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Editor’s note:
There is no AVENews or Meetup review this month; both are on temporary hiatus.

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“George!” Kathy whispered in a scandalized voice. She had lowered it to avoid drawing attention but a few people in the restaurant still glanced their way before returning to their own meals. George turned to his sister with a bewildered expression on his face. “What?” Cody, Kathy’s husband, spoke up. “What’d you mean ‘what’?” he practically hissed in accusation. “You’re checking out that woman two tables over while your wife’s in the bathroom.” George was spared answering by the return of said wife, Jennifer. “Something wrong?” she asked as she sat down, glancing at her three companions.

Cody and Kathy looked at one another uncomfortably since neither of them had the heart to tell her and then glared pointedly at George.

He sighed. “They’re just mad at me because I was looking at another woman.”

“Who?” Jennifer asked curiously, not a drop of venom or jealousy in her tone.

“My four o’clock,” George answered matter-of-factly, like they did this sort of thing all the time.

“Knee-length black dress?” Jennifer asked, as if she were asking for confirmation. “Pale skin? Dark hair? Swept up and held in place with a silver pin? Wears a matching silver necklace?”

“That’s her.”

Cody and Kathy gaped in astonishment as Jennifer surreptitiously appraised the woman in question and said, “Good eye—she’s gorgeous. Wonder how we missed her.”

“She came in late. Had a bit of a spat with the maître d’ when she went to join her group.” George grinned. “Hopefully, they leave before we do so you can watch her walk. You just can’t get the full picture when she’s sitting.”

Kathy sputtered in wordless anger, appalled at George’s inappropriate behavior. Cody appeared stunned and simply stared at them. Jennifer, however, looked completely unfazed. In fact, she looked downright cheerful.

“She has a wonderful figure,” she said. “What do you think? 38 32 38?”

“I was thinking 30 instead of 32, but I agree with both of the 38s.”

Jennifer glanced at the woman with an appreciative look. “She’s got a nice rack too. C?”

George nodded and smiled. “That’s what I thought. And you should see her calves.”

“Why? Is she wearing heels?”

“Four-inch stilettos. Silver.”

“Damn, now I have to see her walk.”

“What the hell is going on here?” Kathy asked, having finally found her voice.

“I’d like to know that too,” Cody chimed in.

George shrugged. “We’re admiring a woman with a beautiful body. Incidentally,” he said, turning towards Jennifer, “did you see her neck?”

She nodded and smiled. “The way it slopes, it just….”

“Makes you want to draw it,” George finished helpfully.

“Exactly! And her cheekbones—.”

“—her whole facial structure really—.”

“—just flawless.”

“Let me get this straight, Jennifer,” Kathy said, obviously trying to come to grips with the situation. “Your husband stares at a gorgeous woman while you’re gone, you come back and join him in staring at her, and none of that bothers either of you?”

George and Jennifer glanced at each other. “Yeah, that pretty much sums it up,” Jennifer said.

Kathy gaped at her friend, utterly speechless, so Cody stepped in for her. “It doesn’t bother you that your husband was eyeing another woman?” he asked incredulously.

Jennifer shook her head. “Nope.”

“Jennifer and I don’t love each other because of our looks. We love each other because of our personalities, who we are inside. So looking at other people...”
isn’t going to jeopardize our marriage.”

The confusion on their faces had lessened, but it wasn’t enough, so Jennifer picked up the narrative. “George and I do this all the time. We love to people watch, and we admire them on a purely aesthetic level. We’re not attracted to them. It’s like looking at a piece of art.”

Cody raised an eyebrow incredulously. “You expect me to believe that you don’t want to tap that?” he asked, indicating the woman they had been watching.

Kathy smacked him on the shoulder and glared at him. “I’m not saying I do,” he said defensively. “They’re the ones checking her out.”

Jennifer and George chuckled. “It doesn’t matter whether you believe us or not,” George said. “The fact is neither of us feels attraction towards anyone.”

Kathy’s eyebrows disappeared underneath her bangs. “Not even for each other?”

Jennifer and George shook their heads. “Then why did you get married?” Cody asked in disbelief.

“Because we love each other,” Jennifer answered, as if such a thing were obvious.

