

1 “How would I know what I would want from or with them?”: Supporting A-Spec
2 **Approaches to Developing Relationships Through Online Platforms**

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6 Online platforms have become a key avenue for forming new relationships, especially for queer individuals. However, some individuals,
7 such as those in asexual and aromantic communities (A-Spec), seek forms of relationships that trouble existing frameworks assumed by
8 online platforms, such as dating apps. To investigate A-Spec needs, we conducted an 8-week ARC study with 38 A-Spec participants who
9 have used online platforms for developing relationships. Participants described a mismatch between the design of dating apps and their
10 approach to building relationships, suggesting platform design that combines affordances of dating apps and other social platforms. We
11 thus outline a “process-oriented” paradigm for relationship-building platforms inspired by community design suggestions, supporting
12 participants’ process of first establishing a low-stakes relationship and then co-constructing its properties. We also argue for a
13 “pluralized” approach to defining identity and relationship in the design of online systems, upsetting default assumptions surrounding
14 any given label.

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27 1 INTRODUCTION

29 HCI scholars have frequently investigated the use and design of dating apps, platforms built to match users in the
30 same locale seeking sex, romance, or even friendship (e.g., [18, 51, 71]). Their design has been noted to encode norms
31 that cause friction for marginalized users, however, such as how rural gay users did not fit into platforms’ “scripting
32 of desire” [25] or how platforms did not address the heightened safety concerns of certain marginalized users [4, 18].
33 Within this design space, and in HCI generally, the needs and experiences of the asexual (“ace”) and aromantic (“aro”)
34 communities, which we refer to collectively here as the A-Spec (A-Spectrum) community, remain underexplored [56].

37 Members of the A-Spec community may feel little to no sexual attraction¹ toward others if they are on the ace
38 spectrum, while they may feel little to no romantic attraction² toward others if they are on the aro spectrum. Their

40¹The Asexuality Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) has defined sexual attraction as being drawn to people sexually and desiring to act on this
41 attraction in a sexual way [6].

42²AVEN has defined romantic attraction as the desire to be romantically involved with another person [6].

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experiences often put them in conflict with some of the core assumptions embedded within general and even LGBT-specific dating platforms. More specifically, intimacy in Europe and North America has centered around the nuclear family for over a century, in which the “the binary cisgender male–female (i.e., heterosexual) configuration has been idealized as the ultimate relational form” [23] and achieving married, monogamous relationships engaging in procreative sex is “internalized as a model of success” [15]. Conversely, A-Spec individuals may seek relationships that are excluded or deprioritized by this framework including romantic relationships without sex, close platonic partnerships that take on an importance usually reserved for a romantic partner, long-term sexual but platonic partnerships, and strong and long-lasting support networks [17, 39, 57]. A-Spec individuals can sometimes find themselves at a loss for finding these types of non-normative relationships, which others may not find agreeable or acceptable [17, 20, 21]. While some HCI work on queer dating platforms has mentioned A-Spec participants (e.g., [18, 50]), there is a crucial gap around how A-Spec perspectives and needs differ from other queer users as they pursue non-normative relationship structures.

To address this gap, we conducted an eight-week Asynchronous Remote Community (ARC) study with 38 A-Spec participants in the United States, investigating their relationship wants, their experiences using online platforms to pursue new relationships, and their design desires and ideas, exploring how technology could support their goals. Participants had diverse wants that challenge normative distinctions between friendships and romantic relationships, and they were overwhelmed on dating apps by profiles and systems that did not share their vision. They often wished to move away from “dating” toward low-stakes interactions that were more similar to how friendships are developed, which led them to suggest ways for platforms to thoughtfully represent their needs and support their preferred process of building relationships by combining the affordances of dating apps and other online platforms.

Our findings point to ways in which we can support A-Spec pursuits of relationship outside of the goal-oriented design philosophy of dating apps. Instead, their own process involved, first, building relationships free from overbearing expectations for its trajectory, where they might benefit from support that facilitates low-stakes interactions among compatible personalities; and second, co-constructing their relationships as they deepen, which might benefit from support that eases the process of challenging normative assumptions. Together, we refer to this as a “process-oriented” paradigm of facilitating relationships via online platforms, which we propose for further consideration by the HCI community. We also argue that technologies supporting A-Spec users must accommodate a “pluralized” approach to defining relationship and identity, highlighting one’s personal interpretations of identity and desire in order to accommodate the A-Spec community’s departure from default relationship structures.

Thus, as first steps toward defining how HCI scholars can support A-Spec users, we highlight how the needs and cultural norms of this community intersect with technology and translate these insights into concrete implications for platform design. In particular, we identify how the A-Spec community’s position outside of normative approaches to relationship poses a particular problem for their use of dating apps, which calls for not just inclusive design but a change in how platforms support relationships. In doing so, we may learn from A-Spec users as those who “perform micro-actions of negotiation, making do, or fitting in” [25], presenting an opportunity to more fundamentally re-imagine how online platforms can support slower or less normative approaches to relationship.

2 BACKGROUND

We contextualize this study by explaining the A-Spec community and its experiences, paying particular attention toward the diverse relationship needs of A-Spec people, which trouble dichotomies of romantic vs. platonic relationships. Then, we review related work in HCI on dating platforms and their future directions.

105 **2.1 A-Spec Identity**

106
107 While asexuality has been written of since the late 19th century, ace individuals were first able to congregate and
108 define themselves in online forums [36], namely the Asexuality Visibility and Education Network ("AVEN," 2001) [6],
109 which took an inclusive approach to identity labels that saw them as "not a box for us to fit in but a flag" [27] that
110 congregated those with shared experiences. "Asexuality" thus accommodated heterogeneity as it was defined: for
111 example, "sex-favorable" asexuals enjoyed having sex despite lacking sexual attraction,³ "sex-repulsed" asexuals had an
112 aversion to having sex, and "sex-indifferent" asexuals had no strong feelings towards the act of having sex [5, 36]. AVEN
113 members also coined the term "aromantic" to describe the lack of romantic attraction that some of them experienced. By
114 2010, the aro community considered itself its own community that included both "aromantic asexual" ("aroace") people
115 and aromantic people who were not asexual [36]. Thus, the aro community is considered to be distinct by members of
116 both communities, although we investigate them together as the "A-Spec" community due to their close relationship.
117

118 Online spaces have since seen a proliferation of A-Spec identities, describing varying relationships to sex and/or
119 romance. This includes, for instance, having faint or infrequent sexual attraction (graysexual), sexual attraction varying
120 in intensity over time (aceflux), and feeling emotional attraction that cannot be called romantic nor platonic (e.g., alterous
121 attraction) [49]. We thus use the term "A-Spec" in this paper, a term originating from the ace and aro communities,
122 to encompass a diverse range of experiences beyond simply lacking attraction. We also use the term "allosexual"
123 to describe those not on the ace spectrum and "alloromantic" to describe those not on the aro spectrum, consistent with a
124 queer need to "index the normative" and "avoid reifying the non-normative status of asexuality" [49] and aromanticism.
125

126 **2.2 A-Spec Relationships**

127 We investigate the relationship needs of A-Spec people, construed broadly to include a diverse range of social relations.
128 Some A-Spec individuals may desire romantic relationships with others [1, 8], while others may wish to remain perma-
129 nently "single" [1, 21]. They may also trouble a binary between romantic and platonic relationships, desiring romantic
130 relationships without sex, or intimate, committed platonic relationships [1, 13, 20, 57]. The latter can entail "friends with
131 benefits" treated seriously and thoughtfully, platonic co-parenting situations, or "queerplatonic relationships" (QPRs),
132 intimate relationships meant to blur the lines between the romantic and platonic [13, 21, 57]. Others may explicitly
133 refuse to define their relationships via predetermined categories that prescribe a relationship's properties and value [57],
134 a framework referred to as relationship anarchy [15]. Due to the A-Spec community's diverse needs, we emphasized a
135 broad scope in our study and left the definition of "relationship" open to interpretation by participants.
136

137 Prior work has highlighted struggles of ace individuals in romantic relationships. Some were able to successfully
138 identify and negotiate their needs in a highly communicative relationship with an allosexual partner based on honesty
139 and creative compromise [17, 20]; others, though, found their asexuality to be a dealbreaker [17], were reluctant to tell
140 their partner about their asexuality [17, 20], were pathologized by their partner [21], were unsure of their needs before
141 discovering their asexuality [21], or felt pressured to agree to sexual activity with their partner [21].

142 Prior work has also discussed difficulty keeping friendships long-term. Ace individuals may see their friends develop
143 sexual desires toward them or, alternatively, de-prioritize the friendship after entering a romantic relationship with
144 someone else [21]. We return to this in our findings, where participants emphasized a desire for long-lasting relationships.
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146 Overall, A-Spec people can find it difficult to communicate an alternative approach to relationships [17, 20, 21, 57]
147 while also potentially viewing it as unrealistic to find a compatible A-Spec partner [17, 20]. Building on this work, this

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156 ³Many scholars acknowledge the fact that the ace community generally defines itself by a lack of sexual attraction [32, 36, 63, 64]. Some scholars, though,
have critiqued this definition as translating poorly across cultural contexts [64] and being complicated by sex-related trauma or disability [32].

