

Community Formation Through a Dinner Club for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Background

Collective Occupations:

- Belonging and community from shared occupation positively impacts well-being^{3,4}
- Need to examine collective occupations from perspective of group^{3,4}
- Do collective occupations create and sustain community?⁶

Group Occupations in 'Autistic Spaces':

- Many social spaces unsafe¹³
- Social supports: ASD group, structured social group, and facilitated social interactions^{9, 13}
- Connection and accepting relationships in autistic-led spaces⁸

Mealtimes:

- Food valued less than social context during mealtimes¹⁵
- Meaning through social connectedness, routine, and enjoyment¹

Research Aim

To explore how adults with ASD experience community formation in a dinner club

Methods

Research Design

- Rapid ethnography

Participants

- Dinner club (DC) for adults with ASD
- Observation (11 members)
- Focus group (2 members)

Data Collection

- Participant and non-participant observation
- Focus group

Data Analysis

- Thematical analysis
- Triangulation

Findings

Community Dynamics

- Inclusive of all
- Genuine
- Feeling connected to others

"We're a dinner club, not a clique"
"I feel like I can fit in with basically any of the people in the group"

A Multipurpose Space

- Practicing social skills
- Making friends
- Being in an 'autistic' space

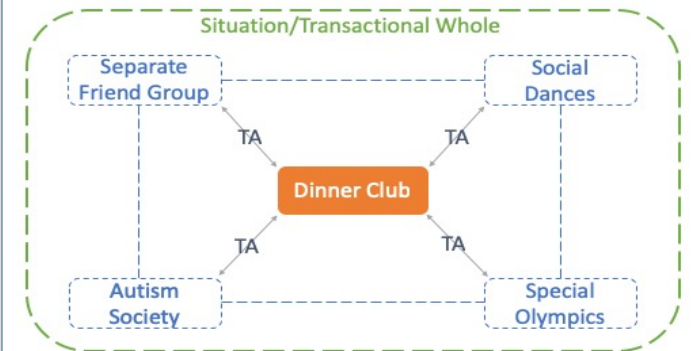
"How the club got formed I guess would be just to like develop social skills..."
"Part of it could be to meet new people."

Transactional Nature

- Participation in local ASD organizations
- Community formation outside of DC

"I also hang out with, um, [Friend 2] and also [Friend 3], our group of friends, on like say Saturdays. So a lot, a lot of times."

Discussion



- Community experienced *through* and *within* the DC.
- Dynamic transactions between organizations and social groups
- Unstructured format and inclusive culture allows members to participate and derive meaning

Implications

- Self-advocates want research on mental health (51%) and social well-being (35%)¹⁶. Could a dinner club address this?
- Therapeutic use of collective occupations for fostering community and safe spaces.
- Top down approach to social skills intervention.
- Addressing "The Cliff" – meaning and purpose after HS.

References

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