“You don’t have to be attracted to someone to love them,” George said.

“You two are strange,” Cody muttered, shaking his head.

“We know,” they said in unison.

“We get that a lot,” Jennifer added.

A shadow fell across the table and everyone looked up to find a tall, rather imposing man standing over them, glaring at George. “I’d appreciate it if you’d stop staring at my wife.”

“Oh! We’re sorry,” Jennifer said with an apologetic smile.

“We’ll stop,” George supplied. “Sorry if we made you uncomfortable.”

The man looked between Jennifer and George with a flabbergasted expression and turned to Cody and Kathy, as if begging for help.

“Don’t look at us, pal,” Cody said, his hands up in an attitude of surrender. “We’re just as lost as you.”

Quite a few people from the surrounding tables were now watching the whole scene with unabashed curiosity.

“What’s wrong?” asked a worried voice as the woman came to stand beside her husband.

“This man’s been staring at you since you got here,” he explained angrily, pointing at George.

“In my husband’s defense, so was I,” Jennifer interjected.

That stopped both of the newcomers cold.

“As we were explaining to my sister and her husband,” George said, indicating Kathy and Cody, “my wife and I like to admire people who are aesthetically pleasing. There’s nothing sexual in it.”

The man didn’t look like he believed them, but the woman had a thoughtful expression on her face. “This may seem like an unusual question,” she said, “but are either of you asexual?”

George and Jennifer practically beamed at her. “Yes, we are,” George answered. At the same time, Jennifer asked, “How did you know?”

“My brother’s asexual,” she said. “He’s right over there.” She waved at one of the people at her table. He waved back and then hesitantly got up to join them.

“I think I need an aspirin,” Kathy muttered, holding her head in her hands.

The woman, her brother, George, and Jennifer started a round of introductions while the man joined Cody and Kathy in staring at them, utterly baffled.

“This is officially the strangest dinner I’ve ever been to,” Cody whispered to Kathy.

She nodded and promptly swallowed two pills from the bottle of aspirin she carried in her purse. “And you thought this dinner would be boring.”
The Madde Pranckes of Gender Identity

I never used to think about gender. It didn’t seem like a topic even worthy of thinking about; that’s just how indifferent I was toward the whole thing. That’s why I never bothered to give myself a gender identity. But that all changed when I joined the asexual community about five years ago. All of a sudden, I was interacting with people with all sorts of gender identities in a way that I never had before. And slowly, I started to formulate a gender identity of my own.

Gender has always been a bit of a mystery to me, to be honest. I could never understand the divide between the boys and girls when I was a child, because it seemed so completely arbitrary. Why should our friendships be decided on the grounds of how we pee? People said that I’d understand when I got older. I don’t. In fact, I’m even more confused by the distinction in adults. I’ve never understood the logic that you should be friends with people of the same sex and romantic partners with the opposite sex. I’m aromantic, but even if I wasn’t, I’d find it rather hard to see myself in a romantic relationship with someone I’m not friends with. The distinction falls apart for me at that point, but it appears that I’m in the minority in that view. I never drew a distinction and I was friends with girls and boys in equal measures, and I still am.

When I started formulating my own identity, I realized that in many respects I wasn’t very male at all. I’ve never gone for the macho stuff that I apparently should find appealing as a member of the male sex. I’ve never been all that interested in popular culture directed at men, and I don’t find the aesthetics of male culture all that appealing. If a group of men get together and start to chat, I’m always lost and can’t contribute to the conversation.

But at the same time, I found that I do find several aspects of culture directed to female audiences to be highly appealing and compelling. This is especially evident when I go to the movies. If I notice that the audience is prominently female, I gather it to be a very promising sign. If a group of women get together and I happen to be a part of the group for some reason, I usually can contribute to the discussion.

A friend of mine suggested that maybe I actually was female and even went as far as to suggest that I wasn’t asexual, but a lesbian trapped in a male body and that I had therefore suppressed my sexuality. At the danger of sounding incredibly creepy, I have to admit that I gave it some serious thought before abandoning the idea. The main reason for abandoning it was that I realized very firmly that my life would not be any different if my biological sex was different. I wouldn’t find sex any more appealing even if I had the alternative variety of reproductive organs. And that is where my indifference to gender really stems from. Being female wouldn’t change my life in any way. I’d wear the same clothes, I’d have the same friends, I’d have the same interests and I’d be writing this very same column, processing the same questions.