157 study examines how exactly A-Spec individuals may pursue non-normative relationships, particularly in the absence of
158 compatible existing relationships, and we explore what role online platforms play in this process.
159

160 2.3 Online Dating Platform Design

161 HCI scholars have become increasingly interested in the design of dating apps, highlighting numerous issues
162 such as being unsafe for marginalized users [4, 33, 68], reinforcing discrimination [42, 47], poorly mediating sexual
163 consent [30, 67–69, 72], and excluding or constraining queer identities [34, 62]. Particularly relevant to our study are
164 discourses around the efficacy of dating apps. Olgado et al. [44] noted the homogeneity of dating profiles, which served
165 to provide commercial value to the platform instead of truly reflecting the user. Prior work has also highlighted the need
166 for more nuanced recommendations from dating apps, as users may have preferences that differ from the norm [14]
167 or may change over time [28]. Additionally, many have critiqued dating apps as encouraging quick physical contact
168 over emotional connection. Grindr and SCRUFF saw themselves as connecting users to an endless supply of profiles,
169 constructing an ever “desiring user” [25] while de-prioritizing conversation [41]. Other work has identified how users
170 may be encouraged to prioritize physicality by prompting users about the physical attractiveness of others [28] or their
171 sexual preferences [65] while providing little reliable information for gauging other types of compatibility [70].
172

173 In response, some scholars have advocated for centering community interactions over the typical pairwise interactions
174 seen in dating apps [37]. Riggs [48] highlights how Lex “queers” dating app design by prompting users to post “personal
175 ads” to the community, while Shen et al. [52] reported how Soul creates “rooms” for users facilitated by an employee
176 “host,” which enables repeated, smooth interactions between users who like to join the same room. Chinese Deaf and
177 Hard of Hearing (DHH) users also leveraged a combination of human mediators—in this case, DHH matchmakers—and
178 community-building in the form of WeChat group chats [10]. Finally, Wang et al. [61] documents how Chinese gay men
179 may look for relationships on a Q&A platform, as the public setting was free from the sexual intent implied in pairwise
180 interactions or location-based apps; further, it emphasized how potential partners behaved outside of a dating context.
181

182 In addition to sexual or romantic intentions, “dating” app users may also use the platforms to find platonic relationships [3, 16, 18, 31, 50, 71], which has been seen among queer users as a mode of accessing queer community [16, 18, 50].
183 However, dating apps lack affordances that differentiate between users’ varying goals, leading them to communicate
184 their intentions through the open-ended text field in a potentially oblique manner [71]. Meanwhile, users open to
185 platonic relationships may still be affected by the romantic framing of dating apps, as shown by how users of a sapphic
186 dating app felt pressured to “hastily push relationships forward” in a romantic way to avoid being “ghosted” [45].
187

188 Building on prior work that noted the scarcity of dating apps catered towards A-Spec people [50] and a dissatisfaction
189 with romance- and sex-focused dating apps [18], we aim to explore how A-Spec use (or non-use) intersects with
190 embedded norms in dating app design. The 2022 Ace Community Survey [8] reported that approximately half of
191 respondents were not “looking” for a relationship but would be open to one, for example, which hints at how A-Spec
192 attitudes may resist a “scripting of desire” [25]. To investigate this further, we elicited design ideas from participants
193 regarding online platforms generally, whether or not they fit into the existing frame of dating apps.
194

202 3 METHODS

203 We conducted an 8-week asynchronous remote community (ARC) study where we asked participants to engage with
204 prompts related to their experiences with asexuality and aromanticism in relation to their relationships, society, and
205 technology, specifically online social platforms for meeting people. The study was approved by the Institutional Review
206

209 Boards at [REDACTED FOR REVIEW] and [REDACTED FOR REVIEW]. In the remainder of this section, we will
210 describe our recruitment methods, participants' information, study procedure, and analysis method.
211

212 213 3.1 Recruitment and Participants

214 Participants needed to be at least 18 years old, be based in the United States, self-identify as being on the ace and/or
215 aro spectrum, and have strongly considered using, currently use, or have used online platforms to find or build new
216 relationships. We recruited participants using a variety of channels, including online forms (AVEN and Arocalypse),
217 authors' university mailing lists, local queer and A-Spec spaces in the [REDACTED FOR REVIEW] metro area, the
218 authors' personal networks, and past participants of the author's research groups who had consented to be notified of
219 future study opportunities. We also employed snowball sampling. We consciously decided not to recruit from Reddit
220 communities due to known issues with online surveys on Reddit being inundated with "bot" responses [40]. Notably,
221 though, many of our survey respondents indicated they were part of A-Spec communities on Reddit.
222

223 We had 86 eligible respondents to recruitment materials, which we sampled using a statistically non-representative
224 stratified sampling method [59]. This sampling method prioritizes participants with demographics likely to be under-
225 represented, uncovering new and varied insights. We prioritized respondents underrepresented in at least one area,
226 including those that were older, non-white, non-cis, non-female [58], were from rural areas [25], identify as aromantic,
227 and reported having below a bachelor's degree. This reflected how work on aromanticism is rare relative to asexuality,
228 while past work on asexuality had predominantly young, white, cisgender, female, and well-educated participants [22].
229 We additionally selected underrepresented respondents based on other intersectional identities that influenced their
230 A-Spec experience, which they could self-disclose. This included information about relationship structure, disability,
231 and religious background. We eventually invited 76 out of the 86 respondents to the study.
232

233 Our findings ultimately contain data from 38 participants. 33 of these participants completed phase 1 of the ARC
234 (before the holiday break), as the remaining 5 answered study prompts initially but later became unresponsive, albeit
235 without withdrawing their data. Then, 21 of the 33 participants from phase 1 also completed phase 2 of the ARC.
236

237 Our demographics (see Table 1) were unsurprising compared to prior work [22] and surveys within the ace [8] and
238 aro communities [1], with notable exceptions. Our participants (range: 18 to 47 years old), skewed older than past
239 surveys, with one third being older than 34. Additionally, approximately one third of our sample was non-white. We had
240 high representation of non-binary and transgender participants, which is consistent with community survey data [1, 8]
241 but underrepresented in prior scholarship [22]. Finally, over half of our participants were on the aro spectrum. We were
242 unable to recruit aro participants not on the ace spectrum, though, which was a notable limitation of this study.
243

244 245 3.2 Procedures

246 We employed the ARC method as our primary elicitation technique, using a private Slack group to engage participants
247 with twice-weekly prompts they could respond to asynchronously and in discussion with other participants [35, 60]. We
248 selected Slack due to its access control features, threaded conversations to organize discussions, and modes of interaction
249 such as replies and emoticon reactions, which support its use for facilitating collaborative, self-paced discussion [46].
250

251 In designing the ARC, we were inspired by participatory design studies such as Hardy et al.'s [24] LGBTQ Futures
252 workshops, which sought to democratize the design process by involving rural queer communities in how they define
253 and envision solutions to community-based problems. In particular, we hoped to involve participants in the process
254 of reconciling the tradeoffs inherent to their designs, as prior ARCs have begun to incorporate [18]. In line with the
255 exploratory nature of this study, however, we did not focus on ending the ARC with functional design prototypes and did
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Demographic Variables		Phase 1	Phase 2	Demographic Variables		Phase 1	Phase 2
Age				Sexuality			
261 262 263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271 272 273 274 275 276 277 278 279 280 281 282 283 284 285 286 287 288	18-24	9	7	Grey-Asexual/Asexual Spectrum*	Asexual	26	17
	25-34	13	6		Grey-Asexual/Asexual Spectrum*	5	3
	35-44	9	7		Demisexual	3	2
	45+	2	1		Prefer not to answer	1	0
Gender				Romanticism			
269 270 271 272 273 274 275 276 277 278 279 280 281	Woman	13	8	Grey-Aromantic/Aromantic Spectrum*	Aromantic	10	5
	Non-Binary/Genderqueer/"Queer"	11	9		Grey-Aromantic/Aromantic Spectrum*	8	8
	Agender	4	2		Demiromantic	7	7
	Man	3	2		Biromantic	4	2
274 275 276 277 278 279 280 281	Genderfluid	1	0		Panromantic	3	3
	Prefer not to answer	2	1		Polyromantic	1	1
	Transgender Identity				Gay	1	1
	No	21	13		Lesbian	1	1
277 278 279 280 281	Yes	9	7		Queer	1	0
	Prefer not to answer	3	1		Heteroromantic	1	1
	Region				Alloromantic	5	3
	Urban	20	14		Prefer not to answer	9	3
282 283 284 285 286 287 288	Suburban	10	6	Education	Bachelor	17	11
	Rural	3	1		Some college, no degree	6	4
	Race				Masters	5	4
	White	23	13		Doctorate	4	2
289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296	Asian	9	7		Associate	1	0
	Mixed	3	3				
	Black	3	1				
	Latin	2	2				
297 298 299 300 301 302 303 304 305 306 307 308 309 310 311 312	Middle Eastern	1	0				

Table 1. Aggregated demographic information of participants. Phase 1 refers to participants who completed phase 1 (33) and phase 2 refers to participants who completed phase 2 (21). Note that we collected open-ended self-identification of gender, and sexual and romantic identities; participants may identify with multiple identities at once, and thus the totals in the table may not always add to the number of participants. We also placed less common labels on the ace spectrum or aro spectrum (respectively) in the same category, denoted with an asterisk. For the ace spectrum, this included proculseual, acespike (not present in phase 2), cupiosexual, and aceflux. For the aro spectrum, this included nebularomantic and platoniroomatic/quasiromantic.

not offer our own insights to participants' designs. While we do not claim a full participatory design approach, we did incorporate best practices from participatory design with marginalized populations: we explored the full context of how design solutions might be "considered successful by community metrics" [26] and designed our prompts acknowledging and prompting discussion about the practical barriers that may obstruct their "blue sky" ideas [26].

The ARC study lasted for 8 weeks, from December 2024 to January 2025, during which there was a 2-week break for winter holidays common in the United States (marking the division between phases 1 and 2). Participants were asked to respond asynchronously to research prompts, generally within a three- to four-day response window. Phase 1 constituted prompts 1 through 5, which elicited participants' past experiences, struggles, and hopes regarding relationship-building on online platforms, and Phase 2 constituted prompts 6 through 10, which had participants discuss design ideas to address their needs. This included prompts that had participants create at-home prototypes to communicate their ideas, which were allotted a full week to complete instead of the three to four days. Because our approach was informed by constructivist grounded theory [11, 12], we wrote tentative prompts in advance of the study, but modified them as the

study went on in order to conduct theoretical sampling. Specifically, the first four authors discussed emerging concepts as we conducted the study in order to investigate emergent leads from previous prompts [11, 12]. The full text of the final prompts given to participants is in Appendix A, and we highlight the core questions asked in each prompt in Table 2 alongside their investigatory purpose.

Participants were compensated with a \$20 Amazon digital gift card if they responded to at least 2/3 of the research prompts up to the end of each phase, totaling \$40 if they completed both phases. The first four authors were responsible for conducting the ARC, which entailed moderation of the code of conduct shared at the beginning of the study (see Appendix B) and clarifying participant responses with follow-up questions, if applicable.

3.3 Analysis

We employed constructivist grounded theory [11, 12] for the analysis of this study. While the study was being conducted, we read through the data and discussed emerging concepts together in order to inform theoretical sampling, adjusting upcoming prompts accordingly. Then, in analyzing the prompts after the ARC concluded, we derived the open codes and, ultimately, the overarching themes from the data.

Coding and memoing of the data was done by the first four authors separately, a process by which concepts surfacing from the prompts are labeled in open coding [38] and then categorized into axial codes [38]. The authors discussed their codes in regular discussions to compare and distill emerging themes, until a consensus about the major themes of the findings was reached. Re-coding was then done by the first author to refine the analysis accordingly.

