

Episode 6: The Importance of Being Gus

“I’m ace.” “I don’t know what that means,” Gus admitted. “That’s okay,” Casey said. “I’m asexual.” And... Gus still didn’t know what to do with that. “Is that...good?” Casey nodded. ~ HtBaNP, Chapter 7

Welcome to the Klunatics Podcast. I’m Kirt Graves.

You know, when we started to work on this series, I was planning for the podcast to have a really simple format. I wanted to talk with Klunatics one-on-one and learn about their lives and how TJ’s work has been meaningful to them. And so I got TJ’s permission and then I reached out to Mia Sciberras, one of the Klunatic Facebook group admins because I wanted to make sure that the podcast stayed true to the spirit of the group she had helped create. She was excited and sent me a list of episode ideas. These were not simple episode ideas. These were documentary style, in-depth examinations of topics and themes that spanned the entirety of TJ’s work. And at the top of that list was a description of today’s episode. And I knew we had to do it. It would be a disservice to the Klunatics to do any less. And so, if you’re enjoying the podcast in its current form, blame Mia.

TJ is the first author I’ve read who identified as asexual, and his writing and the personal example he sets has been an education for me. But I was just scratching the surface, because then I got an education from the Klunatics, the very Klunatics you will hear from today. So, for the most part, I’m just going to let them talk this episode.

With a few notable exceptions. TJ’s work is littered with references to asexuality, and so we’ll be hearing excerpts from several of his audiobooks, narrated by Charlie David, Derrick McClain, Michael Lesley, and even me.

Kirt: Episode seven, the importance of being Gus, which is all about asexuality.

[00:00:07] **TJ:** Hooray

[00:00:08] **Kirt:** Yeah. This has been, uh, this has been really interesting for me to talk to so many people who really have discovered this huge part of, of themselves because of your books, but specifically it’s How to Be a Normal Person that seems to have, uh, triggered an awakening for so many people.

***Kirt:** Here’s producer and ruiner of perfectly good ideas that would have been fine and a lot less work Mia Sciberras, followed by Tanya and Elaine, who we’ve met in previous episodes, and then James and Amy, who will introduce themselves later in this episode.*

[00:00:25] **Mia:** I know I've talked with a couple of people about it and how, how it was just like this light came on for them, that all of a sudden it was like, "ah. That makes that makes sense. That's who I am. This applies to me. This is, this is who I am and it's okay

[00:00:42] **Tanya:** when I saw, um, the, the back blurb for, for How to Be a Normal Person, like what does that even mean? What, what is that? And so I, I, I looked it up.

[00:00:53] I did a little research and it was like. Angels singing like

[00:00:59] This is, This is me. I didn't know that this was a thing.

[00:01:05] **Elaine:** coming across How to Be a Normal Person, that that made a big difference because suddenly I was like, oh hey, there's, there's a word for this. You know, asexuality is a thing.

[00:01:21] and Whoa, that was quite an epiphany.

[00:01:28] **James:** It was kind of a happy accident, almost like I was kind of realizing asexuality within myself.

[00:01:36] Sort of around the same time I started reading TJ's work, so it was kind of, it kind of happened at the same time, reading How to Be a Normal Person, kind of discovering it within myself.

[00:01:45] **Amy:** Okay. So reading that book, and that's how I learned about asexuality to begin with. And from that, I learned about being aromantic, which is really more how I identify.

[00:01:57] **Mia:** Um, but for me, Gus and Casey's story hit, like, right in the solar plexus. It was the biggest gut punch in terms of going, "well, fuck, that actually makes sense. That's what's going on. That's, that's what my story is. That's who I am."

[00:02:17] **Kirt:** your 2012 book, Who We Are included an asexual character, Eddie the therapist,

"You'll have to forgive me," he says. "I'm what you'd call asexual, so I'm not really up on the lingo of the gay culture." ~ Who We Are, Chapter 6

[00:02:23] **Kirt:** You didn't go into great detail about it in that book. Uh, but then in 2015, you released How to Be a Normal Person. Uh, is this indicative of your path of discovering and accepting yourself as asexual?

