
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Research on the Development Path of Feminism from an Aromantic Asexual Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Aromantic asexual is a perspective that has rarely been used in the research of Feminism, and this paper aims to explore the possibility and significance of combining aromantic asexual and feminism to fight against "sexual hegemony" from the perspective of the social identity of aromantic asexual. This paper will carry out research through the following aspects: firstly, analyse the concept of aromantic asexual and clarify its connotation and characteristics; secondly, explore the historical basis of the combination of aromantic asexual and feminism and reveal the links and commonalities between the two; then analyse the reasons why aromantic asexual and feminism can move towards the union, and explore the motivation and possibilities of the combination of the two; finally, explore the reflection on the combination of aromantic asexual and feminism, and conclude that the combination of aromantic asexual and feminism has been a very important factor in the development of the feminist movement. Finally, it discusses the reflection on the combination of aromantic asexual and feminism and concludes that the combination of aromantic asexual and feminism is insufficient in resisting the path of "sexual hegemony." The research in this paper shows that aromantic asexual and feminism have a certain historical basis and connection and that they share some common concepts and goals. At the same time, the combination of aromantic asexual and feminism is not accidental but may be based on the common resistance to and demand for the phenomenon of "sexual hegemony". Therefore, the combination of aromantic asexual and feminism to fight against "sexual hegemony" has certain rationality and significance and can bring new inspiration and impetus to the cause of gender equality. However, it is also necessary to note that there may be shortcomings in practice, which need to be further studied and explored in depth. It is suggested that future research should strengthen the exploration of the combination of aromantic asexual and feminism, promote cooperation and development between the two, and provide more possibilities and support for the advancement of the cause of gender equality.

KEYWORDS

Aromantic asexual; Feminism; Sexual hegemony; Normative romantic-sexual relationships

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1. Introduction

Aromantic asexual, a relatively understudied field, has garnered increasing attention in contemporary society when combined with feminism. This paper aims to explore the legitimacy and shortcomings of the union and resistance against "sexual hegemony" from the perspective of aromantic asexual and feminism, aiming to provide new insights and inspirations for the advancement of gender equality. The choice of this research topic is driven by the fact that aromantic asexual, as a social identity, is often overlooked in feminist studies. However, its combination with feminism could bring new momentum and perspectives to the cause of gender equality. Studying this topic can expand the horizons of feminist research, promote cooperation and communication between different identities, and push the cause of gender equality towards a more diverse and inclusive direction. This research issue is crucial because "sexual hegemony" remains prevalent and widespread in contemporary society, posing an obstacle to the advancement of gender equality. By exploring the union and resistance against "sexual hegemony" from the perspective of aromantic asexual and feminism, this study can provide new ideas and strategies to address this problem, enhancing society's

understanding and practice of gender equality. This paper adopts a specific approach to research by analyzing the related concepts of aromantic asexual, exploring historical foundations, analyzing motives for combination, and reflecting on the topic. This comprehensive and in-depth exploration aims to analyze the legitimacy and shortcomings of the combination of aromantic asexual and feminism from multiple angles, providing a deeper discussion for the advancement of gender equality. Through this research, we hope to offer new insights and inspirations for the union and resistance against “sexual hegemony” from the perspective of aromantic asexual and feminism. We aim to promote cooperation and communication between different identities, pushing the cause of gender equality towards a more diverse and inclusive direction.

2. Clarification of Concepts Related to Aromantic Asexual

Simply put, feminism is closely related to social identity, and aromantic asexual is also intimately connected to social identity. Next, this section will introduce the concept of aromantic asexual and the aromantic asexual spectrum.

Aromantic asexual (also known as Aroace, a combination of aromantic and asexual) is a term that describes both a sexual orientation and a romantic orientation, indicating that a person experiences neither sexual attraction (asexual) nor romantic attraction (aromantic). Asexual attraction refers to the lack of sexual attraction, meaning a person does not experience sexual desire towards others, nor do they have an intrinsic desire to engage in sexual relationships with others (The Asexual Visibility and Education Network, 2024). Aromantic attraction means that a person does not have the desire to form romantic feelings for others. People who identify as Aroace may experience other forms of attraction, such as platonic, aesthetic, or intellectual attraction, but these forms are neither romantic nor sexual. Individuals with an Aroace identity have their own values, emotional needs, lifestyles, and sense of happiness, which do not depend on romantic or sexual relationships for fulfillment. Due to the small percentage of the population that identifies as aromantic asexual (Approximately 1% of the total population) and the influence of mainstream media narratives, aromantic asexual is often overlooked, leading to a certain degree of loss of discourse power. Aromantic asexual emphasizes the subversion of the existing hegemony of romantic love in intimate relationships, thereby offering an opportunity for women to be liberated from male-dominated normative romantic-sexual relationships. This provides a basis for the potential combination of aromantic asexual and feminism.