3.4 Positionality Statement

We had active-member-researchers of the A-Spec community and active-member-researchers of the broader LGBTQIA+ community as part of the research team [2]. Most authors are active members of either A-Spec or LGBTQIA+ communities or have prior experience researching LGBTQIA+ spaces. A team comprised of those active in or familiar with A-Spec and LGBTQIA+ spaces is vital as it allows for an understanding of the experiences of people in these communities. Further, when investigating marginalized identities, having team members familiar with the community allows for the informed design of the study to help alleviate concerns of perpetuating societal stigma. As such, all authors were involved in the design and refinements of the study, while the first four authors were responsible for the implementation.

3.5 Limitations

We were missing aro participants who were not on the ace spectrum, a key intersectional experience that may have generated additional insights on how A-Spec users can be supported. Future work should recruit for this population specifically, who may have been missing from our participant pool because they were a minority in the A-Spec spaces we recruited from, or possibly because they interpreted their desires as outside of the scope of the term "relationship." Our participant pool additionally could have included more representation of other intersectional experiences. We made a decision to recruit participants based in the United States, which enabled discussion within a shared context but largely excluded A-Spec perspectives in other cultural contexts. Our participants were also predominantly highly-educated and either urban or suburban, and we had few male participants, which should be addressed in future work.

Finally, the length of the ARC could have impacted the participant pool, as it required great time investment from participants (8 weeks of asynchronous work) and some expressed difficulty with the design-related prompts. In particular, we saw a noticeable drop in participants midway through the study, which may have been due to phase 2's focus on design and/or phase 2's timing as directly following our holiday break.

Prompt	Core Questions	Purpose
365 366 367 368 369 370 371 372 373 374 375 376 377 378 379 380 381 382 383 384 385 386 387 388 389 390 391 392 393 394 395 396 397 398 399 400 401 402 403 404 405 406 407 408 409 410 411 412 413 414 415 416	Prompt 1 (Phase 1) How do you see yourself as on the asexual and/or aromantic spectrum? What do terms like “relationship,” “companionship,” “partnership,” and “connection” mean for you, and how would you describe what you are/were looking for online? Prompt 2 (Phase 1) Think of a relationship and a community important to you. What was important for finding and building these, and what was difficult? Were your A-Spec (or other) identities relevant here? Prompt 3 (Phase 1) Please tell us about a time or times you’ve used online platform(s) to find or build meaningful connection with a person or group of people. How did these experiences go and why? What was missing if anything? Prompt 4 (Phase 1) What aspirations do you have for how your relationships with other people could be different? Have you done anything to try to make these aspirations come to fruition? How did the social platforms you use impact this? Prompt 5 (Phase 1) What would it look like for the A-Spec community to be in the best position it could be in, in a parallel universe? What would it look like for the A-Spec community to realistically achieve a better position in 10 years, and what are the paths or barriers to this future (including those shaped by social platforms)? Prompt 6 (Phase 2) What to you would be the most meaningful new technology to come into existence to better find or build the types of relationships you want? To communicate your ideas, we would like everyone to respond with an unpolished visual “prototype” of your idea, alongside an explanation of your idea. Prompt 7 (Phase 2) What kinds of barriers do you anticipate would affect the ideas you proposed? Prompt 8 (Phase 2) How would you adjust your prototypes to account for the barriers discussed in the previous prompt? Prompt 9 (Phase 2) Imagine that you have 1,000,000 tokens representing resources that you would allocate towards making your technology resilient in the face of systemic and social pressures over time. How would you “spend” these tokens and why? Prompt 10 (Phase 2) How would you update your prototype based on the barriers and other considerations we’ve been discussing? Do you have any other reflections to share?	Has participants elaborate on their identities and desires, in their own words. Has participants explain their positive experiences in the past (including community, mentioned in prompt 1). Has participants describe their past experiences using online platforms for their goals. Explores participants’ goals for building up existing relationships, as prompt 3 focused on new relationships. Explores sociotechnical barriers for the A-Spec community as a whole. Has participants reflect on their wants and needs and what ideal tool would help. Has participants voice the reservations they have about their (or others’) ideas. Elicits how participants would work through tradeoffs. Elicits how participants would work through tradeoffs that are more than technical. Concretizes the choices participants would make, especially as this was unclear in prompt 8.

Table 2. Summary of ARC prompts and the motivations for including them. See Appendix A for the full text of each prompt.

4 RESULTS

Participants expressed an almost ubiquitous desire for in-person relationships and in-person support, which led many to try to use dating apps. However, they felt a deep mismatch with dating apps, which were “exhausting” (P19) or

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417 "hopeless" (P10). The first section of our findings focuses on how dating apps did not adequately support participants'
418 non-normative aspirations, and how they could be changed to thoughtfully represent A-Spec needs. Moreover, we
419 share participants' existing processes for articulating non-normative relationships and how they might be supported.
420 The second section describes how participants' had an acute need for low-stakes interactions that accommodated the
421 uncertainty their A-Spec identities brought to the table, which motivated designs beyond dating apps. Participants'
422 needs could still be extremely difficult to meet serendipitously, however, which was addressed through designs that
423 accommodated both their preferred mode of building relationships and their need for compatibility.
424
425

426 4.1 Articulating Non-Normative Relationships Aspirations

427 The aspirations that participants had for their relationships were diverse, emphasizing a non-normative interpretation
428 of romantic relationships, friendships, sexual and play partners⁴, and community relationships pertaining to their level
429 of commitment, their emotional intimacy, and the actions involved in upholding such relationships. Dating platforms
430 only reinforced default understandings of pursuing relationships, however, making it difficult for many participants to
431 see a path toward fulfilling their aspirations. In contrast, some participants highlighted how they challenged, or wanted
432 to challenge, normative properties of a relationship and instead co-construct its trajectory. Participant prototypes
433 pointed to how online platforms can help ease this process, providing a structure for non-normative wants.
434
435

436 4.1.1 *Unpacking Participants' Aspirations.* Participants expressed a variety of needs that contrasted with normative
437 expectations of romantic and platonic relationships. Some participants described wanting *romantic* relationships with a
438 "high degree of emotional intimacy" (P34), that constituted "companionship for the rest of [their] life without having
439 to do anything sexual" (P31). Others expressed how they wanted to have a close relationship that was explicitly
440 *non-romantic*, which involved different characteristics for different participants. This could entail "working towards a
441 common goal" (P39), being "there for me and we potentially live together and share life together" (P15), "cuddl[ing]
442 and having a bestie" (P23), or someone "for whom I am considered a priority, the way that a significant other or spouse
443 is, without the relationship necessarily having a romantic or sexual component" (P16). Some details could be desired
444 by one participant and a dealbreaker for another; for example, while some participants wanted to share a living space
445 with a partner, P13 expressed, "now that I'm older and have been living on my own for a while, I've found I've gotten
446 unexpectedly territorial about personal space/time and do not know if I can ever live with other people again."
447
448

449 Aside from romantic or platonic aspirations, some participants were looking for sexual partners or play partners,
450 contrary to how a surface-level familiarity with asexuality would assume a distaste for sex or kink. Because of this
451 seeming contradiction, participants might choose not to disclose either their asexuality or their desire for a sexual
452 or play partner, leading to some "feel[ing] like I'm being used, and sometimes I feel like I'm using people" (P37).
453 Participants were also highly aware of "the conflation of kink with inherently sexual or romantic feelings" (P23) which
454 could similarly discourage them from expressing their wants outside of explicitly understanding spaces.
455

456 Finally, some participants instead described a desire for community, emphasizing how they did not seek a partner—or
457 even multiple partners—but "feel most happy and supported with a variety of different people in my life that I can feel
458 safe with" (P2). These participants articulated an intimate definition of community that served as an "interpersonal
459 networking of support" (P2), often explicitly connected to relationship anarchy⁵.
460

461 ⁴Play partners refer to partners in practicing kink.
462 ⁵As discussed in Section 2.2, relationship anarchy refers to the questioning of predetermined categories of relationships where some are assumed to be
463 inherently more important than others [15, 57]

Importantly, participants would emphasize “community and/or partnerships that aren’t intended to be temporary” (P1), reflecting the harm felt from how “the world is kind of built for couples, & platonic relationships will inevitably take the back burner” (P12). Participants were keenly aware that even close platonic relationships are likely to fade when “it’s with an allosexual person who does not share my long-term goals of having a life-long platonic partnership” (P21), or “they move on to different stages of their lives, getting married, having kids, [and] I kind of get left blowing in the wind” (P36). Similarly, participants could feel frustrated by an assumed superficiality to certain types of relationships: P32’s “aro a-spec version of fwb [friends with benefits] is just not how allo people use it,” because of an emphasis on being genuine friends, while P15 described that “a monthly check in is the most socially acceptable with people I am friends with, but I want to hang out more often than once a month.” This highlighted the tangible impact of social expectations on participants, which made the non-normative structures they sought seem inaccessible.

4.1.2 Representing A-Spec People in the System. Participants emphasized how A-Spec identities lacked representation and/or legitimacy in the eyes of technological systems. On one hand, they were frustrated by a lack of A-Spec filters on mainstream dating platforms, which some participant prototypes added. When each participant explained their own personal relationship to their identity label(s), though, some defined the same label differently, while others disliked labels altogether, as they felt too restrictive to “describe how I view myself and how I understand the world” (P25). They acknowledged how this can be difficult for a technical system, as “there’s so many different sub labels⁶, it’d be pretty impossible to filter and find people that way” (P10). In response, participants emphasized solutions that prioritized inclusiveness: filters could accommodate broader terms (e.g., asexual, aromantic, demisexual, demiromantic) while letting users elaborate on this in their profile through either dedicated space on their bio or “write in labels” (P10), which could even be incorporated into the system design “after X number of profiles have written in Y option” (P28).

Aside from a lack of A-Spec filters, participants also struggled with platforms’ choice of language. (P33) noted they “d[id]n’t really see a clear distinction for myself between who is a partner and who is a friend,” which meant that they saw themselves as neither “single” nor “partnered” when platforms prompted them to choose. Additionally, participants’ hopes for the future consistently included that “people would no longer assume things like that sexual and romantic attraction are one in the same, or that everyone experiences both” (P5), which was conflated on dating apps. Some participants thus suggested changes to dating app interfaces, such as how (P21) added “relationship type” questions to Hinge’s interface that included separate “sexual,” “romantic,” and “platonic” sliders, while they converted “sexual orientation” into “sexual/romantic orientation,” with checkboxes to account for multiple identity labels (see Figure 1).