There are things that I’m more comfortable with that are mainly associated with women, but there’s plenty of stuff that I’m not. Just as there are things that I’m more comfortable with that are mainly associated with men. I don’t shy away from a “chick flick”, but I’m not very invested with Sex In The City. Just like I’m not very invested in James Bond or the latest special effect filled blockbuster starring Megan Fox’s bosoms.

Basically, I’m comfortable with aspects of either gender as long as they’re not too gender specific. When we cross that line, I shy away from both of them. I just can’t find a comfort zone in the depths of either of the two main genders and being explicitly androgynous seems like too much of a commitment as well. I’m just not interested enough in gender to even be that.

So I started to wonder: why can’t people just pick and choose the traits from either gender that they find the most comfortable and just go with them? And then I realized: nothing is stopping me.

So that is what I do.
An interview with...

Sara Beth Brooks

Written by Arielle

Arielle: How did you find out about asexuality?
Sara: Google. I was engaged to be married and my partner and I were having trouble with sex. Once in the middle of the night, while planning the wedding, I was also frantically searching on Google for an answer. By then, I had been in therapy for more than a year, had tried hormone supplements and had blamed myself for the “problem” (as we called it). I was searching for “doesn’t like sex” and “no sex” and ran across the word asexuality. I found AVEN that night and started learning about the asexual community. It was a shock and a relief for me to find out that what I thought was “wrong” was actually something that a lot of people experience.

A: I take it the engagement didn’t work out?
S: No, it didn’t, though it honestly had little to do with asexuality. That relationship was unhealthy in many ways, and it ended before we got married.

A: How did you mention your asexuality to your parents?
S: I’m pretty out. I told my mom for the first time over the telephone. She was familiar with the problems that I had been having in my relationship. I told my dad a few months later, and he was open and accepting. My parents are amazing people who raised me to be myself and they were very supportive when I came out.

Sarah Beth

My whole family knows now - all my aunts, uncles, cousins, my grandfather, and everyone else whom I’m related to. A lot of them are uncomfortable with asexuality, and when we have family gatherings there is certainly a lot of avoiding the issue on their end. (Not me; I’m just all ASEXUALITY IS AWESOME WORLD!)

A: Wow! You are quite out.
S: Harvey Milk said that the only way for us to change society was to come out, and I try to follow the example he set. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbWDNM0wuAc <- This video is part of a speech that Harvey Milk gave commonly in the last year of his life. It’s part of the inspiration for my activism.

A: What do they think about you doing all these visibility events?
S: Both of my parents are very proud of me, and tell me frequently. I’m so lucky to have such awesome parents!

A: What have you done for asexuality visibility wise?
S: I started working on Asexual Visibility last year. I began with a project called Bringing Asexy Back, which was made up of LGBT-identified asexual people who wanted to bring asexuality to the educational conference setting. We worked on three different workshop curricula over the summer of 2010, and one of them was accepted to the Western Regional LGBT Student Conference (which is why I’m in Berkeley this weekend; that workshop will be presented tomorrow!) As a part of Bringing Asexy Back, I had a chance to build Asexual Awareness Week, which debuted in September of 2010. AAW was a week long education project targeted at the
LGBT community and their social networks. I leveraged the political contacts I had in the LGBT community to spread awareness to a huge cross-section of LGBT leaders across the world through Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube campaigns, as well as a five-piece blog series on the popular LGBT blog Bilerico.com. I’ve also been featured in Marie Claire and The Daily Beast about asexuality. This year I am focusing on Asexual Awareness Week 2011, which I am leading a committee for. AAW2011 will happen in the fall, though there isn’t a date set yet. [Editors note: The date is now set – AAW will be 23-29 October 2011!]

A: And how can people who are interested in the 2011 AAW help?
S: To get involved with AAW, people can email volunteer@asexualawarenessweek.com. The committee is now closed for 2011, but there are plenty of small volunteer opportunities for aces and ace allies who want to get involved. We will be doing small projects to engage the community throughout the summer, to get them involved in AAW.

