Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy)

2016

Perceptions of Healthy and Unhealthy Romantic Relationships: A Comparison of Typically Developing Adolescents and Individuals with a Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Lucy Wilding

Student number: 0600854

Part 1: Major Literature Review

Part 2: Major Research Journal Article

Part 3: Major Research Reflective Account

Abstract

Individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may be vulnerable to experiencing unhealthy relationships due to specific individual differences, different opportunities and experiences or, in line with an ecological perspective, a combination of both. The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of individuals with ASD, with regards to healthy and unhealthy relationships, and to examine the learning sources considered most valuable to them. Participants included 11 adolescents with ASD and a comparison group of 13 typically developing individuals. Participants completed the Attitudes towards Dating Violence Scales (Price et al., 1999) and were interviewed using an adaptation of the Ideal Self technique (Moran, 2001). Thematic analysis indicated a number of similarities between participants. Individuals with ASD, however, were more likely to discuss the following: direct behaviours within unhealthy relationships; concrete rules to guide expectations; a need for sameness; and the influence of formal learning opportunities. Implications for sex and relationship education are discussed and the role of educational psychologists is highlighted.

Summary

This thesis contains three parts: a literature review; an empirical study; and a reflective account. Part 1 provides a definition of partner violence (PV) and highlights the relevance of this issue to children, young people, schools and educational psychologists (EPs). This is followed by an overview of relevant theories, regarding the aetiology of PV, which closes with a justification of the value of considering this topic from an ecological perspective.

The literature review then discusses individual differences associated with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), which may result in greater vulnerability to unhealthy relationships. Drawing upon an ecological framework, the impact of other systems on an individual's understanding of relationships is considered. In particular, opportunities for social learning and sex and relationship education (SRE) are discussed. Gaps within the existing research base are highlighted and the value of further research is emphasised. Finally, the aims of the current study are introduced and the key research questions are presented.

In Part 2, a review of the literature leads into a mixed methods study which aimed to compare typically developing adolescents' perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships, to individuals with a diagnosis of ASD. The study also aimed to explore the learning sources considered most valuable to young people. Quantitative and qualitative results are reviewed in relation to previous studies and relevant theories. Implications for developments and extensions of SRE are discussed and the role of EPs within this process is highlighted. Finally, directions for future research are suggested.

Part 3 provides a critical account of the development of the research and research practitioner, as well as the underpinning ontological and epistemological positions and associated methodological decisions. This section also discusses implications of the study, limitations of the results and directions for future research.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of the young people who participated in this study. I appreciate your time and admire your courage in sharing your thoughts and feelings so openly. I also need to thank the members of staff in the participating schools for their support throughout the study and for making this research possible.

I would like to extend my gratitude to my research supervisor, Simon Claridge, for his guidance. Your advice has always been greatly valued and your positivity has kept me motivated throughout this research. I would also like to thank my fellow trainees for their support and sense of humour, even at the most challenging of times.

Thank you to all of my family and friends for their continuous support - I am looking forward to spending a lot more time with you all! Special thanks should be given to my mum, who has always been a huge source of encouragement and positivity. Finally, thank you to my partner, Sam Wilkinson – I could not have completed the training or this thesis without your patience, understanding and unwavering belief in me.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

ADVSs	Attitudes towards Dating Violence Scales
ASD	Autism spectrum disorder
DSM-V	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual – Fifth Edition
EP	Educational psychologist
PV	Partner violence
SRE	Sex and relationship education
TD	Typically developing
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

Part 1: Major Literature Review

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of the Literature Review

The following literature review provides a definition of partner violence (PV) and highlights the relevance of this issue to children, young people, schools and educational psychologists (EPs). This is followed by an overview of a number of relevant theoretical perspectives regarding the aetiology of PV: personality theories; sociocultural and gendered perspectives; social learning theories; and ecological theories. This section concludes with a rationale for considering adolescents' relationships from an ecological perspective.

Following this, the literature review discusses individual differences associated with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), which may result in these individuals being more vulnerable to using and/or experiencing unhealthy behaviours within relationships. This may include behaviours associated with PV. Drawing upon an ecological framework, however, the impact of other systems on an individual's understanding of relationships is considered. In particular, opportunities for social learning and sex and relationship education (SRE), within mainstream and specialist provisions, are discussed.

To conclude, gaps within the existing research base are highlighted and the value of further research, and its relevance to EPs, is emphasised. The aims of the current study are introduced and the key research questions are presented.

1.2 Description of Key Sources

The literature was reviewed using a number of online sources: PsychInfo, Google Scholar, British Educational Index (BEI), the Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and Web of Science. Titles and abstracts of articles, published in English, were searched using combinations of keywords: "partner", "dating", "abuse", "violence", "physical", "psychological", "sexual", "emotional", "autism spectrum disorder", "autism", "teenager", "adolescent", "relationships" and "education". Internet search engines were utilised to access relevant government documents. Searches were completed between December, 2014 and January, 2016.

2. Partner Violence

2.1 Definitions and Terminology Related to Partner Violence

In the US, the term dating violence has been adopted; however, in the UK, the term 'dating' is considered outdated, restrictive and unfamiliar to young people. Accordingly, the term partner violence (PV; Barter, 2009) will be employed throughout this literature review. PV is defined as "the occurrence of physically, sexually, and/or psychologically violent episodes in the intimate interpersonal relationship" (Herrman, 2009, p. 164).

Physical PV refers to the "intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing death, disability, injury, or harm" and may include pushing, grabbing, slapping, choking, scratching, burning or hair pulling (Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black & Mahendra, 2015, p. 11). Sexual PV refers to sexual acts that are attempted or committed without informed consent and includes both contact (e.g., intentional touching) and non-contact acts (e.g., spreading sexual rumours). It also includes tactics (e.g., intimidation or degradation) that may be employed to "coerce someone to engage in or be exposed to a sexual act" (Breiding et al., 2015, p. 13). Psychological PV refers to verbal and non-verbal communication, which intends to cause harm or exert control (e.g., name-calling, monitoring behaviour or stalking), as well as exploitation and "mind games" (Breiding et al., 2015, p. 15). It should be acknowledged that these definitions are brief and the examples provided are non-exhaustive; however, detailed descriptions of these categories can be found in Breiding et al.'s (2015) report.

This literature review focuses primarily upon the broader context of healthy and unhealthy relationships. Nevertheless, as discussed in greater detail throughout this review, the distinction between healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviours can be unclear; thus, the point at which behaviours should be considered to constitute PV is also ambiguous (Stokes, Newton & Kaur, 2007). Accordingly, it is deemed valuable to consider whether studies exploring more general perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships may also have useful implications for the topic of PV.

2.2 Relevance to Children, Young People, Schools and EPs

Within adolescent relationships, PV is acknowledged to be a common, growing and serious public health concern (e.g., Barter, 2009; Jouriles, Rosenfield, McDonald, Kleinsasser & Dodson, 2013; Hertzog & Rowley, 2014). In fact, adolescents are

reported to be at an elevated risk for both using and experiencing PV (e.g., Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Kim-Godwin, Clements, McCuiston, & Fox, 2009). As an example, Barter, McCarry, Berridge and Evans (2009) conducted a detailed study to explore young people's experiences of PV in the UK. A survey was completed by 1,353 young people (between 13 and 17 years of age, from eight schools in England, Scotland and Wales) and the following statistics were reported: 25% of girls and 18% of boys reported experiencing physical PV; nearly 75% of girls and 50% of boys reported experiencing emotional PV; and 1 in 3 girls and 16% of boys reported experiencing sexual PV.

The experience of PV has also been associated with a number of adverse social, emotional, health and educational outcomes: changes in body image; substance abuse; poorer mental health; decreased academic performance; increased likelihood of moving schools; and increased feelings of hopelessness (Banyard & Cross, 2008; Chronister, Marsiglio, Linville & Lantrip, 2014). Clearly, such issues are relevant to all professionals working with children and young people and, thus, PV within adolescent relationships really should be recognised as a "significant child welfare problem" in schools (Barter et al., 2009, p. 178). Moreover, Jennings, Higgins, Tewksbury, Gover and Piquero (2010) reported that, in the US, between 42% and 87% of PV occurs within school buildings or grounds; therefore, school may be a crucial context from which to explore and address PV (Chronister et al., 2014).

This implication is supported by the conclusions drawn from a recent 'Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales' (Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods [WISERD], 2015). This review reported that personal, social and health education was 1 of 3 most frequently cited subject areas that adult respondents (e.g., teachers, parents and governors) felt should be "enlarged and/or improved" (WISERD, 2015, p. 34). In addition, the importance of children and young people gaining an understanding of safe relationships in school was highlighted. Similarly, children and young people noted the importance of learning acceptable social behaviours in school (WISERD, 2015). Overall, therefore, this indicates that it is important for education staff and EPs to consider how pupils can be best supported to develop and maintain healthy relationships.

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives

The aetiology of PV has been considered from several theoretical perspectives: personality theories; sociocultural and gendered perspectives; social learning theories; and ecological theories. The following sections will provide an introduction to each perspective and highlight its relevance to PV within adolescent relationships. Subsequently, a rationale for considering PV from an ecological perspective will be provided. A detailed critique of such theories can be found in the following reviews: Dixon and Graham-Kevan (2011); and Dardis, Dixon, Edwards and Turchik (2015).

2.3.1 Personality theories.

Personality theories highlight how specific individual differences may contribute to the likelihood of a person perpetrating and/or experiencing PV (Renzetti, 1994; Sharpe & Taylor, 1999). PV is, thus, considered to exist "due to a profile of personality traits" found amongst perpetrators and victims (Dardis et al., 2015, p. 8). As examples, Dardis et al.'s (2015) review concluded that psychological distress and substance use/misuse are "fairly consistently" associated with the perpetration of PV. In addition, Dardis et al. (2015) describe specific individual differences which appear to have a differential relationship with male and female perpetration of PV. For instance, low empathy and other "antisocial personality features" have been more consistently associated with PV perpetration in men (p. 4).

Most frequently, personality theories draw support from relationships between personality and/or historical variables (e.g., psychopathology or attachment difficulties) and the occurrence of PV. Accordingly, it is important to question the causality of reported associations. In addition, although studying variables at the individual level offers parsimonious explanations of PV, this approach is reductionist and somewhat neglectful of interpersonal, contextual and societal variables (Dutton, 2006; Dardis et al., 2015). This focus on the individual may result in within-person hypotheses, to explain the occurrence of PV, and unhelpful assumptions regarding particular groups of individuals (Gougeon, 2010; Hartman, 2014). Disregarding the impact of other systems, within which the individual interacts, may, therefore, thwart the development of a holistic understanding of PV and, thus, limit opportunities for supporting adolescents more effectively (D'Amato, Crepeau-Hobson, Huang & Geil, 2005; Joseph, 2008).

2.3.2 Sociocultural and gendered perspectives.

Socio-cultural and gendered perspectives consider how social norms, social constructions of gender and wider societal values, encouraging male dominance and female subordination, contribute to the occurrence of PV (Prospero, 2007; Bell & Naugle, 2008; Smith, White & Moracco, 2009; Underwood & Rosen, 2009; Zurbriggen, 2009; Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011). From this viewpoint, female perpetration of PV is also explained within the context of patriarchal social norms and is, thus, commonly described in terms of self-defence, retaliation and/or the pre-emption of male PV (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; White, 2009; Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011).

This perspective has been widely critiqued, with supporting studies being argued to lack scientific rigour (e.g., Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011). For example, supporting studies rely heavily on samples of women from shelters or accident and emergency departments and should not, therefore, be considered representative of the general population (Dutton, 2006; Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011). Moreover, meta-analyses present limited support for a direct relationship between gendered beliefs and PV, which Dardis et al. (2015) claim undermines the significance of the role of patriarchal norms. It is, nonetheless, acknowledged that gendered beliefs may interact with other risk factors to increase the likelihood of PV. It is, therefore, important for researchers to be aware of potential gender differences with regards to adolescents' perceptions and/or experiences of healthy and unhealthy relationships (e.g., Sears, Byers, Whelan & Saint-Pierre, 2006).

Gender differences may be of particular interest within the field of education, where school climates and peer group cultures may be influential in reinforcing, or challenging, particular social norms and constructions of gender. For example, during the early years of education, Paechter (2007) describes how children develop an understanding of gender as a fixed construct and feel compelled to establish themselves as girls or boys (Davies, 1989, Paechter, 2007). School structures may, thus, act as "sites of normalisation" within which pupils develop beliefs regarding behaviours that are considered acceptable for different genders (Paechter, 2007, p. 61). Accordingly, it could be argued that the reinforcement of societal values associated with male dominance and/or female subordination, within the school context, may have an impact on young people's perceptions of healthy and unhealthy behaviours within relationships.

Paechter (2007) argues the determination of socially acceptable behaviours may be particularly important for boys. Historically, power and strength have been associated with a discourse of masculinity; consequently, tough and oppositional behaviours may be considered desirable to boys and employed to foster a sense of belonging or status (Paechter, 2007; Barter et al., 2009). Within romantic relationships, therefore, boys may feel pressurised to portray a "controlling, sexually assertive and unemotional" form of masculinity (Barter et al., 2009, p. 137). Moreover, female adolescents may perceive such qualities, which could be detrimental to their safety and well-being, to signify higher-status partners (Barter, 2006; Barter et al., 2009).

Media representations of gender are also likely to be an influential source of gender stereotyping (Paechter, 2007). Supporting this, content analyses of discussions of PV within teenage magazine articles (e.g., Kettery & Emery, 2010; Rothman et al., 2012) and representations of romance within popular teenage books (e.g., Collins & Carmody, 2011) have evidenced that these influential sources of information perpetuate patriarchal myths and reinforce female subordination. In view of such research, Manganello (2008) and Rothman et al. (2012) argue that the way in which the media frames incidences of PV is likely to affect how adolescents' interpret the information and apply it to their own lives.

2.3.3 Social learning theories.

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory states that children and young people learn through observing the behaviours of significant people, or "models", within their environment (p. 5). Due to the proximity and longevity of their influences, parents and peers are likely to play an important role in modelling behaviours and transmitting norms and values regarding the acceptability of different behaviours within relationships (Wolf & Foshee, 2003; Simons-Morton, Haynie & Noelcke, 2009; Black, Sussman & Unger, 2010).

Accordingly, social learning theory emphasises the impact of witnessing interpersonal violence, between family members or peers, on the likelihood of a person perpetrating and/or experiencing PV (Bandura, 1986; Arriaga & Foshee, 2004). Children and young people may, for example, learn how to express anger from observing family members or peers. In this view, adolescents who have been exposed to violence may be more likely

to use direct and destructive expressions of anger within relationships (Wolf & Foshee, 2003; Arriaga & Foshee, 2004).

A young person may also identify with a variety of other models, including fictional characters and people in the media (Bandura, 1977). In today's multimedia environment, many children and young people are exposed to a range of media, on a daily basis, which may impact upon their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in relation to PV (Manganello, 2008). In support of this supposition, watching professional wrestling (DuRant, Champion & Wolfson, 2006) and exposure to rap music videos (Johnson, Adams, Ashburn & Reed, 1995) have been associated with greater acceptance of behaviours associated with PV. The influence of the media should, therefore, be considered in research exploring PV within adolescent relationships (Manganello, 2008).

A young person's observation of behaviours associated with PV, between family members, peers and/or through the media, may be sufficient for the behaviours to be replicated; however, particular factors are believed to increase the likelihood of imitation. For example, Bandura (1977) states that the likelihood of imitation is increased if the young person perceives the model to be similar to him/her. Moreover, the relationship between a given behaviour and its consequences is argued to alter the likelihood of imitation: behaviours perceived to produce favourable results are more likely to be repeated, whereas behaviours associated with negative consequences, or limited success, are more likely to be discontinued (e.g., Skinner, 1953; Bandura, 1977). Accordingly, positive responses to PV, within a young person's home environment, peer group or community, may promote imitation. For example, if PV is accepted or commended within a young person's peer group, he/she may be more likely to imitate such behaviours in order to gain approval or status (Kernsmith & Tolman, 2011).

Social learning theory, thus, encourages an appreciation of how differences between adolescents' social contexts, opportunities and experiences may impact on the likelihood of PV within their relationships (Simons-Morton et al., 2009). With regards to education, this theory suggests it would be valuable to consider how social learning, in relation to PV, may differ according to school and peer group factors. For example, it is possible that mainstream schools and specialist provisions offer different opportunities for, and experiences of, social learning. It would also be valuable to consider the sources of information considered most influential to adolescents.

2.3.4 Ecological theories.

The theories discussed thus far offer valuable insights into factors that may contribute to perceptions and experiences of PV. As asserted by Barter (2009), however, any "single theoretical standpoint is likely to be inadequate in explaining the complexity of PV" (p. 214). Furthermore, as suggested by Dutton (2006), it may be more informative and valuable to consider different theories as complimentary, rather than competitive, and explore how different variables interact with one another. Ecological theories may, thus, provide an appropriate theoretical stance from which to consider PV: such theories consider the interaction of risk factors and, therefore, allow different theories to be considered in concert (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dutton, 2006; Matjasko, Needham, Grunden & Farb, 2010; Pinchevsky & Wright, 2012).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, for example, emphasises the importance of understanding an individual's development within the context of his/her environment and refers to five different systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. In brief, these systems are defined in the following ways: the microsystem refers to the context closest to an individual and encompasses direct and "enduring forms of interaction"; the mesosystem represents interactions between features of the microsystem; the exosystem involves social structures that impact upon the immediate context of the developing person; the macrosystem describes the overarching cultural values and belief systems that influence characteristics of the micro-, meso- and exosystems; and the chronosystem refers to changes in the developing person and surrounding systems over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 38). As discussed by Dutton (2006), Belsky (1980) also added a further level to this model: the ontogenetic level. This considers aspects of an individual's developmental history, which may impact upon their interactions within each system.

Accordingly, within this ecological framework, the potential impact of individual "characteristics of the developing person" can be acknowledged (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 38). Unlike personality theories, however, these individual-level variables are not considered to exist within a vacuum, but are deemed to require a "particular social context in which to manifest themselves" (Dutton, 2006, p. 21).

Building upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, Dutton (2006) proposed a "nested ecological model" from which to consider the aetiology of PV (p.

9

22). This model promotes the consideration of how individual variables (e.g., communication difficulties, conflict resolution skills and cognitions regarding relationships) interact with variables at other levels (e.g., conflict issues within the relationship, availability of social support, family violence, media exposure, peer group norms and education) to influence the likelihood of experiencing and/or using PV. Precise, individual-level variables are, thus, conceptualised as "nested in" or "operating within" broader variables (Dutton, 2006, p. 19).

The following sections consider the possible impact of individual differences and traits associated with ASD on the likelihood of a person using and/or experiencing behaviours associated with PV. Nevertheless, drawing upon Dutton's (2006) nested ecological model, the relevance of an individual's interactions within a number of different systems, over time, will also be emphasised.

3. A Consideration of the Impact of ASD on the Likelihood of PV

In order to explore the potential impact of traits associated with ASD on the likelihood of individuals using and/or experiencing behaviours associated with PV, this literature review draws upon the typically developing (TD) population for the purposes of comparison.

The caveats and limitations of the term 'TD', however, should be highlighted. For example, it is important to acknowledge that ASD is considered by some individuals to represent neurodiversity in human development: a form of natural variation that should not be assumed pathological or deficient (Jaarsma & Welin, 2012). This concept of neurodiversity, thus, asserts that "being neurodiverse or neurotypical are just different ways of existing as humans" and neither should be considered superior to the other (Jaarsma & Welin, 2012, p. 21). It is, therefore, acknowledged that the use of the term TD within this report may be interpreted to suggest that individuals with ASD require support to change behaviours considered to deviate from the dominant culture of TD individuals. Nevertheless, this terminology is widely used and recognised within the existing research base and, for the purposes of clarity and concision, is useful in reference to individuals without a diagnosis of ASD.

There is a wealth of research evidencing that the majority of individuals with ASD are as interested in developing and maintaining romantic, intimate and sexual relationships

as their TD peers (e.g., Konstantareas & Lunsky, 1997; Newport & Newport, 2002; Hénault, 2005: Tissot, 2009; Kalyva, 2010; Hartman, 2014). Gutstein and Sheely (2002), for example, describe the desire and need for relationships, approval and love as "universal to the human species" and believe it should not be assumed that individuals with ASD do not covet these emotional bonds (p. 13). Additionally, Hartman (2014) discusses how, with appropriate guidance and support, it should be considered "developmentally appropriate" for adolescents with ASD to be dating alongside their TD peers (p. 187).

Existing research, nevertheless, indicates that adolescents with ASD may feel confused by relationships and feelings of affection (Attwood & Garnett, 2013). They may also be more likely to engage in a range of behaviours associated with PV, when attempting to initiate romantic relationships: touching the person inappropriately; believing that the person must reciprocate their feelings; making inappropriate comments; pursuing the person in a threatening manner; and threatening self-harm (Stokes et al., 2007). Moreover, studies have indicated that individuals with ASD, compared to TD adolescents, are more likely to engage in "intrusive courting behaviours" associated with "stalking" (Stokes & Newton, 2004; Stokes et al., 2007, p. 1969–1970).

It is possible that these findings can be explained by important individual differences associated with ASD (section 3.1); however, the systems surrounding the individual may also play an important role in determining the likelihood of PV. Thus, drawing upon an ecological framework, it is possible that individuals with ASD may experience different interactions, in comparison to TD adolescents, within the systems surrounding them (section 3.2).

3.1 Individual Differences: The Relationship Between Traits Associated with ASD and PV

It should be noted that the term ASD, as opposed to autism spectrum condition (ASC), will be employed throughout this literature review and subsequent research as this is consistent with the terminology employed within the most recent Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-V; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). ASD is defined as a pervasive developmental disorder, characterised by difficulties in social communication and restricted behaviours or interests (Baron-Cohen, 2008; APA, 2013).

Baron-Cohen (2008) describes how impairments in the area of social communication can be broken down into difficulties with specific behaviours: anticipating how others will feel or think; understanding another person's emotional expressions; accepting alternative perspectives; reacting appropriately to another person's behaviour; and/or a tendency to interpret speech literally. Moreover, Gillberg (2001) describes how individuals with ASD may misinterpret social cues and display socially or emotionally inappropriate behaviours.

Baron-Cohen (2008) also describes a number of difficulties within the area of restricted behaviour/interests. Individuals with ASD may have narrow interests, develop an obsession with regards to a particular activity, present with "highly repetitive" behaviours and/or display a profound "need for sameness" (Baron-Cohen, 2008, p. 18). In addition, for some individuals, their behaviours may be restricted by sensory needs, including hyper- and hyposensitivity to sounds, textures, tastes, smells and temperatures (Baron-Cohen, 2008).

