

Conceptualizing A-spec Community:

Affinities, Well-being, and Advocacy Within Asexual- and Aromantic-Spectrum Groups

Introduction

The population of a-spec people is small and dispersed, but the Internet has helped connect people in recent decades, and in-person groups are being organized.

Little work has been done evaluating in-person a-spec communities. A sense of belonging to a community positively impacts member's feelings around their identities, which benefits individuals.¹ A-spec people are often alienated by narratives of sex and romance as essential and healthy, but discourse within community spaces can present alternatives.² Some literature has evaluated different forms of advocacy among asexual-identified people, but the types of advocacy in these spaces are still not clear.³

Methods

I conducted 3 focus groups and 1 individual interview across 3 sites. The 2 hour sessions consisted of a short, optional demographic survey and an audio-recorded discussion of a-spec community, narratives of well-being, and advocacy. Transcripts were open coded using a critical thematic analysis.

Site A: Ivy League university, east coast suburb
(7 group participants, in-person)

Site B: Online-organized group for adults, NYC area
(6 group participants, in-person)

Site C: Community college, small city in Ohio
(4 group participants, 1 individual, Zoom)

Research Questions

1. What does community and connection look like within a-spec affinity groups?
2. How do members of a-spec groups define living well?
3. How do people who identify as a-spec conceptualize a-spec advocacy?

Key Findings

Differences across groups, but generally:

Full, relaxed selves

Easy to connect with other a-spec people

A-spec camaraderie

In-person space for building friendships and community legitimacy (over online)

A-spec narratives of well-being:

Knowing yourself

Autonomy with and within relationships

Networks of support

Landscape of a-spec advocacy:

Existing (as ourselves)

Active visibility and resource sharing

Representation through the media

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Get the thesis,
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<https://bit.ly/aspec-community-thesis>

Implications

It can be hard to find spaces where people feel understood. Participants' reflections on connection and belonging can inform future community-building practices.

Sharing a-spec narratives of well-being counters negative assumptions and can help other individuals consider their lives outside of what may be expected of them.

With an understanding that visibility is still so important for a-spec people, news and other media workers can include more real a-spec experiences in their content.

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