3. Historical Basis for the Integration of Aromantic Asexual and Feminism

The integration of aromantic asexual and feminism has its historical foundations. Human history has relied on production and reproduction for continuity and development, with the reproduction of human beings being particularly crucial. Sexuality has played an essential role in this process, impacting the creation and evolution of family, private property, and the state and thus influencing the survival and development of human civilization. Sexuality is often tied to power structures, with population control being vital for state control over people. Consequently, rejecting social relationships involving sexuality has been a common form of resistance in political movements and revolutions. As early as the Middle Ages, celibacy and asceticism, concepts related to asexuality, were endorsed by religious doctrines, providing opportunities for voluntary celibacy (Voices of Asexual Attraction, 2023). In the 1960s and 1970s, the sexual liberation movement in Europe and the United States promoted sexual freedom and expression, offering women a chance to pursue and express their desires. However, overemphasizing “sexual liberation” and the expression of “sexual desire” led to many negative consequences. Traditional sexual norms reinforced the oppressive structure of patriarchy, leaving women in an exploited and stered position, which did not improve and, in some cases, worsened. Women, who were often in a disadvantaged position both physically and socially, frequently found themselves coerced into compulsory sexual relationships. In this regard, feminism’s opposition to sexual hegemony aligns with the aromantic asexual’s stance. In 1978, feminist Audre Lorde introduced the concept of “the erotic.” She stated that “the erotic” is a means of opening channels to experience ourselves and the world, encouraging us to enrich our life experiences to the fullest. It is broader than mere sexuality and need not be connected to sex or romantic love, though it can encompass both (Przybylo, 2019). Lorde argued that patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism have long intertwined “the erotic” with sex and love because “the erotic” allows women to envision possibilities beyond love and marriage, forming alliances with others and thereby possessing significant political potential to challenge oppressors (Przybylo, 2019). In this regard, “the erotic” aligns with Marxist theories on human development, which emphasize the importance of universal social interaction for achieving comprehensive human development. This highlights the need to expand personal social interactions beyond sexual and romantic relationships, focusing instead on the positive impacts of various social relationships. Since the late 20th century, “political asceticism” has emerged as a form of feminist activism. Initiated in 1977 by the British feminist group “Reclaim the Night,” this movement aimed to protest against gender violence and sexual harassment, advocating for women’s safety and rights. Feminists employed political celibacy by refusing to collaborate with or accept help from men, expressing their opposition to gender inequality and violence. This strategy highlighted feminist autonomy and independence, challenging male-dominated societal structures and drawing attention to issues of gender violence and inequality. By rejecting the negative impacts of sexual and romantic relationships reinforced by political structures, this approach encouraged women to explore the positive significance of broader social relationships beyond patriarchal traps. However, the understanding and recognition of aromantic asexual have been limited and delayed. “Aroace” identities were historically used primarily as a political stance against sexual hegemony within feminist movements (Voices of Asexual Attraction, 2023). Consequently, the role of “Aroace” in feminist history

has been quite limited. This identity has often struggled to gain attention and respect, resulting in a rather awkward position within the feminist movement.

4. The Potential for Integrating Aromantic Asexual and Feminism

Aromantic asexual and feminism share common goals—opposing normative romantic-sexual relationships and sexual hegemony and promoting gender equality and social justice—making their combination inherently advantageous and possible. Then, the drawbacks and practical applications of opposing normative romantic-sexual relationships and sexual hegemony from the shared perspective of aromantic asexual and feminism will be discussed. On this basis, the important role of aromantic asexual concepts in feminist opposition to normative romantic-sexual relationships and sexual hegemony will be explained, and the positive impacts of opposing normative romantic-sexual relationships and sexual hegemony will be analyzed.

4.1 Analysis of the Concepts of Normative Romantic-sexual Relationships and Sexual Hegemony and Their Drawbacks

Since sexual and romantic relationships do not inherently exist, normative romantic-sexual relationships and sexual hegemony are essentially products of social conditioning. Proceeding with this understanding, we will first analyze the concept of normative romantic-sexual relationships and then extend this to discuss the drawbacks of the supremacy of normative romantic-sexual relationships and sexual hegemony.