Hatton and Tector (2010) describe how, as a result of these difficulties, individuals with ASD may find it challenging to develop and maintain relationships. It is, therefore, possible that these difficulties represent important individual differences, or "characteristics of the developing person", that may impact on the likelihood of an individual perpetrating and/or experiencing PV (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 38; Hartman, 2014). The traits associated with ASD may, thus, offer partial explanations for the inappropriate relationship behaviours discussed by Stokes and Newton (2004) and Stokes et al. (2007).

Accordingly, the following subsections will consider the evidence base for the potential impact of these traits on the relationships of individuals with ASD. It is, nevertheless, acknowledged that the term ASD encompasses a range of individuals who may experience the associated traits to varying degrees. Moreover, since the DSM-V identifies only two, rather than three, primary symptom dimensions in the most recent diagnostic criteria for ASD (APA, 2013), it could be argued that the term is now likely to encompass an even more diverse group of individuals. That said, it should be acknowledged that Frazier et al.'s (2012) validation study found the new diagnostic criteria to have superior specificity, reducing the likelihood of false positive diagnoses.

3.1.1 Difficulties understanding and responding to another person's emotional expressions or behaviours.

There are two dominant theories, within the literature, suggesting that individuals with ASD are more likely to experience difficulties understanding and responding to the emotions of others. Baron-Cohen's (2002) empathising-systemising theory describes how ASD is associated with the ability to identify and understand the rules within a system (systemising), rather than the ability to identify with the emotions of others and respond appropriately (empathising). Similarly, Baron-Cohen's (2001) "theory of mind" describes how individuals with ASD are less able to make inferences about the thoughts, feelings and intentions of others (p. 174).

In order for romantic relationships and interactions to be successful, however, Gutstein and Sheely (2002) propose that individuals must possess "relationship skills", which enable a person to rapidly process critical social and emotional information and utilise these observations to determine an appropriate response (p. 21). According to Gutstein and Sheely (2002), these relationship skills are essential to the formation and strengthening of emotional connections and healthy relationships. It is possible, therefore, that the proposed difficulties in recognising and responding to the thoughts and feelings of others may interfere with this process for individuals with ASD and place them at greater risk of employing and/or experiencing behaviours associated with PV.

Firstly, difficulties with theory of mind may cause individuals with ASD to misinterpret thoughts, feelings and intentions of others. Attwood and Garnett (2013), for example, describe how a friend's act of kindness may be misinterpreted as signalling a greater level of affection or intimacy than intended. Such misinterpretations may, subsequently, lead to responses that others deem inappropriate to the situation. For example, due to an incorrect assumption that the other person desires the same interest and affection, individuals with ASD may pursue relationships and become vulnerable to accusations of "stalking" (Attwood & Garnett, 2013, p. 15). Such difficulties may, therefore, offer an explanation for the higher number of "intrusive courting behaviours" observed by Stokes and Newton (2004) and Stokes et al. (2007).

Moreover, individuals with ASD may be more likely to experience difficulties processing, recognising and responding to important cues during social interactions. It

may, for example, be more challenging for persons with ASD to recognise the cues that indicate certain behaviours are unwanted or causing another person distress. This may result in difficulties recognising the "amber or red light signals that indicate there is no consent to continue" and, thus, render these individuals vulnerable to accusations of sexual PV (Attwood & Garnett, 2013, p. 15). Supporting this, Hellemans, Colson, Verbraeken, Vermeiren and Deboutte (2007) noted that a majority of individuals with ASD were reported, by their caregivers, to be unable to distinguish between desired and undesired physical contact.

Due to the complex and reciprocal nature of social interactions, individuals with ASD may be particularly vulnerable to misinterpretations when verbal, emotional and/or social cues are subtle or "insufficiently blunt" (Mehzabin & Stokes, 2011, p. 620). In such situations, the other person's feelings and desires may remain unclear and ambiguous to individuals with ASD (Gillberg, 2001; Baron-Cohen, 2008; Mehzabin & Stokes, 2011; Attwood & Garnett, 2013). Furthermore, in the absence of clear and direct cues, individuals with ASD may be more likely to assume that their own feelings and desires are reciprocated (Baron-Cohen, 2001; Attwood & Garnett, 2013).

The proposed difficulties may also place individuals with ASD at greater risk of experiencing PV. Attwood and Garnett (2013), for example, discuss how misunderstandings, with regards to the expression of affection, may cause persons with ASD to employ behaviours that convey an unintended level of intimacy. This may result in accusations of "leading someone on" and place individuals with ASD at an elevated risk of experiencing "serious or traumatic" events (Attwood & Garnett, 2013, p. 15).

Furthermore, Hartman (2014) discusses the possibility that core difficulties in social understanding, and the interpretation of feelings, intentions and behaviours, may render individuals with ASD vulnerable to exploitation. Supporting this supposition, in a recent survey of the sexual experiences of adults, Brown-Lavoie, Viecili and Weiss (2014) found that individuals with ASD were more likely to self-report experiences of unwanted sexual contact, coercion and rape. One explanation for this finding is that individuals with ASD find it more challenging to recognise when another person is behaving inappropriately (van Roekel, Scholte & Didden., 2010; Jawaid et al., 2011).

14

3.1.2 A tendency to interpret speech literally.

Research has consistently demonstrated that individuals with ASD are less likely to draw non-literal inferences from speech or understand a speaker's intentions across different contexts (e.g., Mitchell, Saltmarsh & Russell, 1997; Landa, 2000; Loukusa & Moilanen, 2009; Adams et al., 2012). This can result in misinterpretations of non-literal utterances: sarcasm, irony, humour, persuasion, indirect requests or deception (e.g., Persicke, Tarbox, Ranick & St. Clair, 2012; Ranick, Persicke, Tarbox & Kornack, 2012; Hartman, 2014; Spotorno & Noveck, 2014). Consequently, although individuals with ASD may understand the spoken word, in a literal sense, they may be less able to use cues (e.g., contextual cues, facial expressions and intonation) to comprehend the intended function of the communication (Landa, 2000).

As a result, individuals with ASD may find it challenging to comprehend complex behaviours within romantic relationships. More specifically, they may misunderstand a range of behaviours that have been identified as constituting psychological PV: humiliation, deception, coercive control, exploitation and manipulation (e.g., Sears et al., 2006; Barter, 2009; Helms, Sullivan, Corona & Taylor, 2013; Breiding et al., 2015). Difficulties understanding non-literal utterances and the pragmatics of language use could, thus, place individuals with ASD at risk of experiencing behaviours associated with psychological PV and exploitation (Hartman, 2014).

In addition, a tendency to interpret speech literally may place these individuals at greater risk of exploitation when communicating with people online. When using social media and online dating, other people may share misleading or deceptive information and their profiles may include inaccurate or fallacious descriptions of themselves. In order to stay safe online, therefore, it is necessary to critically appraise whether the information shared is truthful or deceptive. A tendency to interpret information factually may, thus, cause persons with ASD to experience difficulties discriminating between safe and unsafe individuals (Roth & Gillis, 2015).

On the other hand, as a result of the social communication difficulties discussed, individuals with ASD may also be more likely to communicate in a manner considered unacceptable or upsetting to others. There is a wealth of research to suggest that individuals with ASD may be limited "in their ability to flexibly control the degree of directness with which some intentions are expressed"; as a result, these individuals may

15

lack subtlety in their verbal communication (Landa, 2000, p. 130; Bishop, 2003; Attwood & Garnett, 2013). As an example, they may comment openly and honestly upon another person's weight, personal features or appearance.

Moreover, individuals with ASD may be less likely to recognise times when it is more appropriate to express intentions indirectly. For example, they may not have the linguistic flexibility to make requests in a less directive manner and may, therefore, command that desired actions be completed (Landa, 2000). In addition, expressions of affection may be perceived as overly intense or inappropriate (Landa, 2000; Attwood & Garnett, 2013). Individuals with ASD may, consequently, be more likely to communicate in a manner that could be perceived by others as insensitive, impolite or offensive (Landa, 2000).

3.1.3 Understanding appropriate social conventions and the complex and ambiguous nature of PV.

Attwood and Garnett (2013) discuss how individuals with ASD may not recognise the need for appropriate social conventions and boundaries in a range of contexts. This may become particularly problematic during adolescence, when boundaries regarding issues such as personal space and appropriate/inappropriate touching are subject to change. In order to adhere to these new social conventions, Attwood and Garnett (2013) argue that individuals with ASD may be required to modify learnt scripts, gestures and vocabulary for expressing and responding to affection. According to Hartman (2014), however, there is evidence to suggest that individuals with ASD do not appear to "successfully navigate the transitions through adolescence to adulthood" (p. 17). Individuals who are unable to make age-appropriate adjustments to their behaviour may, thus, be perceived to be demonstrating inappropriate sexual or interactional behaviours.

It could also be argued that there is a "blurry distinction between what constitutes acceptable and inappropriate relationship behaviours" (Stokes et al., 2007, p. 1970; Post, Haymes, Storey, Loughrey & Campbell, 2012). Hatton and Tector (2010), for example, describe how the acceptability of various behaviours within relationships is "built on ifs, buts and it depends" (p. 73). This places a requirement on adolescents to consider the context and meaning of a given behaviour in order to determine whether or not it is appropriate.

The importance of taking the context of a given behaviour into account was highlighted throughout Sears et al.'s (2006) focus groups: TD adolescents discussed the importance of considering the frequency, intent and impact of behaviours in order to establish whether they signified PV. As an example, participants discussed how a given behaviour may be considered abusive if it was employed with intent to cause harm; however, the same behaviour may be considered acceptable if the harm caused was believed to be accidental or intended as a joke.

In light of the social communication difficulties noted, however, it is possible that individuals with ASD may find it more challenging to recognise how the appropriateness of different behaviours may vary according to social, emotional and contextual factors. The point at which a given behaviour might be considered to constitute PV may, therefore, be even more ambiguous and confusing for individuals with ASD.

On the other hand, if individuals with ASD are less aware of the contextual information surrounding a given behaviour, it is possible that they may not experience the blurry distinction between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in the same manner as TD adolescents. For instance, if contextual factors are not considered, individuals with ASD may be more inclined to utilise concrete, fixed rules to definitively categorise behaviours as healthy or unhealthy. Accordingly, within relationships, individuals with ASD may be more likely to draw upon instrumental skills: a repertoire of memorised, scripted behaviours and concrete rules, employed to achieve a particular objective or to adhere to societal norms (Gutstein & Sheely, 2002).

This systematic approach (Baron-Cohen, 2002), however, may become problematic in the context of relationships: social interaction "knows no fixed, absolute rules" and individuals must consider the context and meaning of a given behaviour, in order to determine its acceptability (Klin, Jones, Schultz & Volkmar, 2003, p. 349; Post et al., 2012). As a result, these individuals may find it challenging to adjust their own behaviours, or expectations of others, in light of social, emotional and contextual factors. It would, therefore, be useful to explore whether individuals with ASD utilise contextual information during social interactions in different ways and/or to different extents and consider how this may impact upon the nature and success of their relationships.

3.1.4 Restricted behaviours or interests.

A tendency to develop narrow interests and/or an obsession with regards to a particular activity is considered to be a core feature of ASD (Baron-Cohen, 2008), which may also manifest within the context of relationships (Hartman, 2014) and, thus, interfere with the development and maintenance of healthy relationships.

It could be hypothesised, for example, that the complex and unpredictable nature of romantic relationships may be challenging for individuals who present with the profound "need for sameness" described by Baron-Cohen (2008, p. 18). Moreover, if the relationship interfered with the person's need to repeat certain activities, behaviours or routines, it may be difficult for an individual with ASD to manage this situation. Such needs could also be interpreted as controlling or inappropriate by observers, especially if the repeated behaviours or activities are not considered desirable to the other person in the relationship.

Additionally, Post et al. (2012) describe how individuals with ASD may develop a preoccupation or unusual attachment with a desired person. As a result, when a relationship comes to an end, individuals with ASD may find the relationship particularly difficult to relinquish and find it challenging to cope with the changes that ensue (Holliday Willey, 2012). Anxious or persistent attempts to pursue the relationship, however, may become unacceptable and could be perceived as stalking (Hartman, 2014; Breiding et al., 2015).

3.1.5 Sensory sensitivities.

Individuals with ASD may experience hypersensitivity to sounds, textures, tastes, smells, movements and/or temperatures (Baron-Cohen, 2008; Hartman, 2014). This means that their experience of these senses is intensified. Hypersensitivity to touch, for example, may cause light touch, light kissing or holding hands to feel unpleasant or even painful (Baron-Cohen, 2008; Hartman, 2014; Mendes, 2015). Moreover, kissing may cause discomfort for an individual who displays hypersensitivity to taste or texture (Mendes, 2015). As a result, the initiation or pursuit of certain types of physical interaction may be deemed unacceptable to some individuals with ASD and they may, therefore, need to be aware of particular activities that are likely to cause them distress (Mendes, 2015).

It is also possible for individuals to display hyposensitivity, where senses are experienced as underdeveloped (Hartman, 2014). This can result in "sensation seeking" behaviours (e.g., Schaaf, Toth-Cohen, Johnson, Outten & Benevides, 2011, p. 2), such as seeking out strong, firm hugs or touch (Hartman, 2014). It may, however, be challenging for these individuals to judge the intensity of their physical contact. Such sensory needs may, therefore, place persons with ASD at greater risk of displaying behaviours that others perceive to be inappropriate or aggressive.

It could, thus, be hypothesised that experiences of both hyper- and hyposensitivity may impact on the behaviours that individuals with ASD perceive to be acceptable and unacceptable within their relationships.

3.2 Ecological Perspective: The Impact of Groups and Systems on Individuals with ASD

Although there may be important individual differences to consider, it is also possible that the learning opportunities and experiences of individuals with ASD, with regards to romantic relationships, differ to those experienced by TD adolescents. Accordingly, in line with an ecological perspective, it could be suggested that "characteristics of the developing person" interact with aspects of other systems and subsystems surrounding the individual, to influence perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 38; Dutton, 2006).

The following subsections will consider three ways in which an ecological framework may be useful for exploring differences between TD adolescents and individuals with ASD.

1. The impact of peer groups and the process of social learning may differ for TD adolescents and individuals with ASD.
2. The social learning experiences and opportunities of individuals with ASD may be influenced by the type of educational provision available to them (i.e., mainstream or specialist).
3. Opportunities for SRE may be more restricted for pupils with ASD.

3.2.1 The influence of peers on the social norms and beliefs of TD adolescents and individuals with ASD.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) microsystem refers to the context closest to an individual and encompasses direct interactions with family members and peers. Bronfenbrenner (1994) refers to the "enduring forms of interaction" that occur within this microsystem as "proximal processes" (p. 38–40).

As described by Antonio, Koller and Hokoda (2012), TD adolescents learn acceptable and unacceptable ways of relating to each other through proximal processes. These interactions influence a person's "beliefs and expectations of what a relationship should be like" (Arriaga & Foshee, 2001, p. 164). Ellis, Chung-Hall and Dumas (2013), therefore, propose that researchers must consider peer groups in order "to gain a comprehensive understanding of how dating abuse is facilitated" (p. 494).

A wealth of research has explored the influence of both parents and peers on the likelihood of young people engaging in PV (e.g., Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Ozer, Tschann, Pasch & Flores, 2004; Ellis et al., 2013). Age is suggested to be an important factor when considering their relative influence (e.g., Matjasko et al., 2010) and it is commonly accepted that TD adolescents experience "an increased orientation towards peers and heightened susceptibility to peer influence" (e.g., Fergusson, Horwood & Swain-Campbell, 2002; Ellis et al., 2013, p. 488).

TD individuals spend a significant amount of time with their peers and, during adolescence, these relationships become more "autonomous and central" and a "primary source of support and guidance" (Bokhorst, Sumter & Westernberg, 2010; Oudekerk, Blachman-Demner & Mulford, 2014, p. 2). Moreover, as romantic relationships are novel to most adolescents, they may rely on peers to learn how to interact within this context (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Ellis et al., 2013). Peers are also likely to be a readily available source of information, for TD adolescents, due to the public nature of young people's relationships (Oudekerk et al., 2014).

For TD adolescents, peer affiliations significantly predict PV within cross-sectional and longitudinal research: this association remains significant after controlling for individual and family factors (e.g., Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Haynie & Payne, 2006; Ellis et al., 2013). Ellis et al. (2013), for example, reported a positive relationship between peer

relational aggression and PV perpetration and victimisation, six months later. Moreover, Arriaga and Foshee (2004) found peer PV to be more influential than inter-parental PV. Such research, thus, concludes that peers exert a powerful influence in "shaping standards of acceptable dating behaviours during adolescence" for TD individuals (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004, p. 178).

Furthermore, according to the theory of planned behaviour, an individual's behaviour is likely to be influenced by peer norms (Ajzen, 1985); for example, an individual may be more likely to engage in PV if this is perceived to be socially acceptable to his/her peers (Kernsmith & Tolman, 2011). Supporting this theory, for TD adolescents, attitudes of the "broader peer group" have also been correlated with PV (Foshee et al., 2013; Oudekerk et al., 2014, p. 4). Peer culture at the classroom level may also, therefore, be influential.

This powerful peer influence, however, may not be apparent for adolescents with ASD. According to Hatton and Tector (2010), for example, individuals with ASD may not learn "complex social competencies" from peers in the same manner as TD adolescents (p. 73). In fact, Hatton and Tector (2010) argue that social learning from peers may be an insufficient or even confusing source of information for these individuals. Supporting this, Stokes et al. (2007) found that, compared to TD adolescents, individuals with ASD relied less upon peers to learn acceptable and unacceptable relationship behaviours. It could, therefore, be argued that adolescents with ASD may be less able to learn from their peers.

Nevertheless, it is important to consider that adolescents with ASD, in comparison to their TD peers, may also experience fewer opportunities for socialisation. As asserted by Levy and Perry (2011), parents and carers remain a more significant role in the organisation and monitoring of social activities for adolescents with ASD. As a result, these individuals may not experience the same levels of increased autonomy, independence and unsupervised time with peers (Hartman, 2014). Fewer opportunities to socialise with peers could, therefore, provide an alternative explanation for the differences in peer learning noted by Stokes et al. (2007).

3.2.2 Type of educational provision for pupils with ASD.

The differential impact of social learning from peers may be particularly relevant for adolescents attending specialist provisions. It is possible, for several reasons, that these pupils may have fewer opportunities to learn from romantic relationships within their peer groups, classrooms and school settings (Hartman, 2014).

Firstly, young people in specialist provisions may predominantly observe and learn from the relationships of pupils with similar difficulties. This may, therefore, limit the range of social learning experiences available to them. The impact of specialist provisions may be particularly pertinent for female pupils with ASD as, due to the greater number of males diagnosed with ASD (e.g., Werling & Geschwind, 2013), they are likely to spend a great deal of time within a predominantly male peer group (Hartman, 2014).

It could, thus, be argued that the inclusion of pupils with ASD, within mainstream educational provisions, would be advantageous in increasing opportunities for socialisation and social learning (Tissot, 2009). Supporting this, Levy and Perry's (2011) critical review discusses how the culture of institutionalisation in the 1990's is likely to have contributed to the high levels of social isolation experienced by individuals with ASD at this time. Accordingly, it could be argued that the subsequent shift towards inclusive practice may result in improved social outcomes for adolescents with ASD (Tissot, 2009).

Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that an increased number of opportunities for socialisation may not, necessarily, result in an improved understanding of healthy relationships for individuals with ASD. Bauminger, Shulman and Agam (2003), for example, found that greater levels of social interaction did not alleviate feelings of loneliness in children and young people with ASD, which may indicate that these interactions were not meeting the needs of these individuals. Individuals with ASD are also, therefore, likely to require further knowledge and support to enhance the quality of their interactions within social and educational settings (Hartman, 2014). Adherence to the philosophy of inclusion must, therefore, be accompanied by steps to address the specific needs of these individuals (Koller, 2000).

Education staff and parents may, however, be reluctant to provide individuals with ASD with a similar range of socialisation experiences to their TD peers (Hartman, 2014). It may be felt that opportunities for socialising with TD adolescents may place individuals with ASD at greater risk of displaying inappropriate behaviours and/or experiencing exploitation (Shea & Mesibov, 2005; Kalyva, 2010). The potential impact of such beliefs and wider societal values, on the learning opportunities of individuals with ASD, will be considered in greater detail in the following subsection.

3.2.3 Opportunities for SRE for pupils with ASD.

Educational policy publications and legislation acknowledge that all children and young people have the right to "access the information they need to play a full and active role in society" (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 2000, Department for Education [DfE], 2010; Department of Health, 2013; HM Government, 2010, 2011, p. 61; Blake, Emmerson, Lees & Hayman, 2014). Children and young people are, therefore, "entitled to quality SRE" which "should be inclusive and meet the needs of all young people" (DfEE, 2000; Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF], 2008, p. 2; Blake et al., 2014, p. 12). As suggested by Hartman (2014), therefore, adjustments must be made to ensure that young people with ASD have access to SRE in a way they can understand.

Moreover, as discussed previously, young people with ASD may be less able and/or have fewer opportunities to learn about relationships through observation and social interactions. Consequently, SRE may represent a particularly crucial source of information for these individuals (Bekirogullari, Gulsen & Soyturk, 2011). Hatton and Tector (2010), however, describe how the SRE curriculum is currently "failing young people with ASD" and "changing this must be made an absolute priority" (p. 69).

Studies have shown that education staff and young people with ASD agree on the importance of improving SRE for this population (Hatton & Tector, 2010; Bekirogullari et al., 2011; Mehzabin & Stokes, 2011). Teachers and EPs in Bekirogullari et al.'s (2011) study, for example, discussed how inadequate SRE may create, or perpetuate, a number of difficulties for pupils with ASD: higher stress levels; communication difficulties; and aggression towards others. Furthermore, Hatton and Tector (2010) noted that all participants, within a small sample of young people with ASD, discussed the need for an understanding of appropriate, healthy relationships to be taught in

schools. More specifically, participants believed that an improved SRE curriculum would enhance their awareness of how to remain safe from exploitation and enable individuals with ASD to develop greater self-awareness within relationships.

Drawing upon an ecological framework, however, it is also important to consider factors, within different systems, which may be impacting upon current SRE provision. In line with this perspective, Tissot (2009) describes several factors that may impact on the nature and degree of SRE offered to pupils with ASD: the manifestation of ASD (individual level of analysis); the parents' or carers' beliefs (microsystem level of analysis); societal attitudes and values (macrosystem level of analysis); and legal restrictions on SRE from governing agencies (macrosystem level of analysis; p. 553).