A: How did your friends take your asexuality?
S: My close friends were really relieved. They watched me struggle in my engagement and knew that I had spent several years trying to figure out this serious problem in my life. When I first came out as asexual, they were so happy that I had found the answer I had been looking for. Some of them understand asexuality and some of them don’t. They are all accepting and welcoming though.

A: Why do you think people have issues with the idea of asexuality?
S: The idea of nonsexuality is hard for everyone to grasp, even asexuals. Western society teaches that we must have sex to be happy the way that it teaches that we must be thin to be pretty. Both statements are fallacies. But when we are raised to believe that the only option is sexuality, it is hard to break that societal message and incorporate new ideas. I talk a lot about the emotional puberty process that inevitably follows an asexual coming out. It takes a couple of years (sometimes more) to recalibrate, to think about sexuality, nonsexuality, and relationships wholly differently than society thinks about them. I find this process was true with me, and it’s true with so many aces whom I meet in the community and who are at various stages of acceptance and understanding of their own asexuality.

A: When did you first hear of and meet other asexuals?
S: When I first heard of asexuality on google in April 2008 (almost three years ago!), that was when I first started meeting them online, at places like AVEN and then slowly, in person too. I met David (Jay) for the
first time in person more than a year ago. He’s a passionate and talented organizer!

A: What do you think is the most important thing about AVEN?
S: I think the most important thing about AVEN is that it exists. It exists as an entry point for the asexual community, a place where asexuals can come to when they are first discovering the community.

A: How do you suggest people start things in their city (e.g. Visibility projects) and spread the word of asexuality in their areas?
S: There are five main ways that asexual awareness is moving forward right now: academic studies, LGBT community, sexuality/sex positive community, mainstream media, and the community of mental health professionals. Targeting any one of these communities with a visibility / awareness project can be really effective. I have heard of aces doing education campaigns on their high school or college campuses by giving lectures in sex education / human sexuality classes. I have heard of aces who work with kink/leather/BDSM communities and spread asexuality in those worlds. Targeted education campaigns that focus on mental health professionals can also be successful.
Activism can be almost anything, from leaving pamphlets at Planned Parenthood and the LGBT center, to pitching a story to the local news paper, to speaking in front of students or professionals. The most important thing is that we all do something and play a role in ensuring that our community is known and understood.
Even though your parents will be home any minute, you really need to go to sleep. Do you want to hear a bedtime story?

Yes!

Anything in mind?

Well... Every time I ask my mom where babies come from, she says she’ll tell me a story about the Birds and the Bees once I am older.

She gets annoyed every time I ask her to tell it to me. Could you?

Uhmm...

Evmmm...

Well...

Oookay.

You see, Birds and Bees are a lot like mothers and fathers, in that they both wake up in spring... when the sun comes out! The bees start going to the flowers, trying to find something to eat, while the birds go all around looking for insects to eat. Not the bees though, because they sting, so the birds prefer to eat spiders and butterflies. They like butterflies the most, that’s why they’re called butterflies. The birds like butter... just like mothers and and fathers do. And then when the autumn comes, most of the birds fly away, while all the bees just go belly up and die.

Wow...

That that story wasn’t what I expected.
Would you like to submit?

I am accepting:
• Letters to the editor
• Articles
• Stories
• Real life stories
• Comics/Drawings
• Poetry
• Recipes (Must be original)
• Meetup information
• Meetup Photos
• Current Events
• Photos for the cover
• And more....

Remember, AVENues depends on YOU.
Without your submissions AVENues cannot exist.
Your friends and family can submit too!

Please Recommend:
• Featured AVENite (Whom do you want to see, what questions would you liked asked?)
• Meetup lists (Do you know of any? Do you run any? Let me know!)
• Current events (You can suggest one as well as submit one)
• From the forum (Recommend both funny and interesting forum posts)
Please e-mail suggestions, recommendations, ideas, and any questions you have here:

newsletter@asexuality.org

PLEASE include in your e-mail:
* Name (or name you want under your submission)
* AVEN name (if applicable)
* Title of the piece
* The file or link to the file (make sure the size, if an image, is big)

Also, please submit images if you can (original) with your written piece