lens, as they were able to look into these interlocking societal structures as outsiders.

Prioritization of Marriage & (Monogamous) Partnerships

Another idea that was present in participants’ responses was how married couples, monogamous partnerships, and other sexual/romantic relationships are prioritized and valued more than other kinds of relationships. For example, a white queer gray-aro ace writes, “Honestly, it [asexuality] feels kind of invisible. I’m just the weird person that hasn’t grown up, despite being in my early 30s. No kid, no significant others. People kind of think I haven’t matured.” Other people in this research shared these sentiments, and some even felt pressured to have a sexual/romantic relationship to ease these expectations. For example, an American Indian/Alaska Native demi-aro demi-ace

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12 Participant 108
13 Participant 41
woman\textsuperscript{14} shares, “I feel quite misunderstood and judged. There is a small part of me that really wants to push myself to ‘match’ my peers and settle with some dude that helps shovel my driveway and fixes the faucet.” Many other respondents pointed out the gender roles embedded in amatonormativity as well. In addition to enforcing heteronormativity, the messages present in these responses enforce allonormativity as well, as they give the message that \textit{any} kind of sexual/romantic attraction and relationship is not only more believable but also more desirable than \textit{no} sexual/romantic attraction or relationship. Simultaneously, these systems work together with amatonormativity as those who are single are made to feel like they are not a true adult, as their non-sexual/romantic relationships are not deemed mature. The idea that only sexual/romantic relationships (which should lead to marriage by amatonormative standards) are real relationships is very telling—friends, family, queerplatonic partners, and other relationships are considered fake, immature, and meaningless in adulthood. For many aces who participated in this research, these relationships are very important to them, and for those who are happily single, they are the only kinds they will have in their life. These responses thus demonstrate the resulting feelings of loneliness many aces shared in their stories.

In the same vein, many aces shared how this prescribed superiority of monogamous married couples impacts their experiences within the queer community. One white nonbinary gray-aro ace\textsuperscript{15} says,

\begin{itemize}
  \item Participant 64
  \item Participant 3
\end{itemize}
I feel pretty excluded, marriage is not something that I aspire to. The queer community has centered itself around the issue of marriage and made it the primary issue. I don’t feel connected to that, and I think as a result it has abandoned the rest of the queer community.

This response highlights how many allo queer people have focused on marriage equality as an indicator of queer liberation. However, many aces shared that they have no intention of marrying and see marriage as a source of oppression rather than one of liberation, as discussed earlier. Expressing their concerns about poly relationships, one white genderfluid gray-ace16 shares,

I’m polyamorous and recently entered a relationship with a person in a long-time marriage to someone else, which can feel alienating despite their efforts to include me as an equal partner. It also impacts my desire to marry for myself, as it would feel like imposing unequal bonds across my multiple partners.

While ace respondents who are single offer insight into how the valuing of sexual/romantic relationships works to alienate and infantilize, poly ace respondents’ experiences demonstrate that it is specifically monogamous heterosexual partnerships that are most prioritized in our society. The social institution of marriage makes this very clear as these respondents felt the power imbalances within their relationship between those who were married and unmarried and the very fact that multiple people cannot be married to each other. A white gray-aro gray-ace woman17 recognizes these issues and

16 Participant 26
17 Participant 92
summarizes it as follows: “Any/all acceptance of queer identities leads to less social grip on heteronormativity and amatonormativity, which makes it easier to simply exist when not appearing to be aligned with straight seeking monogamous marriage concepts.”

**Sex Tied to Marriage**

A third trend that surfaced from participants’ responses was how sex is tied to marriage. Many respondents shared that sex is expected in marriage, which is often based on gendered stereotypes. Others shared how this assumed sexual activity may be used to invalidate their asexuality as a phase if they ever got married. Overwhelmingly, they expressed concerns about how consummation laws invalidate their marriages in some places and how platonic marriages may be/are under attack. For example, a demigender Latina/o/x aro ace\(^{18}\) says,

> I definitely feel excluded from marriage in the US on a social level. While I understand that it’s perfectly legal for me to marry someone platonically if that’s the path I choose in my life, socially it feels like it’s looked down upon and some are even advocating for the ban of platonic marriages deeming it unnecessary. I feel like the laws put a lot of pressure on us to get married and leave little to no choice for those of us who may not want to be married.

Expanding more on this point, one white gender-questioning heterromantic ace\(^{19}\) shares,

> Some locations in the US have laws still on the books that require marriages to be sexually consummated to be valid. This technically means that an ace couple in a

\(^{18}\) Participant 72

\(^{19}\) Participant 52
sexless marriage could theoretically be sued for fraud for claiming to be married on their taxes/insurance. I don’t consider this a likely outcome at present, but I can imagine a future where right wing reactionaries petition insurance companies to sue asexual activists who are public about being in sexless marriages. Parts of the right win[g] have recently shifted more to focus on transphobia, compared to a previous greater focus on homophobia, depending on which area of focus they see as more politically beneficial in a given moment. It’s possible in the future their focus could shift to acephobia, especially given the recent rhetoric against “platonic marriages” signed off on by Christian organizations protesting the Respect for Marriage Act. I am glad that the Respect for Marriage Act was signed into law, so that concerned aces at least have the option to plan to be married in a location that lacks consummation requirements.

Many participants echoed these concerns about the possible hypervisibility of aces and acephobia in future politics in the form of attacks on platonic marriages. These responses also reveal that while some aces may disrupt the institution of marriage by having platonic marriages or participate in it simply out of necessity, many aces are and may be excluded from marriage completely because of consummation laws and political backlash. This expectation of sexual activity can also be seen in the next theme found in responses.

**Allonormative Medicine & Negative Experiences with Medical Practitioners**

The second theme that emerged was allonormative medicine and negative experiences with medical practitioners. To discuss this theme, I will examine the
assumption of sexual activity and the pathologization/medicalization (or fear of) of asexuality.

**Assume Sexual Activity**

Many respondents shared that most medical practitioners assumed that they had been sexually active. In their experiences, sexual activity is seen as the norm, and violations of this norm were often met with disbelief and judgment. For example, a nonbinary American Indian/Alaska Native Latina/o/x panromantic demi-ace\textsuperscript{20} shares that,

> Doctors often think I’m lying because the number of people I’ve been sexually intimate with is so low. To the point where in my mid twenties a doctor rolled her eyes after I told her I’d only been sexually intimate with 1 person. Now I try to go to healthcare care locations that specifically service the queer community in hopes that I won’t experience that again.

Similarly, one nonbinary Latina/o/x panromantic ace\textsuperscript{21} says,

> I delayed getting my first pap smear because I’m not sexually active. When I finally went in (after I’d gotten married), the doctor gave me a weird look when I told her I’d never had sex. She also looked at me in disbelief when I told her I’d never [masturbated].

On top of this mistrust from the medical practitioners, many people shared that they were often forced to take pregnancy tests for certain medical procedures despite there being no possibility of them being pregnant. Many respondents perceived this as a violation of

\textsuperscript{20} Participant 59

\textsuperscript{21} Participant 100
trust and invasive. However, for some participants, these assumptions put their health at risk. An American Indian/Alaska Native heteromantic demi-ace woman\textsuperscript{22} shares,

Doctors assume your illness is related to having sex. For example being forced to take a pregnancy test when complaining of stomach pain despite stating you have not had sex recently. [I] [a]lso had to take a pregnancy test on [a] follow-up visit about a week later. This is also clearly related to my identity as a woman and the medical profession not believing women and giving them substandard care. The stomach pain was 3 benign tumors btw, not pregnancy.

A Jewish lesbian ace woman\textsuperscript{23} had a similar story:

It’s frustrating to have to convince health care providers that I am not pregnant and have never had sex. I was once denied medical care in the ER for over two hours because the doctors refused to do an MRI until I had submitted a pregnancy test (I was severely dehydrated so they were waiting for me to produce urine but eventually did a blood test. I didn’t know that’s the only reason I was being forced to wait for treatment until after the fact).

The assumption that everybody is sexually active does not create space for sexually inactive aces to exist in medical spaces. As many responses revealed, this resulted in not only a lack of respect and dignity but also compromised their health and well-being.

*Pathologization/Medicalization (or fear of)*

\textsuperscript{22} Participant 75

\textsuperscript{23} Participant 20
The most prevalent idea that emerged was participants’ ace identity being pathologized/medicalized or the fear of this happening. Respondents overwhelmingly shared that their ace identity had been deemed/worried it would be seen as a disorder, a mental illness, related to hormone levels, not a real sexual identity, etc. For example, one white gender-detached aro ace\textsuperscript{24} shares,

There is always ALWAYS a fear that a doctor will pathologize my sexual orientation. Psychiatrists especially are accustomed to seeing how libido is affected by medications and mental health conditions. I always have to disclose my orientation when I meet new doctors so I can get out ahead of that problem. It’s less of a problem now but I have had a doctor ask me what asexual meant before, which was not encouraging. I have only ever used Planned Parenthood as my gynecologist so they have been wonderful about not making assumptions.