Tissot (2009) argues that societal attitudes may present the greatest challenge to SRE provision. Elaborating on this, Hartman (2014) discusses how the sexual and relationship behaviours of individuals with ASD can be perceived to pose a potential threat to other members of society. In Hartman's (2014) view, this stigma is further perpetuated by the choice of language employed within the literature: certain terms, such as "stalking" and "obsession", are argued to imply that the feelings, behaviours and needs of individuals with ASD should be considered from a pathological perspective (Hartman, 2014, p. 27).

This viewpoint may prevent individuals with ASD from accessing appropriate information in several ways. Firstly, descriptions of pathological qualities focus primarily at the level of the individual and, thus, conceptualise the issue as residing within the person (D'Amato et al., 2005). This may foster a deficit model perspective and undermine the potential impact of other systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; D'Amato et al., 2005; Hartman, 2014). As a result, the importance of access to appropriate SRE, in addition to a range of social learning opportunities, may be overlooked.

Furthermore, the discourse of danger and risk associated with this viewpoint may result in attempts to avoid, ignore, manage or control the sexual and relational needs of individuals with ASD; consequently, their access to SRE may be restricted (Gougeon, 2010; Hartman, 2014). Tissot (2009) and Hartman (2014) discuss how such restrictions may be supported by educators and parents, due to fears that SRE will lead to greater interest and activity. It should be noted, however, that this concern is not supported by research (Ousley & Mesibov, 1991; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organisation, 2009). In fact, the evidence base suggests that pupils who receive SRE are less likely to have sexual intercourse before the age of 16, are more likely to use contraception and are more likely to identify and disclose relationship abuse (DfE, 2015; MacDowall et al., 2015; Walsh, Zwi, Woolfenden & Shlonsky, 2015).

In addition, if societal attitudes are dominated by a discourse of fear, SRE may focus solely on attempts to prevent PV. Course content may, thus, be limited to knowledge of the risks and dangers associated with sex and relationships. As a result, topics related to the promotion of healthy relationships, such as intimacy, love and consent, may be neglected (Chivers & Mathieson, 2000; Hartman, 2014). As discussed previously, however, educational policies and legislation assert that SRE programmes should be supportive of the right of all people to pursue and maintain healthy relationships, in socially appropriate ways (Blake et al., 2014; Hartman, 2014). Arguably, therefore, limiting SRE to PV prevention would breach the rights of individuals with ASD to understand and express their sexual and relational needs in healthy ways.

4. Diminished Social Learning, Limited Access to SRE and Vulnerability to PV

Diminished opportunities for social learning and SRE may, thus, interact with the noted traits associated with ASD to render these individuals vulnerable to unhealthy relationships.

This possibility is supported by the theory of counterfeit deviance, which was initially discussed in relation to the display of sexually inappropriate behaviours by individuals with developmental disorders (Hingsburger, Griffiths & Quinsey, 1991). This theory aims to understand a person's behaviour in the context of the systems within which he/she interacts. In line with an ecological perspective, therefore, this theory may be useful when considering the sexual and relational behaviours of young people with ASD (Hellemans et al., 2007).

Within this theory, a range of hypotheses are employed to explain how limited socialisation and/or educational opportunities may result in the display of inappropriate behaviours (Griffiths, Hingsburger, Hoath & Ioannou, 2013). The partner-selection hypothesis, for example, predicts that individuals are more likely to develop inappropriate behaviours if they do not have the opportunities to learn the social skills to develop healthy romantic relationships. Moreover, according to the structural

hypothesis, individuals with ASD may live in environments where appropriate sexual and relationship needs are restricted; consequently, they may find socially inappropriate ways of expressing or fulfilling their needs (Griffiths et al., 2013; Hartman, 2014).

As a result of limited access to social learning and/or SRE, individuals with ASD may also obtain and utilise alternative sources of information (Roth & Gillis, 2015). This is supported by Mehzabin and Stokes's (2011) research, which found a majority of adolescents with ASD self-reported to learning SRE through their own means, rather than from an authoritative source. Some of these sources, however, may not be suitable or conducive to an understanding of healthy relationship behaviours. Individuals with ASD may, for example, seek information and guidance from viewing television programmes which, according to Attwood and Garnett (2013), tend to focus on more dramatic expressions of affection. Moreover, the use of internet search engines may result in the viewing of age-inappropriate or illegal activities (Attwood & Garnett, 2013).

Furthermore, individuals with ASD may be particularly vulnerable to certain sources of information, due to difficulties interpreting media representations of relationships and distinguishing fact from fiction (Hartman, 2014). For example, for individuals with ASD, the viewing of pornography and soap operas has been associated with inappropriate relationship behaviours, including aggression and promiscuity (Attwood, 1998; Hénault, 2005). The use of inappropriate sources of information may, thus, contribute to any relationship between ASD traits and PV. Accordingly, it would be concerning if the learning of young people with ASD was limited to ambiguous, and potentially misleading, information.

Research suggests that individuals with ASD may also be more likely to utilise alternative modalities, such as online dating, to initiate and pursue romantic relationships (Roth & Gillis, 2015). Roth and Gillis (2015) describe how online dating may provide a number of advantages: there is no demand for face-to-face interaction; they can participate in private; they can control the time and pace of interactions; and they can contact a greater number of people. Due to a tendency to interpret speech literally, however, individuals with ASD may find it challenging to evaluate online information, assess other people's motives and understand the extent to which other people may misrepresent themselves through social media (Hartman, 2014; Roth & Gillis, 2015). As a result, they may be more vulnerable to being pressurised into risky

behaviours, such as exposing themselves online or meeting up with strangers (Hartman, 2014).

These concerns may be particularly relevant in an age where the use of information technology is advancing rapidly (Roth & Gillis, 2015) and issues related to dating websites, pornography, cyber bullying, unsafe online support groups and "sexting" are becoming increasingly pertinent (Hartman, 2014, p. 141). In view of such issues, and given the amount of time some adolescents spend using technology, Hartman (2014) discusses the need for SRE to teach individuals with ASD to critically evaluate media and the motives of others.

Overall, this research indicates that it would be valuable for educators and parents to consider how restrictions on socialisation opportunities and SRE may increase the vulnerability of young people with ASD to unhealthy relationship behaviours. Moreover, it may be valuable for research to explore the sources of information considered valuable to individuals with ASD, compared to TD adolescents. This may offer useful insights with regards to how the SRE curriculum could be improved. Figure 1 aims to illustrate these considerations, at each level of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model.
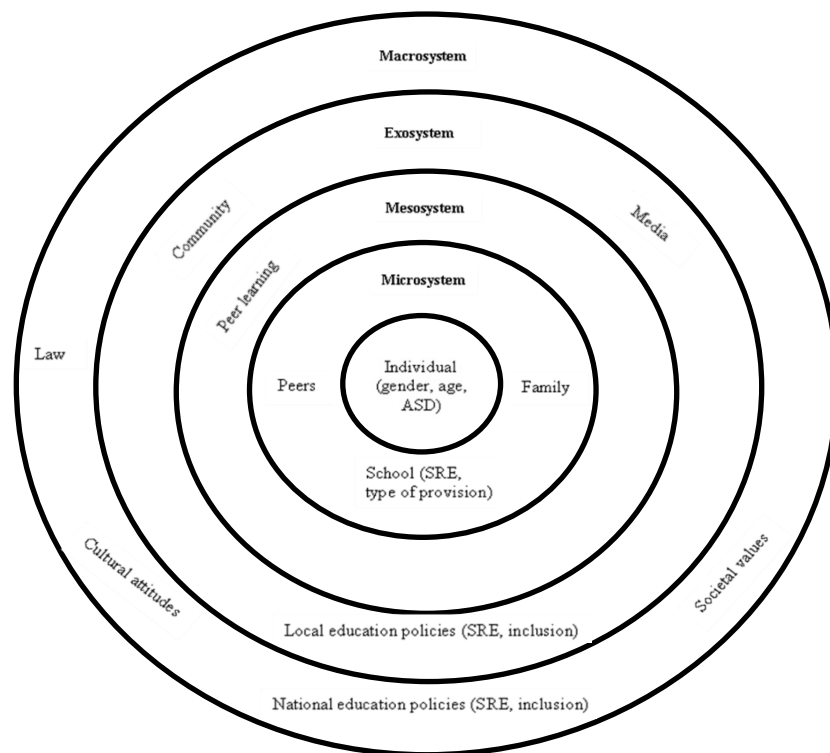
Figure 1. A summary of the different factors, at each level of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, which may interact to influence the likelihood of PV

5. The Value of Further Research to Explore the Perceptions of Individuals with ASD and its Relevance to EPs

The value of further research is supported by the fact that individuals with ASD are more likely than the general population to be unmarried, feel isolated and experience difficulties within social relationships (Levy & Perry, 2011; Howlin & Moss, 2012; Hartman, 2014). For example, Levy and Perry's (2011) critical review reports that a majority of studies indicate that only between 5 and 10% of adolescents with ASD will marry or maintain long-term relationships.

It could be argued that such findings are due to the fact that individuals with ASD have a reduced desire or need to form social or romantic relationships; however, research literature suggests that this is not the case (e.g., Hénault, 2005; Tissot, 2009; Hartman, 2014). Hellemans et al.'s (2007) study, for example, found that 42% of a sample of adolescents and young men with ASD were reported, by caregivers, to have discussed their need for a close affective or physical relationship. Additionally, 21% of the sample expressed frustration regarding their inability to maintain relationships.

Importantly, these findings have been supported by self-reports from individuals with ASD. Mehzabin and Stokes (2011) found that individuals with ASD, compared to TD adolescents, reported significantly greater levels of concern with regards to future relationships and finding a life partner. Moreover, Bauminger et al. (2003) noted that children and adolescents with ASD reported greater levels of loneliness, in comparison to their TD peers.

Attwood and Garnett (2013) argue that helping children and young people with ASD to understand and express affection will enable them to receive "approval, liking and love, in return" (p. 13). This is likely to enhance feelings of self-acceptance and confidence, within social situations, and facilitate a greater level of successful engagement with others (Attwood & Garnett, 2013).

It would, therefore, be valuable for education staff and EPs to consider how best to improve the current SRE curriculum to support pupils with social communication difficulties to develop an understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviours. Bekirogullari et al.'s (2011) interviews with professionals, regarding the use

of SRE with pupils with ASD, however, indicated that EPs and teachers were uncertain about the needs of this group and desired further information and training on this topic.

This research, therefore, suggests a need for an improved understanding of how individuals with ASD can be supported to develop and maintain healthy relationships. This suggestion supports a number of key principles, outlined by the DCSF (2008) in a government response to a review steering group for improving the quality of SRE provision. This response agreed six broad areas of development, emphasising the importance of:

- improving the skills and confidence of those delivering the Personal, Social and Health Education curriculum;
- encouraging the partnership of schools and external professionals;
- providing further guidance and support for schools;
- involving young people in plans for SRE programmes;
- clarifying and improving the contributions of wider government programmes and initiatives, by considering how best to maximise their input; and
- increasing confidence and awareness regarding SRE among school leadership teams (DCSF, 2008).

In order for these areas to be developed successfully, however, schools and external contributors must understand the needs of individuals with ASD and consider how the curriculum should be adapted accordingly. As indicated by Bekirogullari et al.'s (2011) research, specific training and information on this topic is, therefore, essential. Furthermore, it will be important to gather the views of young people with ASD to ensure that SRE addresses the needs of this group more successfully. Arguably, through drawing upon their roles as researchers and practitioners, EPs may be well placed to facilitate this process (Wilkinson, 2015).

5.1 Gaps in the Existing Research Literature: Rationale for the Current Study

In a review of the research literature, between 1990 and 2012, Hartman (2014) concluded that "there is currently a paucity of research relating to sexuality, SRE and ASD" (p. 25). During this time, Hartman (2014) states that only twenty research studies on this topic were published.

Hartman (2014), subsequently, details common methodological and validation issues amongst these studies: small sample sizes; lack of randomised sampling; and, due to the male-female ratio within the ASD population, a significant male sampling bias. Additionally, Hartman (2014) references the lack of control groups within these studies and argues that, as a result, the issues raised have not been considered within the context of the general population, or wider ASD population. Consequently, certain issues have been conceptualised within the literature as "problematic" behaviours associated with ASD (Hartman, 2014, p. 26), prior to establishing meaningful comparisons with TD individuals.

Previous methods have also relied largely upon reports from parents/caregivers and professionals. This assumes that individuals with ASD are unable to provide sufficient insight into their own knowledge and behaviours (Mehzabin & Stokes, 2011; Hartman, 2014) and is inconsistent with the DCSF's (2008) recommendation to involve young people in plans for SRE. It would, therefore, be useful for future research to explore the perceptions of individuals with ASD directly (Hartman, 2014) and consider whether TD adolescents and individuals with ASD differ in their perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships.

In addition to these methodological issues, there are also gaps in the current literature with regards to the content of existing studies. Current research has focused primarily on the sexual interests, knowledge and behaviours of individuals with ASD, compared to their TD peers (Hartman, 2014). It would, therefore, be useful for future research to compare perceptions regarding a greater range of relationship behaviours, which, in line with the broad definition of PV, may be psychological, physical or sexual in nature. Moreover, as indicated by Giordano, Soto, Manning and Longmore (2010) and Helms et al. (2013), in order for researchers to gather a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of adolescents' perceptions of relationships, it would be valuable for measures to explore both healthy and unhealthy features of relationships.

Additionally, existing research has focussed primarily on the appropriateness of strategies used to initiate sexual or romantic relationships (e.g., Stokes & Newton, 2004; Stokes et al., 2007). As indicated by Seltzer et al. (2003) and Stokes et al. (2007), however, research exploring the perceptions of individuals with ASD, with regards to their functioning, behaviours and expectations during relationships, is limited.

Finally, given the proposed differences in peer learning and SRE access, it may be useful to explore the sources of information considered valuable to individuals with ASD, compared to TD adolescents. This may provide an insight into how these young people could be best supported to understand, develop and maintain healthy relationships and remain safe from exploitation.

6. Current Study

The current study aims to contribute to the small research literature by comparing the perceptions of TD adolescents and individuals with ASD, with regards to healthy and unhealthy behaviours within relationships. Moreover, in order to address a number of methodological and validation issues within existing studies, the current study aims to:

- compare and contrast the perceptions of adolescents, with and without a diagnosis of ASD, in order to understand any arising issues within the context of the general population;
- include both male and female participants, with and without a diagnosis of ASD, in order to address the male sampling bias within the current literature;
- explore the perceptions of adolescents, with and without a diagnosis of ASD, directly, through the use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews;
- explore perceptions of a range of healthy and unhealthy behaviours within relationships, rather than focussing solely on sexual knowledge, interests and behaviours; and
- consider how different sources of information, employed by adolescents with and without a diagnosis of ASD, may have informed perceptions of healthy and unhealthy behaviours within relationships.

6.1 Key Research Questions

The current study was guided by the following research questions.

1. How are young people, with and without ASD, similar in their perceptions of healthy/unhealthy relationships?
2. In what ways do TD adolescents and individuals with ASD (male and female) differ in their perceptions of healthy/unhealthy relationships?

3. Are the perceptions of TD adolescents and individuals with ASD influenced by different sources of information?

7. References

Adams, C., Lockton, E., Freed, J., Gaile, J., Earl, G., McBean, K...Law, J. (2012). The social communication intervention project: a randomized controlled trial of the effectiveness of speech and language therapy for school-age children who have pragmatic and social communication problems with or without autism spectrum disorder. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders, 47*(3), 233–244.

Ajzen, I. (1985). From intentions to actions: A theory of planned behavior. In J. Kuhland & J. Becman (Eds.), *Action-control: From cognitions to behavior* (pp. 11–39). New York, NY: Springer.

Antonio, T., Koller, S.H., & Hokoda, A. (2012). Peer influences on the dating aggression process among Brazilian street youth: A brief report. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 27*(8), 1579–1592.

American Psychiatric Association (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Attwood, T. (1998*). The complete guide to Asperger's syndrome*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Attwood, T., & Garnett, M. (2013*). From like to love for young people with Asperger's syndrome (autism spectrum disorder): Learning how to express and enjoy affection with family and friends*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Arriaga, X.B., & Foshee, V.A. (2004). Adolescent dating violence: Do adolescents follow their friends', or their parents', footsteps? *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 19*, 162–184.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Oxford, England: Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1986). *The social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Banyard, V.L., & Cross, C. (2008). Consequences of teen dating violence: Understanding intervening variables in ecological context. *Violence Against Women, 14*(9), 998–1013.

Baron-Cohen, S. (2001). Theory of mind in normal development and autism. *Prisme, 34*, 174–183.

Baron-Cohen, S. (2002). The extreme male brain theory of autism. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 6*(6), 248–254.

Baron-Cohen, S. (2008). *Autism and Asperger syndrome.* Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Barter, C. (2006). Discourses of blame: Deconstructing (hetero)sexuality, peer sexual violence and residential children's homes, *Child and Family Social Work, 11*(4), 347–356.

Barter, C. (2009). In the name of love: Partner abuse and violence in teenage relationships. *British Journal of Social Work, 39*, 211–233.

Barter, C., McCarry, M., Berridge, D., & Evans, K. (2009). *Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships.* London, England: NSPCC.

Bauminger, N., Shulman, C., & Agam, G. (2003). Peer interactions and loneliness in high functioning children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 42*, 489–507.

Bekirogullari, Z., Gulsen, C., & Soyturk, K. (2011). The information and attitude levels of the educational psychologists and special education teachers in the process of sex education for the adolescents with autism. *Procedia Soecial and Behavioral Sciences, 12*, 638–653.

Bell, K.M., & Naugle, A.E. (2008). Intimate partner violence theoretical considerations: Moving towards a contextual framework. *Clinical Psychology Review, 28*, 1096–1107.

Belsky, J. (1980). Child maltreatment: An ecological integration. *American Psychologist, 35*(4), 320–335.

Bishop, J. (2003). The internet for educating individuals with social impairments. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 19*, 546–556.

Black, D.S., Sussman, S., & Unger, J.B. (2010). A further look at the intergenerational transmission of violence: Witnessing interparental violence in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 25*(6), 1022–1042.

Blake, S., Emmerson, L., Lees, J., & Hayman, J. (2014). *Sex and relationships education (SRE) for the 21st Century.* Retrieved 23 December, 2015, from http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/media/17706/sreadvice.pdf

Bokhorst, C., Sumter, S., & Westernberg, P. (2010). Social support from parents, friends, classmates and teachers in children and adolescents aged 9 to 18 years: Who is perceived as most supportive? *Social Development, 19*, 417–426.

Breiding, M.J., Basile, K.C., Smith, S.G., Black, M.C., & Mahendra, R. (2015). *Intimate partner violence surveillance: Uniform definitions and recommended data elements.* Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. In T. Husen & T. N. Postlethwaite (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education* (2nd ed., Vol. 3, pp. 1643–1647). Oxford, England: Pergamon Press.

Brown-Lavoie, S.M., Viecili, M.A., & Weiss, J.A. (2014). Sexual knowledge and victimization in adults with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 44*, 2185–2196.

Chivers, J., & Mathieson, S. (2000). Training in sexuality and relationships: An Australian model. *Sexuality and Disability, 18*(1), 73–80.

Chronister, K.M., Marsiglio, M.C., Linville, D., & Lantrip, K.R. (2014). The influence of dating violence on adolescent girls' educational experiences. *The Counseling Psychologist, 42*(3), 374–405.

Collins, V.E., & Carmody, D.C. (2011). Deadly love: Images of dating violence in the "Twilight Saga". *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work, 26*(4), 382–394.

D'Amato, R.C., Crepeau-Hobson, F., Huang, L.V., & Geil, M. (2005). Ecological neuropsychology: An alternative to the deficit model for conceptualizing and serving students with learning disabilities. *Neuropsychology Review, 15*, 97–103.

Dardis, C.M., Dixon, K.J., Edwards, K.M., & Turchik, J.A. (2015). An examination of the factors related to dating violence among young men and women and associated theoretical explanations: A review of the literature. *Trauma, Violence and Abuse, 16*(2), 136–152.

Davies, B. (1989). *Frogs and snails and feminist tales: Preschool children and gender.* Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin.

Department of Health (DH) (2013). *A framework for sexual health improvement in England.* London, England: Author.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2008). *Government response to the report by the sex and relationships education (SRE) review steering group.* Nottingham, England: Author.

Department for Education (DfE) (2010). *The importance of teaching.* Belfast, Northern Ireland: The Stationery Office.

DfE (2015). *Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education: A review of impact and effective practice.* Belfast, Northern Ireland: The Stationery Office.

Department for Education and Employment (2000). *Sex and relationship education guidance.* Nottingham, England: Author.

Dixon, L., & Graham-Kevan, N. (2011). Understanding the nature and etiology of intimate partner violence and implications for practice and policy. *Clinical Psychology Review, 31*, 1145–1155.

Dobash, R.P., & Dobash, R.E. (2004). Women's violence to men in intimate relationships. *British Journal of Criminology, 44*, 324–349.

DuRant, R.H., Champion, H., & Wolfson, M. (2006). The relationship between watching professional wrestling on television and engaging in date fighting among high school students. *Pediatrics, 118*(2), 265–272.

Dutton, D.G. (2006). *Rethinking domestic violence*. Vancouver, Canada: UCB Press.

Ellis, W.E., Chung-Hall, J., & Dumas, T.M. (2013). The role of peer group aggression in predicting adolescent dating violence and relationship quality. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 42*, 487–499.

Fergusson, D.M., Horwood, L.J., & Swain-Campbell, N. (2002). Cannabis use and psychosocial adjustment in adolescence and young adulthood. *Addiction, 97*(9), 1123–1135.

Foshee, V.A., Benefield, T.S., Reyes, H.L.M., Ennett, S.T., Faris, R., Chang, L... Suchindran, C.M. (2013). The peer context and the development of the perpetration of adolescent dating violence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 42*, 471–486.

Frazier, T.W., Youngstrom, E.A., Speer, L., Embacher, R., Law, P., Constantino, J... Eng, C. (2012). Validation of proposed DSM-5 criteria for autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 51*(1), 28–40.

Gillberg, C. (2001). Asperger syndrome and high functioning autism: Shared deficits or different disorders? *The Journal of Developmental and Learning Disorders, 5*, 81–94.

Giordano, P.C., Soto, D.A., Manning, W.D., & Longmore, M.A. (2010). The characteristics of romantic relationships associated with teen dating violence. *Social Science Research, 39*, 863–874.

Gougeon, N.A. (2010). Sexuality and autism: A critical review of selected literature using a social-relational model of disability. *American Journal of Sexual Education, 5*, 328–361.

Griffiths, D., Hingsburger, D., Hoath, J., & Ioannou, S. (2013). Counterfeit deviance revisited. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, 26*, 471–480.