[00:02:36] **TJ:** It is. And there was another asexual character between those two. How to Be a Normal Person came out in the fall of 2015, Lightning Struck Heart came out in the summer of 2015 and Morgan of Shadows is asexual, and he says that explicitly in that book.

Morgan shrugged. "Simple. I'm asexual." I blinked. "What?" "Asexual. I don't find the act of sex appealing. I'd much rather have the emotional connections I do have, not the intimate ones I do without." ~ TLSH, Chapter 5

James: [00:00:05] Hi, I'm James. I'm a student from the UK currently living in Coventry.

[00:02:57]**James:** Morgan in, um, Tales from Verania, like I, yeah, I enjoy his character but, and then it's just kind of, it's nice that the whole asexual thing isn't a focus for him.

00:03:08] Like it's just kind of, it's another part of himself. Like, it's not made a big deal. It's kind of mentioned here and there when it's come up. But apart from that, it's kind of not focused on which, again, it's nice to see, it's kind of nice to be like normalized almost.

[00:03:20] **TJ:** And writing Morgan as that character was me coming to terms with the fact that I was ace.

[00:03:33] And then once I understood that, and started exploring what that meant, I knew that I needed to, or I wanted to write a character or a book set around an entirely asexual relationship on the spectrum. Um, and I didn't want it to be the lead character in How to Be a Normal Person. Gus, for whatever he is for all that he is, never says at any point in a book that he is asexual.

"What do you identify as?" Gus narrowed his eyes. "What do you mean?" "Gay?" Xander asked. "Bi? Asexual? Demisexual? Gray-sexual? What are you?" "I'm Gus," he said. "That's it." ~ HtBaNP, Chapter 17

Cassie: [00:00:00] My name is Cassie and I am from Chicago

[00:04:10]**Cassie:** I actually identified most with Gus and I, I honestly think a lot of people do.

[00:04:15] Um, you know, who, who doesn't have a label a, doesn't want a label, so I won't label him, but you know. I, especially when I first read it, saw a lot of my own like, depression coping mechanism in him, uh, mechanisms in him. And so I felt acutely connected with him, um, in it when I initially read it. And so, you know, it was lovely to have Casey, but it was almost more lovely to like, be able to see myself in multiple characters.

[00:04:48]**TJ:** So when I was writing, um, How to Be a Normal Person, I was going on a journey with Gus at myself and figuring out what that could mean to me and him as a character.

Anne: [00:00:03] Hi, I'm Anne and I live in Kentucky.

[00:05:03]**Anne:** I didn't read the character of Casey and say, Oh, that's me. It's like looking in a mirror. He's exactly like me cause he's not, there were differences, but just the way that it was written, the way that TJ wrote the character of Casey and the way the other characters spoke about Casey, um, made me reconsider and broaden the definition and I sought out better sources.

[00:05:28] **Mia:** what I loved most about that book, and this could just turn into a conversation about how much I love How to Be a Normal Person, but I think it was the way that TJ educates you through the education of Gus and the way that Gus embraces and goes, "ah, okay, that's fine. There's nothing wrong with this. This is actually just a thing and, eh, it kind of possibly applies to me as well. I don't care. This is just who I am and I, this is me. I don't have a problem with it. And if anybody has a problem with it, that's actually their problem and not my problem."

[00:06:09] **Cassie:** there was no expectation from me as a reader from the author, uh, TJ wrote the book, um, from the other characters in the book, that the asexual needed to change something to be involved in the relationship, which was really lovely and refreshing. And in fact, um, you know, being written from Gus' perspective more, um the expectation almost falls on him to be the one who changes and accommodates.

[00:06:41] Like it wasn't on Casey to be any different than he was or, or to put up with contact that he didn't want, um, or, you know, for Gus to figure out how to make that contact okay for him because he just had to have it.

[00:06:54] Like it was none of that.

"You need to make sure he's comfortable," Betty said. "Let him set the pace for anything that might happen. But don't go into this thinking anything will happen, Gus. You can't change someone else to fit how you want them to be. I don't think you'd do something like that, but even having expectations of something unrealistic can be detrimental." But Gus thought he could change himself and maybe that was enough. ~ HtBaNP, Chapter 11

[00:06:56] **Anne:** Um, his unconditional acceptance of Casey and how he accepted everything about Casey equally. Like he, he was a stoner. He wore a man bun. He was asexual, he was a hipster. All those things were kind of even to Gus in, in his perception, and I loved how confused he got when other characters would try, would talk to him and try to convince him that he should care more about this and he should be more upset about this.