Another Jewish panromantic ace woman\textsuperscript{25} has similar experiences with medical institutions and says,

I mistrust most doctors because I am used to being doubted and called a liar. My sexuality is often treated as an illness, which makes me afraid to go to doctors in case they are going to treat my ace-ness. I also fear that my medical care will be subpar simply because doctors question my judgement and don’t take me seriously.

\textsuperscript{24} Participant 22
\textsuperscript{25} Participant 13
Many respondents echoed these sentiments and felt that being ace meant others would think there is something wrong with them, and it is, therefore, something they must hide. They often did not feel safe being ace as it was not an option. Interestingly, while some participants had not experienced pathologization/medicalization, they still saw it as an inevitable part of their future as an ace. For instance, a white gray-ace woman\(^{26}\) says, “I have heard a lot of ace people who have had issues with it [asexuality] being medicalized but so far (knock on wood) I haven't had issues.” Another white trans aro-spec aegosexual\(^{27}\) shares similar sentiments:

> I just saw my new OBGYN. I brought up the agender aroace identities, and while the nurse was polite and we had a good time chatting, she also told me not to rule out having a relationship in the future. I know she thought she was being supportive, but it was also reflective of her not understanding those identities. The OBGYN herself was fine. But I think California laws protecting LGBTQIA+ folks, as well as living in a very liberal area that is known for a significant LGBTQIA+ population also probably plays a factor. I know that discrimination happens everywhere, even in very liberal areas. I feel lucky that so far my visits with doctors haven't been as dehumanizing as others have encountered; kind of wondering when my luck will run out in that respect.

Related to this, many participants (both those who had and had not directly experienced pathologization/medicalization) said they avoid medical appointments and put off

\(^{26}\) Participant 35
\(^{27}\) Participant 122
receiving the care they need because of the anxiety and fear medical institutions bring to them. Many respondents also worried about being subjected to conversion therapy in particular. For example, one white gender-questioning/detached heteromantic ace\textsuperscript{28} writes,

[I]t would be nice for aces to be protected from conversion therapy and for therapist education to include knowledge of asexuality. The last therapist I went to ended up treating my asexuality as something shameful and something that I shouldn’t be open about, even to close family members or potential romantic partners. This was not a good experience.

Some participants had undergone conversion therapy themselves because their ace identity was seen as an illness needing to be fixed. A Jewish transmasculine aro ace\textsuperscript{29} shares,

I have had some bad interactions with medical institutions. I’ve had providers who did not respect my ace identity or take it into account for my care (including a therapist I was sent to as a teenager to "fix" my asexuality and aromanticism since she and my mom thought it was related to me being mentally ill).

These responses show not only a fear of invalidation and pathologization/medicalization from medical institutions but also from family, as for some participants, it was their parents who had brought them to medical professionals to “fix” them, thinking that their asexuality was an illness/disorder. This fear of pathologization/medicalization that many

\textsuperscript{28} Participant 52
\textsuperscript{29} Participant 23
aces experience further reveals this may be read as a form of collective trauma within the ace community, as these feelings were present among many participants regardless of their medical experiences, and many saw it as an inevitable collective experience of being ace in the U.S. These themes of asexuality being viewed as invalid, an illness, and something needing to be fixed contribute to how many of the participants see themselves, which will be discussed in the next theme.

**Acephobia**

The third theme that emerged in responses was acephobia. I will discuss questions of brokenness, invisibility, and being an outsider; coercive and corrective sexual violence; and conservative backlash.

**Questions of Brokenness, Invisibility, & Being an Outsider**

The most prevalent and pronounced trend in participants’ responses included feeling like they are an outsider, invisible, and made to feel like they are broken because of their ace identity. One Latina/o/x demi-aro ace woman\(^{30}\) says, “I don’t feel represented or understood. I feel a burden of having to explain myself to my friends and to people who are interested in me. *I feel like I am strange* [emphasis added].” A gender-detached white heterromantic ace woman\(^{31}\) echoes these feelings:

> Those of us over 60, who discovered our sexuality late in life, have different experiences than people finding themselves in teens and 20s. It's been lurking in our relationships and social interactions all the time, a baffling feeling of broken

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\(^{30}\) Participant 7

\(^{31}\) Participant 114
inadequate function - more so because I'm also agender. Not recipe for fitting in to "expectatipns" [sic] from family, school, work and society in general. *I've felt like an alien looking in for most of my life* [emphasis added].

Similarly, an Asian demi-aro ace woman\(^{32}\) shares,

> I think, again, since sex is so normalised and especially with high school and university students that I have just very recently started to come to terms with and accept the fact that I lie on the asexuality spectrum. I think not only that I didn't have enough knowledge before but also that I didn't want to accept that I was "wrong" even though I don't believe it's wrong but as a high school student being the only one of my friends that wasn't involved in a sexual relationship, *I always felt like somewhat of an outsider or that no one understood me* [emphasis added].

Because of systems like compulsory sexuality, amatonormativity, and the pathologization/medicalization of asexuality, among other factors, many respondents overwhelmingly shared they feel like they are “strange,” “an alien,” “an outsider,” etc. because they are often made to feel like they do not belong. For a large number of respondents, they not only feel like an oddity but also invisible. For example, a demigender Latina/o/x aro ace\(^{33}\) writes,

> I feel incredibly alienated from the US as an ace because many people see aces as being mentality ill or inhuman. I have faced so much harassment from society as a

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\(^{32}\) Participant 68

\(^{33}\) Participant 72
whole and it’s hard to feel like I belong. In the US it feels as if we’re invisible, but when we are seen it’s met with hate and vitriol from all sides.

For some, this feeling of invisibility is so strong that they feel completely erased from existence. For example, one Jewish panromantic ace woman\textsuperscript{34} writes, “The US is a very sex obsessed place, so I often feel very isolated and villified [sic]. No one knows ace people exist here.” Another gender-detached Latina/o/x demi-aro demi-ace woman\textsuperscript{35} also shares,

The US government and half its citizens don't approve or acknowledge anything that is outside of their decided "norm". As an ace, I feel left out of most things, conversations, spaces, media. Sex is a topic so many obsess over, but I can't relate, so sometimes it feels like I don’t exist [emphasis added].

In addition to these feelings, another common trend was respondents saying they are made to feel like they are broken or that something is wrong with them. One white queer homoromantic ace\textsuperscript{36} writes, “Ace is a term that undeniably identifies [sic] me. It is also a term the US has caused me to feel great shame in.” Another American Indian/Alaska Native demi-aro demi-ace woman\textsuperscript{37} similarly says, “Being told how ‘important’ and ‘crucial’ sex is to well being has always been so strange to me. When learning about human sexuality, this feeling of pressure can make me feel like something’s wrong with

\textsuperscript{34} Participant 13
\textsuperscript{35} Participant 88
\textsuperscript{36} Participant 112
\textsuperscript{37} Participant 64
me and I’m wrong.” A white heterromantic gray-ace woman\(^\text{38}\) also shares similar feelings and says,

> I didn't discover I was ace until I was in my late twenties. I always thought something was wrong with me because in sex-ed they taught you that you're going to have urges and it's normal and sex is normal. And like, yes, sex IS normal but perhaps I could have saved myself a lot of self hatred by knowing that not having those urges doesn't make you defective.

A white nonbinary homoromantic ace\(^\text{39}\) echoes this in their response:

> I grew up being told that my sexuality was going to become this big source of temptation and identity, but that never happened. I was made to feel like I was broken [emphasis added], or missing something integral to the human experience.

However, these discourses about aces being broken are not only internalized by many of the participants but it is also externalized and enforced in society by others.

**Coercive & Corrective Sexual Violence**

The presence of coercive and corrective sexual violence was also common in responses. As discussed earlier in the literature review and the previous subthemes, aces are often made to feel like they are broken, and asexuality is often deemed something in need of fixing (e.g., medically or via sexual violence). Consequently, many of the respondents were either worried about coercive/corrective sexual violence because other

\(^{38}\) Participant 103  
\(^{39}\) Participant 24
aces have experienced it or shared they experienced it themselves. For example, one nonbinary Latina/o/x panromantic ace\(^{40}\) explains,

> Oftentimes I feel alienated. I've been told that asexual people are selfish and shouldn't be in relationships. I've heard stories from other other [sic] asexual people who were abused in an attempt to "fix" them, and I've seen this abuse be justified because asexual people are seen as broken.