4.1.1 Analysis of the Concept of Normative Romantic-sexual Relationships

The term “normative romantic-sexual relationships” refers to intimate relationships based on “sex” and “romantic emotions.” It is similar to the concept of “Amatonormativity” proposed by Elizabeth Brake in 2012, which refers to the assumption that establishing monogamous, exclusive romantic relationships is a universal human goal. This creates a social norm that prioritizes romantic relationships aimed at marriage above other social relationships (Degges-White, 2023). A society operating under the belief in Amatonormativity emphasizes that an individual’s life goal is to find a romantic partner who can meet their needs, thereby achieving life fulfillment. This societal pressure can lead individuals to hastily enter romantic relationships to uphold this belief or attain this goal. Similarly, normative romantic-sexual relationships are essentially a social construct and product of social conditioning, which instills the importance of normative romantic-sexual relationships in women while devaluing other intimate relationships. This elevation of normative romantic-sexual relationships to a supreme status guides women into potentially unhealthy exclusive relationships, thereby fragmenting women’s support networks. Overemphasizing and elevating normative romantic-sexual relationships can solidify and reinforce the position of normative romantic-sexual relationships within social relationships, leading to the prevalence of sexual hegemony. This dominance of sexual hegemony in society squeezes the space for other social relationships to thrive.

4.1.2 Drawbacks of the Supremacy of Normative Romantic-sexual Relationships and Sexual Hegemony

“Cinderella” is a story almost everyone is familiar with: an inspiring girl rebels against her evil stepsisters and stepmother and, through bravery, ultimately falls in love with the prince. The family members living with Cinderella are unreliable, leaving her no choice but to place her hope for love and being loved by a man. However, Cinderella’s ability to gain the prince’s love is because she happens to fit the prince’s aesthetic; the fitting glass slipper is a metaphorical symbol of this. The notion of the supremacy of normative romantic-sexual relationships has been subtly ingrained in women through fairy tales, love songs, films, and other forms of media. By elevating the status of romantic-sexual relationships and devaluing other social relationships, women become isolated from other social connections, which greatly deprives them of many beautiful, emotional bonds that should belong to them, thereby making them dependent on romantic-sexual relationships and subject to male control. When women pursue normative romantic-sexual relationships, they often take a series of actions, such as engaging in “beauty labor,” matchmaking events, and social gatherings. However, these actions often weaken their efforts to fight for their own rights and improve themselves, which is detrimental to achieving gender equality. In this context, normative romantic-sexual relationships exhibit clear exclusivity, primarily affecting women, while men are seldom restricted. As early as Engels’ work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Engels argued that the monogamous family structure nominally confines women to having one husband, whereas, in practice, it allows men the privilege of effectively having one official wife alongside multiple unofficial partners. This patriarchal marriage system separates women from their kin and society, dividing and weakening women’s support networks, forcing them to rely on the small family structure based on normative romantic-sexual relationships to obtain production and living resources and seek emotional bonds, thereby preventing them from fully utilizing their talents and strengths in society. This maintains the legitimacy of the patriarchal male-dominated marriage system, allowing men to legally appropriate women’s labor results in the family. The overemphasis on normative romantic-sexual relationships also reinforces their hegemonic discourse in social relations, negatively affecting the development of healthy and meaningful emotional connections between individuals. In this situation, friendships, family ties, and other emotional bonds are often mistakenly viewed as normative romantic-sexual relationships, leading to awkward situations that hinder the comprehensive development of personal social relationships.

4.2 The Application of Aroace Concepts in Opposing the Supremacy of Normative Romantic-Sexual Relationships and Sexual Hegemony

The union of aroace (aromantic asexual) perspectives with feminism can help feminists recognize that truly fighting for their rights involves addressing issues and concepts related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Uniting with more potential allies can enhance efforts against the male-constructed sexual hegemony. The integration of aroace perspectives can guide women to differentiate between concepts such as "sexual attraction," "romantic attraction," "aesthetic attraction," and "sensory attraction," clarifying their true inner needs. This helps deconstruct the strong demands for "sex" and "romantic love" constructed by patriarchy and aids feminists in recognizing the overemphasis on normative romantic-sexual relationships in society, exploring more possibilities for intimate social relationships beyond these. In this sense, the identity of "political aroace" aligns with that of aroace. Given that the socially constructed binary gender identities and corresponding behavioral norms are deeply ingrained and difficult to eliminate in a short period, constructing, recognizing, and affirming this new identity can help people live better until a society where non-binary gender identities are widely accepted emerges. It is important to note that opposing normative romantic-sexual relationships does not mean opposing all such relationships. It emphasizes rejecting the idolization of these relationships and placing them above all other social relationships, thereby allowing other social relationships to develop more fully. This is meaningful for both feminists and individuals with aroace identities.