[00:07:26] And he was so confused by that. Like, what's the big deal? Um, I love that. And I love how Gus just makes easy things, comically complicated, um, because that's what's so entertaining about the book. But he also makes really difficult things that we think are really difficult and complicated to navigate just really easy.

[00:07:50] **Cassie:** And honestly, another thing I appreciated about it really was that Casey's asexuality is almost incidental to everything else. Just like a piece of him. He's cool with it. You know, his struggle with it is over. His ex is more upset about it than he is at this point.

[00:08:06] And it's really just like this is me, and if you want any type of relationship with me, this is how it's going to be. I'm not going to modify this part of myself for you. And I'm okay with that. So you need to be okay with it too.

[00:08:17] **James:** Well, obviously it's, it's kind of, it features a, an asexual character. So, and that kind of, that for me was a real kind of eye-opener. Like to see like part of myself represented in a book that way was kind of was meant quite a lot to me.

[00:08:32] Cause I know it's not, it's not the focus. Cause obviously the focus isn't this like the asexual character is the love interest rather than the like the protagonist. Um, yeah, it was, it was really important to see that kind of side of myself represented.

Sam E.: [00:00:00] My name is Sam Erin, I'm from uh, Long Island, uh, New York.

[00:08:48] **Sam E.:** So for me, I feel like there's not a lot of ace and aro rep in media in general, so having like a whole book that's like, Oh, this is about me, this is about people like me.

[00:09:01] It was really important. And it was nice to see, uh, an asexual person, like in a relationship and living his best life because I'm an asexual person who would like to be in a relationship someday. I'm not currently, but I still possibly like that idea for myself, you know?

“Are they all... you know. Like you?” Casey arched an eyebrow. “Asexual?” “What?” Gus said. “No. I don’t care about that. Are they all hipsters?” ~ HtBaNP, Chapter 15

[00:09:20] **TJ:** So it's, it, How to Be a Normal Person was my guidebook for myself. And even though I understood technically what it meant after writing Morgan of Shadows in Lightning Struck Heart I, it's, it was basically not something that was discussed in any real extreme depth, but it could be argued that How to Be a Normal Person is all about the depth of asexuality.

[00:09:50] And that's why I wanted to write it as a, almost like a light post for myself so I could find my way back.

[00:10:01] **Kirt:** So how did you learn about asexuality? Cause I mean, I, as much as I may have been aware of the concept, I think the first time I ever actually saw the word asexual was your Twitter account. Like where did you find the language.

[00:10:17] **TJ:** How did I find the language? Google, I Google. I love Wikipedia more than, more than most people, and I can spend hours upon hours upon hours on that website. And so whenever I have a question or there's something I don't know or want to learn about, something new, I'll end up on Google, which usually leads me to Wikipedia.

[00:10:36] **Anne:** I believe the first time that I heard the term asexuality was in a textbook in a human sexuality class in college, and it was a one-line definition that said something like, uh.

[00:10:50] Unable to experience sexual attraction or something like that.

[00:10:55] And that sort of informed my understanding of asexuality and myself for a long time. Uh, that's where I sort of started living with the definition of, I'm just broken. There's just something wrong with me. I don't know what it is, but I'm just not normal. And I even at one point talked to a doctor and said, you know, what's causing this?

[00:11:26] And they, she did tests and everything was normal, but she did offer some, some options, which I ultimately decided not to take. And so then I had this sort of guilty feeling on top of it that I'm, I'm broken and I'm also refusing to try to be fixed. So I started feeling a lot of guilt and a lot of need to apologize.

He went back to the first encyclopedia, but the entry under asexual was relatively short and didn't provide much information as to why an asexual hipster wanted to work his way up to hugging, and Gus didn't know what to do with that. For the first time in his relatively short life, Encyclopaedia Britannica had failed him by not providing the information necessary to solve this most vexing of problems. ~ HtBaNP, Chapter 8

[00:11:53] **TJ:** So. While Wikipedia probably isn't the best place to learn about being asexual, it's where I started, but then of course, it led me to, you know, asexuality.org or AVEN and all of them, and there's message boards. There's, there's all these message boards with people asking questions about. What it means to be asexual.