Gutstein, S.E., & Sheely, R.K. (2002). *Relationship development intervention with children, adolescents and adults: Social and emotional development activities for Asperger syndrome, autism, PDD and NLD*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Hartman, D. (2014). *Sexuality and relationship education for children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders: A professional's guide to understanding, preventing issues, supporting sexuality and responding to inappropriate behaviours.* London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Hatton, S., & Tector, A. (2010). Sexuality and relationship education for young people with autistic spectrum disorder: Curriculum change and staff support. *British Journal of Special Education, 37*(2), 69–76.

Haynie, D.L., & Payne, D.C. (2006). Race, friendship networks, and violent delinquency. *Criminology, 44*, 775–805.

Hellemans, H., Colson, K., Verbraeken, C., Vermeiren, R., & Deboutte, D. (2007). Sexual behaviour in high-functioning male adolescents and young adults with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 37*, 260–269.

Helms, S.W., Sullivan, T.N., Corona, R., & Taylor, K.A. (2013). Adolescents' recognition of potential positive and negative outcomes in risky dating situations. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 28*(15), 3084–3106.

Hénault, I. (2005). Sexual relationships. In L. Baker & L.Welkowitz (Eds.), *Asperger's syndrome: Intervening in schools, clinics and communities* (pp. 243–55). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Herrman, J.W. (2009). There's a fine line...Adolescent dating violence and prevention. *Pediatric Nursing, 35*(3), 164–170.

Hertzog, J.L., & Rowley, R.L. (2014). My beliefs of my peers' beliefs: Exploring the gendered nature of social norms in adolescent romantic relationships. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 29*(2), 348–368.

Hingsburger, D., Griffiths, D., & Quinsey, V. (1991). Detecting counterfeit deviance. *Habilitative Mental Healthcare, 9,* 51–54.

HM Government (2010). *Equality Act 2010: Chapter 15*. London, England: Stationery Office.

HM Government (2011). *UK initial report on the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.* London, England: Office for Disability Issues.

Holliday Willey, L. (2012). *Safety skills for Asperger women: How to save a perfectly good female life.* London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Howlin, P., & Moss, P. (2012). Adults with autism spectrum disorders. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 57*(5), 275–283.

Jaarsma, P., & Welin, S. (2012). Autism as a natural human variation: Reflections on the claims of the neurodiversity movement. *Health Care Analysis, 20*(1), 20-30.

Jawaid, A., Riby, D.M., Owens, J., White, S.M., Tarar, T., & Schulz, P.E. (2012). Too withdrawn or too friendly: Considering social vulnerability in two neuro-developmental disorders. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 56*(4), 335–350.

Jennings, W.G., Higgins, G.E., Tewksbury, R., Gover, A.R., & Piquero, A.R. (2010). A longitudinal assessment of the victim-offender overlap. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 25*, 2147–2174.

Johnson, J.D., Adams, M.S., Ashburn, L., & Reed, W. (1995). Differential gender effects of exposure to rap music on African American adolescents' acceptance of teen dating violence. *Sex Roles, 33*(7–8), 597–605.

Joseph, S. (2008). Positive psychology as a framework for practice. In B. Kelly, L. Woolfson & J. Boyle (Eds.), *Frameworks for practice in educational psychology: A textbook for trainees and practitioners* (pp. 185–196). London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Jouriles, E.N., Rosenfield, D., McDonald, R., Kleinsasser, A.L., & Dodson, M.C. (2013). Explicit beliefs about aggression, implicit knowledge structures and teen dating violence. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 41*, 789–799.

Kalyva, E. (2010). Teachers' perspectives of the sexuality of children with autism spectrum disorders. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 4*, 433–437.

Kernsmith, P.D., & Tolman, R.M. (2011). Attitudinal correlates of girls' use of violence in teen dating relationships. *Violence Against Women, 17*(4), 500–516.

Kettery, H.H., & Emery, B.C. (2010). Teen magazines as educational texts of dating violence: The $2.99 approach. *Violence Against Women, 16*(11), 1270–1294.

Kim-Godwin, Y.S., Clements, C., McCuiston, A.M., & Fox., J.A. (2009). Dating violence among high school students in southeastern North Carolina. *The Journal of School Nursing, 25*(2), 141–151.

Klin, A., Jones, W., Schultz, R., & Volkmar, F. (2003). The enactive mind, or from actions to cognition: Lessons from autism. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, 358,* 345–360.

Koller, R. (2000). Sexuality and adolescents with autism. *Sexuality and Disability, 18*(2), 125–135.

Konstantareas, M.M., & Lunsky, Y.J. (1997). Sociosexual knowledge, experience, attitudes and interests of individuals with autistic disorder and developmental delay. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 27*(4), 397–413.

Landa, R. (2000). Social language use in Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism. In A. Klin, F.R. Volkmar & S.S. Sparrow (Eds.), *Asperger syndrome* (pp. 125–155). London, England: The Guilford Press.

Levy, A., & Perry, A. (2011). Outcomes in adolescents and adults with autism: A review of the literature. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 5*, 1271–1282.

Loukusa, S., & Moilanen, I. (2009). Pragmatic inference abilities in individuals with Asperger syndrome or high-functioning autism: A review. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 3*, 890–904.

MacDowall, W., Jones, K., Tanton, C., Clifton, S., Copas, A.J., Mercer, C.H... Wellings, K. (2015). *Associations between source of information about sex and sexual health outcomes in Britain: Findings from the third national survey of sexual attitudes and lifestyles (Natsal-3)*. Retrieved 29 December, 2015, from http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/5/3/e007837.full?sid=73f2594f-20fb-4c20-b779-a7f9f4b394e0

Manganello, J.A. (2008). Teens, dating violence and media use: A review of the literature and conceptual model for future research. *Trauma, Violence and Abuse, 9*, 3–18.

Matjasko, J.L., Needham, B.L., Grunden, L.N., & Farb, A.F. (2010). Violent victimization and perpetration during adolescence: Developmental stage dependent ecological models. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 39*, 1053–1066.

Mehzabin, P., & Stokes, M.A. (2011). Self-assessed sexuality in young adults with high-functioning autism. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 5*, 614–621.

Mendes, E.A. (2015). *Marriage and lasting relationships with Asperger's syndrome (autism spectrum disorder).* London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Mitchell, P., Saltmarsh, R., & Russell, H. (1997). Overly literal interpretations of speech in autism: Understanding that messages arise from minds. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 38*(6), 685–691.

Newport, J., & Newport, M. (2002). *Autism-Asperger's and sexuality: Puberty and beyond*. Arlington, VA: Future Horizons.

Oudekerk, B., Blachman-Demner, D., & Mulford, C. (2014). *Teen dating violence: How peers can affect risk and protective factors*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.

Ousley, O., & Mesibov, G. (1991). Sexual attitudes and knowledge of high-functioning adolescents and adults with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 21*(4), 471–481.

Ozer, E.J., Tschann, J.M., Pasch, L.A., & Flores, E. (2004). Violence perpetration across peers and partner relationships: Co-occurrence and longitudinal patterns among adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 34*(1), 64–71.

Paechter, C. (2007). *Being boys, being girls: Learning masculinities and femininities*. Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Persicke, A., Tarbox, J., Ranick, J., & St. Clair, M. (2013). Teaching children with autism to detect and respond to sarcasm. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 7*, 193–198.

Pinchevsky, G.M., & Wright, E.M. (2012). The impact of neighborhoods on intimate partner violence and victimization. *Trauma, Violence and Abuse, 13*(2), 112132.

Post, M., Haymes, L.K., Storey, K., Loughrey, T., & Campbell, C. (2012). Understanding stalking behaviors by individuals with autism spectrum disorders and recommended prevention strategies for school settings. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 44*(11), 2698–2706.

Price, E.L., Byers, E.S., & the Dating Violence Research Team (1999). The Attitudes towards Dating Violence Scales: Development and initial validation. *Journal of Family Violence, 14*(4), 351–375.

Prospero, M. (2007). Young adolescent boys and dating violence: The beginning of patriarchal terrorism? *Affilia, 22*, 271–280.

Ranick, J., Persicke, A., Tarbox, J., & Kornack, J.A. (2013). Teaching children with autism to detect and respond to deceptive statements. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorder, 7*, 503–508.

Renzetti, C.M. (1994). On dancing with a bear: Reflections on some of the current debates among domestic violence theorists. *Violence and Victims, 9,*195–200.

Roth, M.E., & Gillis, J.M. (2015). Convenience with the click of a mouse: A survey of adults with autism spectrum disorder on online dating. *Sexuality and Disability, 33*, 133–150.

Rothman, E.F., Nagaswaran, A., Johnson, R.M., Adams, K.M., Scrivens, J., & Baughman, A. (2012). U.S. tabloid magazine coverage of a celebrity dating abuse incident: Rihanna and Chris Brown. *Journal of Health Communication: International Perspectives, 17*(6), 733–744.

Schaaf, R.C., Toth-Cohen, S., Johnson, S.L., Outten, G., & Benevides, T.W. (2011). The everyday routines of families of children with autism: Examining the impact of sensory processing difficulties on the family. *Autism, 15*(2), 1–17.

Sears, H.A., Byers, E.S., Whelan, J.J., & Saint-Pierre, M. (2006). "If it hurts you, then it is not a joke": Adolescents' ideas about girls' and boys' use and experience of abusive behavior in dating relationships. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 21*(9), 1191–1207.

Seltzer, M.M., Krauss, M.W., Shattuck, P.T., Orsmond, G., Swe, A., & Lord, C. (2003). The symptoms of autistic spectrum disorders in adolescence and adulthood. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 33*, 565–581.

Sharpe, D., & Taylor, J.K. (1999). An examination of variables from a socio-developmental model to explain physical and psychological dating violence. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science, 31*(3), 165–175.

Shea, V., & Mesibov, G.B. (2005). Adolescents and adults with autism. In F. R. Volkmar, R. Paul, A. Klin, & D. Cohen (Eds.), *Handbook of autism and pervasive developmental disorders* (pp. 288–311). New York, NY: John Wiley and sons.

Simons-Morton, B.G., Haynie, D., & Noelcke, E. (2009). Social influences: The effects of socialization, selection, and social normative processes on health behavior. In R. J. DiClemente, R. A. Crosby & M. C. Kegler (Eds.), *Emerging theories in health promotion practice and research* (pp. 65–97). San Francisco, SF: Jossey-Bass.

Skinner, B.F. (1953). *Science and human behaviour*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Smith, P.H., White, J.W., & Moracco, K.E. (2009). Becoming who we are: A theoretical explanation of gendered social structures and social networks that shape adolescent interpersonal aggression. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 33*, 25–29.

Spotorno, N., & Noveck, I.A. (2014). When is irony effortful? *Journal of Experimental Psychology, 143*(4), 1649–1665.

Stokes, M., & Newton, N. (2004). Autistic spectrum disorders and stalking. *Autism, 8*, 337–338.

Stokes, M., Newton, N., & Kaur, A. (2007). Stalking, and social and romantic functioning among adolescents and adults with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 37*, 1969–1986.

Tissot, C. (2009). Establishing a sexual identity. *Autism, 13*(6), 551–566.

Underwood, M.K., & Rosen, L.H. (2009). Gender, peer relations, and challenges for girlfriends and boyfriends coming together in adolescence. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 33*, 16–20.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2009). *International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators.* Paris, France: Author.

van Roekel E., Scholte R.H., & Didden R. (2010) Bullying among adolescents with autism spectrum disorders: Prevalence and perception. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 40*, 63–73.

Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD) (2015). *Independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales (the Donaldson Review).* Cardiff, Wales: Author.

Walsh, K., Zwi, K., Woolfenden, S., & Shlonsky, A. (2015). *School-based education programmes for the prevention of child sexual abuse.* Retrieved 29 December, 2015, from http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/enhanced/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD004380.pub3

Werling D.M., & Geschwind, D.H. (2013). Sex differences in autism spectrum disorders. *Current Opinion in Neurology, 26*(2), 146–153.

White, J.W. (2009). A gendered approach to adolescent dating violence: Conceptual and methodological issues. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 33*(1), 1–15.

Wilkinson, L.A. (2005). Supporting the inclusion of a student with Asperger syndrome: A case study using conjoint behavioural consultation and self-management. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 21*(4). 307–326.

Wolf, K.A., & Foshee, V.A. (2003). Family violence, anger expression styles and adolescent dating violence. *Journal of Family Violence, 18*(6), 309–316.

Zurbriggen, E.L. (2009). Understanding and preventing adolescent dating violence: The importance of developmental, sociocultural, and gendered perspectives. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 33*, 30–33.

Part 2: Major Research Journal Article

1. Abstract

Individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may be vulnerable to experiencing unhealthy relationships due to specific individual differences, different opportunities and experiences or, in line with an ecological perspective, a combination of both. The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of individuals with ASD, with regards to healthy and unhealthy relationships, and to examine the learning sources considered most valuable to them. Participants included 11 adolescents with ASD and a comparison group of 13 typically developing individuals. Participants completed the Attitudes towards Dating Violence Scales (Price et al., 1999) and were interviewed using an adaptation of the Ideal Self technique (Moran, 2001). Thematic analysis indicated a number of similarities between participants. Individuals with ASD, however, were more likely to discuss the following: direct behaviours within unhealthy relationships; concrete rules to guide expectations; a need for sameness; and the influence of formal learning opportunities. Implications for sex and relationship education are discussed and the role of educational psychologists is highlighted.

2. Introduction

Partner violence (PV) refers to "the occurrence of physically, sexually, and/or psychologically violent episodes in the intimate interpersonal relationship" (Herrman, 2009, p. 164) and is acknowledged to be a growing concern within adolescent relationships (e.g., Barter, 2009; Hertzog & Rowley, 2014). Due to difficulties with social communication, emotional literacy and restricted behaviours, young people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may be particularly vulnerable to PV (e.g., Stokes, Kaur & Newton, 2007; Hartman, 2014). The current study, therefore, aims to explore the perceptions of individuals with ASD, with regards to healthy/unhealthy relationships, and consider differentiated support that may be required in schools.

Whilst the following study focuses primarily upon the broader context of healthy and unhealthy relationships, it is important to acknowledge that the point at which behaviours may be considered to constitute PV is rather ambiguous (Stokes et al., 2007). Accordingly, implications of this study cannot be considered in isolation from the topic of PV. Furthermore, this approach enables the current study to be situated within the developing research base regarding PV within adolescent relationships.

2.1 A Consideration of the Impact of Traits Associated with ASD on the Likelihood of PV

In order to explore the potential impact of traits associated with ASD on the likelihood of individuals using and/or experiencing behaviours associated with PV, this study draws upon the typically developing (TD) population for the purposes of comparison. It is, nevertheless, acknowledged that the term 'TD' has limitations. Most notably, it is important to acknowledge that ASD is considered by some individuals to represent neurodiversity in human development: a form of natural variation that should not be assumed pathological or deficient in comparison to the dominant culture of TD individuals (Jaarsma & Welin, 2012). It is, therefore, important to consider the possible implications of employing this term. That said, this terminology is widely used and recognised within the existing research base and, for the purposes of clarity and concision, is useful in reference to individuals without a diagnosis of ASD.

Difficulties with social communication may render individuals with ASD vulnerable to unhealthy relationship behaviours. Parental reports, case studies and anecdotal evidence,

for instance, have suggested that individuals with ASD may be vulnerable to accusations of stalking (e.g., Stokes et al., 2007). These findings have been attributed to the display of a "perseverative focus" on desired persons and difficulties interpreting cues that this behaviour is causing distress (Dell'Osso et al., 2015, p. 11).

Furthermore, individuals with ASD are less likely to draw non-literal inferences from speech and may, thus, find it challenging to recognise a range of indirect behaviours associated with psychological PV (e.g., deception, control and manipulation; Landa, 2000). This could, therefore, place individuals with ASD at risk of exploitation.

Additionally, some individuals with ASD present with "highly repetitive" behaviours or a profound "need for sameness" (Baron-Cohen, 2008, p. 18). Such traits may manifest within the context of relationships (Hartman, 2014). A tendency towards rigidity, for instance, may cause individuals to utilise fixed rules to categorise behaviours as healthy/unhealthy. This systematic approach (Baron-Cohen, 2002), however, may become problematic in the context of relationships: social interaction "knows no fixed, absolute rules" (Klin, Jones, Schultz & Volkmar, 2003, p. 349) and individuals must consider the context of a given behaviour, in order to determine its acceptability.

2.2 Ecological Perspective: The Impact of Groups and Systems on Individuals with ASD

It is also possible that the learning experiences of individuals with ASD differ to those of TD adolescents. For example, whereas peers have been shown to shape "standards of acceptable dating behaviours" for TD adolescents (e.g., Arriaga & Foshee, 2004, p. 178; Ellis, Chung-Hall & Dumas, 2013), social learning may be an insufficient source of information for individuals with ASD (Hatton & Tector, 2010).

Furthermore, the discourse of risk associated with the sexual and relational needs of individuals with ASD may result in attempts to avoid or control related issues (Gougeon, 2010; Hartman, 2014). Opportunities for sex and relationship education (SRE) may, therefore, be restricted.

2.3 Existing Research and Current Gaps

Hartman (2014) concluded that the small research literature regarding ASD and relationships suffers from methodological and validation issues: small samples; lack of

randomised sampling; overreliance on reports from parents and professionals; overemphasis on sexual behaviours/needs; and male sampling biases. Hartman (2014), additionally, highlights the lack of control groups within these studies and suggests that issues have been conceptualised as specific to individuals with ASD, prior to establishing meaningful comparisons with TD individuals.

2.4 Current Study

In order to contribute to the research literature, and address the methodological issues noted, the current study aims to explore three research questions:

1. How are young people, with and without ASD, similar in their perceptions of healthy/unhealthy relationships?
2. In what ways do TD adolescents and individuals with ASD (male and female) differ in their perceptions of healthy/unhealthy relationships?
3. Are the perceptions of TD adolescents and individuals with ASD influenced by different sources of information?

3. Methodology

3.1 Epistemology

A critical realism perspective was adopted. This standpoint allows for one explanation of reality to be presented, whilst acknowledging that this has been "framed by relevant factors, relations, and conditions" (Rosnow & Georgoudi, 1986, p. 4; Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006). As such, this perspective avoids reliance on any single method of inquiry and is consistent with the mixed methods design employed (Tebes, 2005; Hall, 2012). The quantitative and qualitative data can, thus, be considered in concert to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016).

3.2 Participants

Specialist provisions were approached to recruit participants with a diagnosis of ASD. In order to access these provisions, individuals were required to have a formal diagnosis of ASD; thus, it was not necessary to view the medical records of these individuals. The specialist provisions were all attached to mainstream schools and offered different

opportunities for inclusion. Most frequently, individuals were encouraged to attend mainstream lessons in subjects of strength. All of the specialist provisions, however, offered separate areas, away from the mainstream site, for their pupils to access during unstructured times of day.

Head teachers of three mainstream schools, one private school, one specialist school and eight specialist bases were approached using gatekeeper letters (Appendices A and B), including copies of the parent/guardian and pupil information sheets and consent forms (Appendices C to F) and a copy of the Attitudes towards Dating Violence Scales (ADVSs; Price et al., 1999; Appendix G). The head teachers of two mainstream schools, one private school and four specialist bases agreed to participate.

A total of 24 participants were recruited: 7 TD males (Mean age = 14.14 years) and 6 TD females (Mean age = 15.17 years), from two mainstream schools; 6 males with ASD (Mean age = 15.83 years), from one specialist base; and 5 females with ASD (Mean age = 14.6 years), from four specialist bases and one private school. This sample size is deemed ample for a thematic analysis of the entire dataset and sufficient for comparisons between groups (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Comparisons drawn between the groups, however, cannot be considered representative of these populations.

All participants were aged between 13 and 17 years (Mean = 14.92 years). Research suggests that general violence peaks in mid-adolescence; therefore, the constructions of this age group were considered relevant (e.g., Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, Van Kammen & Farrington, 1991). All participants had achieved a minimum of Level 3 in reading and oracy, to ensure they were able to understand and respond to the questionnaire and interview questions. The ADVSs have been validated with 11 to 19 year olds of average reading ability (Price et al., 1999); therefore, Level 3 was deemed sufficient.

3.3 Measures

Through six subscales, the ADVSs measure attitudes towards the following: male psychological, physical and sexual PV; and female psychological, physical and sexual PV (Price et al., 1999). Participants were required to state how far they agreed with a total of 76 statements (e.g., boys should spend most of their time with their girlfriends) using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = mildly disagree, 3 = neither

agree nor disagree, 4 = mildly agree and 5 = strongly agree). Items were reverse scored and then scores were totalled. Higher scores indicate greater tolerance to PV.

Using a sample of over 800 adolescents, Price et al. (1999) conducted a validation study of the ADVSs. Internal consistencies for the subscales ranged from 0.75 to 0.87, exceeding the minimum for test score reliability ($\alpha = 0.60$) and suggesting items within each subscale measure the same construct. Construct validity was evidenced by interrelationships between the subscales and their positive correlations with attitudes towards gender roles. Criterion validity was also evidenced: higher scores on the ADVSs were associated with greater use of PV within relationships.

3.4 Procedure

Participants completed a demographic form, the ADVSs and an adaption of the Ideal Self technique (Moran, 2001), referred to as the Ideal Relationship technique (Appendices G to I).

3.4.1 The ADVSs (approximately 15 minutes).

Participants completed the ADVSs independently. The ADVSs do not indicate whether the statements represent healthy/unhealthy behaviours; therefore, the impact of completing this questionnaire on responses within the subsequent activity was expected to be minimal. All data were stored anonymously.

3.4.2 The Ideal Relationship technique, using semi-structured questions and prompts (approximately 45 minutes).

The Ideal Relationship technique involved participants drawing and/or labelling characteristics of desirable/undesirable relationships. Previous adaptations of the Ideal Self technique have been used effectively with adolescents with ASD (Moran, 2006; Williams & Hanke, 2007). These techniques are underpinned by principles of personal construct psychology (PCP; Kelly, 1955) and explore opposing poles of particular constructs (Moran, 2001). It is, therefore, acknowledged that the elicitation of such bipolar constructs is likely to have impacted on the qualitative data gathered.

Semi-structured interview questions were utilised to gather data in relation to the research questions (Appendix J). Discussions were audio-recorded to assist thematic

analysis. Recordings were stored on a secure computer, confidentially, and only the researcher had access to the information. Participants' responses were anonymised 2 weeks after the interview.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought from the university ethics committee. Information sheets and consent forms were given to pupils meeting the inclusion criteria and their parents/guardians. Both pupil and parental consent were required prior to participation.

Following participation, pupils were debriefed concerning the purpose and value of the research. Additional time was set aside for participants to ask questions and a designated member of staff was available, should they wish to discuss arising issues. Participants were also provided with debrief forms, containing relevant contact details, websites and support services (Appendix K).