For some participants, this justification can make it harder for them to be believed as a sexual assault victim/survivor. For example, one Black/African American Latina/o/x homoromantic aegosexual transsexual man\(^{41}\) says, “My ace identity makes me less likely to be taken seriously as a sexual assault survivor, especially as a trans masculine person of colour.” Similarly, a white gender-detached/questioning heterromantic ace\(^{42}\) also shares their experience of coerced sex:

> Some states/regions have laws requiring schools to provide sex ed that covers queer identities. I grew up in Texas and received an abstinence- only style sex ed with no mention of any queer identities. If I had been informed that asexuality existed and was normal, I think I would have been able to determine the label fit me as early as age 14 or 15. Instead I didn’t really learn about the identity until I was 23, and took much longer to come to terms with it. Knowing earlier might have resulted in me not being coerced into sex I didn’t want. This means laws

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\(^{40}\) Participant 100  
\(^{41}\) Participant 71  
\(^{42}\) Participant 52
about comprehensive sex ed could have made a very substantial impact on my life.

Conservative backlash and laws will be discussed more in the next section. However, this response, interestingly, highlights how, for many participants, there is a connection between the visibility/awareness/teaching of asexuality and sexual violence. If they had simply known about asexuality and had the words to describe and validate their experiences, they feel they may not have been coerced into sex. Another white heterromantic demi-ace woman\textsuperscript{43} shares a similar experience and says,

\begin{quote}
I think relationships in general in the US are extremely difficult- not just marriage. I've had to do things with partners I didn't want to because that's just what is expected and if that doesn't happen, you either get left or cheated on. It makes you feel like you always have to be sexual no matter what and it's not normal to not be.
\end{quote}

Others also shared that there is an expectation of sex in romantic relationships (e.g., in the context of marriage, as discussed earlier), which makes some participants feel pressured to be sexually active in these relationships because they fear their partner will find sex elsewhere and/or their partner expects it. This concern about sexual violence against aces is discussed further in the next subtheme as it relates to recent legislation in the U.S. context.

\textbf{Conservative Backlash}

\textsuperscript{43} Participant 32
Many people also noted in their responses concerns about conservative backlash and recent legislation. In addition to many participants concerns about the current and future attacks on platonic marriages, as discussed earlier, many respondents also mentioned the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* and the recent anti-queer—especially anti-trans—legislation. For example, one Latina/o/x gender-detached demigender aro ace\textsuperscript{44} writes,

I’m privileged to live in NYC where my rights are protected for the most part. But in the broader country anti-abortion laws, the don’t say gay bill and almost all of the anti LGBTQ bills would negatively affect me. This is because I plan on becoming a math professor at a university. In order to do that I have to go to grad school. These laws limit my options on where I can go for grad school since I would not want to go in a state where my rights would be limited. I also want the freedom to be open about my identity to anyone in my life including future students. Also as someone who is sex repulsed and has been sexually assaulted before, in the event that I were to ever become pregnant as a result of assault I would like to have the right to an abortion. For me the process of pregnancy would be traumatic.

Similarly, in response to which queer laws impact them (see Appendix B, Question 19), an American/Indian Alaska/Native Latina/o/x nonbinary panromantic ace\textsuperscript{45} says,

Anti-trans laws/policies. For this reason i dont often disclose that i identify under the trans umbrella. Anti abortion laws/policies. I can get pregnant. If i were to get

\textsuperscript{44} Participant 72

\textsuperscript{45} Participant 59
raped for being queer (or because someone decides they want to rape someone),
getting an abortion would be an extremely stressful and debilitating experience.
These respondents, along with many of the other trans survey-takers, were not only
concerned about how the anti-queer and -trans laws would negatively affect them but also
about how difficult and traumatic it would be to get an abortion if they needed one.
Interestingly, their worries about abortion bans were centered on the fear of an unwanted
pregnancy as a result of coercive/corrective sexual violence due to their queer identities.
As the previous subtheme demonstrates, this concern about sexual violence is not
unfounded. Additionally, the demigender ace’s\textsuperscript{46} concerns about identities being
restricted in general, especially in school settings, connects back to how for some
participants, not knowing and not being taught about asexuality contributed to them
experiencing sexual violence.

Other participants made connections between the recent conservative legislation
and the lives of queer people in general. For example, one white agender arospec
aegosexual\textsuperscript{47} writes,

Lately a lot of religious zealots are pushing Christian nationalism down our
throats, and those folks tend to be anti-LGBTQIA+, so that[’s] even more risk.
\textit{Some of those folks would rather have dead kids than queer kids} [emphasis
added]; there’s no rationalizing with that.

Similarly, a white gender-detached/questioning heteromantic ace\textsuperscript{48} shares,

\textsuperscript{46} Participant 72
\textsuperscript{47} Participant 122
\textsuperscript{48} Participant 52
It hurts to see the attacks against the queer community across the country. Anti-trans legislation, “don’t say gay” and other legal restrictions of expression, attacks at drag events and gay bars, and now proposed bills that would criminalize gender nonconformity. I have tried to explain to my mom why I won’t move back to Texas and she doesn’t get it. Not moving is in large part about gender stuff not ace stuff, sure, but it’s also that the culture of the queer community I’ve found here in California won’t necessarily be the same in [a] red state. There’s a sense of openness here that I can’t imagine existing there, at least right now. And some of the rise in queerphobia *is* against aces - the books being banned include things like ace memoirs, aces are being accused of being groomers, queerphobes concoct wild conspiracy theories about ace- acceptance movements that are scary and damaging. A while back there was some organizing by some members of my local ace group to try to get the language of the Equality Act updated to include aces and aros instead of just straight/gay/bi. It was met with dismissiveness from the politician because ace inclusion was too insignificant to be worth including. Even in something as progressive as the Equality Act, we’re not important enough to be worth protecting [emphases added].

These responses directly link back to the concept of queer necropolitics (Puar, 2017). Not only are the lives of queer people under attack, but some participants note that ace bodies specifically are deemed disposable as they are “not important enough to be worth protecting” compared to some other queer bodies.

**Exclusion from the Queer Community**
The fourth theme present in responses is exclusion from the queer community. I will examine this theme by discussing questions of not queer enough and acephobia in the queer community.

**Questions of “Not Queer Enough”**

A common issue that many responses highlighted was gatekeeping in the queer community. A large number of participants shared how aces are often excluded from the queer community or made to feel like they do not belong to the queer community. Often, this was worded as aces are not seen as “queer enough” and they do not experience oppression. For example, one white demi-ace woman\(^{49}\) writes,

> I am worried about gatekeepers though and shy away from referring to myself as both queer and ace around queer people I don't know well. I know there are a lot of people who don't think ace people are "queer enough" because we don't face discrimination - which is just not true and is reductive to think that being ace is our only identity.

In addition to this rhetoric of aces not being queer enough because they are not discriminated against—which, as the literature review and previous themes have discussed, is not the case—this response also reveals the common subtheme of how some respondents do not reveal their ace identity, which will be discussed later. Similarly, a white demi-aro demi-ace man\(^ {50} \) says,

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\(^{49}\) Participant 35  
\(^{50}\) Participant 124
Generally I feel pretty included, with the exception of two things. Sadly I have heard some people in the community refer to demisexuality as "a Tumblr sexuality," which arguably erases the identities of countless demi people. In addition, while I personally do not identify this way, I know of a few straight demi people who do not feel included within the community, because being demi is not seen by all members of the LGBTQIA+ community as being "queer enough." There's definitely a lot of oppression that comes with being demi in the sense that society pressures you that you should always be wanting sex.

Their response not only echoes these ace-exclusionary ideas of what is queer enough, but it also highlights how the asexuality spectrum challenges the hetero/queer divide (Cohen, 1997), as some aces may experience heterosexual attraction at times even though they are queer. Another white nonbinary demi-aro demi-ace\textsuperscript{51} shares how alienating this hetero/queer divide can be, especially as someone who is queer via their gender identity as well, and says,

I've tried to join groups, volunteer with organizations and I'm told I don't belong or I'm told I'm straight. Like I don't know how to combat that. I don't belong in straight spaces either. My attraction to people doesn't have any connection to what's in their pants. Being non-binary too, it's really lonely.

Another white homoromantic ace woman\textsuperscript{52} echoes this and says, “I feel like I don’t really belong in the straight world or the LGBTQIA+ world either.” Many other respondents shared

\textsuperscript{51} Participant 54
\textsuperscript{52} Participant 56
these sentiments of feeling too queer to be straight yet too ace to be considered queer while straddling the hetero/queer division.