Participants saw their suggestions as not only improving the usability of the platform but also heightening the profile of the A-Spec community, which they hoped could be more accepted and understood in the future. Such visibility can “help move society towards more expansive ideas about sexual orientations and relationship structures” P33, which participants hoped to leverage as intentional education features. To this end, participants suggested an “‘education’ section of the app that includes a glossary of LGBTQ+ terms” (P5), or “question marks” (P21) (see Figure 1) next to LGBTQ+ terms that would lead users to “brief, digestible info about what the word means from people who hold those identities” (P21). In order to grapple with contested or changing definitions, however, “these definitions / materials would be updated on a regular basis to ensure they are current, and they would show multiple definitions/perspectives from various people who are defining the term for themselves” (P21). Alternatively, participants were also keen on identity fields that encouraged extended description of “what I’m looking for” as “someone who resists labels” (P8), which they hoped would simultaneously help other users understand different perspectives.

⁶As discussed in Section 2.1, online spaces have seen a proliferation of A-Spec identities that elaborate on their experience of attraction [49].

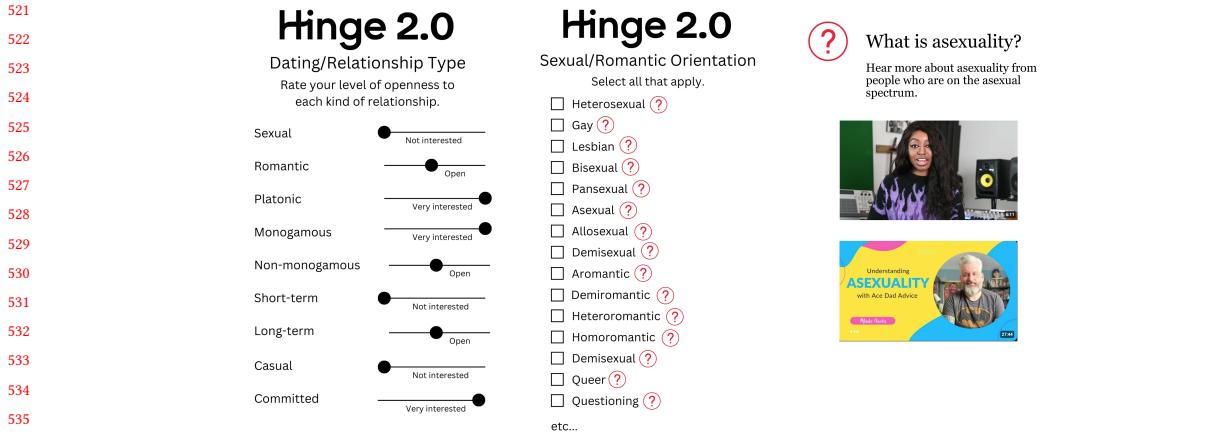


Fig. 1. P21's prototype was an adjustment to Hinge's profile creation interface, which did not accommodate for A-Spec experiences. They converted Hinge's questions about intention, which was a checklist asking only about monogamy or non-monogamy and short-term vs. long-term relationship, into a more extensive list including sexual, romantic, platonic, monogamous, non-monogamous, short-term, long-term, casual, and committed goals. Each of these had a separate slider that allowed a user to indicate if they were open to a certain kind of relationship (left). Then, they turned Hinge's multiple choice options on identity into checkboxes, reflecting how they identified with multiple labels and wanted each of them to be seen (center). These would have question marks displayed next to each label, which P21 hoped would direct users to multiple perspectives in the community on that label (right).

4.1.3 Countering Default Assumptions about Relationship. Participants repeatedly referenced an intentional practice of elaborating on their relationship aspirations that challenged default assumptions, “chip[ping] away at the idea that there’s one default kind of relationship people are looking for” (P37). This might mean “starting an open conversation on being ace, what it means for me, & what physical intimacy tends to look like for me” (P12) after having a couple dates with someone, “bringing up queerplatonic and nontraditional relationships” (P17) to close friends, or prompting for the “rich details” (P25) of what someone wants when they meet new people who erroneously expect romance from them. This reflects how participants’ ideal worlds would see “fewer assumptions made about what certain types of relationships should be like and more communication about the specific things people want in relationships” (P16), which seemed to be motivated by how their wants, needs, and limits differ from others’ assumptions.

Engaging in such conversations can be difficult, however. On one hand, initiating them can be uncomfortable when they go against implicit social norms, as “it just doesn’t fit the script on what most people think or talk about” (P17). On the other hand, even after initiating such conversations, participants can be worn down by the effort it requires and the repeated potential for rejection: “when people match with me [on dating apps], ask me what a QPR is, and then ghost me or unmatch when I tell them what it means to me, it can feel discouraging – especially when this happens repeatedly” (P21). Similarly, P7 “used to be a very affectionate person... but then constantly being accused of putting out ‘the wrong signal’ has led me to diminish that part of myself,” discouraging them from attempting to introduce physical affection to their current friendships. As P23 explained, “it’s hard to know if people are chill dating an aroace person without asking outright,” but it could “mak[e] things awkward” (P23) and ultimately make participants vulnerable.

Participants highlighted how platforms could help shift norms in this area. P37 wanted dating platforms to require users to fill out “their hopes, nevers (off limit things/actions) and curiosities when it comes to romantic relationships versus when it comes to sexual relationships,” teasing out more detailed information about their wants and needs.

573 Although other participants shared nervousness “at the thought of sharing that so openly” (P28), this general idea
 574 could be imagined in a more intimate setting, such as structuring disclosure within the context of trusted relationships.
 575

576 On the other hand, P1 built on social media to create a design that would help them convey a specific want in a less
 577 vulnerable way: a desire to spend more time with others. “A problem I run into a lot when I want to build friendships
 578 is not knowing whether they have the time or desire to spend time with me” (P1), which can be a particular point
 579 of sensitivity from an A-Spec perspective when friendships are normatively considered less important than romantic
 580 relationships (see Section 4.1.1). They addressed this with a prototype that shared their availability with certain social
 581 media connections as a way of passively gauging mutual intent to invest in the relationship.
 582

583 4.2 Moving Away From a Dating Paradigm

584 Participants expressed a consistent need to build relationships gradually and flexibly, which was particularly pronounced
 585 due to their A-Spec identities. Some might only develop clarity on their hopes for a relationship (e.g., whether they
 586 would like to pursue a romantic relationship) after getting to know someone for a long time, while others did not fit
 587 into normative models of relationship but engaged in case-by-case considerations of how they would like to relate to
 588 someone, co-constructing the form of the relationship rather than deciding it *a priori*. Accordingly, many participant
 589 designs were focused on building a new relationship in low-stakes settings, contrasting with the expectations placed
 590 upon them in dating apps and “dating” in general. These participants seemed to employ strategies to move away from
 591 dating, then, while leveraging technology in order to encounter people they would likely find compatible.
 592

593 **4.2.1 Turning Toward Low-Stakes Interactions.** Participants’ A-Spec identities often made them uncomfortable with
 594 the fast-paced norms of dating. One example is how those who were demisexual or demiromantic⁷ explained how it
 595 could take “a very long time for me to establish a connection and even longer to trust that connection” (P28). Dating
 596 norms might make them “feel guilty not immediately knowing what I’d want out of any given relationship,” but “if I
 597 don’t know the person, what their life looks like, or how we’d communicate, how would I know what I would want
 598 from or with them?” (P1). Accordingly, participants might deliberately looked for “an open minded person to start
 599 as friends and see if romantic feelings would develop from there” (P37). This sentiment was echoed by participants
 600 who described a lack of distinction between romantic and platonic feelings (sometimes labeled as platoniroomantic or
 601 quasiromantic by participants) or feeling romantic attraction only in rare, fleeting moments (arospike). This meant that
 602 “the most important aspect of trying to find that special someone is how open and accepting they are” (P22).
 603

604 Other participants disliked “forc[ing] one ideal for relationships” (P25), and sought “people who want to get to
 605 know me simply because they want to get to know me, not because they see me as a means to an end (whether that end
 606 be sex, marriage, committed partnership, whatever)” (P16). They may even saw delight in the uncertainty of how a
 607 relationship unfolds:
 608

609 “Are we opening a taco food truck together? Are we going to be book buddies? Hiking pals? Fandom
 610 friends? Are we the perfect gossip and vent friends?? Are we going to set up a queer commune??? The
 611 exploration and possibilities are wonderful.” (P32)

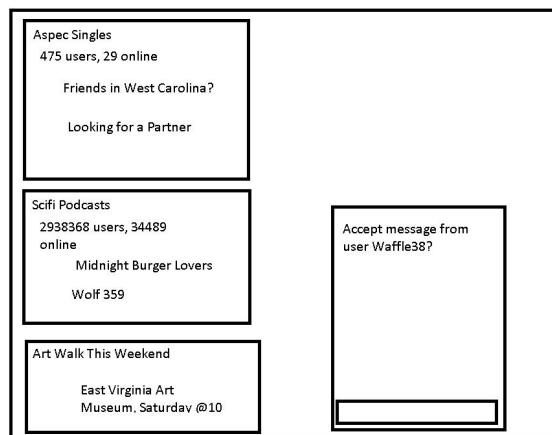
612 In each of these cases, participants wanted to build relationships where the format of the relationship was mutually
 613 accepted to be secondary or undecided. This was also familiar to them, as participants often described how past
 614 relationships were formed serendipitously through a shared context with the opportunity to meet often, forming
 615 a close bond over years of time. It “felt fairly natural as we were engaging about things we had in common” (P1),
 616

617 ⁷Developing attraction only after connecting deeply enough with someone else on an emotional level [7].
 618

625 whereas "in dating apps you have to basically small talk and that sucks" (P14). Dating apps then seemed to reinforce
626 the high-pressure connotations of dating by forcing users to "immediately jump into one-on-one communication" (P20)
627 with strangers or set up the assumption "that they are going to find romance with me, which they will not" (P25).

628 In response, participant prototypes would emphasize low-stakes interactions between users, especially emulating
629 their past experiences on forums and social media where they could "feel somebody out more so in a group setting
630 first" (P20). Many designs supported space for users to spend time together in community, as participants' motivations
631 were two-fold: it served as a reliable way to meet new people in a low-pressure environment, but community was also
632 valuable in itself, particularly for A-Spec people "b/c it comes from a place of wanting broader community with more
633 connections that don't just prioritise a romantic relationship" (P12). A few participants even felt that a better future
634 for them would involve access to (in-person) A-Spec community for connection, support, and collective action.

635 Their designs, then, drew from other types of platforms to create online space. P24 reflected, "I started with something
636 more like a dating app, but the more we progressed the more I was thinking of more of a community app with personal
637 messaging," where "dating-focused users could absolutely form a community in an app like this and then move to
638 private messaging if they chose" (See Figure 2). Even participant prototypes modeled after dating apps hoped to create
639 community, hosting virtual and in-person events for users to socialize based on shared interests.