4. Quantitative Data Analysis

Questionnaire data were inputted into SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists; Appendix L) and, following descriptive analyses, different statistical tests were considered.

Due to the small sample size, comparing scores on all six subscales would have violated an assumption of multivariate analysis of variance. Cronbach's alpha was, therefore, employed to analyse the internal consistency of all items across the six subscales. This indicated that the total scale had good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.95$). Accordingly, a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test for differences in overall PV tolerance scores (the sum of scores across the subscales), at each level of the two independent variables: gender (male/female) and neurological development (TD/ASD). An alpha level of $< .05$ was employed (Appendix M).

The power of this statistical test was lower than Cohen's (1988) desired value of 0.80 (Appendix M), which can cause "strong and important effects" to be non-significant (Type II error; Levine & Hullet, 2002, p. 3). Effect sizes were also, therefore, employed to estimate the magnitude of effects. Cohen's (1988) guidelines for interpreting effect sizes were utilised (0.01 = small; 0.06 = medium; and 0.14 = large).

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1

Means and standard deviations for PV tolerance scores

Group	N	Mean	SD
Male/TD	7	152.86	31.16
Male/ASD	6	166.33	46.60
Female/TD	6	143.50	36.96
Female/ASD	5	114.40	32.37

Note. N = number of participants in the groups, SD = standard deviation.

Table 1 displays an overview of the means and standard deviations of PV tolerance scores for each group. The highest possible mean score was 380 and the lowest possible mean score was 76. Figure 2 provides a bar graph to illustrate these results.
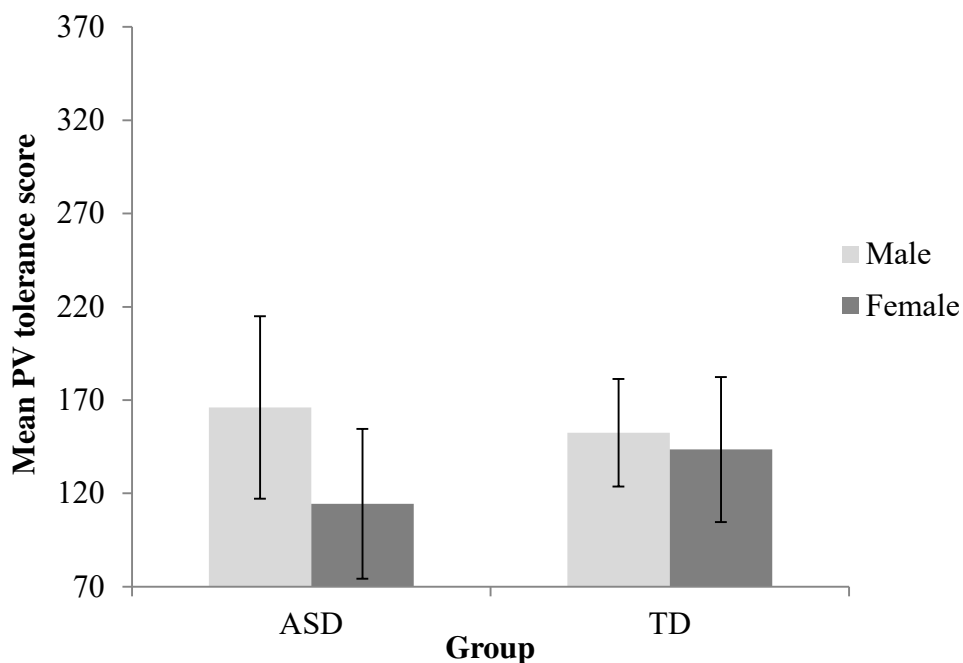
Figure 2. Mean PV tolerance scores for males and females, with and without a diagnosis of ASD. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

4.2 Assumptions of a two-way ANOVA.

The data were checked to ensure that the following assumptions of a two-way ANOVA had not been violated.

4.2.1 The dependent variable should measure continuous data, whilst the two independent variables should each consist of two or more categorical, independent groups.

The dependent variable (PV tolerance scores) was measured at the continuous level. The two independent variables were categorical and each consisted of two levels: gender (male/female); and neurological development (ASD/TD). There were different participants in each group; therefore, samples were independent.

4.2.2 The data must be approximately normally distributed and the variances of the groups must be equal.

Shapiro-Wilks tests of normality, skewness and kurtosis z-values (which were all within +/-1.96) and visual inspections of the normal Q-Q plots indicated that PV tolerance scores were approximately normally distributed at each level of the two independent variables (Table 2).

Table 2

Standard errors and z-values (for skewness and kurtosis) and results of the Shapiro-Wilks tests of normality

Group	Skewness	Kurtosis	Shapiro-Wilks tests
Male/TD	SE = 0.79 (z = 0.73)	SE = 1.59 (z = -0.46)	S-W = 0.89, df = 7, p = 0.30
Male/ASD	SE = 0.85 (z = 0.69)	SE = 1.74 (z = -0.37)	S-W = 0.96, df = 6, p = 0.84
Female/TD	SE = 0.85 (z = 1.57)	SE = 1.74 (z = 1.18)	S-W = 0.90, df = 6, p = 0.34
Female/ASD	SE = 0.91 (z = 1.28)	SE = 2.00 (z = 0.27)	S-W = 0.87, df = 5, p = 0.26
All participants	SE = 0.47 (z = 1.38)	SE = 0.92 (z = 0.32)	S-W = 0.95, df = 24, p = 0.32

Note. SE = standard error, z = z value, S-W = Shapiro-Wilks statistic, df = degrees of freedom, p = p values, significant at the p<.05 level.

Levene's test verified the equality of variances in the samples, $F(3, 20) = 0.46$, p = 0.71.

4.2.3 The groups must have approximately the same sample size.

ANOVA is a robust test for groups of similar size and the differences between the groups are not considered to violate this assumption (Garson, 2012).

4.2.4 There should be no significant outliers.

Garson (2012) states "it is common to define outliers as cases which are more than plus or minus three standard deviations from the mean" (p. 31). Within the data, no scores were more than plus or minus two standard deviations from the mean.

4.3 Results and Preliminary Discussion

Mean PV tolerance scores were slightly higher for TD participants ($M = 148.54$), compared to participants with ASD ($M = 142.73$). The main effect of neurological development, however, did not reach statistical significance and the effect size was small, $F(1, 20) = 0.26$, $p = 0.62$, $\eta_\rho^2 = 0.013$. Mean PV tolerance scores were higher for males ($M = 159.08$) compared to females ($M = 130.27$). The main effect of gender was near significance and the effect size was large, $F(1, 20) = 4.01$, $p = 0.06$, $\eta_\rho^2 = 0.17$. The interaction between gender and neurological development was not statistically significant, but the effect size was medium, $F(1, 20) = 1.94$, $p = 0.18$, $\eta_\rho^2 = 0.09$.

As shown in Figure 2, the near-significant main effect of gender is predominantly due to the difference between males and females with ASD: this may explain the medium effect size for the interaction between gender and neurological development. One possible explanation for this finding is that individuals with ASD categorised behaviours as healthy/unhealthy more definitively, by selecting strongly agree/disagree on the Likert scale more regularly than TD participants. Figure 3, however, only supports this suggestion for females with ASD. These differences will be explored further in conjunction with the qualitative data.
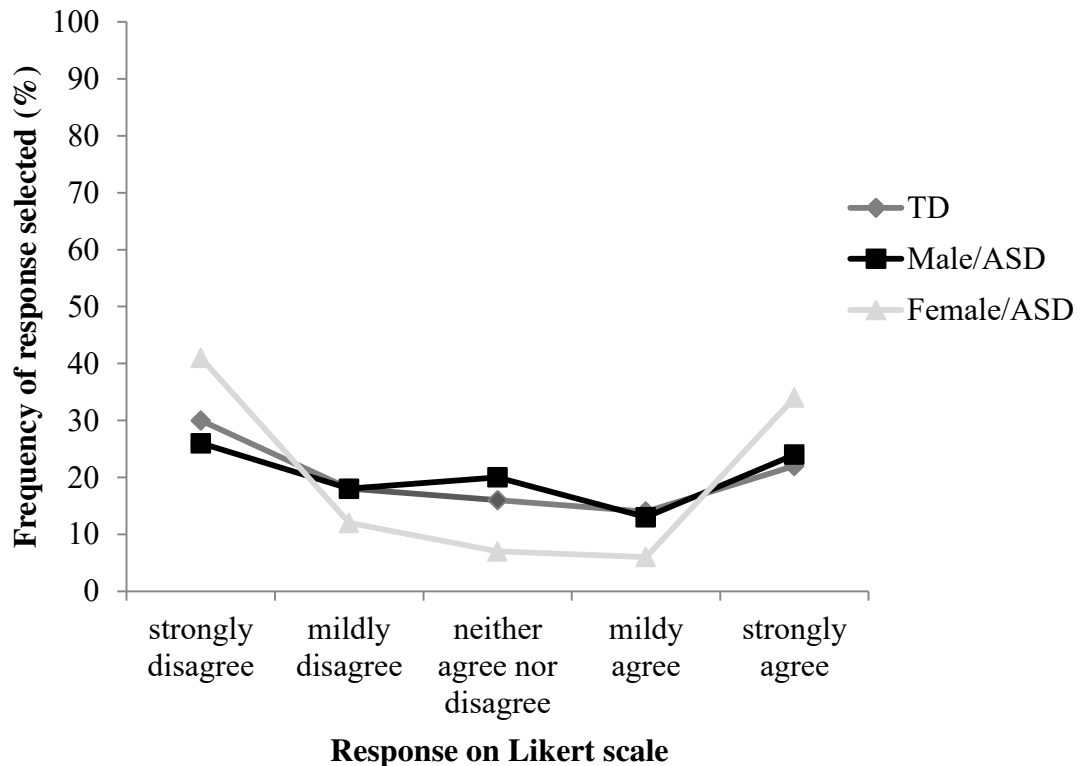
Figure 3. Frequency of each Likert scale response selected by TD participants, compared to males and females with ASD.

5. Qualitative Data Analysis

To ensure a rigorous thematic analysis was employed, Braun and Clarke's (2013) seven stages were followed: transcription; reading and familiarisation; complete coding; searching for themes; reviewing themes and producing a provisional thematic map; defining and naming themes; and report writing. It is, nevertheless, acknowledged that thematic analysis is considered to have less interpretative power than other approaches and does not allow for detailed claims regarding the use of language (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Interviews were transcribed verbatim; however, when "cleaning up" the data, identifying information was anonymised, participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms and hesitations and repetitions were removed (Sandelowski, 1994; Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 251).

During the coding stage, phrases were employed to represent meanings, within lines or chunks of data, and the entire dataset was coded in relation to each research question (Appendix N). Codes were both inductive and deductive in nature. In line with PCP, this ensured that the analysis remained close to the participants' language choices and

constructs (Moran, 2001). It was, however, also possible to go beyond the explicit content of the data and make connections with existing theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

As familiarity with the dataset increased, codes were grouped into distinct themes and subthemes and comparisons were drawn between groups. The validity of proposed themes and subthemes was ensured through an iterative process of continuous reference to the whole dataset and coded data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Additionally, investigator triangulation was undertaken during supervision sessions whilst on placement with an educational psychology service. Titles of proposed themes and subthemes were shared and the supervisor was required to match a total of 91 data extracts to their corresponding themes (Appendix O). There was 80% agreement during this process: this is argued to enhance the validity of the themes generated (Denzin, 1989).

5.1 Qualitative Results and Thematic Map

The following subsections detail the themes identified in relation to each research question. Where data extracts are included, '[...]' indicates that irrelevant material has been removed.

The following thematic map (Figure 4) illustrates the themes and subthemes identified and the links between them. Appendix P collates all supporting data extracts relevant to each theme and subtheme.

1. An emotional connection

2. The hidden nature of unhealthy relationships

1. ASD - reassured by rules and systems

1.1 Expectations of sameness

3. Unhealthy responses to conflict

4. Unhealthy relationships - obstructive to school work and life goals

2. Healthy, unhealthy or abusive - does context matter?

3. Understanding a partner's direct and indirect behaviours

Are the perceptions of TD adolescents and individuals with ASD influenced by different sources of information?

4. Direct or indirect responses to conflict?

5. TD participants - the benefits of unhealthy relationships

1. Social learning opportunities

2. The influence of the media

3. Opportunities for incidental versus formal learning
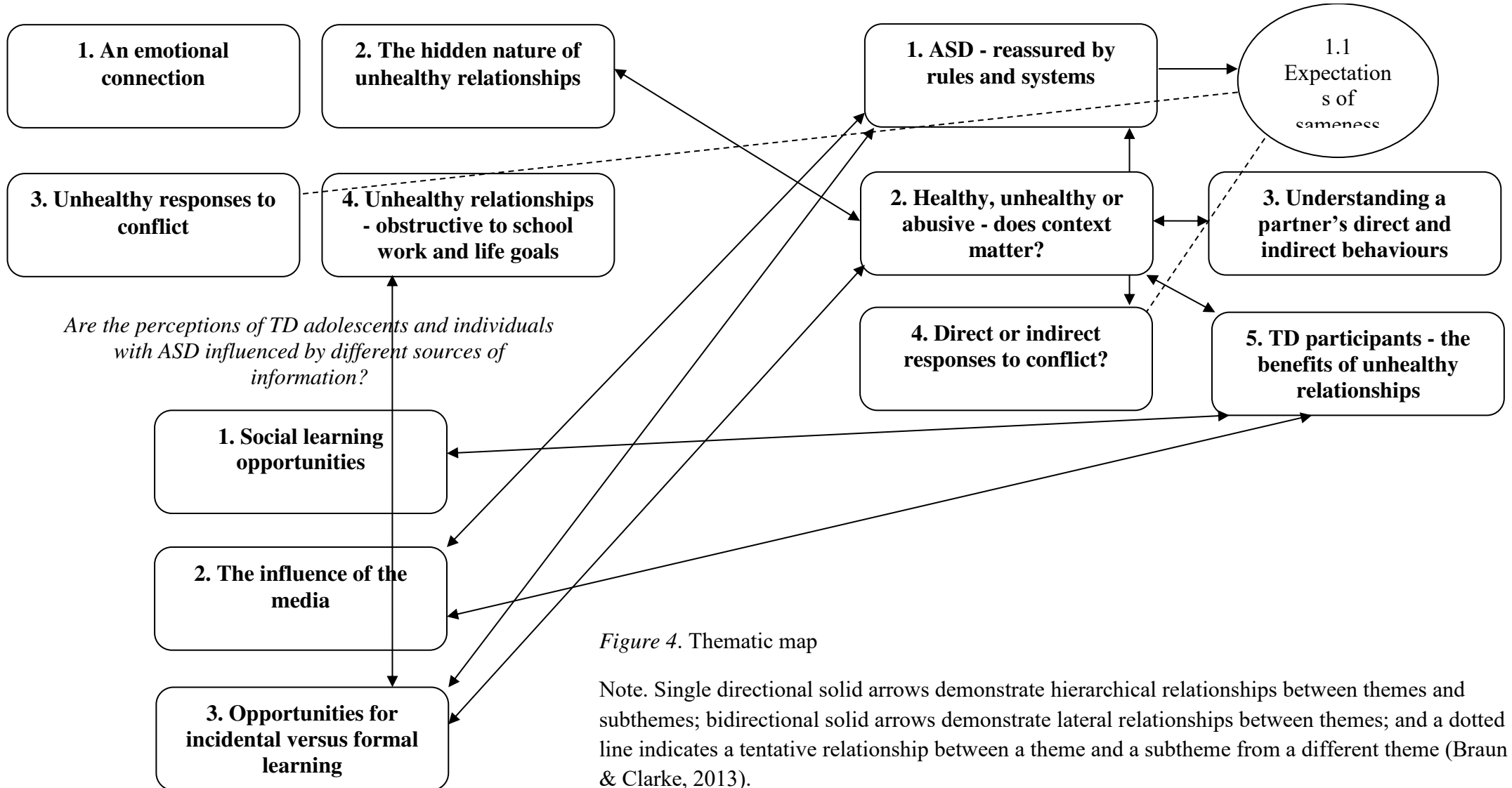
Figure 4. Thematic map

Note. Single directional solid arrows demonstrate hierarchical relationships between themes and subthemes; bidirectional solid arrows demonstrate lateral relationships between themes; and a dotted line indicates a tentative relationship between a theme and a subtheme from a different theme (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

5.1.1 How are young people, with and without ASD, similar in their perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships?

Theme 1: An emotional connection.

equal
trust
support

(Sarah, TD)
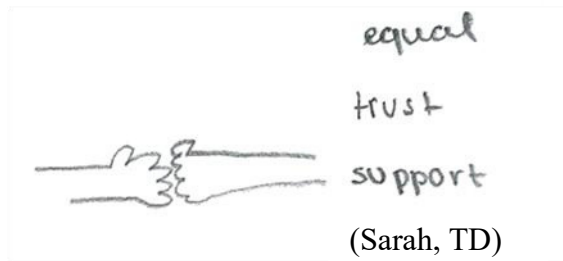
'It's a drawing of a couple holding hands and being happy with each other and their company' (Grace, ASD)

Many participants emphasised the importance of nurture and an emotional connection: 'there's just more of an emotional connection [...] room to foster a kind of understanding' (Molly, ASD). Additionally, participants discussed how their partner would be supportive of their individual needs and goals: 'he would be there to help me, wherever he could' (Grace, ASD).

Supporting previous research, this suggests that the experience of an emotional connection and social support is important to adolescents, with and without ASD. This highlights the value of improving current strategies and interventions to support all young people to develop and maintain healthy relationships.

Theme 2: The hidden nature of unhealthy relationships.
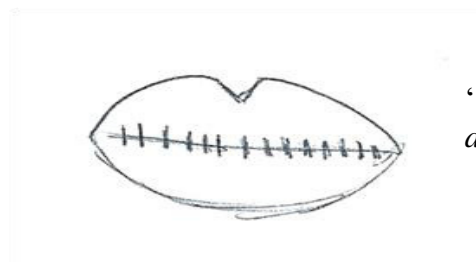
'...you wouldn't be able to say anything' (Molly, ASD)

A majority of participants believed that difficulties within unhealthy relationships would remain concealed. Firstly, several participants commented that they would prefer to keep issues hidden: 'I don't want to reveal to the world that I've got a terrible relationship' (Daniel, ASD). This appeared to be partially due to the perception that issues may be too personal to disclose: 'you just don't tell people that kind of stuff' (Molly, ASD).

These comments support the findings of Barter, McCarry, Berridge & Evans' (2009) survey, within which only a minority of young people reported informing an adult of PV. Building on this, some adolescents in the current study indicated that they would not inform an adult due to concerns that he/she may attempt to control the situation. Grace (ASD), for example, stated that her parents would 'just take it too far' by 'phoning the police'. Issues may, therefore, have to be considered serious before being disclosed: 'it would be confidential up to the point where I would like to report that to the authorities' (Harry, ASD).

For male participants, the desire to conceal relationship difficulties also appeared to serve the function of protecting self-esteem: 'it's a case of pride [...] I don't wanna show all of the faults' (Daniel, ASD). Supporting Barter et al.'s (2009) suggestion, this may indicate that the disclosure of relationship difficulties is perceived to indicate a level of vulnerability that is incompatible with dominant expectations of masculinity (e.g., Paechter, 2007):

> Especially for like if it was a man, they'd be like embarrassed [...] they don't wanna like speak out about it [...]. They'd be afraid that they'd just like laugh at them or like their friends would just take the mick. (Sarah, TD)

A few female participants indicated that they may conceal issues due to feelings of guilt or shame. Amy (ASD), for example, shared that she would 'feel really annoyed' with herself if her partner forced her into having sex due to the belief that she 'should've probably pushed them harder' to prevent it. Supporting previous studies, this suggests that females may be vulnerable to questioning their responsibility for experiencing PV (Chung, 2005; Barter et al., 2009).

Moreover, many participants indicated that family and friends may respond negatively to their relationship difficulties:

> If your family don't want you near him [...] your family's just gonna go. So you won't have any family. They're just gonna disown you, and then all your friends will, so you'll have no one. (Imogen, TD)

Daisy (TD), similarly, described how an unhealthy relationship may impact negatively on her relationship with her mother: 'she would make it clear that she wasn't happy with it and she would kind of distance herself from me'. These comments have important implications: building on Barter et al.'s (2009) findings, adolescents may conceal issues due to concerns that friends or family members will 'disown' them.

Accordingly, adolescents may benefit from improved access to confidential support systems: 'we could talk to someone experienced' (Lily, TD).

Theme 3: Unhealthy responses to conflict.

'*I don't deal very well with telling people like that I miss you or anything nice - I kind of just go straight to the negative*' (Daisy, TD)

A majority of participants described responding to relationship difficulties in unhealthy ways. Most evidently, a quarter of participants indicated that they may use behaviours associated with physical PV: 'I would push her away' (Jack, ASD); and 'could probably lash out one day' (Lily, TD). This fear of becoming abusive was captured vividly by the following comment:

> What I would be most afraid of in the relationship is simply physical violence like, I mean, from myself [...] obviously there might be a case where I lose my temper to a point where I just can't take it anymore, so I end up maybe doing something that hurts them [...] you lose your temper or you just end up losing your mind. (Daniel, ASD)

This supports Sears, Byers, Whelan and Saint-Pierre's (2006) assertion that adolescents may require support to develop conflict resolution skills.

Theme 4: Unhealthy relationships - obstructive to school work and life goals.

'*I'll end up with an F, because of her*' (Oliver, ASD)

Nearly all participants perceived unhealthy relationships to impact negatively on school work and/or life opportunities. Most frequently, participants described unhealthy relationships as time-consuming and distracting: 'everything you're hearing is just going through that ear and out of the other' (Lily, TD). Many female participants also described how ruminating about issues might interfere with their readiness to learn: 'I'd

be considering how bad it is […] who to tell and what to do, like the worst case scenario' (Amy, ASD). As a result, several participants indicated that they would be more likely to fail exams: 'your GCSEs would be terrible' (Tom, TD).

Overall, this theme is consistent with the potentially long-term implications of experiencing relationship difficulties reported in previous studies (e.g., Banyard & Cross, 2008; Chronister, Marsiglio, Linville & Lantrip, 2014) and highlights the relevance of this topic, within the field of education.

5.1.2 In what ways do TD adolescents and individuals with ASD differ in their perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships?