For the respondents who had multiple queer identities, some of them shared how they felt included in the queer community because of their other identities yet excluded for their aceness. A white queer homoromantic ace\textsuperscript{53} explains,

\begin{quote}
When [s]peaking to someone of the LGBTQIA+ community, I always lead with saying I am gay, not asexual. There has been much anger of late that ace is a way for straight people to hijack the community and thus I feel it is being gay that allows me acceptance in this group, not necessarily being ace.
\end{quote}

Many other participants also shared that their aceness may be overlooked, erased, or invisibilized because their other queer identities are more welcome and accepted. For example, one agender Latina/o/x panromantic ace\textsuperscript{54} shares,

\begin{quote}
I think I'm privileged in being panromantic because queer people generally write off you if you aren't visibly queer. I've had close friends tell me to my face that aces aren't oppressed, and so they don't belong in the LGBTQ+ community. It's more annoying than anything, because it's very obvious they're more interested in maintaining some imaginary Oppression In-Club than they are in doing any research about the history of queerness or asexuality, or what laws/policies are in place that target people like me. . . it definitely helps that being panromantic, androgynous, and openly kinky has given me some visibly identifiable queerness.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{53} Participant 112
\textsuperscript{54} Participant 46
In addition to this gatekeeping and Oppression Olympics, acephobia in the queer community was also a common experience among respondents.

**Acephobia in the Queer Community**

Another concern that was pronounced in the responses was acephobia in the queer community. Not only did many participants experience gatekeeping, but many also invalidation and discriminatory remarks from allo queer people. One white heterromantic gray-ace woman\(^{55}\) shares, “Sexually-driven LGB people have been rude, dismissive, and infantilizing towards me over the years for not participating in amatonormativity. I relate to their experience but it's not a two-way street.” Similarly, “I know there are people who reject asexuality as ‘straight people who want to feel special,’” writes a white gender-detached gray-aro demi-ace\(^{56}\). Building off of this, a white heterromantic ace woman\(^{57}\) shares,

> Some asexuals do identify as part of the LGBT+ community, but I feel alienated from it because some (not most or all) members of the community assume asexuals have [heterosexual] "passing" privilege and don't experience discrimination. This attitude feels dehumanizing, especially when there is a stereotype of asexual people as cold, emotionless robots who are incapable of truly loving people.

While some allo queers made explicit acephobic comments such as these, others implicitly dismissed and invalidated asexuality, thereby contributing to the struggles of

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\(^{55}\) Participant 92  
\(^{56}\) Participant 60  
\(^{57}\) Participant 11
many ace respondents. One agender mixed demi-aro demi-ace\textsuperscript{58} points out this hypocrisy and remarks, “I feel unwelcome. It has been expressed to me that since I am not openly discriminated against, that I am not part of the community. Which is open discrimination in itself.” As I will discuss in the next theme, in order to lessen these negative experiences, many participants shared that they do not disclose their ace identity.

**The Avoidance of “Coming Out” as Strategy**

The fifth theme was the the avoidance of “coming out” as strategy. To discuss this theme, I will examine the medical repercussions for being openly ace, the evasion of allonormativity and compulsory sexuality, and the acephobia and privilege in the queer community.

**Medical Repercussions for Being Openly Ace**

An interesting trend was how many of the respondents intentionally hid their ace identity from their medical practitioner to avoid discrimination. For example, one white homoromantic ace\textsuperscript{59} writes,

Asexuality is something I never broach with healthcare professionals. Only in the last year have I found a general practitioner who does not b[y] default act as if all patients are straight and cisgender. But even there, I feel hesitant to bring up asexuality as I’ve heard so many horror stories from others being told something is wrong with them, they need medication, there must be an underlying condition, etc.

\begin{footnotes}
58 Participant 77
59 Participant 112
\end{footnotes}
Similarly, a white demi-aro ace woman\(^{60}\) shares, “I have not, and would not, disclose my ace identity to medical professionals. Currently asexuality isn’t respected enough in the medical community and I would rather avoid that kind of confrontation.” Another white aro ace woman\(^{61}\) also writes, “I have never told a medical practitioner about my asexuality. I don’t need a doctor telling me that my sexuality isn’t real.” These responses also show that even if the participant has not been pathologized themselves, they know other aces have and intentionally do not reveal their ace identity to avoid those experiences. Additionally, even when medical practitioners presented as queer-friendly, many respondents chose not to share their ace identity because they were still not confident they would be respected and believed. One Jewish gray-aro ace transman\(^{62}\) also highlights this point, “Often even good doctors and therapists both see asexuality, and/or aromanticism, as something ‘broken’ in a person that should be fixed. I don’t mention it to professionals anymore.”

However, as the second theme supports, even when respondents did not share their ace identity, they would still feel marginalized for violating sexual norms. For example, a white agender aro ace\(^{63}\) says, “I never tell medical providers that i am ace in order to avoid more direct discrimination.” Thus, while hiding their ace identity was one way many respondents tried to avoid direct negative experiences, it does not stop indirect forms of discrimination (e.g., assuming sexual activity). This trend of intentionally not

\(^{60}\) Participant 104  
\(^{61}\) Participant 31  
\(^{62}\) Participant 110  
\(^{63}\) Participant 117
revealing one’s ace identity to avoid/lessen discrimination was common in other settings as well.

**The Evasion of Allonormativity & Compulsory Sexuality**

The concept of respondents hiding their ace identity also emerged in the context of avoiding acephobia in general. Some participants will not reveal their ace identity unless they are close to that person and trusts they will validate and respect their aceness. A Jewish demi-aro ace transman\(^{64}\) says, “I don’t talk about my aroace-ness to people who aren’t close friends because the response is often negative or disbelief.” However, many respondents choose not to reveal their ace identity to anybody for safety. For example, a white demi-aro gray-ace woman\(^{65}\) shares,

I am not out because I do not want to deal with the jokes and misogyny that often get attached to female aces. Our compulsive-sexuality culture has no real space for ace people and that’s intimidating. I would like to be an ace advocate but the cruelty to people who don’t participate in compulsory sexuality makes me feel emotionally unsafe.

To alleviate or lessen the negative reactions or comments they may face for not following sexual norms enforced by compulsory sexuality, they choose to not share their ace identity. Additionally, this respondent intentionally does not reveal their aceness because women are often considered automatically ace due to patriarchal constructions, which connects to the gold-star ace, as discussed earlier in the literature review. Moreover,

\(^{64}\) Participant 110  
\(^{65}\) Participant 84
concerns about their safety and well-being take precedence over wanting to be an ace advocate because of acephobia. A white homoromantic gray-ace man\(^{66}\) echoes these concerns and says, “Being ace is not something that is openly discussed or acknowledged, and so it doesn't feel like it's possible to be openly ace.” Due to the invisibility of and discrimination towards asexuality, this participant and others feel like it is not even possible to mark their existence as an ace. These sentiments are prevalent for many participants in the context of the queer community as well.

**Acephobic, Queer, & Privileged**

Similar to how many participants do not share their ace identity in the context of medical institutions and everyday life in general, this trend emerged again in the context of the queer community. To avoid many of the issues discussed in the previous subtheme, many of the respondents intentionally did not share their aceness even when around other queer people. As briefly mentioned earlier, some of the participants intentionally share their other queer identities but do not share their ace identity because they are not confident that part of themselves will be accepted. For example, a white nonbinary homoromantic ace\(^{67}\) writes, “I do not tell other[s] in the queer community that I’m ace because I have been frequently told that[‘]s not ‘gay enough’ and met with ignorance and dismissal.” For those whose only queer identity (at the time of this survey) is their aceness, this knowledge about acephobia in the queer community can make their identity more complicated. One white demi-aro gray-ace woman\(^{68}\) says,

\(^{66}\) Participant 66
\(^{67}\) Participant 116
\(^{68}\) Participant 84
I am still wrestling with this, particularly because I am not out as ace. I know many LGBT people don’t consider asexuality to be a form of queerness, and as a straight cis person otherwise I don’t know that I “belong” in this community.

An Asian heterromantic demi-ace woman\(^\text{69}\) echoes this difficulty and shares,

Because I’m not completely out yet and had only realized that I’m demisexual/heteroromantic after college, I worry that my peers in the queer/LGBTQIA+ community who knew me before might not accept me. Plus, there is already a stereotype that asexuality as a whole has been dismissed as asexuality that doesn’t exist/is an “excuse” to be celibate. When I read the definition of demisexuality and researched about it, I came to the conclusion that my ace identity will be taken advantage of and hard to explain to someone who is closed minded. That is what alienates me the most and part of why I’m not ready to come out completely.

