

# Assignment Coversheet

Please complete **one** copy for each assignment & attach securely to your coursework submission

Student Name: Elizaveta Kuznetsova
Student ID: 25040596
Assignment Tutor Name: Nigel Mairs
Assignment Title: Design for Animation, Narrative Structures and Film Language
Unit Title: Design for Animation, Narrative Structures and Film Language (PU002333)
Course & Year: 25/26 MA 3D Computer Animation LCC Full-time Year 1
Due date: 15 <sup>th</sup> January 2026

You must ensure that your work is clearly labelled.

Please complete **two** copies of this receipt per assignment and bring with you to the Hand in Office when you submit your work

# **Asexual representation suppresses aromantic representation in modern animation**

## **Abstract**

This critical report explores aromantic and asexual representation in modern animation. The purpose of the work is to establish why asexual identity is more widespread in animated series. Using case study of three characters from different shows, research tries to explain causes of prevailing asexual heroes over aromantic ones.

## **Key words**

Modern animation, Asexuality, Aromanticism, Representation, Identity.

# Contents Page

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
Relevance.....	2
Literature review.....	2
Research objective.....	3
Research gap.....	3
Research question & Hypothesis.....	3
Limitations.....	4
Methodology.....	4
<b>1. Chapter 1: Case Study.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Reference List.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Articles and Books.....	8
Animated series.....	8

## **Introduction**

### **Relevance**

Nowadays, the world is diversified, which is reflected in modern animation. For the last decade, animation has increasingly embraced LGBTQIA+ character representation. However, the visibility of less well-known identities such as aromantic and asexual remains quite low. Before moving forward, it is essential to provide some definitions of the above mentioned terms. Asexuality (or ‘ace’) is when people do not experience sexual attraction. Aromanticism (or ‘aro’) is when people do not experience romantic attraction. An aromantic asexual person (further in this work would be referred to as ‘aroace’) is an individual who does not experience both romantic and sexual attraction. Often, such characters are endorsed to be part of the community by the fan base rather than by canon and producers. However, even officially confirmed characters carry stereotypes, such as the idea that aromantic characters must also be always asexual. Sometimes, characters’ identities are confirmed post-factum when the show is already over. Now, it is extremely difficult to figure out whether there exists a confirmed aromatic character which is not asexual. This fact alone already shows how many stereotypes are present in the animation industry and how hard it is to distinguish such stereotypes from good representation.

### **Literature review**

Literature review was conducted in order to make a proper characters’ representations overview and to distinguish the research gap in this paper.

In the article ‘A Content Analysis of LGBTQIA+ Representation in Anime & American Animation’ (Bravo, 2022) representation of LGBTQIA+ characters in Japanese and American Animation is evaluated by using qualitative method of research. Bravo (2022) studied 3 Japanese

anime's and 3 American cartoons in order to compare and contrast differences in portraying queer characters.

Brown (2019) in 'Asexual Representation in Fiction' stated that the work focuses on asexual representation in fiction and media. The author researched whether asexual identity was presented in negative or positive light.

Gray (2024) in 'A social conversation on asexuality: queer spaces and media representation' stated that asexuality remains poorly understood despite the increasing visibility of queer topics in mainstream discourse. Through an ethnographic approach authors' research aimed to foster dialogue on asexuality and promote greater inclusivity within media and society.

### **Research objective**

Before continuing, it is necessary to define the objective of the research paper.

It is to study why asexual identity is more frequently explored and described in animation than aromatic one.

### **Research gap**

The research gap of this research is that while there exists a number of research which examines the impact of the aromatic and asexual representation on people, it lacks the specifics of reasons for the prevalence of asexual identity over aromatic one in modern animation. There is also no precise statistics or list of characters that represent only aromaticity, which leaves an even larger niche for study.

### **Research question & Hypothesis**

The research question of this paper is 'Why does asexual representation undermine aromatic representation in modern animation? The hypothesis is that asexuality is easier to show than

aromanticism, therefore, in animation, either a completely aromantic and asexual character, or an asexual one, is most often created.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation of this work is that there exist a small number of articles and statistics about aromantic characters which complicates research. Thus, there appeared the lack of the evidence base to completely eliminate bias from the conclusions and evaluations while studying the topic.

### **Methodology**

In terms of methods, case study was used in this work. According to Yin (2003), case study is an “inquiry that copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence ..., and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis”. In this research paper, in case study three characters were used as an example of representation which became a base for argumentation.

## 1. Chapter 1: Case Study

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the asexual and aroace characters. Initially, in this part aromantic characters should have been analyzed but during the research it became clear that right now officially confirmed aromantic (aromantic alone) characters do not exist as such. Therefore, it has been decided to examine asexual and aroace individuals. The logic was to consider why asexual representation replaced the aromantic one.

