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

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## Background

### Collective Occupations:
- Belonging and community from shared occupation positively impacts well-being.
- Need to examine collective occupations from perspective of group.
- Do collective occupations create and sustain community?

### Group Occupations in ‘Autistic Spaces’:
- Many social spaces unsafe.
- Social supports: ASD group, structured social group, and facilitated social interactions.
- Connection and accepting relationships in autistic-led spaces.

### Mealtimes:
- Food valued less than social context during mealtimes.
- Meaning through social connectedness, routine, and enjoyment.

## 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

### Situation/Transactional Whole

- TA: Transaction

Adapted from Dickie, Cutchin, & Humphry (2006)

- Separate Friend Group
- Social Dances
- Autism Society
- Special Olympics

## Implications
- Self-advocates want research on mental health (51%) and social well-being (35%). 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.