Interestingly, while some participants chose to not reveal their ace identity because of the acephobia present in society as a whole, some participants were especially cautious to share their ace identity because they feel outcast from the queer community and do not have their support. This theme demonstrates how “coming out” narratives are not accessible, attainable, desirable, or even necessary for some queer people, and for many participants, this holds true. This resembles an almost self-coming out, as it seems to be more important for them to know about their ace identity than it is for others to know.

\(^{69}\) Participant 115
Thus, having the words to validate their aceness for themselves appears to hold value to participants in combating feelings of brokenness and invalidation.

**The Assemblance of the Ace Community**

The final theme was the assemblance of the ace community. To examine this theme, I will discuss the disconnection with the ace community, gatekeeping and the gold-star ace, and community empowerment.

**Disconnection with the Ace Community**

The disconnection of the ace community was one idea that emerged when participants discussed their relationship with the ace community. Many respondents shared how the ace community does not feel very prevalent or visible in their lives. For instance, a white homoromantic gray-ace man\(^{70}\) writes, “I don't feel like there is a strong or visible ace community for me to be a part of.” Many other respondents shared that because of the invisibility of the ace community, they do not feel like they are part of any ace community. A nonbinary Latina/o/x ace\(^{71}\) shares, “I don’t have an ‘ace community’ to turn to.... I don’t know anything like me.” Similarly, a white demi-ace woman\(^{72}\) highlights, “I haven't really experienced an ace community at this point even though I've been out for 3ish years. It seems sort of fragmented but I do interact with a few ace people like Elle (scretspiderlady) and Yasmin Benoit.” Other participants also noted that when they do interact with other aces and have a sense of community, it is often in online spaces. However, for many respondents, these feelings of invisibility and loneliness can

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\(^{70}\) Participant 66
\(^{71}\) Participant 80
\(^{72}\) Participant 35
make it feel as if there is no ace community at all. In response to the question about their relationship with the ace community (see Appendix B, Question 24), one white homoromantic demi-ace transman shares, “Not super integrated, but I feel that’s because ace community is difficult to find rather than the fact I’m excluded.” Later in the survey, they write,

From my experiences *I don’t feel like ace community really ‘exists’* [emphasis added]. Two of my close friends are ace, but I don’t really feel like we have a community, but I do end up gravitating towards ace people whether I realize it or not.

Interestingly, many participants feel somewhat disconnected from each other via erasure and invisibility as they are made to feel like they do not belong in the U.S. While an ace community appears to exist for some, these are overwhelmingly in online spaces only, and most participants often described the ace community as fragmented, invisible, difficult to find, disconnected, or even nonexistent.

*Gatekeeping & the Gold-Star Ace*

While the ace community feels invisible or non-existent for some, another common concern highlighted in participants’ responses was gatekeeping and the gold-star ace in the ace community. Many respondents highlighted that they felt like they did not belong in the ace community and/or their ace identity was complicated because of their

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73 Participant 18
intersecting identities. For example, an Asian heterromantic demi-ace woman\textsuperscript{74} shares their experiences of the intersections of harmful Asian and ace stereotypes:

I had mixed feelings about how my ace identity is integrated with my identity as an Asian person. On one hand, I’m grateful that my ace identity is validated by my friends and some of my family members. However, in the beginning, I had trouble accepting being demisexual because of the general public’s assumption that all Asian people, specifically East Asian people, are asexual and unable to love because they are “emotionless.” I am someone who carries so much emotions and had admitted to be[ing] a cry baby, so realizing that I was ace terrifies me because of that assumption/stereotype. I haven’t come out to everyone about my demisexuality yet, but for now I try to keep it between my mom and close friends.

Another Christian Asian demi-aro gray-ace\textsuperscript{75} also shares how their race and religion complicate their aceness:

I feel generally included, however there are times when I feel somewhat alienated. This is primarily due to the "whiteness" of certain parts of the community, and the disdain for religion in general. To be clear, I respect that many have had more negative experiences with religion regardless of their sexuality, however I do sometimes wish that there were more opportunities for religious (relatively speaking) people to share and grow from shared experiences.

\textsuperscript{74} Participant 115
\textsuperscript{75} Participant 106
Similarly, a nonbinary Latina/o/x homoromantic demi-ace also shares their experiences with their intersecting identities: “I feel rare. I feel like I don’t see representation of someone like me anywhere. Let alone my community. I doubt any of them understand.” A white gender-questioning aro ace also discusses the racism and harmful gatekeeping in the ace community:

I don't feel fully accepted or integrated within the ace community, partly due to a generational/age gap and, partly, due to my difference experiences that I know that most white people don't experience, like me growing up living in African-American communities, attending a majority African-American school, multi-racial schools, etc. So, I've felt, from seeing white people in the ace community write disparaging, negative, judgmental posts about African-Americans (and other POC) and other experiences, I don't feel as though there are people in the ace community who understand BIPOC's lives and how hurtful, harmful, and unwelcoming their posts can, possibly, come across and affect BIPOC. Me trying to be a supportive ally to BIPOC and help speak up about racism, micro-aggressions, colorism, etc. hasn't resulted in anyone understanding me, only in dismissiveness, criticism, and arguing at me.

In a similar vein, a white gender-detached gray-aro ace writes, “As a fat, disabled person, I don't feel like I'm very well connected to the ace community. Even with the online parts, I'm an outlier.” In addition, to race, religion, disability, and body size,

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76 Participant 98
77 Participant 10
78 Participant 41
gender and being sexually active were other factors for some participants. For example, one Black/African American Latina/o/x homoromantic aegosexual man\textsuperscript{79} shares,

“Incredibly alienated and excluded, due to being sex-positive/favourable and interested in risk-aware kink. As well as due to being a transmasculine person, I am often seen as unable to be asexual due to my manhood.” As discussed in the literature review, because of harmful stereotypes based on race, body size, disability, gender, and religion, and the expectation for aces to be celibate, the gold-star ace (Chen, 2020) works to exclude many participants and gatekeep them from asexuality. As one agender Latina/o/x panromantic ace\textsuperscript{80} summarizes,

\begin{quote}
I don't interact with the ace community, honestly. There always seems to be some kind of drama or gatekeeping -- "You're not the right kind of ace because you have sex/are kinky/aren't aro, etc." If I meet an ace in the wild, that's fun. But there seems to be this pinnacle of white gold-star asexuality everyone strives to be [emphasis added], and it feels like a reiteration of purity culture. Didn’t we form queer spaces to get away from that? Wtf.
\end{quote}

These issues of the gold-star ace and gatekeeping and the ace community being a source of pain and exclusion emerged in many responses. However, some participants also highlighted the importance of the ace community in their lives.

\textit{Community Empowerment}

\textsuperscript{79} Participant 71 \\
\textsuperscript{80} Participant 46
Despite many respondents sharing negative feelings and experiences, community empowerment was prominent in some responses. For example, a white gender-detached/questioning heterromantic ace\textsuperscript{81} shares,

\begin{quote}
I think that personally I have overall felt very included in my ace community. It has been an important place for me to feel connected to others like me. A very important step in me getting enough courage to leave my last relationship was from talking to other aces online about what it was like to leave a relationship that isn’t sexually compatible. Until I found a space where I was comfortable having these 1 on 1 conversations, I was continuing to try to make that incompatible relationship work even though I knew I was ace and could see there were problems. The ace community was crucial. Since then, my local ace group has been a great source of friendship and understanding. My online ace group has also been a good place for exploring other pieces of my identity, like my grey-aromanticism and my questioning about gender.
\end{quote}

For some respondents, the ace community was crucial in helping them discover and navigate their ace identity, as well as other identities. Many participants stated how important the ace community was in helping them find others with similar experiences.

One white homoromantic gray-ace man\textsuperscript{82} writes,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{81} Participant 52 \\
\textsuperscript{82} Participant 66
\end{flushleft}
I was never taught that asexuality was a real thing, it was always the butt of jokes, it hasn't been until my adulthood that I found out that it is real and something I identify with, that there are other people like me.

Another white demi-aro demi-ace woman\(^{83}\) also noted how empowering and validating the ace community is for them and writes, “I didn’t know what I felt and who I was in high school so to know I am not alone is awesome.” Similarly, a white heterromantic demi-ace woman\(^{84}\) shares, “I actually feel very happy whenever I see any sort of posts about [asexuality], because *I always felt alone* [emphasis added].” While participants have mixed feelings and relationships with the ace community for various reasons, the community still holds a crucial place in helping many participants gain access to words that describe their experiences and identities, validate their feelings, and understand that they are not broken and alone in this world.