[00:12:14] **Mia:** Well, that's the thing as well is like even if you go and try and research it, you get every gamut of, of definitions and explanations, and you very quickly realize that actually there's no one definition.

[00:12:27] For everybody, and that's what makes it really hard as an individual to try and work out "well, what does that actually mean for me?"

Kirt: Here's Elaine, one of the Klunatic Facebook admins.

[00:12:35] **Elaine:** I just wanted the truth.

[00:12:37] Like what? What does it mean to be asexual? And what would it mean for me in particular if I was asexual? So I actually decided, I'm not going to make a spur of the moment decision on this. I took two years to research this and read up on all the different kinds of attraction, the different levels, you know, asexual, demisexual, that sort of thing, graysexual, and in the end , I made myself step back and go based on the evidence it definitely, clearly points to my being on asexual spectrum.

[00:13:20] **Anne:** I did get a better understanding of the term, um, a few years after that when I. I can't remember where I saw it initially, but I sought out a better explanation or a better definition, and I was still coming across very strict definitions that in order to be asexual, you have to not, um, not enjoy sexual contact ever.

[00:13:50] Um, and you have to be repulsed by sex. And those didn't, I didn't fit into that box. I couldn't check all those boxes. So I sort of set that label aside and said, well, that's not me. So even if even though I, by that point, did sort of understand it as a valid sexuality for some people, it didn't apply to me because I couldn't check all the boxes.

[00:14:16] So I just went back to my, I'm broken, something's wrong with me, but I'm not going to fix it place. And that's where I was when I found TJ's book.

He had tried to research asexuality later into the night, but it might have intimidated him a little, given how much contradictory information there seemed to be. All he could really figure out was that there was no one way to be asexual. And that answered absolutely none of the questions he had. ~ HtBaNP, Chapter 10

[00:14:27] **TJ:** Can you be a asexual person and still have sex? Of course you can. Can you be an asexual person to be sexually repulsed? So of course you can. Can you have sex a lot? Yep. Can you have no sex at all? Sure. That's totally fine. It's, it's something that. There that I feel more comfortable in, in my skin under the umbrella term than I have at any other point in my life.

[00:14:52] **Sam E.:** So for me, asexuality is really kind of textbook. For me, it's a lack of sexual attraction. Like I don't feel sexual attraction towards other people.

[00:15:00] I never have, and I probably don't think I ever will. I don't really see that changing. Um, like, I don't have issues with other people having sex, like go live your lives, do wonderful things. But myself having sex just, no thanks. I'm good.

[00:15:15] **James:** Asexuality to me is just kind of a lack of desire to want to do anything kind of sexual. It can range from not wanting sex itself to not wanting any, kind of, like physical, kind of, contact in kind of any way really.

[00:15:32] **Cassie:** I, I don't enjoy, um, imagery of physical intimacy. Like people kiss too intensely on a TV show and I'm uncomfortable.

[00:15:43] Like, it's like, Ooh, too in my face. Um, I don't like it in movies. I like no porn. Like, I just don't, it's uncomfortable for me.

[00:15:52] **Elaine:** So for me, asexuality means that, you know, I pretty much don't ever look at someone and feel sexual attraction to them, or even think of them in a sexual way.

[00:16:08] I mean, I know that sexual attraction exists because society has taught me that it exists, that society has sort of taught me that there's a sort of lens through which most people view things, you know, and see, okay, that's sexually attractive. And I just don't have that lens.

“It took me a long while to figure it out, why I didn't feel the way everyone else seemed to feel about sex. It doesn't do a whole lot for me, to be honest. I thought maybe it was women, so I switched to men, but it wasn't all that much better. It's...it was mechanical, almost. I was going through the motions but it wasn't really doing anything for me. I could get off but I didn't care about it. I thought maybe there was something wrong with me until I figured it out and then it was like a big, fat asexual ray of sunshine fell over me and it was glorious. But it felt better when I figured out that I wasn't weird and that it was okay to not want sex like everyone else. But I like touching and I like kissing most of the time and I can be there for a partner should the situation...arise. Sometimes, I'll even jerk

off, and I'm told I give really awesome hugs." He waggled his eyebrows unfairly. ~
HtBaNP, Chapter 7

[00:16:32] **TJ:** And, um, you know, obviously there's subsets of asexuality, like there's subsets of every kind of sexuality that there is. And I, I, I though am comfortable with the label of asexual, and that's just something that I've chosen for myself.

