



## “Being Not Straight:” A Story that Refuses Any Amatonormative Speculation

Review by Bianca Bergamasco

Jaiden Dittfach. 2022. “Being Not Straight.” Uploaded on March 20, 2022. YouTube video, 15:21. <https://youtu.be/qF1DTK4U1AM>.



Pictured above is a screenshot from YouTube. The image features a video thumbnail along with the title of the YouTube video, “Being Not Straight.” Smaller text underneath the title reads the YouTube channel name (Jaiden Animations), amount of views (566k), and how long ago it was posted when this screenshot was taken (2 hours ago). There is a profile picture for the channel to the left of the text, which features a light blue background and a cartoon character with wavy brown hair, pale skin, rosy cheeks, and a purple shirt. The thumbnail for the YouTube video has a rainbow flag as the background and a cartoon portrait of Jaiden from the chest and up, front and center in the foreground. Her cartoon character is drawn in simple lines and is in black and white, except for her hair and bangs, which are dark brown and have a wavy texture. Her face is a circle, her eyes are wide-set dots, and her mouth is a straight line. In the corner of the thumbnail, there is a timestamp that reads the full length of the video (15:22).

adding that she has never developed a crush, not throughout her childhood, adolescence, or college years — adding that she would pretend to have a crush just to feel normal and blend in with her peers’ discussions in late elementary and middle school.

The term *compulsory sexuality* can be defined as “the assumption that all people are sexual and to describe the social norms and practices that both marginalize various forms of non-sexuality, such as a lack of sexual desire or behavior, and compel people to experience themselves as desiring subjects, take up sexual identities, and engage in sexual activity” (Gupta

The video essay “Being Not Straight,” by Jaiden Dittfach — who goes by Jaiden Animations on YouTube — is a narrated animation that educates and depicts what it is like to be aromantic and asexual while growing up and entering adulthood. Upon viewing this video around mid-March, it was trending nationally at #3 on the platform. The creator, Jaiden, identifies as aroace, but chooses to highlight her aromanticism more heavily than her asexuality for the purposes of the “Being Not Straight” video.

In the video, which is about her aromanticism and asexuality and which is targeted towards those who want to learn more about these identities, Jaiden discusses the discoveries she has made about herself throughout her life. She tells her story by mainly describing interactions with peers growing up and how her environment has shaped the way in which she came to terms with her aroace identity. She includes a disclaimer that she does not want any of her viewers speculating or assuming details about her own experience in relation to being aroace that she doesn’t herself reference. This leads Jaiden into a discussion on her aromanticism,



2015, 132). When, in the video, Jaiden is describing how she gave into the idea that everyone should have a crush — including herself, even as she was struggling to understand and experience those accompanying feelings — this is her engaging with the idea of compulsory sexuality, upholding the societal expectation that everyone must engage in these feelings of romantic desire for another person. Jaiden elaborates further on her experience navigating these feelings and understanding herself and her aromanticism, by describing a past video she made. In this video, she explores not being able to fathom why it is so difficult for other alloromantic folks to get over the fact that their potential crushes might not reciprocate their feelings and instead want friendship. Jaiden admits that she misunderstood what it’s like to have romantic feelings, as she does not experience them herself — and this is why she made this statement. She had always thought that romantic feelings and platonic feelings were synonymous.

Similarly, it is fascinating to hear Jaiden learn more about the difficulty that alloromantic folks face when getting turned down by a crush. Seeing Jaiden reflect on it in this video essay was especially impactful to allo folks like me, as she reinforces that not everyone may have the same perspective on a situation, such as rejection; therefore, ace and aro folks may not be able to understand certain concepts that allo folks may incorrectly assume are second nature to everyone (thanks again, compulsory sexuality). Showcasing this realization in front of millions, demonstrates to ace and aro folks that it is natural and okay to not easily grasp concepts such as rejection, despite allo folks expecting everyone to understand without much thought at all.

Jaiden’s decision to denounce any and all outside assumptions about her experience as an aroace individual brings immense power to ace and aro communities, which is especially meaningful given how much of the narrative surrounding these communities is irresponsibly driven by folks outside of their communities. Allo individuals often shape the discussion about asexuality and aromanticism based on amatonormative stereotypes, misunderstandings, and uncomfortable questions projected onto ace and aro folks. *Amatonormativity* is “the widespread assumption that everyone is better off in an exclusive, romantic, long-term coupled relationship and that everyone is seeking such a relationship” (Brake 2012, n.p.). For example, Jaiden is firm about not disclosing intimate details to viewers. This includes but is not limited to, potential past partner affiliations, sexual encounters, or anything she just did not want broadcasted on the internet. She is trying to tell any uneducated and unsatisfied viewers who may still want answers to hold off with their comments. If Jaiden didn’t take steps to preventing these comments from appearing, it could lead to viewers unknowingly posting intrusive questions and statements. This would be inappropriate and offensive to her as an asexual individual who doesn’t owe any overly curious allo viewer any explanation on her own life experiences. Due to Jaiden preemptively combatting amatonormative responses, she retains creative agency over her own story while creating a safe space for viewers, who themselves may be exploring their identities. In this way, Jaiden sets boundaries and encourages discretion with her video, especially since many ace and aro folks explain instances of self-doubt around their lack of romantic and/or sexual desire when coming to terms with their identities, due to a culture steeped in compulsory sexuality and amatonormativity.

Jaiden’s video introduces important ideas surrounding aromanticism and asexuality, defying amatonormativity and challenging compulsory sexuality. One may claim that her story could be strengthened if she elaborated on her experience with asexuality further, just as much



as she did with her experience with aromanticism; my response to this proposal, is that her choosing not to disclose more information than she wants to about her experience of asexuality is in itself a method for shutting down compulsory sexuality. The brief time she spends on discussing her asexuality, in contrast to the majority of the video discussing her aromanticism, symbolizes how sex and sexual attraction need not be the main topics of discussion in society, and for ace creators. Jaiden illustrates that there are intriguing and important elements to life other than sex.

### Works Cited

- Brake, Elizabeth. 2012. “Amatonormativity.” Accessed April 18, 2022.  
<https://elizabethbrake.com/amatonormativity/>.
- Gupta, Kristina. 2015. “Compulsory Sexuality: Evaluating an Emerging Concept.” *Signs* 41, no. 1: 131–154.

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