640 Fig. 2. P24's prototype displayed a "community app" that focused on meeting new people. Its structure resembled online communities
641 on social media platforms, but centered the process of finding in-person events, addressing a need that current social media platforms
642 did not meet.

643
644
645 4.2.2 *Addressing Compatibility.* While participants had positive experiences developing friendships from online
646 and offline spaces, they still struggled to form ties that met their needs for in-person, long-lasting, non-normative
647 relationships (see Section 4.1.1). This called for the affordances that dating apps provided, where users could search
648 their locale for particular kinds of people. However, these platforms were poorly matched to their needs. In addition to
649 compatible long-term goals and approach to relationships, participants needed information about other users' values
650 and personality, which was elicited poorly on dating profiles. This was especially relevant when participants "so often
651 don't have a distinct yes or no gut reaction to the person base[d] on their profile" (P19), which often centered physical
652 attractiveness. P1 captured this dynamic well:

677 "I've seen conversations that my allosexual + alloromantic friends had before going on dates and I've
 678 been so confused. 'How did you get to the point of going out? Their profile AND their conversation
 679 were so boring.' But of course they had the impetus of attraction to continue the conversation." (P1)

680
 681 Thus, participants were frustrated when they were forced to "choose right now and swipe left or right or whatever,
 682 based on this scant information" (P16), and suggested features that addressed what compatibility meant to them.
 683

684 *Shared Values.* Participants repeatedly expressed how they were "looking for someone who shared certain values
 685 and political beliefs" (P37), or looking for community that was "most strongly a sharing of values" (P2). In fact, one
 686 participant lamented how the "guesswork" of determining another user's values was "where I put the most labor
 687 into" (P15). While past work has found a similar need for shared values (e.g., [18]), participants identified how their
 688 values were in fact closely tied to their overall approach to relationships. For example, P32 highlighted that "people
 689 who immediately ask 'pics please / why don't you have a photo of you / can you send a pic of yourself' are people who
 690 I (as an overall pattern) don't have a lasting connection with. We just don't share values?" while P36, as a relationship
 691 anarchist, said "wanting to build strong, emotionally resilient relationships with mutual support resonates very very
 692 strongly with me. I would say its part of my core values." Here, a mismatch in values constituted incompatibility because
 693 the relationship itself is an expression of participants' values and related philosophies.
 694

695 Accordingly, some participants included "values" tags in their designs in order to filter for users with shared values
 696 (see Figure 3). They also suggested questionnaires to provide more information about users and reveal hints of their
 697 worldviews. In fact, multiple participants noted how one dating app, OKCupid, used to have questionnaires that helped
 698 them make friends "just finding similar world views" (P17), and wanted to bring back this older design.
 699

700 A special case of shared values involved an acceptance of A-Spec identity and goals. Some participants shared that
 701 they now "question (sexual) motives and don't trust many when they say they know what Asexual is and respect
 702 it" (P39), which arose not only in mainstream dating spaces, but in gay or sapphic spaces as well. Participants felt
 703 like they needed to guess at allosexual/alloromantic intentions toward them, such as how P33 explained that they
 704 "filter out people who seem to exhibit romantic interest or otherwise treat me differently than I'd expect them to."
 705 A particularly common event was when other users would indicate interest based on their images rather than their
 706 bio, offending participants. "Like did you actually fully read the novella I wrote about myself before you messaged
 707 or swiped on me? Which is absolutely a form of gauging intent for me" (P28). This led some participant prototypes
 708 to include a questionnaire to "weed out the kind of people who just 'swipe right' on everyone, or who only judge
 709 from photos" (P5), which users could optionally answer after they indicate interest in someone (see Figure 3). They
 710 imagined that "someone who did check the box (or boxes) gets placed at the top of your review queue and you can see
 711 what their responses were" (P28), increasing the visibility of compatible users.
 712

713 Mismatched values motivated some participants to specifically seek out A-Spec users, who were assumed to hold
 714 certain shared values and norms. P32 described "a particular sense of comfort and ease" in play partner negotiations "by
 715 knowing that they are aro like me," while P31 "only dated girls on the asexuality-spectrum since I didn't have to worry
 716 about that part of the relationship [pressure to have sex]." However, some asexual dating apps already exist, which
 717 were surprisingly not useful for participants. They were "often not very active, or (like the couple of Facebook groups
 718 I've been in) they're full of people nowhere near me (or if they are close by, we don't have much in common)" (P24).
 719 This was particularly pronounced for participants in more rural areas, but even in urban A-Spec groups, "often being
 720 ace is the only thing we have in common, and then it can feel awkward" (P21). Indeed, "having the same identities is
 721 not necessary for the desired connection" (P25) and can be too limiting when compatible users are relatively scarce.
 722

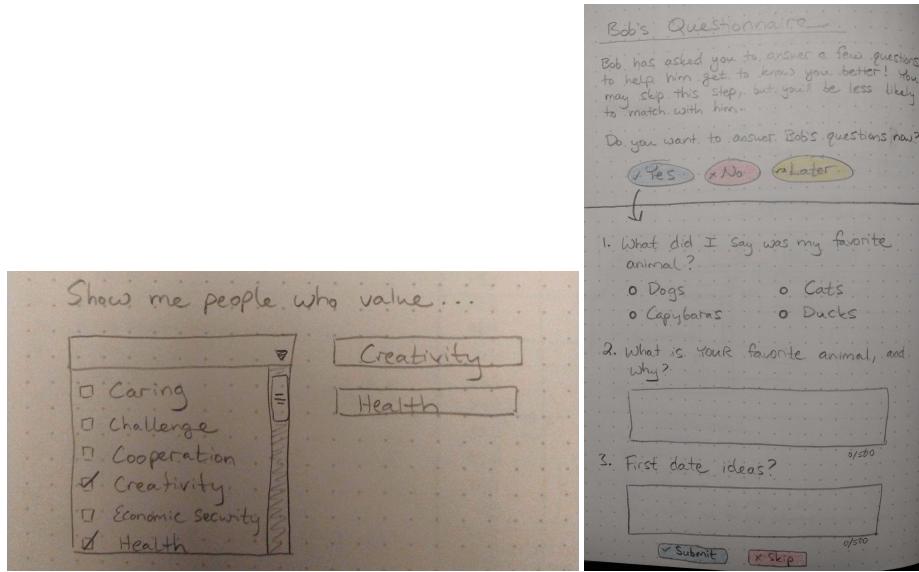


Fig. 3. P5's prototype included multiple avenues of evaluating other users' values. They included a list of values for users to associate with themselves, which would be used for filtering (left). P5 additionally incorporated a customizable questionnaire for those who indicate interest in a user's profile, which is meant to assist users in finding potential matches whose approach to relationships aligned with their own, namely, that they focus on getting to know others (right).

These shortcomings made participants suggest A-Spec-focused platforms that centered A-Spec values and norms while being open to non-A-Spec users. Allosexual/allromantic users could join if they "would be interested in a relationship without sex, or without much" (P24), "openly questioning whether or not they're A-Spec" (P13), or were invited to the platform, where "invitations would be generated primarily by the A-Spec members" (P36).

Personality. Participants also wanted to learn more about someone as a person, lamenting,

"People present a sanitized version of themselves. They show you what they think is appealing about themselves & often hide things that are more polarizing. This dynamic makes it really hard to find any of these people interesting." (P1)

This issue motivated participants to imagine open-ended and expressive profiles that reflected their creators. "If someone wants to spend a chunk of their profile talking about how much they love cats, or what kind of hookup they want, or anarchist literature, or they write 'idk' for fields—that's all information" (P32), a sentiment that was reflected in the variety of information fields P32 added to their final prototype (see Figure 4). This contrasted with current dating apps, as "Bumble only lets you add so much to your bio, which was one of my gripes with the app" (P5).

Some participants additionally advocated for multimedia profiles, despite frustration with how other users would use images to ignore their bio text. "Sometimes we decide we're interested in people based on smaller things—how someone talks about their dog, their kids, how they talk about what makes them passionate, their smile looks kind or their laugh is infectious, they share things that made them sad or what they want to change" (P17), which led P17 to suggest recorded introduction videos to profiles. Multimedia profiles can provide useful information about a

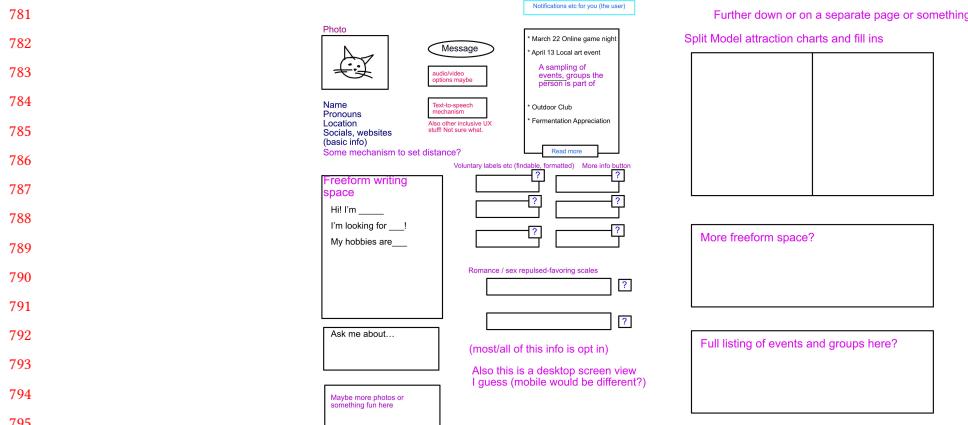


Fig. 4. P32's prototype showed how they wanted to add many forms of information to dating profiles, including labels they identify with, multimodal ways of expressing themselves, communities or events they are part of, how they feel about romance or sex, how they would break down their wants in a relationship, how they would describe themselves, and what they want to be asked about. This contrasted strongly with the streamlined profiles allowed by standard dating apps, which limit freeform writing space and tend to center images.

person's personality if used for that purpose, motivating some designs to have photos "interspersed throughout the profile instead of all in one place" (P35) to shift norms of how multimedia content is used.

4.2.3 Creating Opportunity for Low-Stakes Interactions with Compatible Users. Combining how participants preferred to build relationship and how they needed to search for compatible users to be in relationship with, some participants took steps to meet both of these needs. One participant proposed a dating platform specifically for ace gamers, where matching with someone meant "you would then be playing games with them as usual. If you think you wanna meet up with this person for a date, you can" (P31). In addition to providing a clear structure for interaction, playing games "as usual" would fight against the pressure participants felt to make decisions quickly while dating.