[00:16:46] **Elaine:** being ace means that I do feel a clear difference between romantic attraction and sexual attraction since I feel romantic attraction. And so I, I actually identify as being demisexual where I only feel sexual attraction if I'm already, you know, emotionally bonded with somebody,

Kirt: You know, I'm, I'm, I'm sitting here looking at my soundboard and there's like different faders, you know, and you, you, you realize that like sexuality has so many different faders, you know, because you can be, you can be on the gay side, the straight side, you can land anywhere in between.

[00:17:08] **Mia:** And that's the thing, even in asexuality, you've got that fader as well in terms of, you know. You know, no sex, sex. Or you know, there's everything in between as well. And there, you know, when you think about gray sexual and

[00:17:22] **Kirt:** demisexual and pansexual, and then there's the romanticism fader, like are you aromantic or are you the type of person who always has to be in a romantic relationship?

[00:17:32] Like there's, there's so many different faders.

[00:17:36] **Sam E.:** I don't even know if I have romantic attraction yet. Who knows.

[00:17:39] **Tanya:** Um, I, I don't want a partner. I, I'm still finding my way on the spectrum and as also being aromantic as well. I just, I've no desire for a partner and realizing that there are other people out there who are like that and have fulfilling lives without a partner and that that's okay.

[00:18:07] **Cassie:** I had understood that I was not looking for similar things in life as a lot of the people that I was around, especially at that school.

[00:18:25] Um, and after that, it was just, I don't want to date. I don't really want to date. I don't enjoy it. It's not fun. It's always work for me. Like it's just always difficult.

Amy: [00:00:00] Hi, I'm Amy from Bigfork, Montana.

[00:18:35] **Amy:** And so for me. Having a relationship that has sex in it, it's not important to me. I'm not, I definitely am not repulsed or averse or anything, but it just has no, it's not important in my relationships with people and being aromantic, I don't even really enjoy that close of a relationship with people where you say, Oh, I'm in love, or I love this person so much, I want to spend the rest of my life with them. No, thank you.

“maybe Casey doesn’t even want to date me. He’s asexual. He doesn’t like that sort of thing.”Bertha frowned. “Now you’re generalizing and that’s not fair. Sex and romance don’t always have to go hand in hand, Gustavo. And there’s a difference between being asexual and aromantic. Asexuals experience little to no sexual attraction. Aromantics experience little to no romantic attraction. They’re not the same. And you can be one without the other. Or both. Or neither.” ~ HtBaNP, Chapter 12

[00:19:06] **Anne:** Two very big things changed for me when I found TJ's book. Um, the first thing is that it broadened my understanding of what asexuality is and could be.

[00:19:19] Um, I didn't see the need for that strict rigid checklist that I had had in my head. Um, I realized that it could be as complicated and varied as people are.

[00:19:35] Um, and that the label doesn't exist to define me by shoving me into this tiny little box that I don't fit into.

[00:19:44] But it can be a means of expressing something about myself. And that was a big paradigm shift for me. And the second thing that it did for me was it made me realize that I can stop apologizing even if it confuses or inconveniences someone else. Uh, I don't need to feel guilty and I'm not broken.

[00:20:05] **Cassie:** the magical thing about How to Be a Normal Person for me wasn't necessarily that it told me what asexuality was, but it was really the first book that I read with an asexual main character where asexuality wasn't a a problem to solve or a barrier to overcome, or an interesting plot point to prolong the sexual tension.

Kirt: TJ's work hasn't just taught people about themselves, but he's helped to facilitate conversations and foster acceptance within families.

[00:20:34] **TJ:** one of the most touching letters that I've ever received, or one of the most touching emails that I've ever received was from a straight dad whose asexual daughter, his 16 year old asexual daughter came out as asexual, he didn't understand what that meant.

