

# hendrickx associates

training. consultancy. support.

Tel: 01903 231571

## Developing Social and Personal Relationships - from childhood friendships to complex adult interactions

Sarah Hendrickx

'I feel like I have a different operating system and a very good emulator running on top of it. The few people I tell are shocked to find I'm autistic. I can fit in, I can behave like others up to a point, but it isn't me and doesn't fulfil anything within me. It's empty and meaningless.'

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## Social World of Girls

- Girls talk more than boys
  - Precocious and early speech (Hendrickx, 2014)
  - Masks underlying lack of social understanding
- Mimicry and copying
  - Accents
  - Clothes
  - Mannerisms
- 'Little Psychologist'
  - Studies people
  - Emulates - Lianne Holliday-Willey - 'became the person'
- 'Shy'
  - Silence masks lack of social understanding
  - Doesn't cause any trouble - slips under the radar



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## Social World of Girls

- Imagination
  - Fantasy worlds
  - Take on persona of animals/characters
  - Difficult to separate fantasy/reality
  - Seen as 'weird'
- Activity Choice
  - Reading
  - Construction
  - Collecting
  - Colouring, drawing
  - Animals and bugs
- Peer relationships
  - 'Tomboy'
  - Other girls 'mother' and lead
  - Can be bossy
  - Can be passive



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## Teenage Years

- 'Worst years of my life'
- 'Peering in from the outside'
- 'Tried to fit in; failed'
- Fashion /Trends
  - Tried and failed
  - Imitating peers
  - Don't understand the rules
  - Don't understand the point
- Puberty
  - Physical and emotional changes
  - Hygiene and self care
  - No one to talk to
  - Needs to be taught the rules



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## Teenage Years

- Female Peers Paradox:
  - I don't like them
  - I want to be me
  - I want to be accepted by them
- 'Girls in real life are not something I enjoy being near, especially loud, squealy, hair-and-makeup high-schoolers.'
- 'I hated the typical teenage girl behaviour with a fiery passion, and frankly, still do.'
- 'I was a tomboy, did not get into makeup but wished I could be more like the other girls. I loved motorbikes, got one and learned how to take it apart and fix it.'



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## Adult Life

- '*Little psychologist*'
  - lifetime work studying people
  - *It never becomes entirely fluent*
- Societal expectations of women
  - 'Socially and emotionally driven'
  - 'Feminine' behaviour
  - 'Good at small talk'
  - 'Good at facial recognition'
  - *Fail!*
- Friendship expectations
  - Female peers still difficult (as in teens)
  - Interim contact between activities expected
  - Emotional support expected
  - Interest in trivial topics expected



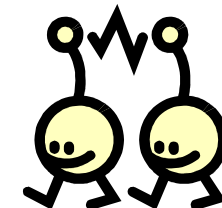
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## The Perfect Partner/Friend

- Someone just like me
  - Male or AS female as friend
  - AS person as partner
  - Someone generally 'odd'
- 1:1 interaction (not groups)
- Activity based interaction
- Time limited interaction
- Limited requirement for intuitive empathy
- Accepts for yourself
- Valued for knowledge
- Meets physical needs (or lack of)



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## Friendship & Relationship Stuff

- No game-playing
  - Blunt, straight-forward
  - Expect same from others
- Personas
  - Can't keep up indefinitely
    - Work colleagues – all day every day
- Sensory issues
  - Touch, smell and noise
  - Positive & negative
- Sexual Offences
  - Stalking, inappropriate behaviour, revenge
- Cannot read interest (or lack of)



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## Personal Relationships

- 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
- Reported higher numbers (than in gen pop):
  - Homosexuality
  - Bi-sexuality
  - Asexuality
  - Transgender
  - Gender identity disorder/confusion



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## Relationship Stuff

- Early starters?
  - Grateful
  - 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 sometimes seen (Attwood, Henault)
  - Poor personal boundaries
  - Wanting acceptance
  - Wanting sex



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## Supporting Women on the Autistic Spectrum

- *Teach women with ASD never to compare themselves to NT women*
- Women only ASD support/peer groups
- Online forums – sharing experiences
- Specialist ASD sexual health and awareness
- Mentoring from NT women – navigating the NT world
- Teach the rules explicitly – regardless of intellectual level
- Self-respect and self-acceptance
- Awareness of difficulties with boundaries – support in recognising own limits
- Reading women focused ASD information:
  - Tony Attwood, Lianne Holliday-Willey, Rudy Simone, Robyn Steward, Shana Nichols
  - 'Women and Girls on the Autism Spectrum' (Hendrickx, 2015)!

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