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Autistic individuals' sexual experiences

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Background to research

- Overrepresentation of autistic individuals in CJS
- Formulations of autistic individuals' sexual offending
- Tropes of autistic individuals being asexual or sexually deviant
- Experience challenges forming and maintaining sexual relationships
- Inadequate/inaccessible SRE and lack of guidance
- Limited research autistic without learning disability

Aim of research

1. Exploring autistic individuals' sexual experiences, knowledge and behaviours
2. Improving sex education and support, in turn better sexual experiences
3. Improving NTs understanding/addressing stereotypes/stigma

Study One

Quantitative online survey – AQ10 (Allison, et al. 2012), LDSQ (McKenzie, et al. 2015), SBS III (Hancock, 2017)

- 127 responses
 - All adults
 - 17 removed

Autistic

Y – 82
N – 25
Unknown – 3

- Sexual Behaviour Scale III
 - Privacy
 - Sexual education
 - Sexual behaviour
 - My concerns



Study One

	Gender	Age
Autistic	M – 23, F – 42, Trans – 15	18 – 62yo (29yo)
NT	M – 4, F – 20, Trans - 1	18 – 56yo (19 + 20yo)

- Comparing Autistic and NT
 - **More worried sexual behaviour misunderstood + be taken advantage of**
 - Less interested in/think about sex
 - Same level of anxiety/worry
 - Less pain/discomfort
 - **More had first sexual exp. under 10yo/over 18yo**
 - Similar figures re: sex regret, didn't want to
 - **More thought someone attracted to them but told being friendly**
 - **More spoken to others about sexual topics they got upset/angry**
 - Similar self-report levels of sexual knowledge + wanting to know more
 - **Found understanding sex. ed. more difficult**

Factor analysis to be done on scales

Study Two

Interest in participating	Contacted	Response
37/82	22/37	Y – 5, N – 3, N/A – 14

Qualitative interviews with VARGT (Wheatley, 2019)

- Consent and ISB
- Language and social cues
- Sensory needs
- Nature of sex education

Thematic analysis to be done
Idiogrid analysis to be done

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Good self-worth	Person I don't like	Self-future Person I like	Offender Manager	Ex-intimate	Self-now Parent/carer	Alleged victim	Self-past Stalker	Low self worth
Connected to others	Alleged victim	Person I like Ex-intimate	Self-future	Self-now	Offender Manager Person I don't like	Self-past	Parent/ carer Stalker	Lonely; isolated
Realist								Fantastist
Trusting								Guarded
Faith in self								Self-doubting



Consent and ISB

- “kind of taking advantage of stuff and ‘Ohh, I'm gonna talk you into this’ and you know ‘you should do this for this reason’. And that's a really difficult one to kind of pin down because people like, ‘oh, they’re taking advantage of you’ and I’m like, ‘well, yes. But I really liked them at the time’ and at the time wanted to do it. And then afterwards your like, did I actually want to have done that, you know? Unfortunately that's a recurring one” (Participant One)
- “Which is bizarre because I can go to these [fetish] clubs and walk around pretty much naked and not worry about inappropriate sexual behaviour. But if I were to go to a nightclub, I could guarantee that there I will probably be groped by about 6 different people. Even if I was wearing something that is quite modest.” (Participant One)

Consent and ISB

- “Sometimes I'd send pictures myself to them, like not, not like with any indication. Most the time it was, it was fine. And even if it wasn't, I just like, I just apologized. Said ‘look, sorry. Shouldn't have done that’. And that's kind of a mistake that I made...there's a lot of stuff has to be explicitly explained when you're autistic” (Participant Two)
- “she had a boyfriend. They broke up. She came into the house crying and she started to kiss me and it's all very uncomfortable, but I don't really know what to say. No. So it was very uncomfortable situation. You know, we didn't fully sleep together... And it was very uncomfortable situation that I was in that I really did not know what to do with it” (Participant Two)

Language and social cues

- “I’ve had a lot of times that people have gone ‘they’re into you’ and I’ve gone ‘no, no they’re not’. And they’re like ‘yeah, they are!’ And then the opposite where I’m like, ‘I’m really into them’ and they’re like ‘then don’t do that because you’re not telling them’... crossing the line too often, have been too forward and too strong on people that’s freaked them out. And then I went completely the other way... no idea how to tell them. How to initiate that without stretching into the inappropriate” (Participant One)

Language and social cues

- “unless someone's explicitly saying to me “I like you”, then I'm not gonna take it any other way really. And I think that's a healthy way and I think it's something neurotypical people could learn from” (Participant Two)
- “overcomplication that neurotypical people tend to do. They tend to think, ‘Oh well, it if he if he looks at you this way, this means this, but it might not mean that it might mean this.’ Where it's like you could just ask them and could be very cut and dry about it” (Participant Two)

Language and social cues

- “I have been told so many times over the years that somebody is flirting with me and I'm like, ‘really?’ and then other times and somebody tells me that I'm flirting with somebody and I'm like, ‘am I?’ I was just having a nice conversation with somebody and apparently to other people, it looked like flirting. And I'm like, ‘I don't know what that is’. And if somebody said go and flirt with that person, I wouldn't even have the foggiest clue what to do” (Participant Three)
- “sometimes things I said weren't quote-quote ‘appropriate’, but the way they were explained to me wasn't either. It was kind of like ‘ohh you said this thing that was wrong’. OK, but what was wrong about it? They didn't. They never explained that. They just kind of expected me to know.” (Participant Two)

Sensory needs

- “I've a sensory issue around body hair. I think I made that known to the person and they didn't kind of shave...And so I just kind of. That made me feel uncomfortable. I was kind of like ‘this person, didn't kinda respect this kind of boundary’ I felt awkward” (Participant Two)
- “Well with the kissing, the problem is too sensations, moisture. I don't do well with moisture.... And I think kissing people, it's just very yeah, very wet” (Participant One)
- “Think it's a lot of the sensation stuff as well. It's, you know, being hypersensitive in some areas being under sensitive in other areas” (Participant One)

Nature of sex education

- “I look at TV shows. Like Love on the Spectrum that their like relationship counsellors. The fact that they're neurotypical uh, I find that to be kind of incredibly patronizing. It's like, ‘ohh, this is the way, *the* way you do it’ whereas, like, no, you you need to find a healthy way of doing it as an autistic person. So it should really be an autistic person, quote-quote ‘teaching’ it if such a class is deemed appropriate” (Participant Two)
- “So we did sex education first year of secondary school when that was a thing and we did it as part of biology....Went straight home, burst into tears... ‘sounds like it’s horrible I don’t like any of this’ (Participant Three)

Next steps of my research

- Statistical analysis of Study One
- Continue Study Two data collection
- Analysis of Study Two
- Design Study Three – ideas welcome!
- Continue writing literature review and reflections



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