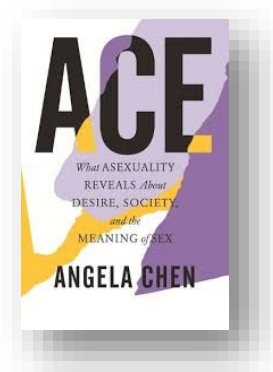


LGBTQIA+ Book Club Feedback

“Ace” by Angela Chen



Introduction

The LGBTQIA+ Book Club met to discuss *Ace* by Angela Chen. The session created space to explore asexuality (ace identities), the idea of “compulsory sexuality”, and how social norms shape our assumptions about love, intimacy, and relationships. The group also reflected on how ace experiences intersect with race, disability, gender identity, and cultural expectations, and what this means for inclusion in workplaces and learning environments.

Key messages

- **Asexuality is often overlooked or misunderstood**, including within broader LGBTQIA+ conversations, training, and media representation.
- **Compulsory sexuality is reinforced everywhere**—in language, workplace norms, popular culture, and everyday assumptions about what “normal” relationships look like.
- **Relationship hierarchies shape policy and practice**, privileging coupledness, marriage, and traditional family structures while marginalising friendship, chosen family, co-parenting, and community-based living.

- **Intersectionality matters:** the pressures and risks of identifying as ace can be compounded by racism, sexism, ableism, and stereotypes (including hyper sexualisation and cultural expectations).
- **Language can be both liberating and limiting:** labels can validate identity and community but can also lead to stereotyping or “othering” if used carelessly.

Learning and action points

What we learned (individual and organisational learning):

- Inclusion needs to explicitly consider ace identities, not assume “LGBTQIA+ inclusion” automatically covers this lived experience.
- Workplace inclusion isn’t just about policies **it’s also about everyday culture**, humour, assumptions in conversation, and the “default” expectation of sexual/romantic norms.
- Representation matters: when ace identity is only implied (rather than named), it can reinforce invisibility and leave people feeling unseen.

Actions agreed (next steps):

- **EDUK:** Confirm the next book club date (proposed **Tuesday 11 March**) and communicate to registered attendees.
- **All participants:** Source the next book, **XOXY**, ideally via LGBTQIA+ bookshops or recommended second-hand sellers (where possible).
- **Claudette:** Draft a prompt/statement for a future “**backpack activity**” to encourage reflection on asexuality and/or relationship hierarchies.
- **Laura:** Include books about **friendship (not only romance)** in the Valentine’s Day/LGBTQ+ History Month library book list to broaden representation of love and connection.



Suggested “take-away” actions for workplaces/learning settings (optional but recommended):

- Review internal comms and training examples for **assumptions about relationships** (e.g., “bring your husband/wife”, “when you settle down”, “everyone wants...”) and swap for neutral language.
- Build ace visibility into EDIB/EDI learning: include definitions, myths, and examples that don’t frame asexuality as a “lack” or deficit.
- Encourage managers and teams to treat sexualised humour, intrusive questions, and “compulsory sexuality” assumptions as inclusion issues.

Good practice received

- **Psychological safety was actively modelled:** the facilitator reinforced confidentiality, empathy, and permission to step away or pause if needed.
- **Inclusive participation approach:** attendees were encouraged to join the discussion even if they hadn’t finished the book, keeping the space welcoming rather than “performance-based”.
- **Values-led facilitation:** the group centred lived experience, respect, and learning (rather than debate), and held complexity without demanding disclosure.
- **Intersectional lens in practice:** participants explored how identity “lenses” (race, disability, gender identity, culture) affect how safe it is to be visible as ace.
- **Practical inclusion suggestions emerged naturally:** broadening book lists beyond romance; creating reflective activities; and promoting ethical purchasing that supports LGBTQIA+ bookshops.

Key Discussion Themes

- Compulsory sexuality
- Relationship hierarchies
- Intersectional experiences of being Ace
- Community and platonic love

Demographics & Social Pressures

- Stats noted: 63% of aces identify as female, with questions about gender, socialization, and pressure to be sexual.
- Discussion of barriers to different groups identifying as asexual- pressures on men to initiate sex, hypersexualisation of gay men, and cultural barriers for aces from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Ace Representation in Media

- Sexual content is pervasive in media (e.g., advertising, even cooking shows).
- Explicit ace characters remain rare; more often implied by lack of sexual relationships.

Redefining Asexuality & Love

- Asexuality is often framed by what it “lacks”; participants discussed more positive, expansive definitions.
- Suggested including books on friendship in LGBTQ+ History Month to broaden ideas of love and relationships.
- Reflected on non-romantic expressions of love and how relationship hierarchies play out in workplaces and society.



Vision for the Future

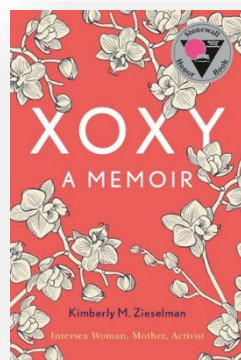
- Vision of a future where no one has to “come out” and all partners are accepted without explanation.
- Discussed alternative family structures and co-parenting, and how law and policy favour heterosexual couples.
- Shared visions of communal homes and retirement communities built around chosen family.

Commitment to Action:

- Bring awareness of Ace experiences into training
- Stop making assumptions that everyone wishes to be in a relationship
- Highlight all different versions of loving relationships beyond just sexual and romantic relationships
- Challenge compulsory sexuality
- Challenge relationship hierarchies

Next date: Wednesday 11th March: 6:30pm- 7:45pm

Next book: XOXY, an intersex memoir by Kimberley M. Zieselman



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