On the other hand, P36 was at a loss for how to develop "really close besties" unless they had "some sort of algorithm to connect specific people in addition to a platform having broader group conversations." P32 employed this strategy by using online platforms in two parts: Lex as "a community-based chaotic arena" where they can find local connections, events, and Discords, and Discord for "community building or follow up after meeting people at events." Similarly, P13 took it upon themselves to build a hand-curated community space after using OKCupid to find connections: "I used OKCupid to find people who 1) I found aesthetically attractive, 2) had profiles that said they were ethically non-monogamous, 3) had nerdy interests similar to mine, and 4) that I thought would get along with the others, and I started planning monthly beer-and-boardgame nights," which "started with around 25-30 people and the events were an instant hit." They used Eventbrite at first to organize the events, but moved to a Facebook group "so anyone in the group could post events" (P13), after which the community ultimately grew too large to keep its unique element of mutual chemistry. This hints at a benefit of smaller, more specific spaces, such as how P14 wished there was "an ace space where people looking for QPRs talked about historical fiction books or cats."

Other participants indeed connected to existing smaller spaces, often in-person, which would require some work to discover. They might use online community calendars and dedicated applications like Meetup to navigate the landscape

of local, in-person spaces, and so they focused on how such platforms could be improved for their purposes. P8 hoped to use "a more comprehensive Meetup style app" to filter local events by properties such as distance, length of activity, information about the location and its accessibility (e.g., whether there are stairs or ramps, what food is on site with which ingredients, etc.), cost, and need for volunteers. P16, similarly, discussed the properties of groups on Meetup they would like to know, including the type of group (e.g., social, networking, hobbies, sports, etc.), meeting pattern, size, general demographics of group members, and "overall vibe" (e.g., "lively," "relaxed," "nerdy," etc.). This addressed their unpredictable experiences on Meetup: "unless a group is attended regularly by the same people, you're meeting different people at every event, which can be fun but also makes it difficult to really get to know people over time" (P16).

Finally, P25 highlighted that "the community calendars that are in my area are terrible at encoding [their] information in a useful manner," and emphasized the desire to search events (past or current) by keyword or topic. Community calendars specifically may have highlighted local spaces that aligned with P25's values or followed certain desirable norms. This context, though, surfaced a need for a "freely available webpage plugin" to ensure use of a consistent inter-operable framework across community groups, who may not be willing or able to use a paid tool.

5 DISCUSSION

Participants described a process of relationship-building that first established low-stakes relationships with compatible individuals, and then elaborated on and co-constructed the properties of these relationships. This stood in contrast with the design of dating platforms and the culture of dating they uphold, prompting us to look toward new online structures for facilitating relationship. Below, we first discuss alternative platform structures in a "process-oriented paradigm" that would support an A-Spec relationship-building process, inspired by participants' designs. Then, we discuss how participants' experiences pointed to an need for a "pluralized" approach to definitions in systems built for relationship-building, rather than definitions put forward by an epistemic authority. In this way, we may consider how systems can emphasize personal meaning and challenge the assumptions underlying any given label.

5.1 A Process-Oriented Paradigm For Building Relationships Through Online Platforms

A-Spec users in our study struggled to build the types of relationships they desired on dating apps, building on work that has highlighted embedded norms within standard dating apps that discourage slower, deeper connection (e.g., [25, 41, 70]). More than just encoding sexual intent, however, dating apps seemed to reflect dating norms and idealized beliefs about romance, such as how "love can strike at first sight," and "love is the highest goal of the relationship" [29]. A-Spec users may not be particularly drawn to another user at first glance, and they may need to escape default assumptions about their goals. Dating platforms failed to represent the aspirations of A-Spec users while, more fundamentally, they seemed to exclude how A-Spec users may see the format of a relationship as secondary or undecided.

We argue that dating apps reflect a **goal-oriented** paradigm of searching for relationships, in which systems presume that users have, and consistently seek, an "ideal" end-goal as they pursue new relationships, and attempt to move them efficiently toward fulfilling that singular goal. This is reinforced technologically by how users are only allowed intimate pairwise interactions [61] and are forced to make immediate decisions about other users (Section 4.2.2), echoing how applications determine the bounds within which sexuality is practiced [25].

A-Spec users seemed to prefer a different approach to relationships that aligns more with prior work on friendship formation [53, 66], building close bonds gradually in stages. A-Spec needs go beyond the "goal-less" status quo of friendship formation, however, due to a need to find compatible users for non-normative relationship aspirations (Section 4.1.1); thus, they often still turned to solutions that let them match with nearby users. While they attempted to

adapt to these platforms, A-Spec users only had a surface-level ability to emphasize their own norms (e.g., in their bio or in private messages with other users), similar to how other queer identities are marginalized from being ignored at the data schema, algorithmic, and ideological layers of dating apps [62]. This heavily impacted how participants were able to navigate these systems to suit their purposes, resulting in dissatisfying or even excruciating experiences.

We thus propose a **process-oriented** paradigm of technology for finding new relationships, where platforms emphasize a process of *gradually building* relationships and subsequently *co-constructing* the goals and structure of relationships. A process-oriented approach would involve a paradigm shift in which platforms are designed to recognize the value of relationships even when they do not quickly fulfill pre-set goals. This embraces Sharma et al.'s provocation to design for relations that suspend assumptions about "the type of relationship they have—or will develop" [51], speaking to increasing interest in the role of uncertainty in HCI [54]. This philosophy may be beneficial even outside of A-Spec design, which warrants future inquiry. Prior work on queer dating apps has reported that users may prefer to get to know someone through "a chat with little purpose" [65] or, similarly, users may believe "as their connections deepened, their relationships would become more clear" before being thwarted by dating app norms [45]. Even for romantic purposes, then, some users may prefer to build authentic relationships that serendipitously result in love. Future work may also investigate whether other critiques of dating apps, such as their lack of safety [4, 33, 68] and their negative impact on self-esteem [28], might become less intense when they enable lower-stakes connection first.

As a first step towards realizing this paradigm shift, we outline two design spaces for a process-oriented approach inspired by our findings, which future work should consider as a core design goal.

5.1.1 Building Relationships Through Compatible Spaces. Participants adopted creative practices to resolve a tension between slow relationship-building and an acute need for compatibility, leveraging community-building spaces with members that were likely to be compatible. This idea builds on prior calls for adopting slowness [48] or community-building features in dating apps [10, 18, 37, 61]. However, our findings highlighted how the particularities of a space were critical: participants curated who showed up in these spaces, recommended different spaces that were appropriate for certain needs, or sought out spaces fitting a certain "vibe," purpose, demographic, or shared values. The desire for an A-Spec-focused space is another example of this, carrying the caveat that a highly-restricted space would leave compatibility on other levels less likely.

To support a process-oriented paradigm, we might imagine how online platforms could help users discover compatible spaces, building on how participants wanted to use Meetup. Platforms directing users toward local groups or events could elicit and incorporate filters for information about the structural properties (e.g., meeting pattern), purpose, and values of a space, potentially asking groups to respond to questionnaires like how participants wanted to elicit shared values in Section 4.2.2. Platforms may even encourage users to support each other by recommending appropriate spaces for their needs.

Alternatively, we might iterate on the design of dating apps to "match" compatible users and subsequently facilitate repeatable, low-stakes interactions between two or more users. Some existing dating platforms leverage online spaces for this purpose, such as Lex, which allows users to post "personal ads" in a shared space [48], or Soul, which hosts "rooms" for users to converse in and further offers interest-based group chats [52]. These are good examples of design that allows for low-stakes interactions, but it may still be difficult for an A-Spec user to find someone with the same non-normative aspirations as well as similar values and mutual chemistry. Lex is a platform intended only for sapphic users, which could be too restrictive or too broad depending on an A-Spec user's circumstances, while "rooms" on Soul have undefined demographics. Instead, we may consider designs that allow for the creation of ephemeral, user-defined spaces, which

937 could adapt to the user’s needs by allowing them to list criteria or, alternatively, manually select individuals to include
938 in the space. This flexible approach would let someone meet other A-Spec users, for example, but also experiment with
939 defining a space differently if they find that an A-Spec-only group is not useful. These spaces could be accompanied by
940 structured support to initiate low-stakes interactions as well.
941

942 *5.1.2 Enabling Co-Construction of Relationship Properties.* There is also a design space for supporting users in the
943 construction of a non-normative relationship. A-Spec users needed to redefine the norms and boundaries of a relationship
944 as it grows, which could be particularly difficult when their hopes exist outside of the mainstream (e.g., serious, lifelong
945 friendship or a queerplatonic relationship). They needed to communicate specific aspirations for a given relationship,
946 which would expend significant effort and, moreover, repeatedly leave them vulnerable to rejection.
947

948 We might imagine, then, designs that help users break down their aspirations and communicate them more easily.
949 Importantly, while similar strategies exist in some communication—such as the “relationship anarchy smorgasbord”
950 developed by the polyamorous and relationship anarchist communities to structure discussions about the possibilities
951 for a relationship [9]—participants highlighted a need for such measures to be integrated into the tools they use to
952 search for new relationships, which is dominated by normative definitions of relationship. Systems for finding new
953 relationships could prompt reflection on and therefore normalize questions about a user’s wants and limits relating to
954 different types of intimacy, such as emotional or sexual intimacy. Even if these responses may not be entirely suitable
955 for public disclosure, users may be prompted to adjust the visibility of their responses while considering how responses
956 can inform how the system assists in finding new relationships. In line with a process-oriented philosophy, users could
957 also be prompted to communicate their thinking with respect to a given user as they get to know them. This expands
958 on prior calls for dating apps to accommodate different user goals [18, 71], acknowledging that users’ goals may not
959 necessarily fit into normative categories of platonic, romantic, and sexual relationships.
960

961 **5.2 Pluralized Definitions of Relationship and Identity**

962 We observed A-Spec users interrogate the meaning of different relationship labels, expressing aspirations which did
963 not fit cleanly into established divisions of relationships (Section 4.1.1). As such, although the distinctions between
964 “romantic,” “sexual,” and “platonic” intentions remained important, A-Spec users also preferred to break down what
965 these relationships would entail instead of leaving them to be assumed (Section 4.1.3). We saw a similar complexity to
966 participants’ A-Spec identities. Our participants seemed to embrace how identity labels were contested, suggesting
967 that educational features emphasize multiple definitions of a label or, alternatively, each user instead explain their
968 own definition (Section 4.1.2). This contrasts with past work that has suggested implementing educational features to
969 explain LGBTQIA+ labels [18], but implied that definitions would come from an epistemic authority on LGBTQIA+
970 labels, which may be “enforcing overly prescriptive systems of meaning” [55] when the A-Spec community uses labels
971 to counter hegemonic constructions of sexuality [49].
972

973 Systems supporting A-Spec users must follow this example and embrace a “pluralized” approach to definitions,
974 where definitions may be uncategorizable, conflicting, and highly personal. One’s intimate relationship to their own
975 identity and wants cannot be accurately defined by an outside authority; instead, we as designers need to consider how
976 to make visible users’ personal definitions of their identity and wants. This may be particularly relevant in a relational
977 context, where users would benefit from opening up a dialectic about what they and others are looking for rather than
978 being fit into a “casting mold” dictated by the platform [44]. Riggs [48] highlights how Lex encourages users to do
979 this through open-ended “personal ads,” enabling “queer relationalities” where users slow down and reflect on what it
980

is they desire. This would reflect our participants' needs to richly express their aspirations and identity. Particularly outside of queer spaces, though, A-Spec users may need not only the freedom to express themselves but also prompting to challenge what is assumed to be a shared definition. Similar to suggestions from our participants, systems could link identity or relationship labels to "glossary" pages that host a variety of contrasting perspectives from individuals defining the label for themselves (Section 4.1.2).

