

# Dating, Relationships, and Sex on the Autism Spectrum

ACE Conference  
May 27th, 12:00p

Kayla Rodriguez & Spenser Norris



## Getting to know Kayla...

Kayla Rodriguez is Puerto Rican and was diagnosed with Aspergers when she was a child, but she prefers to identify as autistic. Kayla is originally from New York but currently resides in Buford, Georgia. After high school, she made connections with autistic self-advocates and realized advocacy was her calling. She joined Autistic Self-Advocacy Atlanta and she learned advocacy in the Bobby Dodd Institute Ambassador Program, the GaLEND (Georgia Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities) program and the My Voice My Participation My Board program.

Kayla is very talented in writing and speaking and she has spoken in several panels and she won the Golden Goal Goldie Award for Young Community Advocate and the Bobby Dodd Institute Empowers Luminaries Award. She has just finished her first ever work experience, which was a paid internship at GCDD (Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities) and is currently figuring out her next step. In addition to advocating for autistic people and people with disabilities, she plans to advocate for Latinx rights, diabetes healthcare, mental health and sexual assault survivors in the future. In her free time, Kayla loves to play video games, watch movies especially animated ones, and hang out with her friends.





# Getting to know Spenser...

Spenser Norris is the Inclusive Employment Coordinator for the Inclusive Digital Expression and Literacy (IDEAL) at Georgia State University, an inclusive college program for students with intellectual disabilities.

She has been working with the IDEAL since January 2017 and accepted a full-time staff position at Georgia State University's Center for Leadership in Disability in June 2017.

Spenser is a certified Georgia special educator, clinical rehabilitation counselor, and focuses most of her work on: inclusive postsecondary education, supporting folks with disabilities to find meaningful career opportunities, systems level advocacy and mental health and sexual health education and wellness.



# Introduction to the spectrum of sexuality

<https://neuroclastic.com/2019/07/30/an-introduction-to-neuroqueer-theory/> -NeuroClastic article on autistic and LGBTQIA+ identity

<https://neuroclastic.com/2019/10/19/life-between-two-spectrums-autism-gender-queerness-and-why-it-shouldnt-be-ignored/> - NeuroClastic article about autism and being queer



# Introduction to Autism...

What do neurotypical people expect from Autism?

How might that affect dating and relationships?

What is the “image” that comes to your mind when you think of Autism?

What does the media show you about Autism?

# What do autistic people say? What do autistic people want from relationships?

1. Hope for authenticity
2. Need kindness, interest, commitment
3. Are less interested in “hook-ups”,
- 4.
- 5.
6. Its mostly the same!



# Barriers Autistic People Face to Dating

- Societal Expectations, Assumptions, Stereotypes, Ableism
  - Assumption of sexuality, gender, ability, etc to participate in relationships and sex
  - lack of social coaching services related to relationships and dating
- Heavy reliance on social cues and nonverbal communication in dating world
- Lots of “reading between the lines”
- Lack of understanding in expectations in relationship and sex education
- Lack of “safe spaces” or unawareness of safe spaces where people can meet in a more authentic and reliable, “safe” setting
- Lack of extensive social groups and support networks of “wing men and women” who can act as social coaches and peers
- People’s intentions aren’t tangible and able to be seen.



# Current dating trends

- Online dating
  - reading intentions and social queues through online platforms is difficult
  - Lots of slang, generational terms, nuance
    - nudes and hook-up culture
    - Ghosting, catfishing, etc.
- Bars, Large Events, Parties
  - not sensory friendly - loud noises
  - hard to initiate conversation especially with strangers





# Multiple Marginalized Identities

Research shows - ASD more likely to be trans, nonbinary, etc  
Ableism in LGBTQIA+ communities  
Homophobia, Transphobia in Disability



# Autism and Healthcare

<https://autisticadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Real-Talk-Improving-Quality-of-Sexual-Health-Care-for-Patients-with-Disabilities.pdf> - ASAN discussing improving sexual health care for people with disabilities



# What's happening in Atlanta?

Compassionate Atlanta + SOJOURN + Global Ubuntu

ASAA

Southern Fried Queer Pride