**Conclusion**

This chapter discussed my qualitative survey responses from 124 people who identified on the ace spectrum and currently live in the U.S. In my analysis of the responses, the following six themes emerged: 1) Amatonormativity, 2) Allonormative Medicine & Negative Experiences with Medical Practitioners, 3) Acephobia, 4) Exclusion from the Queer Community, 5) the Avoidance of “Coming Out as Strategy, and 6) the Assemblance of the Ace Community. To better understand the implications of

\(^{83}\) Participant 4
\(^{84}\) Participant 32
these findings and directions for future research, I will further examine the results in the concluding chapter.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

This research examines how people, who currently live in the U.S. and identify on the acespec, are impacted by sexual citizenship. Participants’ responses revealed multiple themes, such as 1) Amatonormativity, 2) Allonormative Medicine & Negative Experiences with Medical Practitioners, 3) Acephobia, 4) Exclusion from the Queer Community, 5) the Avoidance of “Coming Out as Strategy, and 6) the Assemblance of the Ace Community. The findings that emerged in each of these themes connect back to the concept of sexual citizenship, which I use as a theoretical tool to further analyze these themes, as well as an intersectional feminist lens.

Evaluating the Results

Most respondents feel excluded or alienated from the institution of marriage for a variety of reasons, which demonstrates that many of the participants were excluded from the socially constructed married sexual citizen (Aizura, 2006; Bell & Binnie, 2000; Taylor, 2011; Walters, 2014; Willse & Spade, 2013). Many respondents did not want to get married because they did not agree with the institution as a whole, and some did not desire sexual/romantic relationships, which already violates the married citizen. Because of the marginalization that marriage causes for many single people, some of the participants would consider or were pressured into marriage for the legal and financial benefits. In order to ease some of their struggles, many respondents—especially those on the arospec—either currently or would hypothetically choose to work within the system and opt for a platonic marriage because they understand that married people are often valued and, thereby, citizens. Due to consummation expectations in some states [e.g.,
Connecticut and Ohio], some respondents’ marriages would not be considered completely legally ratified (Decker, 2015; Emens, 2014; Gupta, 2015), and many participants expressed concerns about current and future attacks on platonic and sexless marriages. Additionally, marriage excludes poly relationships (Chen, 2020, Brake, 2012, Przybylo, 2019), and many poly participants felt the power imbalances in their relationships, as the married couple holds more power and value under the law. Thus, not only is the married sexual citizen supposed to be in a monogamous sexual relationship, but they are also expected to have sex with their spouse. These issues also signal the denial of rights (Evans, 1993; Monro, 2005), as many may not be able to have the kind of marriage that suits them (e.g., platonic or poly) because of consummation laws and conservative backlash. They are also denied the same privileges given to married people and are even denied a true choice of marriage due to the marginalization of being single. The few participants who did feel included in marriage were those who are married, alloromantic, and monogamous, and many of them were privileged because of their whiteness and class identity. Thus, while some participants felt included as married sexual citizens, those who did not follow (or somewhat resemble) white allonormative, particularly heteronormative, relationship scripts were made to feel like they did not belong, a signifier of their status as a noncitizen (Richardson, 2017). While many respondents acknowledge and understand the value of legal protections for same-sex and interracial marriages and agree with scholars like Bevacqua (2004), most argue that even more must be done as the institution of marriage as a whole is harmful and oppressive. Interestingly, the experiences of many participants directly challenge homonationalist
discourses (Puar, 2017). Same-sex marriage (Dreher, 2017) and queer rights are seen as markers for progressive nations (Çalişkan et al., 2020; Grewal & Kaplan, 2001); however, many participants not only felt alienated by marriage as a whole but the concept of marriage even denies the rights of some queer people. Consequently, many respondents exposed the image of the U.S. as queer-friendly due to its “marriage equality” as a fallacy. This is because many of them, as queers, feel oppressed by marriage itself along with other social institutions.

In addition to marriage, many respondents noted many negative experiences with medicine and medical practitioners, highlighting the ways in which many of their rights are once again denied (Evans, 1993, Monro, 2005). Because of compulsory sexuality (Gupta, 2015; Przybylo, 2019), many medical practitioners expected the respondents to be sexually active, and most participants were overwhelmingly met with disrespectful comments and reactions and were not believed. Some respondents’ healthcare was delayed, and their safety was jeopardized because of assumptions about sexual activity. Additionally, many respondents had experienced disbelief from the medical practitioner about their aceness, pathologization/medicalization, conversion therapy, or feared experiencing these things because they knew others in the ace community had faced them. Respondents often saw discrimination as an expected and even an inevitable experience for acespecs in medical institutions, which may be read as a collective trauma as this anxiety and fear impacted most participants regardless of their own previous experiences with medical practitioners. Consequently, some participants put off going to the doctor and getting the medical care they need because of these collective traumatic
experiences. Through the lens of sexual citizenship, the rights of many of the respondents are jeopardized or denied: the right to proper and responsive healthcare, the right to exist, and, for some, the right to live.

This erasure and denial is clear as most respondents, especially the people of color, overwhelmingly shared they were made to feel like they were broken, invisible, or an outsider. Consequently, many ultimately feel like they do not belong or even exist, which demonstrates their status as noncitizens (Richardson, 2017). Feelings like, “I’ve felt like an alien looking in for most of my life,” “I feel like I am strange,” and “It feels like I don’t exist” are not consequences of solely individual experiences. They are also consequences of systemic, intentional, and insidious violence (Chen, 2020), and they cannot be ignored as they reveal just how powerful and internalized these feelings of brokenness and estrangement are for many of the respondents. Many respondents’ noncitizenship status was further emphasized by sexual violence and conservative backlash. Some participants had either experienced or fear sexual violence, which is commonly the result of enforcing compulsory sexuality via coercion from partners—which was linked to lack of access to language about asexuality for some—or “fixing” aces because they are deemed broken (Doan-Minh, 2019; Parent & Ferriter, 2018). Participants also noted how their rights were restricted by the overturn of Roe v. Wade, the exclusion of asexuality from queer protection laws (e.g., the Equality Act), and recent anti-queer laws, especially anti-trans laws, as many respondents were gender non-conforming and had bodies capable of pregnancy. Due to this intersectionality, not only were they concerned about their bodily autonomy being violated (regarding pregnancy
and expressing their queer identities), but also feared the trauma of an unwanted pregnancy as a result of sexual violence motivated by queerphobia. The concerns about Don’t Say Gay bills are also tied back to the issue of coercive sex and lack of access to language about asexuality. If asexuality is already largely considered invisible, Don’t Say Gay bills further keep conversations about asexuality out of schools (Wenzel, 2022) and withhold vital information that some participants feel would empower them to not be coerced into sex they do not want. Once again, queer necropolitics (Puar, 2017) helps conceptualize that these experiences (among others) not only construct many aces as inhuman and disposable—which can be seen in the violence, asexuality often not being seen as worthy of legal protection, and queerphobic legislation that mentally, emotionally, and physically harms them—but also as nonexistent. In this sense, some aces, especially those who are more marginalized, are treated as not worthy of living while simultaneously being seen as already “dead” to the rest of society through invalidation, invisibility, erasure, and ontological denial. Thus, the concept of sexual citizenship reveals that most participants are denied many rights due to their intersecting identities and are considered broken or nonexistent and, thereby, noncitizens.

Furthering this exclusion, many participants highlighted the issue of gatekeeping in the queer community, as some allo queers did not consider aces “queer enough” because asexuality challenges the hetero/queer divide (Cohen, 1997) and because of Oppression Olympics—the comparing of oppressions to see who has it worse (Hancock, 2011). While some felt a sense of belonging to the queer community, these were often people who had other queer identities (e.g., trans, homoromantic, panromantic, etc.) that
overshadowed their aceness or made them “pass” as allo queer (e.g., panromantics passing as pansexual). This is because compulsory sexuality and amatonormativity are also prominent in the queer community (Chen, 2020). Sexual liberation, marriage equality, and queer sexual/romantic relationships are often at the core of many queer spaces, which often does not create space for aces, especially aro aces. Consequently, many participants felt too queer to belong to the straight society and too ace to belong to the queer community, leaving them displaced as invisible outsiders in an ambiguous area somewhere in between these spaces, yet simultaneously as aliens on what can feel like a different planet. In addition to this continuing denial of rights and belonging, Evans’s (1993) idea of the sexual citizen as one who can participate in a consumer society can also help theorize why some allo queers are more accepted as sexual citizens in society compared to some aces. Many allo queers are able to purchase things like birth control or pornography and perform their sexuality through consumerism and are influenced by sex in advertisements (Evans, 1993). Thus, allosexuality is easily commodified and consumable, and consequently, some allo queers are able to belong as sexual citizens in this way. However, many aces resist these things as they cannot buy their sexuality to perform it. Because capitalism relies on compulsory sexuality and allonormativity (Gupta, 2015), in a way, asexuality has not yet been commodified. Consequently, many aces, especially those who are not sexually active, cannot buy their sexuality (e.g., via porn, birth control, etc.) and are resistant to the sex used in marketing and advertisements. Thus, through Evans’s (1993) theorizing of sexual citizenship, the compulsory sexuality in capitalism and consumerism (Gupta, 2015) renders them noncitizens. However, this is
not to say that aces should be enforcing capitalism as a system of oppression by being included as consuming sexual citizens. Rather, asexuality’s resistance to systems like capitalism reveals how it challenges many societal norms, which adds to its exclusion.