[00:20:51] So she gave him How to Be a Normal Person to read, and he read that and wrote to me saying how much it helped him understand where his daughter was coming from, and that was, that was absurd. That was ridiculous. I was floored. I teared up. I was just in shock that that something like that happened.

[00:21:13] **Anne:** And, uh, when I found this book and started talking about these characters and how great they were, they, my husband and my kid both decided we need, we need to read this one. And my kid desperately wanted to voice Gus. So we did it as a read aloud and they were Gus and it was amazing. Um, and it did open up a lot of great conversations.

[00:21:35] I had never actually spoken about that topic with my kid. And so that was the first time it had come up that, that I was asexual. Um, and they, they reacted very much as Gus would, like, okay. No big deal.

[00:21:51] **Anne:** I think it helped my husband a lot because as someone who is not asexual, who is in a relationship with someone who is, I think, I think he took some blame for that too.

[00:22:09] Um, I think it was, you know, in the back of the back of his mind from messages from the outside world, it seemed as if it would, it was about him not being good enough or handsome enough, or good enough at sex or whatever it was. And I think seeing their relationship helped him understand that it's not, it's not about you, not about anything that you do or don't do.

[00:22:37] It's about me and how I am. And so that was really helpful too. That was, it was kinda healing.

“You don’t care that I’m asexual.”Gus frowned. “Of course I don’t. Why would I?”Casey’s smile widened. “Exactly, man. And it’s the same for me. I don’t want you to be a normal person, okay? Or, if that’s what you want, that’s okay too. I just want you to have what makes you happy, Gus, and that’s what matters most. ~ HtBaNP, Chapter 20

[00:22:44]**Mia:** How to be a Normal Person is the book that I've given away the most. Like, dozens of copies, physical copies, like I just, it's handed out like candy. Um, you know, I even gave my mum a copy. She loved it. Um, and it's been really good for starting conversations with people who then read it cause they're like, "Oh, I didn't know this was a thing".

Kirt: Here’s Janice from our last episode expanding on the education she’s received from reading TJ’s books and how it’s affected her own family.

[00:23:07]**Janice:** that was the beginning of my journey in learning so much more about, um, asexuality, yes, and demisexuality and so much more. I had a limited vocabulary. Um. Prior to reading, um, particularly TJ's books. He, his representation is brilliant. Um, and so you get to learn about these things. And it was very personal for me because when I read How to Be a Normal Person, I had a daughter who was in her 20s, had never had a partner, had told us that she wasn't interested in dating until she finished uni, and she was, and she's always been very happy, um joyous girl, um, very social, and I thought, I wonder if she's asexual. Um, and I wouldn't have known to think that, um, because I didn't have access to all this. So I read, um, How to Be a Normal Person when it first came out and I immediately bought copies for several of my friends who had kids in various stages of coming out or thinking about who that, who and what they were. Um, and I gave it to my daughter. She adored it, but she didn't talk to me about the asexuality. So I thought, okay, let's see, that might not be aware where at.

[00:24:25] Um, and as it turns out, she's demisexual and she met someone and they were great friends, and gradually it was like watching Josy and Qbert, um, just this gorgeous, um, slightly nervous, um, gently coming together of two gorgeous girls, and they're madly in love now.

[00:24:52] **Elaine:** So How to Be a Normal Person was a really good resource for me to sort of start with, and when I later shared about being asexual with some of my close friends, I pointed them to How to Be a Normal Person because I felt that it illustrates quite well what it means to be ace and how it differentiates between asexuality and being aromantic. Because those are two things that often get conflated. And one of my friends, when I told her about my being asexual and that How to Be a Normal Person had helped me work this out. She actually went out and bought the book immediately and read it just so that she could teach herself, educate herself, and be a good, supportive friend.

[00:25:52] And that really touched me when I heard that.

“The fact that he’s already told you of his asexuality also shows how comfortable he is with you,” Bertha said. “We knew a lovely asexual woman back in the nineties who told us only after we’d known her for close to a year. It’s not a secret, nor is it meant to be, but it shows a sign of trust and comfort to be told.” Gus was quiet for a moment. Then, “He gives really good hugs.” ~ HtBaNP, Chapter 11

[00:25:56] **Kirt:** Did the positive response to How to Be a Normal Person encourage you to have future characters identify on the asexuality spectrum?