Theme 1: ASD - reassured by rules and systems.
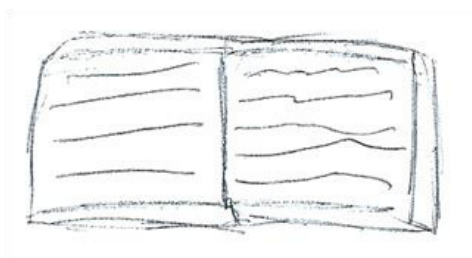
'...books [...] they kind of have a formula to 'em [...] nice and set out [...] doesn't do anything too surprising' (Molly, ASD)

Supporting Baron-Cohen's (2002) empathising-systemising theory, participants with ASD were more likely to describe a rule-based, systematic approach to relationships. Harry, for example, described a warning system that he would employ to ensure that his partner understood his expectations:

> I'll give her a caution, saying that I will leave after if you do it to me a couple times. Warning is saying two times, twice more, and I'm done. Danger means it's once more and I'm done and, when she exceeds that danger limit, I am divorced.

Additionally, participants with ASD were more likely to reference rule-breaking and the illegality of behaviours: Oliver described how he would not like his partner to swear at him because 'it's the most illegal thing' and Tia explained that violence is unhealthy 'because it's against the law'. Accordingly, these individuals were more likely to suggest involving the police: 'I'd phone the police and get a court order' (Tia).

This rule-based approach also appeared to influence the types of behaviours individuals with ASD found acceptable/unacceptable: Matthew described how he would be concerned if his partner was 'a smoker' or 'obese' and Oliver shared concerns regarding a partner who needed to 'drink more water' or 'brush their teeth properly'. It could be

suggested that these examples reflect behaviours which are considered to breach societal norms (Gutstein & Sheely, 2002). It is possible, therefore, that these socially approved behaviours were learnt as rules during childhood and have since been interpreted as having almost a legal status.

Supporting Vermeulen (2015), several comments suggested that this rule-based approach may provide comfort by instilling a level of predictability within otherwise complex and changeable social interactions. Molly, for example, described her ideal relationship as similar to a structured book:

> I guess like books have a kind of gradual kind of start finish end, and they kind of have a formula to 'em and that [...] nice and set out [...] like it doesn't do anything too surprising.

Similarly, Oliver described feeling annoyed and confused with 'people who are contraries'. It is, therefore, possible that these individuals remember times when they have felt confused or distressed when attempting to understand another person's behaviour. Clear rules may, thus, provide reassurance and reduce demands to monitor social, emotional and contextual cues within interactions (Gutstein & Sheely, 2002):

> It's just kind of nice to know what you're doing, just not having to think about what you're gonna say or like if this is gonna be okay or whatever. Just kind of knowing what's the rules. (Molly)

This systematic approach may also prevent these individuals from becoming confused by the "blurry distinction" between healthy and unhealthy relationships: behaviours either violate or uphold the rules (Stokes et al., 2007, p. 1970). This theme could, therefore, offer support for the explanation of the quantitative results for females with ASD, who were more likely to categorise behaviours definitively as healthy/unhealthy. It must be acknowledged, however, that this pattern of response was not identified for males with ASD.

Subtheme 1.1: Expectations of sameness.
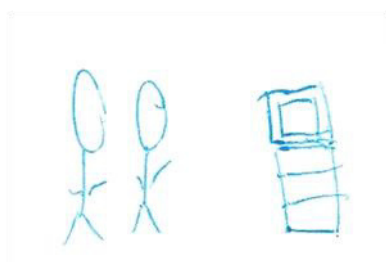
'...imagine they're watching a programme together right, in this kind of healthy relationship [...] they'd obviously both agree on the show, they'd obviously agree on the programme' (Daniel, ASD)

Individuals with ASD were also more likely to discuss a desire for their partners to share similar interests, personality traits and viewpoints: 'you have to have something in common' (Oliver). Elaborating on this, Daniel described how unhealthy relationships are caused by 'differences that go way too far', such as dissimilar tastes in furniture and colours. He described how 'there's a lot less like stuff you have to put up with if you both agree on the same things':

> You get along with everything. You both agree on exactly the same things. So you both agree that a BMW is better than a Toyota; you both agree that you prefer literature as opposed to the movies; you both agree that sometimes the news lies.

Accordingly, Daniel described a healthy relationship as like 'hanging out with yourself'.

These comments, thus, provide examples of how the restricted behaviours and interests associated with ASD (Baron-Cohen, 2008) may manifest within the context of relationships. On occasions, however, expectations of sameness may be unrealistic and, consequently, the complex and unpredictable nature of relationships may become challenging (Vermeulen, 2015).

Theme 2: Healthy, unhealthy or abusive - does context matter?

'If it's just like an argument and she's really annoyed for something and it's just a one off then fair enough. But if it's continuous then like yeah continuing on, over and over again, then yeah I wouldn't want that.' (Jacob, TD)
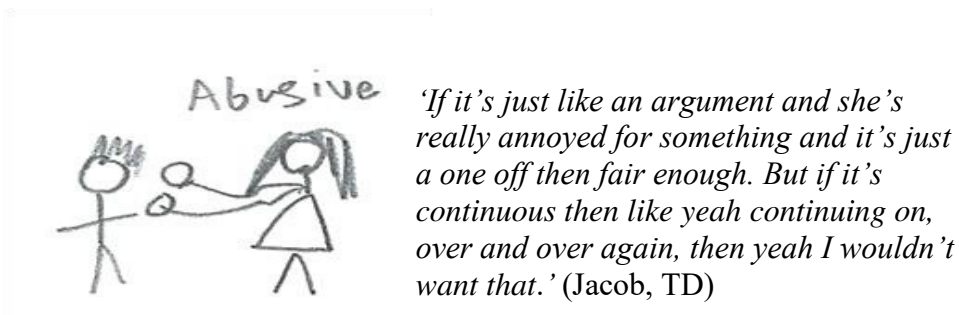
Supporting Sears et al.'s (2006) findings, many TD participants and females with ASD (and one male with ASD) referenced the frequency, motive and severity of behaviours when determining whether a relationship should be considered unhealthy. Daniel (ASD), for example, described how 'anger issues' could justify physical PV, if the injuries sustained were 'minor':

> Where they are extremely cross and can't help it or, you know, they have anger issues and things like that I might forgive them if the injuries are minor. So let's say I got cut or something. It wasn't big, it was small, wasn't deep or anything like that [...]. That's nothing to be super, you know, crazy about [...]. I suppose I could be fine with that.

Moreover, many TD participants expected a few unhealthy behaviours and described 'ideal relationships' as unrealistic and insincere: 'no relationship will ever be perfect [...] otherwise you'd just seem really fake' (Jacob); and 'people always make mistakes' (Zack).

Due to the consideration of such contextual factors, however, participants indicated that the distinction between healthy and unhealthy relationships can be unclear:

> At my age like not many people have been in a lot of relationships like you're not that experienced, so you kind of think 'Oh is this normal?', it's like you don't know levels of like tolerance and stuff. (Daisy, TD)

Supporting Barter et al.'s (2009) research, the possible mixture of enjoyable and negative experiences within a relationship was perceived to make this distinction even more challenging: 'there could be a bit of like violence in there and then it could be like a bit of like nice and caring' (Imogen, TD).

As only one male participant with ASD discussed contextual factors, it is possible that males with ASD are less likely to take this information into account when attributing meaning to behaviour (Vermeulen, 2015). As a result, they may be less likely to make allowances for unhealthy behaviours: 'no buts, nothing' (Harry). Nevertheless, as discussed previously, this approach may result in unrealistic expectations of others. The greater consideration of contextual factors by females with ASD, however, warrants further exploration.

Theme 3: Understanding a partner's direct and indirect behaviours.

'...he's swearing at her' (Grace, ASD)
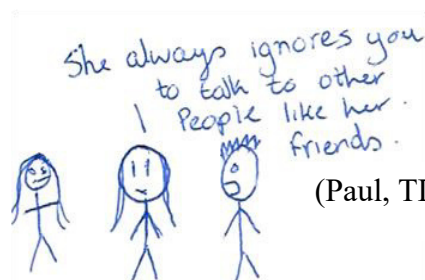
She always ignores you to talk to other people like her friends. (Paul, TD)

For participants with ASD, discussions regarding unhealthy relationships centred on direct forms of physical, sexual and psychological PV: 'they would hurt and would like hit you' (Matthew); 'I wouldn't like a girl to shout at me' (Jack); and 'if she tried to have sexual content with me, without authorised permission' (Harry).

In addition to these concerns, however, TD participants described a range of indirect behaviours within unhealthy relationships. For example, several TD females described the use of insults as a form of humiliation, manipulation and/or sexual coercion:

> Like a man forces a girl into having sex with them and then if they say no it would be stuff like "Oh well you're ..." they just come out with it, something nasty for a girl. (Imogen)

Furthermore, some TD males described how their partner might be evasive or ignore them: 'just doesn't wanna talk to you or anything [...] not telling you anything about what's happening' (Jacob).

Individuals with ASD may, therefore, be less aware of indirect cues that a relationship is unhealthy. Drawing on previous studies (e.g., Levy & Perry, 2011), however, these individuals may also have observed and/or experienced less of the nuances within relationships. Additionally, Molly's (ASD) comment suggests that this finding may be partially due to an overemphasis on direct PV, within SRE: 'they focus too much on physical abuse and not like mind games'.

Theme 4: Direct or indirect responses to conflict?

'...you smoke and this is not happening any more' (Matthew, ASD)
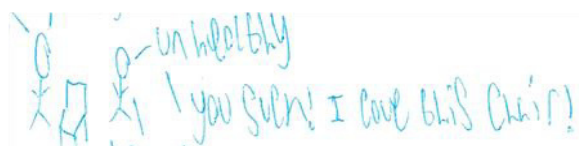
'You suck! I love this chair!' (Daniel ASD)

Several TD participants described responding to conflict within relationships in unhealthy, but indirect, ways. As an example, Ava described how she might engage in behaviours to purposefully 'make her boyfriend jealous' and check on his whereabouts by texting 'every day'. Furthermore, Rhys described how he might monitor his partner's behaviour using CCTV, 'in a position where she would never find out'. When describing his future with this partner, Rhys made the following comment:

> My future, it would probably end up with her being normal, just dealing with it, 'cause at the end of the day she'd rather be with me than someone on benefits [...] so she'd probably adjust a little bit.

These comments, thus, imply indirect means, involving the use of deception, control and status, to modify a person's behaviour.

Male participants with ASD, however, were more likely to suggest direct means of communicating discontent. Oliver, for example, stated he would send 'a written message' saying 'I'm fed up with you', 'yell at her for all the things she caused' or state 'I'd rather be with another girl'. Moreover, if his relationship had a negative impact on his school work, Harry stated he would tell his partner the following: 'you don't do it again or else we will have immediate divorce'.

Daniel (ASD) noted the importance of being 'obvious' and 'thorough' when communicating relationship difficulties and this viewpoint appears to be highlighted by the examples discussed. Depending on the context, however, such directness could be perceived as unacceptable to others (e.g., Landa, 2000). This preference for direct communication may, nevertheless, offer an explanation for the higher mean PV tolerance score of males with ASD: if 'thorough' communication is appreciated by these individuals, perhaps they are more likely to use and/or tolerate comments that their TD peers perceive to be unacceptable.

Theme 5: TD participants - the benefits of unhealthy relationships.

'She's hot [...] yeah they flaunt it'

'...they're normally not ugly if they're gold diggers'

(Rhys, TD)

Several TD participants indicated that unhealthy relationships may be advantageous in some respects. As discussed by Helms, Sullivan, Corona and Taylor (2013), these comments highlight "the complexities teens face in their decision-making processes" and may offer explanations for their motivations to engage in, and maintain, risky relationships.

For some participants, unhealthy behaviours were perceived to provide interest and excitement: 'some girls might like bad boys and like wanna have sex with them' (Imogen). Daisy, for example, offered the following description of men who employ PV:

> People like that are often like really elusive and kind of mysterious [...] a lot of women like someone who's a bit interesting and like difficult and like a bit of

like a bad guy. Like, it just attracts 'cause like girls are like attracted to like problems.

This supports Barter's (2006) supposition: adolescents, particularly females, may characterise particular qualities as signifying higher status, even if these attributes present a potential threat to their safety.

Other participants indicated that unhealthy relationships may achieve popularity: 'if she's popular then you'd be liking it, 'cause you're getting more popular' (Paul). Similarly, Rhys commented that his friends would 'all be jealous' if he was in an unhealthy relationship with an attractive, popular person:

> It's like a car [...] it's like you get to show them off and they get to show you off and it's like a symbol that you made it [...]. People can't see your bank account when you walk past them in the street but they can see your girlfriend, so that's cool.

Elaborating on Barter (2006), therefore, TD males may also experience vulnerabilities to wider pressures: popularity and peer approval may offer powerful social reinforcements for this group.

Drawing upon social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), and the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985), these comments suggest that TD individuals are more likely to develop and maintain unhealthy relationships when this choice is associated with favourable results (Kernsmith & Tolman, 2011). Participants' considerations of popularity also suggest an influence of the "broader peer group" described by Oudekerk, Blachman-Demner and Mulford (2014, p. 4): popularity may involve wider comparisons with peers, at a classroom, year group or whole-school level. The public nature of young people's relationships may, therefore, be significant to TD adolescents (Oudekerk et al., 2014).

Interestingly, advantages of unhealthy relationships were not identified from discussions with participants with ASD. These individuals may, therefore, be less susceptible to desires for popularity or excitement. Alternatively, as 10 out of the 11 participants with ASD attended specialist provisions, it could be argued that pupils attending mainstream schools are subject to greater social pressures.

5.1.3 Are the perceptions of TD adolescents and individuals with ASD influenced by different sources of information?

Theme 1: Social learning opportunities

A majority of TD participants and females with ASD referenced learning from friends and family, predominantly through observation: 'you only set yourself morals and guidelines from like what you see' (Daisy, TD). In line with principles of social learning theory, the extent to which adolescents perceived these role models to be relatable and knowledgeable appeared to determine the extent of their influence: 'they're my age maybe and they can relate more' (Jacob, TD); and 'your mum and dad have like been together for like quite a long time, so like they know what to do' (Paul, TD).

In comparison, male participants with ASD rarely indicated learning from either parents or peers and, on the occasions where these sources were mentioned, participants were unable to provide details of these learning experiences: 'there's a bit here and there and everywhere' (Matthew). Supporting Stokes et al.'s (2007) parental reports, this may suggest that these individuals do not rely upon social learning to the same extent as TD adolescents. There are, however, alternative explanations for this finding: specialist settings may provide fewer social learning opportunities; or these individuals may have found it challenging to articulate their experiences.

Theme 2: The influence of the media

Adolescents with ASD were more likely to reference forms of media as an influential source of information: 'reading books' (Hannah); 'there's a lot of information on TV' (Molly); and 'just seeing like dramas [...], like Eastenders' (Daniel). Daniel also made reference to discussing relationships with people via the internet and online gaming:

> I have friends on the internet I know either from games or just from simple stuff on the internet. I know people on the internet and I get new friends from the games, obviously not actual friends, but you get the chance to learn a bit about them and I've learnt a bit about some people over in places like America and how they have relationships.

Several TD participants also discussed learning about relationships through the media; nevertheless, these sources of information were discussed alongside other influential

sources, such as family and friends. For some males with ASD, however, the media appeared to represent the most influential source of information.

Theme 3: Opportunities for incidental versus formal learning

TD participants described incidental learning opportunities, inside and outside of school. Emma, for example, described how just seeing 'older people' around school influences her understanding of relationships. Moreover, TD individuals discussed spending time with partners outside of school, on a regular basis: 'if you're seeing them all the time outside of school, you're never getting any revision or homework done' (Emma). Several TD adolescents described the importance of learning through such personal experiences: 'you gain experience from it, like if it happened once you know what to expect if it happened again' (William).

For individuals with ASD, whilst references were made to deliberate forms of learning, such as 'sex ed' (Molly) and 'lots of lessons' (Matthew), personal experiences of relationships appeared to be limited and restricted to opportunities in school. In particular, Oliver described how he is currently unable to develop a closer relationship with a pupil, outside of school, and must wait to 'be invited' by her parents. He stated 'I only see her in school' and 'I don't know how I'm supposed to deal with it'. The school context, therefore, may play a greater role in determining relationship opportunities for adolescents with ASD.

It could be argued that this overreliance on formal learning, for individuals with ASD, may reinforce the rule-based approach discussed. This suggestion is supported by Oliver's list of rules he has learnt from books; for example, 'I must not be late, always arrive before her'. Perhaps, therefore, it is through incidental and social learning experiences that TD adolescents develop an understanding of the more subtle intricacies within relationships.

5.2 Summary

Within the following table, the results of the current study have been applied to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework. This table, thus, presents a summary of the different factors, at each level of analysis, which may interact to influence the perceptions and expectations of adolescents with ASD with regards to relationships. It

is, however, acknowledged that this table represents a summary of dominant themes and is not representative of all participants/individuals with ASD.

Table 3

A summary of the different factors, at each level of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, which may interact to influence the perceptions and expectations of adolescents with ASD with regards to relationships

Level of analysis	Factors affecting the perceptions of individuals with ASD
Individual (ontogenetic)	- Expectations of sameness - Rule-based/systematic approach to relationships - Direct communication style
Microsystem	- Influence of the media - Fewer opportunities for social learning - Higher level of supervision/ fewer opportunities for autonomy - Formalised learning opportunities in school - Parental beliefs regarding ASD, sexuality and the need for SRE - Parental perceptions of inclusion - Type of educational provision (mainstream or specialist)
Exosystem	- Influence of the media - Limited breadth of experiences - Limited opportunities to develop relationships outside of school/in the community - Local education policies regarding SRE and inclusion
Macrosystem	- Societal attitudes towards ASD and SRE - Societal attitudes towards inclusion - National education policies regarding SRE and inclusion - Legal restrictions regarding SRE and inclusion

6. Conclusions and Implications of the Study

This study compares perceptions of TD adolescents and individuals with ASD, with regards to healthy and unhealthy relationships. It contributes to the research literature by highlighting issues which appear to be relevant to young people, in general, and suggesting ways in which TD individuals and adolescents with ASD may require differentiated support.

This study suggests that adolescents may be unlikely to disclose relationship difficulties and that help-seeking behaviour may be increased by improving access to confidential support systems. Moreover, it may be beneficial for adolescents to conceptualise relationships as existing along a continuum, from healthy to unhealthy. This may alleviate feelings of confusion when adolescents encounter a mixture of enjoyable and negative experiences within a relationship. Additionally, adolescents may not feel a situation needs to be considered critical or dangerous before seeking support.

A number of young people discussed responding to conflict in unhealthy ways. Individuals with ASD described using physical aggression or employing direct forms of communication, which could be interpreted as aggressive by others. TD adolescents also referenced indirect means of retaliation (e.g., evoking jealousy). Adolescents may, therefore, benefit from support to communicate and resolve relationship difficulties more effectively.

For TD individuals, it was concerning to note that unhealthy behaviours might be accepted if the relationship was perceived to offer excitement or an enhanced reputation. These findings, therefore, suggest that SRE may be more effective if contextual and motivational influences on adolescents' decision-making processes are explored (Miller & Rollnick, 2002; Helms et al., 2013).

This study also highlights ways in which support may need to be tailored to meet the needs of adolescents with ASD. Firstly, these individuals may be more inclined to follow a rule-based approach to relationships. It may, thus, be useful for schools to consider strategies that promote an understanding of the contextual variables that influence the meaning/interpretation of behaviour (e.g., video modelling or role play; Hartman, 2014).

Furthermore, in order to manage expectations of sameness, individuals with ASD may benefit from learning about how people and relationships are subject to change. For example, when using social stories to support understanding, it may be useful to gradually introduce conditions/variables that emphasise the "ifs, buts and it depends" within relationships (Gray, 2002; Hatton & Tector, 2010, p. 73).

Additionally, these individuals are likely to benefit from a wide range of socialisation opportunities, in order to extend their understanding of the complexities within relationships (Hartman, 2014). Time spent with TD peers may, thus, be valuable in supporting individuals with ASD to develop and practise relationship skills. A greater range of learning and socialisation experiences may also support individuals with ASD to develop an improved understanding of indirect behaviours within relationships.

Educational psychologists (EPs) may be well placed to facilitate the development of appropriately differentiated SRE programmes, through sharing the evidence base for effective SRE and dispelling misconceptions regarding the relationship between SRE and sexual interest/activity. Moreover, EPs could play a crucial role in promoting the inclusion of individuals with ASD within mainstream provisions.

Moreover, EPs are well positioned to promote ecological thinking and consider the impact of interpersonal, contextual and societal variables on developmental outcomes (Dutton, 2006). This may prevent within-person hypotheses and thwart unhelpful generalisations regarding individuals with ASD (Gougeon, 2010). Through promoting a holistic understanding of healthy/unhealthy relationships, therefore, EPs may be able to extend the opportunities and interventions available to these young people (Joseph, 2008).

6.1 Strengths, Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The current study included a TD comparison group, which allowed the perceptions of individuals with ASD to be considered within the context of the general population. Moreover, the inclusion of male and female adolescents allowed the generalisability of perceptions to be examined. Further research to explore possible explanations for the noted differences between males and females with ASD would be valuable.

As all participants had achieved at least a Level 3 in reading and oracy, the differences noted can be more readily attributed to traits associated with ASD, as opposed to

general learning difficulties (Hartman, 2014). Nevertheless, as ten participants with ASD attended specialist provisions and all TD participants attended mainstream schools, any differences noted may reflect educational experiences. Accordingly, it would be valuable for future research to compare the perceptions of individuals with ASD within specialist and mainstream provisions.

Overall, the mixed method approach was considered valuable in providing greater depth to interpretations and enabling the triangulation of findings (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). The data are, nevertheless, based on a small sample and should be considered exploratory.

7. References

Ajzen, I. (1985). From intentions to actions: A theory of planned behavior. In J. Kuhland & J. Becman (Eds.), *Action-control: From cognitions to behavior* (pp. 11–39). New York, NY: Springer.

Arriaga, X.B., & Foshee, V.A. (2004). Adolescent dating violence: Do adolescents follow their friends', or their parents', footsteps? *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 19*, 162–184.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Oxford, England: Prentice-Hall.

Banyard, V.L., & Cross, C. (2008). Consequences of teen dating violence: Understanding intervening variables in ecological context. *Violence Against Women, 14*(9), 998–1013.

Baron-Cohen, S. (2002). The extreme male brain theory of autism. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 6*(6), 248–254.

Baron-Cohen, S. (2008). *Autism and Asperger syndrome.* Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Barter, C. (2006). Discourses of blame: Deconstructing (hetero)sexuality, peer sexual violence and residential children's homes, *Child and Family Social Work, 11*(4), 347–356.

Barter, C. (2009). In the name of love: Partner abuse and violence in teenage relationships. *British Journal of Social Work, 39*, 211–233.