4.3 Positive Impacts of Opposing Normative Romantic-Sexual Relationships and Sexual Hegemony

Opposing normative romantic-sexual relationships and sexual hegemony enables women to break free, to some extent, from their long-standing subordinate status as "objects" of the gaze, thus restoring their agency as human beings. It liberates women from male-dominated normative romantic-sexual relationships, allowing them to engage more in society and form emotional connections with others through social activities. As long as women are excluded from broader social relationships and confined to patriarchal normative romantic-sexual relationships, their liberation, and equality with men, now and in the future, remain impossible. Women's liberation is only possible when they can fully participate in social interactions, realizing the universal development of social relationships, with normative romantic-sexual relationships constituting only a small part of their social interactions. The weakening of the status of normative romantic-sexual relationships allows women to invest more time and energy into self-improvement and the process of fighting for their rights. It also enables them to engage more in large-scale social production and social interactions, thereby creating more social wealth and value and laying a more solid material foundation for improving their status. In the long run, the full development of women's capabilities in various fields can alleviate economic conflicts in society. The degree of participation in social production will no longer be focused on any one gender, and the social conflicts arising from the opposition between men and women will be mitigated. This can unite more potential forces to address social contradictions and problems, fostering a more harmonious society.

5. Reflection on the Combination of Aromantic Asexual and Feminist

5.1 Inability to Escape Existing Discourse Systems

When discussing the combination and resistance of "aromantic asexual" and "feminism," it is essential to recognize that concepts and discourses like "aromantic asexual" and "feminism" are inextricably linked to the existing patriarchal structure. They are extensions of this discourse system. Consequently, efforts to secure one's rights will inevitably be influenced by oppressive structures. Despite this, it is crucial to consider this issue because, before the eradication of binary gender identities, the construction, recognition, and unification of these identities can help individuals better express their uniqueness, ultimately leading to a better life. One significant aspect of emphasizing aroace is to break the hegemony of traditional love over intimate relationships, encouraging people to redefine love and being loved on their terms. Furthermore, the alliance between feminism and aromantic asexual appears to be a struggle and effort primarily at the cultural and ideological levels, lacking a real economic foundation that would enable these groups to gain corresponding economic power and, thus, discourse power. However, it is also important to note that culture and ideology are playing increasingly significant roles in social development. This is reflected in frequently trending issues like "low fertility rates" and the feminist practice of "6b4t," highlighting the power of ideological aspects. Therefore, further reflection and theoretical construction on the union and resistance of aromantic asexual and feminism have certain social significance.

5.2 Squeezing the Living Space of Aromantic Asexual Individuals

Given the role of aromantic asexual in the history of the feminist movement, as mentioned above, the public's limited understanding of aromantic asexual often results in its practical combination with feminism being politically motivated. Those choosing an "aromantic asexual" identity may do so based on certain political considerations, becoming "political aromantic asexuals." Many of these individuals have not genuinely experienced the confusion and self-exploration associated with being aromantic asexual, which, to some extent, contradicts the existing principles and concepts of aromantic asexual. This deepens the difficulty for some aromantic asexuals in affirming and identifying their own identity and complicates the task of scientifically defining the concept of "aromantic asexual." Therefore, the development of feminism from the perspective of aromantic asexual

should further consider how to find the “greatest common divisor” in combining aromantic asexual with feminism without affecting the identity recognition and discourse power of the aromantic asexual community to achieve synergistic development of both.

6. Conclusion

Through studying the combined resistance against “sexual hegemony” by aromantic asexual individuals and feminists, we conclude the following: Firstly, this combination has historical connections and shares common ideas and goals. It can support the rights and recognition of the aromantic asexual community while injecting new strength into the feminist movement. Secondly, their joint resistance against “sexual hegemony” is rational and significant. By jointly resisting gender discrimination and oppression, the aromantic asexual community and feminists can form a stronger alliance to advance gender equality. However, potential shortcomings exist, as differences in ideas and goals between the two groups require further communication and coordination. It's also important to avoid viewing the aromantic asexual community as monolithic and to respect individual diversity.

To further promote the combination of aromantic asexual and feminism, future research can improve in the following areas:

- (1) Enhance research and discussion: Continue exploring the connections and commonalities between aromantic asexual and feminism, promoting theoretical and practical exchanges.
- (2) Advocate inclusivity and diversity: Respect the diversity of identities, advocate for inclusivity and mutual understanding, and avoid simplifying individuals into categories.
- (3) Promote cooperation and action: Collaborate on joint actions to advance gender equality, contributing to a more just and equal society.

In summary, the joint resistance against “sexual hegemony” by aromantic asexual individuals and feminists is a crucial and challenging task that requires ongoing exploration and effort. Through cooperation and dedication, we can advance gender equality and foster a fairer and more inclusive society.

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