[00:26:04] **TJ:** Absolutely. Absolutely.

[00:26:06] the fact that it was well received gave me courage to include more asexual characters in, in books, which is why, uh, the book In the Lives of Puppets, the main character, Victor, he is biracial, he is a person with autism, but he is also asexual and that is explicitly discussed in the book. Kelly from Heartsong is asexual. That is discussed explicitly in the book.

“We made it work. It’s not that I’m repulsed by sex or anything. It’s just not everything to me. There’s more to us than physical intimacy. Or there was.” ~ Heartsong, high school girls/see you again, Page 177

[00:26:34] **Sam E.:** It was such a, it was a really nice surprise because we have Kelly in Green Creek and he says, especially in like Heartsong, he says such perfect ace things that are just like, ah, there you go. Hitting me like that, it's really the same thing for Casey. He just says these little things that I'm just like, Oh, you get it, you understand that, and it's kind of one of the best feelings in the world to have someone in a book understand the little nuances about you that people who aren't ace really might not understand.

“You don’t need sex to be in love with someone.”“But then how else do you show that you’re in love?” Josy looked up at the sky. The stars were bright. “Because you can look at the person and just know they’re someone special. That you would do anything to see

them smile. Sex is good for a lot of people, but not for others. And just because they feel that way doesn't mean they don't love like everyone else." ~ HtBaMS, Chapter 12

[00:27:15] **Elaine:** When I first read the character of Josy in How to Be a Movie Star, I cried. It was so wonderful to see someone like me, a demisexual person, depicted so respectfully and accurately in a book.

[00:27:31] demisexual characters are often so called cured by having sex with their one true love, but in How to Be a Movie Star none of these things apply to Josy. Yes, he's demisexual and it is an important part of how he behaves, how his relationships form, but his sexuality isn't the be all and end all of who he is.

"I need to get a girlfriend," Chris said with a sigh. "I'm tired of seeing naked people I don't want to have sex with." "That sounds like too much work," Tanner said. "That's because you're aro. You don't want a girlfriend." "Maybe you should just learn to be happy with yourself. Being aromantic doesn't have anything to do with that." ~ Ravensong, pinpricks of light/bones and dust

[00:27:57] **Amy:** Tanner is my boy. Um, he makes me very happy. And I remember when I read that line, "that's because you're aro", I went, woohoo! Because it made me so happy. I literally woohooed, um.

[00:28:14] There's not a lot of that kind of representation out there, and it was just so awesome to come across it in a book and by an author that I love.

[00:28:25] **TJ:** Using words like asexual or bisexual, pansexual. The more we use them, the more power they will have because there are going to be people who don't know what asexual means and if they can learn along with a narrative then that's all I could ask for. That's all I could ever want.

[00:28:47] **Mia:** And I think the more you talk about it, the more normal it actually becomes for the people around you and the better educated they are about what it is, because, you know, sex and sexuality is such a big thing in society. And trying to, um. Define where you are on that spectrum. Um, I think everybody constantly is trying to define where they are on that spectrum. Um, you know, because as you age, things change as well. So, um, I think it's one of those things that for me it was like getting a name to it made it so much easier to understand.

[00:29:30] **TJ:** I don't want to come across as preaching because there's going to be topics that I'm writing about that I should not be preaching about that, that it shouldn't sound like I'm preaching, but when it comes to topics that are about like asexuality and stuff like that, I still want to teach people, but do, to do so in an entertaining way so it doesn't come across like I'm just copying and pasting Wikipedia.

"That sounds nice," Casey said. "But I'm asexual, Xander and Serge are gay, and Josiah is demisexual." "I don't know what any of that means," Margo Montana said. "Demi

means half,” Mrs. Von Patterson said, sounding very proud of herself. “He’s half sexual. Bisexual. He likes men and busty women like myself.” “Not even close,” Casey said. “Have a good day!” ~ HtBaNP, Chapter 15

[00:29:52] **Elaine:** one of the things I like about, I guess the How to Be series, is that it, it's a very gentle but effective way of educating people about the fact that, you know, even asexuality is nuanced.

<CREDITS>