To help avoid these difficult situations and for their safety, many respondents chose not to “come out” as ace. As a way to navigate acephobic medical experiences and lessen the direct discrimination they may face, many participants chose not to reveal their ace identities to their medical practitioners or even their families in some cases. Additionally, because of acephobia and compulsory sexuality, many participants intentionally choose not to reveal their ace identity and do not consider themselves publicly “out.” It was more important for them to find the words that describe their experiences and have internal validation than it is for other people to know about it. This goes against mainstream “coming out” narratives in the queer community and highlights the reality that “coming out” is not accessible, desirable, attainable, or even necessary for some queer people (Hamidi & Moyer, 2020; Johnson, 2001; Najmabadi, 2008). Many allo queers often have access to words like lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc., and it is generally understood that these queer sexualities should not be treated as an illness. Thus, many of their concerns instead focus on how others will accept them. On the other hand, many of the people in this research were first and foremost worried there was something wrong with them or were broken because of the invalidation and invisibility of asexuality. Consequently, while “coming out” may be a form of liberation for some allo queers, this process was out of the question for many of the respondents, and they saw it as a potentially harmful experience rather than one of liberation. This idea was consistent across various settings,
including the queer community. Many respondents noted that the ace part of them was often still not accepted, even among other queer people. They would lead with their other queer identities in conversations first to try to build trust first, and some would not reveal their ace identity at all. Similarly, the respondents whose only queer identities were their aceness (and aroness) would often not reveal their identities either because of the invalidation, gatekeeping, and acephobia in the queer community. Thus, those who were more likely to belong to the queer community had a queer gender identity or could pass as allo queer, or “visibly queer,” as one respondent phrased it. Therefore, the pathologization/medicalization and invisibility of asexuality (Chen, 2020; Decker, 2015; MacNeela & Murphy, 2014; Przybylo, 2019; Puhl, 2016) not only facilitates the epistemic injustice (Cuthbert, 2021) but also enforces the ontological denial of aces, as their identities and experiences are subject to dismissal, and their very existence is subject to erasure (Brown, 2022). Thereby signaling their status as “noncitizens.”

The noncitizenship status for many of the participants also helps explain the various interactions and dynamics occurring within the ace community in the U.S. context. Many participants felt that the ace community is fragmented and disconnected because it does not seem very visible. Much as it can be difficult for individual aces to exist, many felt the ace community did not exist either. Due to the invisibility of asexuality, many participants often felt they had no ace community to be part of and felt lonely. Paradoxically, because of invisibility and discrimination, many respondents did not feel comfortable “coming out” as ace, which can continue the cycle of invisibility of asexuality if aces cannot find or see others like themselves. However, as Scherrer (2008)
notes that online spaces are prominent places for aces to gather and build community, and for the participants that did have a sense of community, it was predominantly online. However, those that often felt included in the ace community held more privilege or were more represented in the ace community because they were white, cisgender, women, nonreligious/atheist, sex-averse, able-bodied, young, etc. (Brown, 2022; Chen, 2020; Kim, 2011, 2014; Przybylo, 2014, 2019). Thus, the gold-star ace (Chen, 2020) came into play, as many participants’ ace identities were either invalidated by other aces or they experienced difficulties coming to terms with their aceness because of racist, sexist, ageist, etc. stereotypes. Respondents who were in the gray area of the acespec and were not sex-averse or aro also experienced invalidation and policing within the ace community for not being “ace enough.” Moreover, some participants noted that issues such as racism, transphobia, ageism, fatphobia, ableism, among others, were present in the ace community. Consequently, even though many of the participants can be thought of as noncitizens through the lens of sexual citizenship, the ace community is not immune to systems of power, and marginalized aces—especially those who violate the gold-star ace—are more likely to experience invalidation, invisibility, and exclusion. Despite this reality and these important issues that must be addressed, many respondents still shared positive experiences with the ace community as well. While many of them experience oppression, they do not lack agency and find ways to resist these struggles and empower themselves and other aces. Because of these feelings of invisibility and loneliness, many participants understood and felt how important the ace community is in discovering their ace identity (and other identities), as well as validating their unique experiences. Perhaps
most important, in a place where aces are often made to feel broken and outcast, they are able to find others like them, understand there is nothing wrong with them, and know they are not alone in this world.

**Significance**

This thesis is just one part of a vital ongoing conversation that must continue to grow and deepen to better understand the experiences and elevate the voices of people who identify as acespec or in similar ways beyond dominant constructions of sexuality. It is an attempt to amplify the voices of acespecs, particularly marginalized acespecs, to combat epistemic injustice by giving space to them to share some of their experiences and stories. Perhaps more important, this project also attempts to communicate to other acespecs that you are heard, seen, valued, and you are not alone.

However, a transnational feminist lens reveals that the issues this research highlighted could potentially impact aces outside of the U.S. as well. For example, when considering the intersections of the invisibility and invalidation of asexuality and the social construction of the nation, the lives of ace immigrants can become very complicated. As Hodge (2019) and Murray (2013) note, queer immigrants must often conform to a Westernized “coming out” narrative and dominant constructions of sexuality and their labels, which can make their lives very precarious. For example, if asexuality is often invisible, invalidated as a sexual identity, and not explicitly protected in queer protection laws in the U.S., this could make it difficult for someone seeking asylum in the U.S. due to their aceness. Similarly, if asexuality is invalidated and not explicitly protected or discriminated against by any laws in other contexts, it can be hard to prove that someone
is being targeted for their aceness and that it is a marginalized sexual identity worthy of protection if the laws do not even acknowledge asexuality. This concern is not unfounded, as some asylum seekers who identified as ace have been refused asylum because asexuality was not explicitly being oppressed by any laws in their country of origin, and laws in the U.S. and the U.K. do not explicitly recognize or protect asexuality (Benoit, 2023; EDAL, 2018). This can put aces in an ambiguous space in-between of not being explicitly protected and not being explicitly discriminated against because of invisibility and invalidation. Simultaneously, this creates reliance on the state to officially recognize asexuality and construct aces as legal subjects, and challenges the homonationalist rhetoric that Western countries are safe havens for queer people (Çalişkan et al., 2020; Grewal & Kaplan, 2001; Puar, 2013, 2017).

This is just a small representation of ace experiences in the U.S. context and by no means speaks to every experience out there. Thus, it also important to keep in mind not only the positionality of the people who graciously volunteered their time to share some of their stories for this research but to also remember the geographical and historical contexts in which this research takes place in the world. With this in mind, it is important to note that the invisibility, invalidation, and erasure of asexuality from conversations is a cause for many of the issues raised in this thesis, and research that aims to visibilize and empower aces, particularly marginalized aces, is crucial. Consequently, more work needs to be done to improve the lives of aces and create a world where we do not feel forced to hide any part of ourselves.

**Future Studies & Goals**
While more people are becoming increasingly aware of asexuality, many of the problems that existed in past (e.g., pathologization/medicalization) still persist today. Future research must be conducted for and with aces. It must center the voices and experiences of aces—especially marginalized aces—through qualitative methods, such as interviews and ethnography, in which feminist researchers are able to ask deeper questions as new revelations are made in the process. Deeper and critical conversations must be had within asexuality studies in general, but they are especially needed at the intersections of aceness and race, class, gender nonconformity, romantic identity, immigration status, and more. What are the experiences of people who identify as ace and immigrate the U.S.? How do their experiences differ between the two contexts? If many aces from the U.S. are already denied their existence, what does this mean for aces seeking asylum in the U.S., and what are their experiences? How does language impact one’s understanding of asexuality? What are non-translatable words or phrases other people use to describe similar feelings and experiences? What are the experiences of people who identify as ace in contexts outside of the U.S.? How do racialized aces reconcile with their aceness? How does this look similar or different for Black, Asian, Latinx, or Indigenous people? These are just some of the many questions we must further explore, and an intersectional and transnational feminist lens is crucial in this journey of learning with and from aces while empowering them.
Appendix A

Dear [Person’s/Organization’s Name],

My name is Maya Wenzel, and I am currently a graduate student in the Gender & Women’s Studies Department at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Under the guidance of Dr. Maria Bevacqua, I am conducting research on people’s experiences of their ace identity.