Following Weathington et al. [62]'s analysis of queer identity exclusion in the design of dating apps, however, users' heterogeneity needs to be understood not only at a cosmetic "profile" level but also in how a system utilizes their data. Our participants landed on using broad identity labels—and perhaps even sub-labels that occur frequently enough—for the purpose of filtering, and then describing themselves in detail at the profile level. A more radical approach could allow for a proliferation of user-defined tags, similar to the plurality exhibited by The Archive of Our Own, which hosts fanworks that can be found through an extensive tagging and filtering system [19]. This system allows creators to use user-defined tags, retaining complete control over how they describe their works, while "tag wranglers" from within the community determine which tags are treated in the same way by the system when it processes a search query [43]. While potential solutions would need to address how to supply the effort required to manage freeform tags, such an approach in the context of building new relationships could center the user herself as an epistemic authority, whose rich definitions would become part of the system.

6 CONCLUSION

We investigated A-Spec perspectives in an 8-week ARC study, where A-Spec individuals discussed their past experiences trying to use online platforms to find or build relationships, as well as how technology can support their needs. These discussions surfaced a strained relationship with dating platforms, which addressed a need for compatible in-person relationships that can be difficult to find organically, but also had a deep mismatch with A-Spec needs. Participants were constrained by the hegemonic framework dating apps assume, which lacked room for them to challenge default assumptions about romantic and platonic relationships and therefore pursue non-normative relationships. Participants' A-Spec identities may also mean that they need open or co-constructed goals. This led them to design for low-stakes interactions is reminiscent of prior calls for more slowness and community features in dating apps, but also surfaces a need to accommodate their acute need for compatibility.

We therefore propose two design implications for platforms to support A-Spec relationship-building. First, we propose a "process-oriented" trajectory for facilitating relationships through online platforms, in which online platforms might support either low-stakes relationship formation between compatible users, or scaffold vulnerable communication that opens a dialectic to define relationships in a non-normative manner. This goes hand in hand with our argument for a "pluralized" approach to defining identity and relationships in online systems that emphasizes specific and highly personal definitions of labels, rather than always pointing to definitions from an epistemic authority. We call for future work exploring process-oriented and pluralized paradigms of relationship-building platforms, which may not only benefit A-Spec users but, as participants hope for, lead to a future more abundant in diverse, meaningful relationships.

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A STUDY PROMPTS

A.1 Prompt 1

We have participants from a range of different backgrounds, with potentially different relationships with asexuality/aromanticism. Please introduce yourself to the group with:

- (1) How you see yourself as on the asexual and/or aromantic spectrum and how your understanding of asexuality/aromanticism and your relationship to these terms might have changed and evolved over time. If it's useful, feel free to use visuals to help illustrate how you think about asexuality/aromanticism, such as sharing a physical or digital drawing, making a diagram, or even creating a meme that gets your point across. Please share screenshots or image files instead of external links.
- (2) What do terms like "relationship," "companionship," "partnership," and "connection" mean for you? Do they share the same meanings? You can also consider making a diagram to illustrate your thinking. How would you describe what you are/were looking for online? (can be one of the aforementioned terms or something else we haven't mentioned)
- (3) Anything else you think others should know about you as you participate together in this study! Please keep in mind that you should avoid disclosing any identifying information about yourself.

A.2 Prompt 2

Thank you everyone for your thoughtful responses and discussions with each other over the past few days! We saw in the last prompt that we have a diverse group of perspectives/experiences. Some appreciated specific definitions of asexuality/aromanticism/relationship-adjacent terms while others had more uncertain or purposefully-loose definitions of these terms. We have some who are interested in a romantic relationship without sex some interested in sharing life with a committed non-romantic partner and some interested in community instead of prioritizing relations with a particular individual. Additionally while some are interested in seeking these out directly others need these to develop organically in order to happen at all.

Next to inform our future discussions about designing for aspec connection with other people and/or communities we would like to ask you to reflect on your relationship with at least one important person in your life and one community you enjoy being in if applicable. What was important for finding those building those relationships and feeling part of those communities? On the other hand what was difficult about this process? And if applicable how did your aspec (or other) identities color your experiences here?

A.3 Prompt 3

Thank you everyone for your responses to the last prompt—it's been lovely getting to read about all the different kinds of support networks you've built and what made them work. This time we want to bring in your experiences with online platforms. Please tell us about a time or times you've used online platform(s) (e.g. Social media forums dating apps video conferencing apps etc.) to find or build meaningful connection with a person or group of people. How did these experiences go and what characteristics of these platforms (e.g. platform features community norms etc.) contributed to those outcomes? What was missing if anything?

You don't need to repeat anything you might have discussed in the last prompt unless you have more to say on how it relates to the online platform!

1249 **A.4 Prompt 4**

1250
1251 Thank you everyone for sharing your experiences with online platforms—a lot of interesting challenges about dating
1252 apps are starting to emerge such as how they might not give us time to slow down and get to know someone as well as
1253 some ways that online communities/interactions can be both helpful and limited on their own. It's also great to learn
1254 how some of you may combine or use these platforms in creative ways to make their features work for you. The last
1255 prompt was mostly about the current state of things so this time we would like to start exploring what we'd want to
1256 change.
1257

- 1258 (1) As an Aspec person what aspirations do you have for how your relationships with other people(both on and
1259 offline) could be different? This could mean developing the types of relationships you mentioned in the 1st
1260 prompt but it could also mean other aspirations about the types of relationships you already have.
1261 (2) Have you done anything to try to make these aspirations come to fruition? If so what did you do and how did it
1262 go? If not why not?
1263 (3) How did the social platforms you use and their features help shape your aspirations? How did they affect the
1264 ways you may have tried to make them come true?
1265

1266 Feel free to use visuals to help you respond to this if it's helpful for example by creating a collage of images that
1267 illustrate your thinking or drawing what might be on your screen when you're using platforms.
1268

1269 **A.5 Prompt 5**

1270 Hi everyone thank you so much for your responses this past week—it seems like many of us hope for more long-lasting
1271 mutually-prioritized and/or consistent relations with others although there may be some difficult barriers to achieving
1272 these while others discussed how expectations for a relationship can be wrongly assumed or uncomfortable being
1273 honest about and still others felt generally satisfied with where they are now. It could also be difficult to find certain
1274 types of people that would work for a specific need for connection.
1275

1276 Zooming out a bit our last prompt for y'all before our holiday break is focused on your aspirations for the aspec
1277 community as a whole. We'll first talk about an "ideal" future and then something that feels more realistic.
1278

- 1279 (1) Imagine that in a parallel universe the aspec community is in in your eyes the best position it could be in
1280 in relation to broader society. What does that look like for you? You might for example discuss matters of
1281 community visibility attitudes toward the community lessons learned from the community etc.
1282 (2) Imagine that it is 10 years later and the aspec community has achieved in your eyes a realistic better position
1283 for itself in broader society. What does this look like for you?
1284 (3) What paths do you see to get closer to this more realistic future and what barriers still exist? Finally how are
1285 these paths and barriers shaped by the social platforms you use and their features if at all?
1286

1287 **A.6 Prompt 6**

1288 Happy new year everyone! We're excited to be back and really looking forward to seeing what comes out of this next
1289 phase of the study. We'll use the rest of our time to brainstorm and refine ideas together for how technology can best
1290 support aspec communities' abilities to form the kinds of relationships we wish for. While technology isn't everything I
1291 believe it is one of many important ways in which our interactions with each other are structured and mediated. We
1292 hope that this study can serve as a space to really explore what it would mean for technologies to support aspec goals
1293 and desires. We're starting off with a really open prompt. Thinking about what we've discussed so far **what to you**
1294

**1301 would be the most meaningful new technology to come into existence for you to better find or build the
 1302 types of relationships you want?** In other words if you were able to magically make a piece of technology instantly
 1303 appear right now to make your life easier in this regard—what would it look like? This could be a new online platform
 1304 but it could also be an extension or modification of existing platforms or something that isn't an online platform at all
 1305 such as a physical device.

1306 We will spend a full week on this prompt to give you time to really think about it and reflect on what would be
1307 meaningful to you.

1308 To communicate your ideas please refer to the “prototyping introduction” message in [reproduced in Section A.11]
1309 for details on how to respond to this prompt which will be the format we will use for the rest of the prompts in this
1310 study!

A.7 Prompt 7

1311 Thank you so much for all of your engagement with the last prompt—we loved hearing all the creative ways you would
1312 design technology to be meaningful to your lives!

1313 Some of you acknowledged barriers that might get in the way if these designs were deployed in real life and we
1314 want to dig into these barriers more. For this prompt we will brainstorm possible barriers that would affect our ideas
1315 and we'll later iterate on our designs in the second half of the week to try to mitigate these barriers.

1316 What kinds of barriers do you anticipate would affect the ideas you proposed? Some ideas to get you started:

- 1317** • Thinking back to the (in)visibility stigma stereotyping and structural disadvantages aspec people face that you
1318 all discussed previously how would you anticipate this prototype interacting with a broader allo world?.
- 1319** • What barriers did you observe from the platforms that currently exist which could come up here?
- 1320** • What kinds of people would be drawn to use your prototype and what abilities routines or expectations are
1321 they coming in with?
- 1322** • What barriers would prevent your prototype from staying functional/useful long-term?

