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Sex and Relationships Autistic Women

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Autism, Gender & Sexuality: Another Spectrum

- Possible higher % in autistic population:
 - Non-heterosexual
 - Non-binary
 - Transgender
 - Gender neutral
 - Asexual
- Sexuality & Gender ID are a spectrum
 - Not binary, not black and white
 - Many individual needs and choices
- Attempting to fit the binary norm can cause:
 - Confusion
 - Frustration
 - Mental health – anxiety, depression, self-harm, suicide



If you can't find the box that you fit in: Make a new box

Autism & Gender ID

- Does not necessarily relate to biological sex/gender, sexuality or presentation
- 'I'm just me'
 - Less sense of social gender?
- Brain development
 - Hormonal differences?
 - Testosterone / androgens (Baron-Cohen)
 - Research: more androgynous hormone profile – neither male or female
- Sense of self
 - Developed through others
 - Less/differently developed in autistic people?



Autism & Gender Presentation

- Does not necessarily relate to biological sex/gender, gender ID or sexuality
- Societal influence + hormonal profile/neurological profile =
- Atypical gender presentation
 - ‘Tomboy’ females
 - Androgynous
 - Sensory / comfort
- Non-gender typical interests
- Societal construct of gender
 - Less societal awareness
 - Less societal/peer influence
 - Smaller data input
 - Independent choices



The 'Shoulds'

- It's what everyone else does
- It is what I am supposed to do
- If I have a partner, I will be normal
- I should enjoy sex
- I should like to cuddle
- I should miss my partner
- I should want children



Safe Sex

- Early starters?
 - Grateful
 - If they want to have sex with me, they must like me
 - Sign of acceptance
 - 'Thought it was what you were supposed to do'
- Vulnerable
 - Borderline consensual/abusive encounters
 - Unable to read signals
 - Unable to spot hidden agendas
 - Fewer friends to help recognise sexual predators
- Promiscuous behaviour (Attwood, Henault)
 - Poor personal boundaries
 - Wanting acceptance
 - Wanting sex because its nice



Logic and Love

- Different motivation for choice of partner
 - ‘he/she gets me’
 - ‘he/she looks after me. I can’t manage on my own’
 - ‘love’ or gym equipment (Hendrickx)
- Pragmatic/Logical
 - Sex as tangible sign of approval/love
 - Sex as tangible, physical feeling of connection
 - Sex as separate from intimacy for some
 - Different monogamy perspective for some



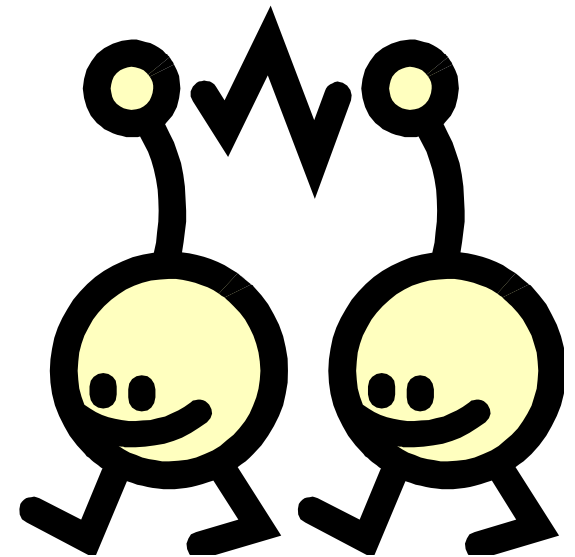
Love is Hard

- Can't play the game
 - Blunt, straight-forward
 - Can't flirt
 - Expect same from others
- Personas
 - Public performance
 - Can't keep up indefinitely
- Sensory issues
 - Touch, smell and noise
 - Positive & negative
- Person as Special Interest
 - Revenge
 - Stalking



The Perfect Relationship

- 'Me in the preferred gender' – often also autistic / neuro-diverse
- Direct – no mind games / hidden agendas
- Person is focus of intense interest
- Small social world: 1:1 interaction (not groups)
- Not constant interaction (text, FB etc.)
- Plenty of silence
- Online / non face to face
- Shares interests
- Useful – helps / makes life easier
- Meets physical needs – whatever they are
- Low (emotional) maintenance
- Social bodyguard



Autistic Relationships

- Many people with autism have or desire personal and/or physical relationships
- Most fit within 'typical' format

BUT SOME:

- May be unconventional
- Live apart
- Polygamous/polyamorous
- Different language/culture
- Non-physical/sexual)
- Physical only
- Based on shared interests
- Virtual
- Paid for (escorts)



Love in an Autistic World

- 'More obsessional and stalky at first, then more disinterested over time'
- 'Wanting to spend time with someone every day without gouging my own eyes out'
- 'I've never met anyone who irritates me less than he does'
- 'I love unconditionally, was naive, trusting - used.. did not know, how to think of myself - stopped, after - death threats - not getting involved again!'
- 'Love is about actions, not feelings. Feelings are transient, unpredictable and irrational. When you love someone, you treat them well and look after them and listen to them - it's in the doing'
- 'Being in a bubble with this one person who feels like an extension of yourself. It takes no effort to be with them, whilst it takes SO much effort to be with anyone else on the planet'

Supporting Autistic Women

- *Teach autistic women never to compare themselves to non-autistic women*
- Women only autistic support/peer groups
- Online forums – sharing experiences
- Specialist autism sexual health and awareness
- Mentoring from non-autistic women – navigating the world
- Teach the rules explicitly – regardless of intellectual level
- Self-respect and self-acceptance
- Being aware of the ‘shoulds’
- Awareness of difficulties with boundaries – support in recognising own limits