We are currently looking for people who identify on the asexuality spectrum to participate in an online anonymous survey. I am reaching out to you to ask if you could please share this flyer and information with people who might qualify for this research and your other networks.

Eligible participants must:

- Be at least 18 years old
- Identify on the asexuality spectrum
- Currently live in the US

Eligible participants can take the survey at this link:

https://mnsu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5pUsVitokEXDTVk
The online survey will be anonymous, and IP addresses will not be recorded. There are no strict definitions of asexuality, so if you feel you identify with the asexuality spectrum, you are welcome to participate.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Dr. Maria Bevacqua at (507) 389-5025 or maria.bevacqua@mnsu.edu or myself at maya.wenzel@mnsu.edu.

Minnesota State University, Mankato IRBNet Id# 1995559

Thank you for your time, and I hope you have a great rest of your day!

Best,

Maya Wenzel
Appendix B

Q1 Online Anonymous Survey Consent Form

You are asked to participate in research being conducted by Maya Wenzel, under the supervision of Dr. Maria Bevacqua in the Department of Gender & Women’s Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato. This survey should take about 10 to 20 minutes to complete. The goal of this survey is to understand people’s experiences of their ace identity in the United States context, and you will be asked questions about that topic. If you have any questions about the research, please contact Dr. Bevacqua at (507) 389-5025 or maria.bevacqua@mnsu.edu or Maya Wenzel at maya.wenzel@mnsu.edu.

Participation is voluntary. You have the option not to respond to any of the questions. You may stop taking the survey at any time by closing your web browser. The decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board, at (507) 389-1242.

Responses will be anonymous and IP addresses will not be recorded. However, whenever one works with online technology there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact the Minnesota State
University, Mankato IT Solutions Center (507-389-6654) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

The risks of participating are no more than are experienced in daily life. There are no direct benefits for participating. Society might benefit from the increased understanding of some asexuals’ experiences in the United States.

Submitting the completed survey will indicate your informed consent to participate and indicate your assurance that you are at least 18 years of age, currently live in the United States, and identify on the asexuality spectrum.

Please print a copy of this page for your future reference. If you cannot print the consent form, take a screen shot, paste it to a word document and print that.

Minnesota State University, Mankato IRBNet Id# 1995559

Date of Minnesota State University, Mankato IRB approval:
Do you agree to participate?

☐ Yes  (1)

☐ No  (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Q1 = No

Display This Question:

If Q1 = Yes

Q2 Please note that the word "ace" or "ace identity" will be used in some of the wording in this survey to refer to people who identify as ace, on the asexuality spectrum, or in a way that is similar to this identity. The researchers acknowledge that some participants may not use ace to describe themselves but may use other terms or identify similar to asexuality. Thus, "ace"/"ace identity" is not used with the intention to exclude or disregard the words participants use to describe themselves.

End of Block: Online Anonymous Survey Consent

Start of Block: Demographics
Q3 Please select the option(s) that best describe(s) your sexual identity. You may select multiple options.

- Asexual/Ace (1)
- Demi-ace/demisexual (2)
- Gray-ace/graysexual (3)
- Aceflux (4)
- Queer (5)
- If a term you use/prefer is not mentioned please list it (6)

__________________________________________________
Q4 Please select the option(s) that best describe(s) your romantic identity. You may select multiple options.

☐ Aromantic/aro (1)

☐ Demi-aro/demiromantic (2)

☐ Gray-aro/grayromantic (3)

☐ Aroflux (4)

☐ Queer (5)

☐ Homoromantic (6)

☐ Heteromantic (7)

☐ If a term you use/prefer is not mentioned please list it (8)

__________________________________________________

Q5 What is your age in years?

__________________________________________________
Q6 Which best describes your education level?

- Less than high school  (1)
- High school or equivalent diploma, some college, or associate’s degree  (2)
- Bachelor’s degree  (3)
- Master’s, professional, or doctoral degree  (4)

Q7 On average, what is your yearly income?

- Less than $45,000  (1)
- $45,000 to $145,000  (2)
- More than $145,000  (3)
Q8 Do you live in a rural or urban area?

- Rural (1)
- Suburban (2)
- Urban (3)

Q9 Please select the option(s) that best describe(s) your religion/spirituality. You may select multiple options.

- Atheist/Agnostic (1)
- Muslim (2)
- Jewish (3)
- Christian (4)
- Buddhist (5)
- Hindu (6)
- If a term you use/prefer is not mentioned please list it (7)
Q10 Please select the option(s) that best describe(s) your race/ethnicity. You may select multiple options.

- [ ] White/Caucasian (1)
- [ ] Black or African American (2)
- [ ] Middle Eastern or North African (3)
- [ ] American Indian or Alaska Native (4)
- [ ] Asian (5)
- [ ] Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (6)
- [ ] Latina/o/x (7)
- [ ] If a term you use/prefer is not mentioned please list it (8)

_____________________________________________________________________________
Q11 Which US state/territory/etc. do you live in?

________________________________________________________________

Q12 Do you identify as an immigrant?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Display This Question:

If Q12 = Yes

Q13 In which country were you born?

________________________________________________________________
Q14 Do either of your parents identify as an immigrant?

- Yes  (1)
- No  (2)

Display This Question:
If Q14 = Yes

Q15 In which country were they born? If both of your parents identify as immigrants, please specify where each parent was born.

________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________
Q16 Please select the option(s) that best describe(s) your gender identity. You may select multiple options.

- Woman (1)
- Transwoman (2)
- Man (3)
- Transman (4)
- Nonbinary (5)
- Two-Spirit (6)
- Agender (7)
- Demigender (8)
- Queer (9)
- Transgender (10)
- Transsexual (11)
- I feel detached from gender and do not feel like I "have" a gender (12)
Q17 Please select the option(s) that best describe(s) your sex/sex assigned at birth. You may select multiple options.

☐ Male (1)

☐ Female (2)

☐ Intersex (3)

☐ Transsexual (4)

☐ If a term you use/prefer is not mentioned please list it (5)

Q18 The terms used on this page do not list every identity/experience, and for some, gender, sexual, and/or romantic identity may not be separate and are instead interconnected.
If the previous questions do not accurately describe or address your experiences and/or how you identify, please list the term or describe your identity below.

________________________________________________________________

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Sexual Citizenship

Q19 Are there any anti-LGBTQIA+ laws/policies in the US that impact you, and if so, how?

________________________________________________________________

Q20 How integrated, included, alienated, or excluded do you feel from the concept of marriage in the US? How do the laws about relationships impact you?

________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________
Q21 How does your ace identity shape your experiences with the education system (e.g., sex education, experiences with teachers/staff members, etc.)?

____________________________________________________________________

Q22 How does your ace identity shape your experiences with the criminal justice system (e.g., police, judges, attorneys)?

____________________________________________________________________

Q23 How does your ace identity shape your experiences with medical institutions in the US (e.g., health care/treatment, interactions with medical practitioners, etc.)?

____________________________________________________________________
Q24 How integrated, included, alienated, or excluded do you feel within the ace community because of your various identities (like race, gender, religion, and more)?

________________________________________________________________

Q25 How integrated, included, alienated, or excluded do you feel within the queer/LGBTQIA+ community?

________________________________________________________________

Q26 How integrated, included, alienated, or excluded do you feel within the US as an ace?

________________________________________________________________
Q27 If there is anything you think is important to share about your ace identity in the United States context that the survey did not ask, please share it below.

End of Block: Sexual Citizenship
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Sexual Identity</th>
<th>Romantic Identity</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ace</td>
<td>Aro</td>
<td>Nonbinary, agender, queer</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Atheist/Agnostic</td>
<td>19 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ace, gray ace, queer</td>
<td>Aro, queer</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>Atheist/Agnostic, Christian</td>
<td>30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ace</td>
<td>Aro, gray aro</td>
<td>Nonbinary, androgyne</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>Atheist/Agnostic</td>
<td>28 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Demi ace</td>
<td>Demi aro, heterromantic</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>Atheist/Agnostic</td>
<td>24 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ace</td>
<td>Demi aro, heterromantic</td>
<td>Woman, detached, &quot;cis-genderless&quot;</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>Atheist/Agnostic, Jewish</td>
<td>43 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ace</td>
<td>Aro</td>
<td>Woman, agender</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>31 years</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Note: Responses in quotes were typed in by the respondents. This is not a full list of participants’ identities. To see what other demographics were gathered see Appendix B.
References

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