The first example that would be discussed is Alastor from the animated series 'Hazbin Hotel' (2019). In the pilot episode, Alastor was ace-coded because he perceived any joke with sex subtext with disgust. Later on he was confirmed to be asexual by the creator. In season, episode 5 he was labeled as asexual by another character. However, it was a slight hint in the form of the joke and was not developed further. What is more, Alastor's voice actor (Amir Talai) once said that his character is aroace, but then clarified that he made a mistake. To summarize, Alastor being aromantic is not confirmed, but the fact that he is not interested in romance is evident from the show. This case, however, shows that representation is quite weak as it is vague, undeveloped, and does not have any influence on the plot.

Another example is Todd Chavez from the animated series 'Bojack Horseman' (2014) who is one of the most cult and well-known characters. He is canonically confirmed asexual. A significant part of the plot builds on the base of his identity, that is why, he is quite a demonstrative example for this work. Todd Chavez is the main protagonist of the show. He comes out as an asexual at the end of season 3 and, starting from season 4, his identity is widely explored and explained. It is important to mention that, 'Bojack Horseman' is the type of a story which is mainly focused on the personality of the main character and his development. Todd Chavez is asexual and he does not move under aroace spectrum over time. The creator clearly

represents that: the main character engaged in several romantic relationships in different seasons of the show. In the end, he stays in a long serious romantic relationship. This case shows a clear asexual representation which does not intersect with aromantic identity.

The last character to examine would be Lilith Clawthorne from 'The Owl House' (2020). She is a minor character who in the beginning is presented as the antagonist. Later she chooses the good and becomes a friend of the main hero. From that moment the narrative focuses on her more closely. It never has been stated directly which is her orientation but as the plot progresses, it becomes more clear that she is not engaging in any romantic relationship. Lilith mainly focuses on her friend ties and her research. Her voice actress (Cissy Jones) confirmed the fact that Lilith is aromantic. It is essential to state that later Lilith was confirmed to be asexual too. In this case her plot line does not build around her identity so there is no direct confirmation in the series, only slight hints. As it can be seen, this situation looks a bit like one with Alastor. There exists the character which does not have a stated orientation. Then she becomes aromantic and after asexual, moving to the aroace niche. Once again it occurs to be a very vague and blurry representation which is not critical for the plot or character development.

## Conclusion

To conclude, at the beginning it was stated that asexual representation prevails over aromantic one and it has been seen through the case study. However, after the analysis of the characters it has formed into the interesting pattern which confirmed frequent merger of the asexual and aromantic identities into one, namely aroace. This tendency has been traced on Alastor and Lilith which were firstly confirmed to be asexual, but then moved to the aroace 'umbrella' (Lilith case) or stayed in the gray blurred area in-between (Alastor case). Thus, one can lead to the conclusion that the issue is not only in asexuality receiving more recognition. Another problem is that in modern animation stereotypical thinking exists which 'swallows' identities and merges them into something more simple and clear for the viewers. This promotes stereotypes and bias even further in mass.

Furthermore, this trend seems to be quite common as animation creators do not show clearly enough what is the difference between 2 above mentioned identities. As no actual and representative facts have been developed, it becomes much easier to include characters in aroace niche in order to lighten plot lines. This shows that until the plot is not built around one concrete character and their life, the representation appears to be weak as it does not affect the plot. At the end of the research, it could be mentioned that aroace identity tends to undermine aromantic and asexual identities separately.

## Reference List

### Articles and Books

1. Bravo, A. (2022). 'A Content Analysis of LGBTQIA+ Representation in Anime & American Animation'.
2. Brown, A. (2019). 'Asexual Representation in Fiction'.
3. Franke, J. (2023). 'Identity and Perception Among Aspec Consumers of Mass Media'. *Theses and Dissertations-Communication*, 123.  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1100-0826>
4. Gray, M. E. (2024). 'A SOCIAL CONVERSATION ON ASEXUALITY: QUEER SPACES AND MEDIA REPRESENTATION'.
5. Hernandez, J. (2021). 'Asexual Protagonists: What Their Patterns Reveal About the Representation of Asexuality in Current Literature'.
6. Yin, R. K. (2003). 'Case study research: design and methods'.

### Animated series

1. Bojack Horseman (2014). Directed by R. Bob-Waksberg. Netflix
2. Hazbin hotel (2019). Directed by V. Medrano. Amazon Prime Video
3. The Owl House (2020) Directed by D. Terrace. Disney Channel