Barter, C., McCarry, M., Berridge, D., & Evans, K. (2009). *Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships*. London, England: NSPCC.

Bhaskar, R., & Danermark, B. (2006). Meta-theory, interdisciplinarity and disability research: A critical realist perspective. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, *8*(4), 278–297.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. London, England: Sage Publications.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Chronister, K.M., Marsiglio, M.C., Linville, D., & Lantrip, K.R. (2014). The influence of dating violence on adolescent girls' educational experiences. *The Counseling Psychologist, 42*(3), 374–405.

Chung, D. (2005). Violence, control, romance and gender inequality: Young women and heterosexual relationships. *Women's Studies International Forum, 28*, 445–455.

Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.

Dell'Osso, L., Luche, R.D., Cerliani, C., Bertelloni, C.A., Gesi, C., & Carmassi, C. (2015). Unexpected subthreshold autism spectrum in a 25-year old male stalker hospitalized for delusional disorder: A case report. *Comprehensive Psychiatry, 61*, 10–14.

Denzin, N. (1989). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods. Englewood* Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Dutton, D.G. (2006). *Rethinking domestic violence*. Vancouver, Canada: UCB Press.

Ellis, W.E., Chung-Hall, J., & Dumas, T.M. (2013). The role of peer group aggression in predicting adolescent dating violence and relationship quality. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 42*, 487–499.

Garson, G.D. (2012). Testing statistical assumptions. North Carolina, NC: Statistical Associates Publishing.

Gougeon, N.A. (2010). Sexuality and autism: A critical review of selected literature using a social-relational model of disability. *American Journal of Sexual Education, 5*, 328–361.

Gray, C. (2002). *My social stories book*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Gutstein, S.E., & Sheely, R.K. (2002). *Relationship development intervention with children, adolescents and adults: Social and emotional development activities for Asperger syndrome, autism, PDD and NLD*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Hall, R. (2012). *Mixed methods: In search of a paradigm*. Retrieved 27 January, 2016, from http://auamii.com/proceedings_phuket_2012/hall.pdfhall

Hartman, D. (2014). *Sexuality and relationship education for children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders: A professional's guide to understanding, preventing issues, supporting sexuality and responding to inappropriate behaviours.* London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Hatton, S., & Tector, A. (2010). Sexuality and relationship education for young people with autistic spectrum disorder: Curriculum change and staff support. *British Journal of Special Education, 37*(2), 69–76.

Helms, S.W., Sullivan, T.N., Corona, R., & Taylor, K.A. (2013). Adolescents' recognition of potential positive and negative outcomes in risky dating situations. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 28*(15), 3084–3106.

Herrman, J.W. (2009). There's a fine line...Adolescent dating violence and prevention. *Pediatric Nursing, 35*(3), 164–170.

Hertzog, J.L., & Rowley, R.L. (2014). My beliefs of my peers' beliefs: Exploring the gendered nature of social norms in adolescent romantic relationships. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 29*(2), 348–368.

Jaarsma, P., & Welin, S. (2012). Autism as a natural human variation: Reflections on the claims of the neurodiversity movement. *Health Care Analysis, 20*(1), 20-30.

Joseph, S. (2008). Positive psychology as a framework for practice. In B. Kelly, L. Woolfson & J. Boyle (Eds.), *Frameworks for practice in educational psychology: a textbook for trainees and practitioners* (pp. 185–196). London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Kelly, G.A. *The psychology of personal constructs*. New York, NY: Norton.

Kernsmith, P.D., & Tolman, R.M. (2011). Attitudinal correlates of girls' use of violence in teen dating relationships. *Violence Against Women, 17*(4), 500–516.

Klin, A., Jones, W., Schultz, R., & Volkmar, F. (2003). The enactive mind, or from actions to cognition: Lessons from autism. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, 358,* 345–360.

Landa, R. (2000). Social language use in Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism. In A. Klin, F.R. Volkmar & S.S. Sparrow (Eds.), *Asperger syndrome* (pp. 125–155). London, England: The Guilford Press.

Levine, T.R., & Hullett, C.R. (2002). Eta squared, partial eta squared and the misreporting of effect size in communication research. *Human Communication Research, 28,* 612–625.

Levy, A., & Perry, A. (2011). Outcomes in adolescents and adults with autism: A review of the literature. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 5,* 1271–1282.

Loeber, R., Stouthamer-Loeber, M., Van Kammen, W., & Farrington, D.P. (1991). Initiation, escalation and desistance in juvenile offending and their correlates. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, 82,* 36–82.

Makrakis, V., & Kostoulas-Makrakis, N. (2016). Bridging the qualitative-quantitative divide: Experiences from conducting a mixed methods evaluation in the RUCAS programme. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 54,* 144–151.

Miller, W.R., & Rollnick, S. (2002). *Motivational interviewing: Preparing people for change.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Moran, H. (2001). Who do you think you are? Drawing the ideal self: A technique to explore a child's sense of self. *Clinical Psychology and Psychiatry, 6*, 599–604.

Moran, H. (2006). A very personal assessment: Using a personal construct psychology assessment technique (Drawing the Ideal Self) with young people with ASD to explore the child's view of the self. *Good Autism Practice, 7*(2), 78–86.

Onwuegbuzie, A., & Leech, N. (2005). On becoming a pragmatic researcher: The importance of combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8*(5), 375–387.

Oudekerk, B., Blachman-Demner, D., & Mulford, C. (2014). *Teen dating violence: How peers can affect risk and protective factors.* Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.

Paechter, C. (2007). *Being boys, being girls: Learning masculinities and femininities.* Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Price, E.L., Byers, E.S., & the Dating Violence Research Team (1999). The Attitudes towards Dating Violence Scales: Development and initial validation. *Journal of Family Violence, 14*(4), 351–375.

Rosnow, R.L., & Georgoudi, M., (1986). *Contextualism and understanding in behavioral science. Implications for research and theory.* New York, NY: Praeger.

Sandelowski, M. (1994). Notes on qualitative methods: Notes on transcription. *Research in Nursing and Health, 18*, 179–183.

Sears, H.A., Byers, E.S., Whelan, J.J., & Saint-Pierre, M. (2006). "If it hurts you, then it is not a joke": Adolescents' ideas about girls' and boys' use and experience of abusive behavior in dating relationships. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 21*(9), 1191–1207.

Stokes, M., Newton, N., & Kaur, A. (2007). Stalking, and social and romantic
functioning among adolescents and adults with autism spectrum disorder.
Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 37, 1969–1986.

Tebes, J.K. (2005). Community science, philosophy of science and the practice of
research. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 35*, 213–230.

Vermeulen, P. (2015). Context blindness in autism spectrum disorder: Not using the
forest to see the trees as trees. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental
Disabilities, 30*(3), 182–192.

Williams, J., & Hanke, D. (2007). Do you want to know what sort of school I want?:
Optimum features of school provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder.
Good Autism Practice, 8(2), 51–63.

Part 3: Major Research Reflective Account

1. Part A: Contribution to Knowledge

This section considers the rationale for the study and its relevance to children, young people and educational psychologists (EPs). Furthermore, the study's contribution to knowledge is explored with regards to the following topics: the value of using the Ideal Relationship technique; knowledge gleaned from employing a typically developing (TD) comparison group; knowledge of similarities and differences between TD adolescents and individuals with ASD, with regards to perceptions of healthy/unhealthy relationships; knowledge of the learning sources considered valuable to young people, with and without ASD; and knowledge regarding possible differences between male and female adolescents with ASD. This section concludes with a discussion of the implications of the study, limitations of the results and directions for future research.

1.1 Rationale for the Study and its Relevance to Children and Young People

The literature review indicates that partner violence (PV) is prevalent within adolescent relationships (e.g., Barter, McCarry, Berridge & Evans, 2009) and is associated with adverse social, emotional, health and educational outcomes (Banyard & Cross, 2008; Chronister, Marsiglio, Linville & Lantrip, 2014). As a result, the past decade has seen an increase in the number of studies examining PV within adolescent relationships.

Nevertheless, there remains a paucity of research in this area, particularly in the UK, and the majority of existing studies may only be representative of the TD population. Based on the social communication difficulties and restricted behaviours/interests associated with ASD, however, it seems plausible to suggest that these individuals may perceive healthy/unhealthy relationship behaviours differently to TD individuals.

The literature indicates that individuals with ASD are more likely to be isolated and experience greater concerns regarding relationship difficulties (Levy & Perry, 2011; Hartman, 2014). These issues, however, may be associated with restricted social learning opportunities and/or limited access to effective sex and relationship education (SRE): current learning sources may, thus, be ineffective in supporting these young people to develop and maintain relationships (Hatton & Tector, 2010; Mehzabin & Stokes, 2011). This highlights the value of reflecting upon the role of the EP in conducting research and developing strategies to enhance the social outcomes and emotional well-being of these young people.

More specifically, the development of tailored SRE programmes could be supported by an improved understanding of the relational needs of individuals with ASD. In the current study, therefore, detailed exploration of the perceptions and learning experiences of individuals with ASD was considered essential to gaining further insight into the needs of this group.

1.2 Contribution to Knowledge

In a recent review of the literature, concerning young people with ASD, sexuality and SRE, Hartman (2014) noted that only twenty studies were published between 1990 and 2012. The following subsections discuss a number of methodological and validation issues within the existing research base and how the current study aimed to address these limitations through its research design. The ways in which this enabled the study to contribute to knowledge are highlighted.

1.2.1 The value of using the Ideal Relationship technique to explore the perceptions of individuals with ASD.

Previous studies, exploring sexuality, ASD and SRE, have largely relied upon reports from parents/guardians and professionals (Hartman, 2014). Research exploring the views of individuals with ASD, however, is limited. The current study, thus, contributes an understanding of the perceptions of individuals with ASD, which is not reliant on the observations or interpretations of third parties. It is, nonetheless, acknowledged that, even though Braun and Clarke's (2013) stages of thematic analysis were followed, the portrayal of participants' views in the current study is still subject to researcher interpretation (Williams & Hanke, 2007).

Contributing to previous adaptations of the Ideal Self technique, employed with individuals with ASD (e.g., Moran, 2006; Williams & Hanke, 2007), the Ideal Relationship technique was valuable in enabling participants to share their views (Appendices I and Q). Firstly, participants could draw pictures to represent ideas that might otherwise have been challenging to verbalise. In addition, the open-ended nature of the task allowed for an individualised approach, which did not assume predetermined or neurotypical responses (Williams & Hanke, 2007). The current study, therefore, supports the effectiveness of this technique and suggests it may be valuable within the context of relationships.

1.2.2 Knowledge gleaned from employing a TD comparison group.

Within previous studies, there has been a lack of control groups; consequently, certain issues have been conceptualised as specific to individuals with ASD, prior to establishing meaningful comparisons with TD individuals (Hartman, 2014). The current study, therefore, included a TD comparison group. This allowed perceptions and issues to be considered within the context of the general population (Hartman, 2014). It was also possible to explore the vulnerabilities of TD adolescents to unhealthy relationships.

Furthermore, this design enabled both similarities and differences, between TD adolescents and individuals with ASD, to be explored. It is possible that examining differences in isolation may have contributed to the dominant discourse of fear and pathology, within the literature, regarding the relational needs of individuals with ASD (Hartman, 2014). This research design, therefore, facilitated a balanced account of the dataset.

1.2.2.1 Knowledge of similarities between TD adolescents and individuals with ASD.

TD adolescents and individuals with ASD discussed the issue of unhealthy relationships remaining concealed. This supports previous research indicating that young people are unlikely to inform an adult of PV (Barter et al., 2009). Building on this, the current study offers possible explanations for the hidden nature of unhealthy relationships: the importance of privacy; feelings of embarrassment, shame or guilt; fear of disapproval, isolation or the partner's reaction; and concerns that the adult may take unwanted action. These issues may, therefore, reflect important topics to be covered through SRE. Moreover, these concerns suggest the need to raise young people's awareness of, and access to, confidential support systems.

The negative effects of unhealthy relationship experiences on school work were also noted by TD participants and individuals with ASD. This suggests that the adverse consequences of unhealthy relationships, in terms of educational experiences, educational outcomes and emotional well-being (Chronister et al., 2014), are also relevant to adolescents with ASD. This supports Barter et al.'s (2009) assertion that PV must be recognised as a "significant child welfare problem" in schools (p. 178).

1.2.2.2 Knowledge of differences between TD adolescents and individuals with ASD.

The current study suggests differences, between TD adolescents and individuals with ASD, with regards to perceptions of behaviours associated with psychological PV: individuals with ASD may be less aware of the indirect and subtle behaviours (e.g., sexual coercion, manipulation and jealousy) that may indicate a relationship is unhealthy.

Moreover, participants with ASD were more likely to refer to rules and laws when determining the acceptability of a given behaviour and male participants with ASD were more likely to employ direct means of communicating discontent within relationships. A greater desire for sharing similar interests and viewpoints to a romantic partner was also identified amongst individuals with ASD.

Within the current study, such differences are interpreted as reflecting a more systematic, rule-based approach to relationships, with limited consideration of contextual factors. This study, thus, contributes to theories related to the inclination towards systems, rules, predictability and finer details observed in individuals with ASD (Frith, 1989; Baron-Cohen, 2002; Vermeulen, 2015).

TD participants, however, were more likely to suggest advantages to unhealthy relationships, including excitement and status. Moreover, greater consideration of contextual factors resulted in some unhealthy relationship behaviours (e.g., physical violence) being accepted or excused.

1.2.3 Knowledge regarding perceptions of a range of relationship behaviours.

Previous research studies have not explored the perceptions of adolescents with ASD, with regards to a range of relationship behaviours (i.e., psychological, physical and sexual). As noted, there may be important differences in the perceptions of individuals with ASD, compared to their TD peers, regarding behaviours associated with indirect and psychological PV. This study, therefore, moves beyond knowledge from previous studies, which have tended to focus on sexual knowledge, behaviours and interests (Hartman, 2014).

1.2.4 Knowledge of learning sources.

The current study indicates that individuals with ASD, particularly males, may be more likely to draw upon the media (e.g., television or online gaming), as a source of information regarding healthy and unhealthy relationships. These individuals may also be less likely to engage in incidental or social learning, from peers or family members, and more inclined to learn through structured methods: attending SRE lessons, reading books, searching internet websites and seeking specific advice (e.g., Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

These findings, thus, highlight the importance and value of ensuring that these individuals access good quality SRE. On the other hand, to avoid reinforcing an overly structured, rule-based approach to relationships, it may also be valuable for schools to provide a range of learning opportunities that encourage flexibility and a view of relationships as changeable (e.g., video modelling, role play and unstructured time with TD peers; Hartman, 2014).

1.2.5 The inclusion of both male and female participants with ASD.

Due to the male-female ratio within the ASD population, a significant male sampling bias is evident within existing studies: this limits the generalisability of conclusions drawn. The current study, therefore, included females with ASD. This allowed their perceptions to be compared to males with ASD, as well as the TD population.

Within the current study, more females with ASD referenced the importance of free, independent choice within relationships and considered the influence of contextual variables on the acceptability of certain behaviours. Males with ASD, however, were more inclined to discuss rules and systems and to employ direct means of communicating discontent within relationships. These differences could be attributed to the fact that females with ASD were more likely to engage in social learning opportunities, which may have increased their self-awareness (e.g., with regards to communication style) and developed their understanding of the nuances within relationships.

Overall, these differences suggest it would be valuable to include females within future studies, so that the generalisability of conclusions can be scrutinised in this manner. More specifically, this study suggests that the exclusion of females from previous

studies is likely to have resulted in an overestimation of the differences between TD individuals and those with ASD.

1.3 Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

1.3.1 An exploratory quantitative analysis.

Due to the small sample size, it was difficult to draw conclusions from the quantitative data; therefore, the differences noted should be considered exploratory. It was, nevertheless, interesting to note that scores indicated that males with ASD had the highest tolerance to behaviours associated with PV, whereas females with ASD had the lowest.

Initially, given the rule-based approach discussed during the interviews, it was hypothesised that individuals with ASD may have chosen more extreme scores on the Likert scales (strongly agree/disagree) to indicate definitive, concrete responses. In contrast, TD individuals may have responded more cautiously, due to greater consideration of contextual factors influencing the acceptability of certain behaviours. Further analysis, however, indicated that only females with ASD showed a response bias towards the extremes of the scales.

Nevertheless, the greater use of direct communication by males with ASD, identified within the interview data, may offer an alternative explanation for the greater mean PV tolerance score of this group: if candid communication is appreciated by these individuals, perhaps they are more likely to use and/or tolerate comments that their TD peers perceive to be unacceptable.

To gain further insight, it would be valuable for future research to explore the nature and extent of these preliminary differences with a larger sample size.

1.3.2 Differences between mainstream and specialist provisions.

It is important to acknowledge that 10 out of the 11 participants with ASD attended specialist bases, whereas all of the TD participants attended mainstream schools. It is, therefore, possible that the differences noted could be attributed to different opportunities and experiences within school.

For example, the fact that individuals with ASD were less likely to discuss social learning from peers could be attributed to fewer social learning opportunities within specialist provisions. Moreover, the systematic, rule-based approach identified may reflect limited observations or experiences of authentic, complex relationships within school. Perhaps, therefore, adolescents attending mainstream schools experience a wider variety of socialisation opportunities and, thus, develop a more flexible understanding of healthy/unhealthy relationships. Accordingly, it would be valuable for future research to compare the perceptions of individuals with ASD attending specialist provisions, to individuals with ASD attending mainstream schools.

There may also have been important differences between the four specialist provisions in the current study (e.g., opportunities for inclusion and beliefs regarding SRE). This must, therefore, be acknowledged as an alternative explanation for any differences between males and females with ASD.

1.3.3 Categorical and dimensional approaches to the classification of ASD.

A categorical view of ASD claims that there are qualitative differences between individuals with and without a diagnosis. This view states that ASD is an example of "a distinctive condition", which "does not just shade off into normalcy" (Volkmar, 1998, p. 45–47). Accordingly, this viewpoint could be argued to justify the categorical distinction between TD individuals and adolescents with ASD, within the current study, and the subsequent comparisons drawn between these groups.

A dimensional view of ASD, however, assumes that there are quantitative rather than qualitative differences between individuals with and without a diagnosis (Frazier et al., 2012). From this viewpoint, individuals with a diagnosis of ASD "comprise a heterogeneous group that shows diverse levels of social, communication, behavioural and intellectual development" (Wiggins, Robins, Adamson, Bakeman & Henrich, 2012, p. 191). Moreover, this perspective emphasises the variability of traits within the TD population (Baron-Cohen, 2008).

A dimensional view would, therefore, assume that the participants with ASD, in the current study, experience associated traits to varying degrees. Furthermore, although none of the TD participants were diagnosed with ASD, this stance would speculate that these participants also experience associated traits to varying degrees. This perspective

may, thus, be considered to dilute the comparisons noted and limit the validity of conclusions drawn. Nonetheless, as 10 out of the 11 participants with ASD attended specialist provisions, it could be hypothesised that this group are likely to represent individuals considered to be a significant degree of the way along the continuum. Accordingly, it may be reasonable to assume that the groups were suitably different.

Perhaps of more direct importance to the present research, a dimensional perspective could be drawn upon to explain the variability within the dataset: differences between TD adolescents and those with ASD were not clear-cut and particular findings were not applicable to all individuals within the TD/ASD groups. For example, although participants with ASD were more likely to reference rules and systems within relationships, some TD participants also discussed clear expectations. Moreover, although TD participants referenced contextual factors more frequently, some participants with ASD considered similar factors when discussing the acceptability of certain behaviours. It could, thus, be argued that the differences noted could be placed along a continuum, ranging from a clearly defined, rule-based approach to an entirely flexible, context-dependent approach. The noted overlap between the ASD/TD groups may, therefore, reflect the continuum of ASD traits throughout these populations.

1.4 Implications of the Study

The evidence base suggests that individuals with ASD are more likely to be isolated and experience difficulties within social relationships (Levy & Perry, 2011; Howlin & Moss, 2012). Supporting these young people to develop and maintain healthy relationships should, therefore, be considered a priority in schools. EPs may be well placed to facilitate this process, through dispelling misconceptions regarding the relationship between SRE and sexual interest/activity and supporting schools to differentiate the curriculum effectively.

Importantly, this study highlights ways in which support could be tailored to meet the needs of individuals with ASD. Firstly, whilst a rule-based approach may be advantageous to these individuals in outlining clear boundaries of acceptable/unacceptable behaviour, it may also result in unrealistic expectations of sameness and consistency. Accordingly, these individuals are likely to require a wide range of socialisation opportunities, in order to extend their understanding of the differences and complexities within relationships (Hartman, 2014).

Moreover, these individuals may benefit from strategies and interventions that encourage the consideration of contextual factors and highlight how people and relationships are subject to change. For example, with improving technology, virtual learning environments (VLEs) may be able to provide opportunities to practise appropriate social skills and behaviours within increasingly realistic, complex and flexible contexts (Parsons, Leonard & Mitchell, 2006). VLEs may, therefore, provide a safe, motivating and effective tool for supporting individuals with ASD to learn appropriate relationship behaviours (e.g., Parsons et al., 2006; Mitchell, Parsons & Leonard, 2007; Cheng, Chiang, Ye & Cheng, 2010). Such authentic simulations may, thus, offer an alternative to the teaching of decontextualised rules and enhance the generalisation of skills (Chin & Bernard-Opitz, 2000). Parsons et al. (2006) provide a discussion of the advantages, and possible pitfalls, of this approach.

The SRE curriculum may also need to focus more explicitly on the interpretation of indirect, psychological behaviours (e.g., sexual coercion, manipulation and jealousy) within unhealthy relationships, which may be more difficult for individuals with ASD to identify. This may help to protect these individuals from exploitation.

For TD individuals, this study highlights a number of beliefs with respect to unhealthy relationships that may need to be addressed through SRE: the belief that anger issues can excuse PV; the belief that adolescents should feel ashamed and/or guilty if they experience unhealthy relationship behaviours; and the perception that unhealthy relationships may offer excitement or status. These perceptions offer valuable insights into adolescents' motivations for developing and/or maintaining unhealthy relationships. Accordingly, SRE may be more effective if these external influences are explored (e.g., Miller & Rollnick, 2002; Helms, Sullivan, Corona & Taylor, 2013).

Importantly, this study emphasises the value of considering unhealthy relationship behaviours from an ecological perspective. It is argued that, although there appear to be notable individual differences between TD adolescents and individuals with ASD, it is more useful to consider these differences within the context of learning experiences and other intervening variables. Drawing upon Dutton's (2006) nested ecological model, for example, it may be more useful to consider how the individual differences noted in the current study (e.g., communication styles, responses to conflict and expectations) interact with variables at other levels (e.g., media exposure, social learning opportunities and educational provision) to influence adolescents' perceptions of

different relationship behaviours. This may be a valuable approach for EPs to promote within schools, as it may generate constructive ideas for supporting young people more effectively.