1323 We would again love for you to build off of each other's ideas and to make this easier we wanted to highlight which
1324 of you seemed to be going in a similar direction and could therefore be in conversation with each other:

- 1325** • Having more casual interactions before “dating”: [REDACTED]
- 1326** • Better identification of compatibility: [REDACTED]
- 1327** • Support for having conversation and/or dating: [REDACTED]
- 1328** • Establishing intent: [REDACTED]
- 1329** • Providing other ways to express yourself on dating apps and/or de-emphasizing photos: [REDACTED]
- 1330** • Getting rid of “swiping”: [REDACTED]
- 1331** • Adding Aspec identities and/or intentions: [REDACTED]
- 1332** • Searching for communities: [REDACTED]
- 1333** • Togetherness when we're far away from each other: [REDACTED]
- 1334** • Coordinating time together: [REDACTED]

A.8 Prompt 8

1340 Now that everyone has shared barriers they see affecting their prototypes we would like y'all to think about how you
1341 could potentially adjust for these barriers and iterate on your prototypes accordingly.

1353 Your lived experiences will of course be a great guide for what would and wouldn't work; to help you with this
1354 step we have also summarized below the barriers y'all mentioned and some possible solutions mentioned by other
1355 participants that could provide inspiration. Some of these may be in opposition with each other as well—if it seems like
1356 you are making a trade-off in your re-design of your prototype please share your thinking on that and why you landed
1357 on your final choice.
1358

- 1360 • **Barrier: keeping the platform culture and expectations useful to aspec users not getting taken over
1361 by allo priorities.**
 - 1363 – Possible solution: integrating moderation into the design (how to do this sustainably?).
 - 1364 – Possible solution: incorporating educational features for allo users (e.g. informational workshops linking
1365 educational resources in the app or having a space to explain your own interpretation of your identity).
 - 1366 – Possible solution: restricting the app to only aspec users.
- 1368 • **Barrier: preventing harassment discrimination and deception using the feature.**
 - 1370 – Possible solution: preventing your profile from being seen by certain kinds of people (how does this play
1371 into discrimination itself?).
 - 1372 – Possible solution: integrating moderation into the design (how to do this sustainably?).
- 1373 • **Barrier: making users comfortable enough to use the feature when it can make you uncomfortably
1374 vulnerable (such as expressing your honest desires or interacting with a lot of strangers).**
- 1376 • **Barrier: forgetting about the feature struggling with checking the app regularly and/or having
1377 inconsistent access to the internet.**
 - 1378 – Possible solution: designing with the expectation of less frequent interaction like once a day or once a
1379 week.
 - 1381 – Possible solution: including a variety of notification options to opt in to (such as Duolingo's notifications).
- 1382 • **Barrier: difficulty getting people to use the feature the feature being effort-intensive.**
 - 1383 – Possible solution: creating incentivizes for feature use such as increasing the visibility of their post/profile.
 - 1384 – Possible solution: designing with the expectation that the feature won't always be used.
- 1386 • **Barrier: not gaining enough traction having too few people (especially aspec people).**
 - 1387 – Possible solution: making accessibility considerations to ensure more people can use the app (e.g. accounting
1388 for disability low tech literacy etc.).
 - 1389 – Possible solution: creating a plug-in/extension that works with existing platforms.
 - 1390 – Possible solution: accommodating for/appealing to allos with similar needs on top of aspec users.
- 1392 • **Barrier: accommodating the variety of aspec labels and categories and properties of groups which
1393 are subjective and can evolve and change over time.**
 - 1395 – Possible solution: having users write in their own labels instead of sticking to a pre-defined list (how would
1396 this information be used in a way that is resilient against empty or unintelligible answers?).
 - 1397 – Possible solution: continually getting feedback on and updating the design over time.

1400 A.9 Prompt 9

1401 Thank you all for your thoughtful reflections this past week on the potential barriers that your ideas could run into if
1402 implemented.
1403

1405 For this prompt we want to tease out more about what is important to you to preserve the spirit of your idea. Imagine
 1406 that you have 1000000 tokens representing resources that you would allocate towards making your technology resilient
 1407 in the face of systemic and social pressures over time. How would you “spend” these tokens and why? To focus on
 1408 what we want to see in the world you can assume that your idea already exists has a substantial user base and lacks
 1409 responsibilities to funders.
 1410

1411 If you’re unsure how this question applies to your idea you can think back to the original desires you had that
 1412 prompted your idea and the barriers you anticipated for the technology.
 1413

1414 **A.10 Prompt 10**

1415 We’ve done a lot of reflecting on what technologies would be meaningful to us what barriers we anticipate would
 1416 complicate their creation and what aspects are most essential to prioritize for its success over time. Before that we had
 1417 a lot of great discussion on what is and isn’t working in the current tech landscape for our relationship-related goals.
 1418

1419 For this last prompt we would like you to take the time to update your prototype based on the new ideas barriers
 1420 and other considerations you’ve talked about—we would like to see your visual prototype again here!—and share any
 1421 reflections you have at the end of this study considering the thoughts you and others shared from the beginning up
 1422 until now! If you find you prefer someone else’s prototype over your own at this point you may share your version of
 1423 that idea instead.
 1424

1425 **A.11 Prototyping Instructions**

1426 *Prototyping Instructions.* To communicate your ideas, we would like everyone to respond with an unpolished visual
 1427 “prototype” of your idea, alongside a description of the prototype that further explains your idea. This will serve solely
 1428 to help communicate what your idea is—it needs to be understandable, but it can and should be rough! You’re free to
 1429 use whatever medium is comfortable, including photoshop, drawing, arts & crafts, etc. Attached are some examples.
 1430

1431 Your idea doesn’t have to be limited to an app or website—other formats could include...

- 1432 • An extension for (or modification of) existing platforms such as dating apps, social media, forums, messaging
 1433 platforms, games, etc.
- 1434 • An “extension” of real-world relationship finding or analog forms of communication
- 1435 • A physical device
- 1436 • A virtual reality or augmented reality application

1437 For the sake of this study, we would like this idea to fall under the umbrella of technology, but we acknowledge
 1438 that these challenges might not always need to be addressed with technology. If you have other thoughts to add about
 1439 addressing this prompt, we would still love to hear them, and I’m sure others here would appreciate them as well!
 1440

1441 *Giving Feedback.* We would also love for y’all to share your thoughts on others’ ideas too. To focus on constructive
 1442 feedback, we would like this to take the form of either:
 1443

- 1444 • “yes, and” - I like what’s here, but I want to improve on it or add something crucial
- 1445 • “I’m concerned about” - I like some of this, but I worry it will do X accidentally, or open us up to the possibility
 1446 of Y

1447 *Examples.*

- 1448 • https://www.researchgate.net/figure/PROTEUS-with-a-low-fidelity-prototype-view_fig2_236678650

- 1457 • https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https://conceptboard.com/wp-content/uploads/Blog_Header_Prototype.png&tbnid=oa0zRifjNPGA-M&vet=1&imgrefurl=https://conceptboard.com/blog/low-fidelity-prototyping-tool-conceptboard/&docid=kGWC0CBPOwYW_M&w=1200&h=840&source=sh/x/im/m1/1&kgs=ae83147c6bd1d61e

1461
1462
1463 **B CODE OF CONDUCT**

1464 All posts and interactions in the research Slack must adhere to the following code of conduct. Violations of this code of
1465 conduct will be dealt with according to our moderation guidelines, which are located at the end of the code of conduct
1466 and may result in you being withdrawn from the study with repeated or severe offenses.

1467 **You Know You, I Know Me** - Try not to make assumptions about others. When speaking, please try to use "I"
1468 statements and avoid making generalizations or applying your own ideals to others.

1469 **What Happens Here, Stays Here** - Though you are welcome to share your own experiences and feelings about
1470 the study with others, **you must refrain from repeating other participants' stories, names, likenesses, etc., outside of the group. Doing so will cause you to be withdrawn immediately from the study without any further compensation.** We want to ensure that this space is as safe an environment as possible. Please help us protect
1471 everyone's privacy and keep the contents and members of the research group confidential.

1472 **Challenge the Idea, Not the Person** - People have a lot of different opinions - and that's great! Disagreement
1473 about different priorities is good, and some of what we are trying to learn about here is how different people want to
1474 balance those priorities. However, we want to keep the discussion centered on those opinions, not the people that have
1475 them. If you disagree with an opinion, say so - but don't insult the opinion, and don't attack the person.

1476 **Don't Yuck My Yum** - Folks here have different tastes and preferences, so avoid antagonizing language like "I hate
1477 that" or "ew." Likewise, folks have different traumas and triggers, so avoid language that belittles or trivializes their
1478 experiences.

1479 When you send messages, you should refrain from posting content or language that you feel is not appropriate to be
1480 shared with the study audience; however, readers should recognize that others' thoughts and experiences may contain
1481 content or language which is upsetting to them, and take breaks as needed.

1482 **Talk It Out** - If something offensive, problematic, or hurtful is said or done in the group, we want to be able to
1483 maturely talk it out. If this situation arises and you feel emotionally well-regulated, we suggest creating a thread to
1484 directly discuss your reaction with the other participant and reach an understanding. Otherwise, we suggest taking a
1485 step back from the conversation before engaging again. If you have a strong reaction to another participant's messages
1486 and need a space to process this, you may also DM one of the study team members to talk through it and figure out
1487 how to best approach the situation.

1488 **Harassment** - We are dedicated to providing a harassment-free experience for everyone. **We do not tolerate harassment of participants in any form, nor any abuse directed towards the research team members.**
1489 **Participants violating these rules may be removed from the study at the discretion of the study staff.** If you
1490 feel harassed by another participant and are comfortable identifying yourself, DM one of the study team members. If you
1491 wish to report anonymously, use the form in the help channel, which will send an anonymous report to our moderators.
1492 Harassment includes, but is not limited to: Comments that target other participants based on characteristics such as
1493 gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age, ability status, physical appearance, body
1494 size, or religion. Deliberate intimidation, stalking, or following Unwelcome personal attention Persistent, unwanted
1495 attempts to contact another study member Advocating for or encouraging any of the above behavior

1509 Do Not DM Participants – Feel free to direct message the study staff with any concerns at any point, but refrain
1510 from direct messaging your fellow participants or encouraging them to do so. This is because we want to ensure that
1511 the research environment is civil and safe for everyone, and we will not be able to moderate DMs. DMing, especially
1512 without prior permission, will be considered harassment.
1513

1514 Keep Your Information Private – This is a project where you will talk to many people, but it's crucial you keep
1515 your personal information safe when doing so. **1516 Don't post anything that would help others identify your home**
1517 **or work neighborhood, your bank account, or driver's license, or that of another participant.** This includes
1518 not revealing your full name in the research Slack, either in discussions or when filling out your profile. Similarly, do
1519 not provide details regarding your phone number, job title, or any other contact information in your profile. Do not
1520 upload photos of yourself for your profile picture – keep it abstract, or use one of the images we provide.
1521

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