Within the current study, however, since all of the TD participants attended mainstream schools and 10 out of the 11 participants with ASD attended specialist provisions, it is difficult to disentangle the impact of individual differences from classroom/school level factors. Accordingly, in order to explore the impact of different variables further, it would be valuable for future research to compare the perceptions of individuals with ASD within specialist and mainstream settings.

2. Part B: Critical Account of the Research Practitioner

This section considers the following parts of the research process: the inception of the research; the relationship between the research paradigm and methodological design; the literature review; ethical considerations; recruiting participants; data collection; data analysis and interpretation; and the development of the researcher. Any difficulties encountered, as well as strengths and limitations of the study, will be considered throughout.

2.1 The Inception of the Research

At the time of the inception of this research, there was increasing media interest regarding the prevalence of PV within adolescent relationships and a number of documentaries were broadcast. As a result, it was pertinent to explore the evidence base and reflect on strategies and programmes currently employed within schools to support the development and maintenance of healthy relationships.

Additionally, prior experience, although anecdotal, included high levels of teacher and parent reported difficulties in understanding and supporting the relational needs of young people with ASD. In particular, the display of sexualised behaviours within public places often caused a great deal of anxiety for parents. This suggested that parents and schools may benefit from further research exploring the specific needs, perceptions and vulnerabilities of this group. It should be acknowledged, however, that this prior experience may have resulted in an expectation to find differences between TD adolescents and young people with ASD in the current study. In addition, this expectation may have been reinforced further by the focus on inappropriate sexual

behaviours amongst individuals with ASD within the existing research base (Hartman, 2014).

In order to carry out the research, from inception it was important to consider which approach to adopt at an epistemological and methodological level. The research paradigm and methodological design will, therefore, be explored in the following section.

2.2 The Relationship Between the Research Paradigm and Methodological Design

Research paradigms are frequently described in the literature as representing a world view, mental model, epistemological position or the beliefs and practices that guide a field (Morgan, 2007; Hall, 2012). When considering the research methodology, therefore, it was important to consider the research paradigm guiding each decision.

An important part of this process involved contemplating different philosophical stances associated with ontology and epistemology. Ontology considers the nature of reality: whether reality is universal and exists independently from human practices (realism) or whether it depends entirely on human interpretation and knowledge and differs across time and context (relativism; Braun & Clarke, 2013). Epistemology is concerned with the nature, scope and justification of knowledge, beliefs and truths and determines the kinds of knowledge considered legitimate and meaningful (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The following subsections consider the relationship between qualitative and quantitative approaches and different ontological and epistemological stances. The research paradigm employed in the current study is then discussed.

2.2.1 Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodological approaches to research.

Research methods tend to be divided into qualitative or quantitative types (Morgan, 2007; Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016). In general, quantitative research tends to be associated with a positivist epistemology that emphasises objectivity, measurement, hypothesis testing, the causality of relationships, value-free predictions and the generalisability of conclusions (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016). Qualitative research, on the other hand, is associated with constructivist and interpretivist epistemologies, which consider knowledge to be "created through the process of

research", value-laden and based on interpretation (Hall, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 29).

Over the past twenty years, however, a third methodological movement has gained popularity (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Hall, 2012). This is termed mixed methods research and was defined by Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) as "the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches" (p. 123).

A mixed methods research design was employed in the current project, as both quantitative (structured questionnaires, using Likert scale responses) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews, using open-ended questions) methodologies were utilised. A convergent parallel study design was used, as the quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously (Carayon et al., 2015). The research design is regarded as mixed methods, as opposed to multi-methods, due to the manner in which the quantitative and qualitative approaches complement each other.

2.2.2 Ontology, epistemology and mixed methods research.

Concerns regarding the mixed methods approach centre upon the notion that the research paradigms underpinning quantitative and qualitative methodologies present distinct worldviews and are philosophically incompatible (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Morgan, 2007; Hall, 2012). In the current study, for example, it could be argued that the use of a standardised questionnaire to measure attitudes as individual variables, numerically, and independently of context, assumes a realist ontology and positivist epistemological stance (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The analysis of the interviews, however, draws upon principles of relativism, acknowledging the interpretative and context-dependent nature of knowledge. Some researchers may, thus, assert that these approaches cannot be combined coherently.

Nevertheless, there is also a growing emphasis in the literature regarding the potential value of studying complex social phenomena using mixed methods, to produce a broader and deeper understanding of a topic (Carayon et al., 2015). Furthermore, Scott (2005) and Hall (2012) argue that the dualism and rivalry between quantitative and qualitative paradigms is unhelpful and it is more constructive to consider paradigms as part of a continuum. That said, as asserted by Makrakis and Kostoulas-Makrakis (2016),

it is important that researcher's employing mixed methodologies explicitly acknowledge the epistemological assumptions underpinning their research.

Some mixed methods researchers assume an "a-paradigmatic stance", which claims that methodology is independent of epistemology (Patton, 1990; Hall, 2012, p. 3). According to Hall (2012), however, no study should be considered "paradigm free" and the inherent challenges of integrating the fundamentally different assumptions of positivism and constructivism must be acknowledged (p. 3).

In contrast, other researchers adopt a "multiple paradigm stance", which enables the researcher to draw upon more than one paradigm within the same study (Hall, 2012, p. 3). Hall (2012), nevertheless, contends that it is unclear how the values and assumptions of opposing paradigms can be integrated: this is particularly problematic for paradigms with contradictory assumptions.

Accordingly, a "single paradigm approach" was selected in the current study: this involves accepting an established paradigm that encompasses the assumptions of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Hall, 2012, p. 3). In this view, a position of critical realism was deemed appropriate. Critical realism accepts knowledge and explanation as plausible objectives of research; however, it recognises the influence of values and interpretations and accepts that knowledge can only be partially accessed (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1997; Scott, 2005; Braun & Clarke, 2013). Consequently, this standpoint does not limit understanding in the same manner as positivism and constructivism and allows for a more inclusive understanding of "multiple domains of reality" (Sayer, 2000; Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006; Bergin, Wells & Owen, 2008, p. 170). This stance is, therefore, argued to be compatible with mixed methodologies.

2.2.3 Value of mixed methods approaches.

In the current study, the mixed methods approach was valuable in providing greater depth to interpretations and conclusions drawn. For example, the quantitative data were surprising: scores indicated that males with ASD had the highest tolerance to behaviours associated with PV, whereas females with ASD had the lowest. After completing the thematic analysis of the interview data, however, a possible interpretation of this finding was identified: perhaps the rule-based approach adopted by

individuals with ASD might result in more extreme scores on the Likert scale being selected (i.e., strongly agree/disagree). Further analysis of the quantitative data indicated that this may offer a possible explanation for the scores of females with ASD.

Accordingly, this approach provides an example of how, in the absence of qualitative data, quantitative data may be more challenging to interpret (Carayon et al., 2015). Mixed methods research can, thus, assist the triangulation of findings arising from qualitative and quantitative methods (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). According to Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989), through the demonstration of congruence within data from different approaches, this methodological triangulation also enhances the validity of findings.

2.3 The Literature Review

The literature review concludes that ecological theories (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979) may provide a valuable framework from which to explore PV as, through the promotion of systemic thinking, ecological perspectives can shift practice away from negative labelling. Given the pervading discourse of fear associated with the sexual and relational needs of individuals with ASD (e.g., Hartman, 2014), it was important to promote further consideration of systemic influences within this study. It must, however, be acknowledged that this inclination towards ecological thinking is likely to have influenced decisions with regards to the literature review and interpretation of results.

The ecological perspective adopted is also argued to be compatible with the research paradigm. In line with critical realism, ecological frameworks do not offer single or reductionist explanations of events: individual differences are considered to "presuppose a social context for their employment" and the different ways in which a range of influences may interact to cause events are emphasised (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 28; Archer, 1998; Elder-Vass, 2004). When drawing conclusions in the current study, therefore, both the theoretical perspective and research paradigm enabled the interplay between individual and systemic factors to be considered.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

The university ethics committee raised a number of concerns in response to the initial proposal: the need to tailor information sheets and consent forms to the age and abilities

of participants; the potentially sensitive nature of the topic and the limits of confidentiality; and the use of the Ideal Relationship technique to elicit the views of young people with ASD.

In order to address these issues, informed consent was obtained from all participants and their parents/guardians. All forms were adapted appropriately, with visual cues to support the understanding of pupils. Following the interview, participants were debriefed verbally and provided with a debrief form including relevant contact details and useful websites/services.

To alleviate concerns regarding issues of confidentiality, participants completed all aspects of the research on a one-to-one basis with the researcher. Since completing the research, however, the conjecture remains as to whether the intra-group stimulation associated with focus groups may have sparked richer discussions (Folch-Lyon & Trost, 1981). Nevertheless, it is possible that adolescents may have felt uncomfortable discussing relationships in front of other pupils or felt more inclined to offer socially desirable responses. Overall, therefore, it is acknowledged that interviews were an appropriate choice of methodology.

Finally, the importance of considering alternative ways of gathering the views of individuals with ASD was emphasised to the ethics committee and evidence regarding the effectiveness of previous adaptations of the Ideal Self technique was shared.

2.5 Recruiting Participants

One hundred and fifty TD pupils were randomly selected from the two participating mainstream schools and these pupils received parent/pupil information sheets and consent forms. Ideally, participants would have been randomly selected from those who returned consent forms; however, as only 13 pupils returned their forms, all of these pupils participated in the research activities. It is acknowledged that this limits the generalisability of results.

The process of recruiting participants with ASD was also more challenging than anticipated. As obtaining ethical approval from the university ethics committee was a lengthy process, a special school that had expressed an interest in participating was no longer able to take part. As a result, it was necessary to send gatekeeper letters to eight specialist bases (four of which agreed to take part).

The requirement for participants to have achieved at least a Level 3 in reading and oracy created further difficulties when recruiting individuals with ASD. In some settings, due to the low numbers of pupils in specialist bases, only one or two pupils met the inclusion criteria. Due to the male-female ratio within the ASD population, it was particularly challenging to recruit female participants.

Moreover, several parents did not provide consent for their children to participate. Many parents commented that their children were not currently interested in sexual or romantic relationships and were concerned that the research might create interest/activity. Such beliefs, therefore, created a barrier to exploring the perceptions of individuals with ASD and resulted in a smaller sample size than expected.

2.6 Quantitative Data: The Attitudes Towards Dating Violence Scales (ADVSs)

This questionnaire was selected for two reasons: the ADVSs have been validated for use with 11 to 19 year olds (Price et al., 1999); and the ADVSs include a range of relationship behaviours associated with sexual, physical and psychological PV. Previous research, exploring the attitudes and behaviours of individuals with ASD, has focused predominantly on sexual knowledge, interests and behaviours (Hartman, 2014); therefore, it was important to explore a broader range of perceptions in the current study.

Nevertheless, there are limitations of the ADVSs to highlight. Firstly, the ADVSs are limited to exploring attitudes within the context of heterosexual relationships. It would have been valuable, and more appropriate, to use a questionnaire which was inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) adolescents. Unfortunately, however, a standardised, LGBT inclusive questionnaire for adolescents was not available at the time of data collection.

Moreover, as a self-report measure, the possibility of social desirability biases must be acknowledged (Paulhus, 2002). Additionally, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, social desirability biases may represent a greater concern within the current study. It is also possible that motivations for social approval may have differed between the groups (Damarin & Messick, 1965).

2.7 Qualitative Data: The Ideal Relationship Technique

A majority of existing studies, exploring the relationships of individuals with ASD, have relied primarily on reports from professionals and parents to infer the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of these young people: this assumes that individuals with ASD are unable to provide sufficient insight into their own knowledge or behaviours (Mehzabin & Stokes, 2011). Accordingly, in the current study, it was important to reflect on the difficulties individuals with ASD may encounter when communicating their views and consider which methodologies might be most appropriate to facilitating their participation.

The Ideal Self technique is a tool used to gather the views of young people (Moran, 2001). In line with the Ideal Self technique, and previous adaptations, the Ideal Relationship technique is underpinned by principles of personal construct psychology (PCP; Kelly, 1955) and focuses on how the young person views the world. One of the advantages of this technique is that the open-ended nature of the questions is deemed less intrusive when discussing potentially sensitive topics: young people can offer as much or as little detail as they wish and can guide the conversation in directions of their choice. As a result, the technique is effective in enabling young people to share constructs that are meaningful and important to them (Moran, 2001). From the perspective of PCP, it is argued that an improved understanding of the views, or constructs, of young people will enable others to better "anticipate and provide for their needs" (Williams & Hanke, 2007, p. 127).

This technique, therefore, has advantages over methods and tools that have been prepared in advance by adults and may predetermine responses. Williams and Hanke (2007) contend that this technique may be particularly beneficial when gathering the views of individuals with ASD, who are likely to experience the world through "a distinctive lens" (p. 127). As an example from the current study, one participant with ASD was able to discuss, at length, the difficulties that may occur if two people have dissimilar tastes in furniture. Although this response was unexpected, the task enabled this participant to share perceptions that were important to him.

It is, nevertheless, important to consider how the use of a technique underpinned by PCP may have impacted on the processes of data gathering and analysis within the current study. According to PCP, a person's constructs are bipolar in nature; thus, each

construct held has an opposing pole (Kelly, 1955). In the current study, it could be argued that the dichotomy between healthy and unhealthy is emphasised by the Ideal Relationship technique. This may, therefore, have increased the likelihood of bipolar constructs being elicited during the interviews. For example, the discussion of one pole of a given construct in relation to unhealthy relationships (e.g., aggressive behaviour) may have primed participants to refer to the opposing pole (e.g., nurture, an emotional connection) when describing features of healthy relationships.

2.7.1 Style of questioning.

In order to adhere to the PCP approach (Kelly, 1955) associated with the Ideal Self technique, semi-structured, open-ended questions were employed. This aimed to provide a flexible framework for exploring the views, meanings and experiences of participants, without concepts being "pre-framed by the researcher" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 20). The semi-structured interviews, therefore, ensured that topics related to the research questions were explored, but, importantly, encouraged flexible and participant-led discussions and permitted further detail to be extracted through the use of prompts (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

2.7.2 Analysis and interpretation.

In order to provide a written, word-for-word replication of the audio recording, interviews were transcribed verbatim (Poland, 1995). Drawing upon the principles of critical realism, however, the role of the researcher within this process must be acknowledged. In this view, the transcript is not considered to represent a duplicate of the recording, but rather "the product of an interaction between the recording and the transcriber" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 162). According to Braun and Clarke (2013), the transcript should be considered "two-steps removed" from the interview experience: the transcript is not the same as the recording and the recording is not same as the interview experience (p. 162).

The transcription process may, therefore, include errors, such as omission errors and mistaken words (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The transcription stage was, thus, acknowledged as part of the data analysis (Wellard & McKenna, 2001) and, in order to provide a transparent and consistent approach, Braun and Clarke's (2013) transcription notation system was followed (Appendix N). To reduce the need for researcher

interpretation, the orthographic transcripts also included little or no punctuation (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Qualitative methodologies are often criticised regarding the subjectivity of data collection, analysis and interpretation (Easton, McComish & Greenberg, 2000). Braun and Clarke (2013), however, assert that this subjectivity can be "positively valued in the qualitative paradigm" (p. 36). In line with critical realism, therefore, the interpretations of the data are "no longer purely the outcome of the events they might appear to reflect, but rather a product of the combination of those events with [the researcher's] prior knowledge" (Elder-Vass, 2004, p. 5). Nevertheless, in order to enhance the validity of proposed themes, an iterative process of continuous reference to the whole dataset and coded data was deemed essential. This process encourages reflexivity and highlights ways in which assumptions may be shaping the knowledge produced (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Investigator triangulation was also undertaken during supervision sessions whilst on placement with an educational psychology service. Titles of proposed themes and subthemes were shared and the supervisor was required to match a total of 91 data extracts to their corresponding themes (Appendix O). As noted previously, there was 80% agreement during this process and this is argued to enhance the validity of the themes generated (Denzin, 1989). That said, it is acknowledged that biases within this process could have been reduced. For example, with more time, it would have been beneficial for the supervisor to have coded the data independently.

Discussions throughout this process were, nevertheless, deemed useful to the analysis. In particular, at times when data extracts were coded differently, it was evident that this was often due to information lost during the transcription process (e.g., tone of voice, gestures or facial expressions). It is, therefore, important to be aware of how the process of conducting interviews can impact upon perceptions of meaning within participants' comments during the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

2.8 Contribution to Professional Development

In practice, it is important for EPs to consider alternative means of engaging young people, gathering their views and enabling them to participate actively in decisions affecting them. This research highlights the value of an adaptation of the Ideal Self

technique to elicit the views of young people and demonstrates how this technique can be employed flexibly.

In addition, this study emphasises the importance and value of considering issues within an ecological framework. This represents a learning point for future professional practice as an EP, as it may, for example, be useful to draw upon ecological models of development more explicitly during consultations with parents, teachers and other professionals. As discussed, the consideration of a range of systems, and a young person's interactions within them, is likely to be helpful in moving beyond within-person hypotheses and towards suggestions for supporting him/her more effectively in different contexts (D'Amato, Crepeau-Hobson, Huang & Geil, 2005; Joseph, 2008). In line with the principles of PCP, this approach encourages EPs to refrain from labelling a person's behaviour (e.g., as 'sexually inappropriate') and, instead, to consider the sort of response this person might be expecting to receive from others/their environment by behaving in this way (Kelly, 1955).

In order to provide a confident justification of the value of a mixed methods design, it was important to develop an improved understanding of the use of quantitative and qualitative methodologies and the research paradigms that support/oppose particular approaches. On reflection, therefore, a thorough review of critical papers discussing these issues was an essential part of the research and learning process.

Finally, there were important reflections to consider with regards to understanding and managing the scale of this study. Due to the breadth and depth of topics covered by the Ideal Relationship technique, there was a large amount of data to transcribe and analyse. Due to the succinct nature of the report, however, careful selection of discussion material was paramount. This may have led to some aspects of the data being set aside, including some interesting references to gender differences within adolescent relationships. Some participants, for example, described how male adolescents may be more likely to tolerate unhealthy behaviours within relationships due to beliefs that they should be able to cope (e.g., with physical PV) and that they may be ridiculed by peers. Since gender differences were not the primary focus of the current study, however, it was not appropriate to discuss such comments in detail within this report. Further reflection and learning from this process highlights the need to consider carefully the nature and number of research questions to explore from the outset. That said, data set aside may indicate valuable areas for further research.

3. References

Archer, R. (1998). Introduction: Realism in the social sciences. In M. Archer, R. Bhaskar, A. Collier, T. Lawson & A. Norrie (Eds.), *Critical realism: Essential readings* (pp. 189–205). London, England: Routledge.

Banyard, V.L., & Cross, C. (2008). Consequences of teen dating violence: Understanding intervening variables in ecological context. *Violence Against Women, 14*(9), 998–1013.

Baron-Cohen, S. (2002). The extreme male brain theory of autism. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 6*(6), 248–254.

Baron-Cohen, S. (2008). *Autism and Asperger syndrome.* Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Barter, C., McCarry, M., Berridge, D., & Evans, K. (2009). *Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships*. London, England: NSPCC.

Bergin, M., Wells, J.S., & Owen, S. (2008). Critical realism: A philosophical framework for the study of gender and mental health. *Nursing Philosophy, 9*(3), 169–179.

Bhaskar, R. (1989). *The possibility of naturalism*. Hemel Hempstead, England: Harvester Press.

Bhaskar, R., & Danermark, B. (2006). Meta-theory, interdisciplinarity and disability research: A critical realist perspective. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, *8*(4), 278–297.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. London, England: Sage Publications.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Carayon, P., Kianfar, S., Li, Y., Xie, A., Alyousef, B., & Wooldridge, A. (2015). A systematic review of mixed methods research on human factors and ergonomics in health care. *Applied Ergonomics, 51*, 291–321.

Cheng, Y., Chiang, H., Ye, J., & Cheng, L. (2010). Enhancing empathy instruction using a collaborative virtual learning environment for children with autistic spectrum conditions. *Computers and Education, 55*, 1449–1458.

Chin, H.Y., & Bernard-Opitz, V. (2000). Teaching conversational skills to children with autism: Effect on the development of a theory of mind. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 30*(6), 569–583.

Chronister, K.M., Marsiglio, M.C., Linville, D., & Lantrip, K.R. (2014). The influence of dating violence on adolescent girls' educational experiences. *The Counseling Psychologist, 42*(3), 374–405.

Damarin, F., & Messick, S. (1965). *Response styles as personality variables: A theoretical integration*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

D'Amato, R.C., Crepeau-Hobson, F., Huang, L.V., & Geil, M. (2005). Ecological neuropsychology: An alternative to the deficit model for conceptualizing and serving students with learning disabilities. *Neuropsychology Review, 15*, 97–103.

Denzin, N. (1989). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Dutton, D.G. (2006). *Rethinking domestic violence*. Vancouver, Canada: UCB Press.

Easton, K.L., McComish, J.F., & Greenberg, R. (2000). Avoiding common pitfalls in qualitative data collection and transcription. *Qualitative Health Research, 10*(5), 703–707.

Elder-Vass, D. (2004). *Re-examining Bhaskar's three ontological domains: The lessons from emergence.* Paper presented at IACR annual conference, Cambridge, England. Retrieved 14 April, 2016, from http://www.csog.group.cam.ac.uk/iacr/papers/Elder-Vas.pdf

Folch-Lyon, E., & Trost, J.F. (1981). Conducting focus group sessions. *Studies in Family Planning, 12*(2), 443–449.

Frazier, T.W., Youngstrom, E.A., Speer, L., Embacher, R., Law, P., Constantino, J... Eng, C. (2012). Validation of proposed DSM-5 criteria for autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 51*(1), 28–40.

Frith, U. (1989). *Autism: Explaining the enigma*. Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell.

Greene, J.C., Caracelli, V.J., & Graham, W.F. (1989). Toward a conceptual framework for mixed-method evaluation designs. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 11*(3), 255–274.

Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Hall, R. (2012). *Mixed methods: In search of a paradigm*. Retrieved 27 January, 2016, from http://auamii.com/proceedings_phuket_2012/hall.pdfhall

Hartman, D. (2014). *Sexuality and relationship education for children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders: A professional's guide to understanding, preventing issues, supporting sexuality and responding to inappropriate behaviours.* London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Hatton, S., & Tector, A. (2010). Sexuality and relationship education for young people with autistic spectrum disorder: Curriculum change and staff support. *British Journal of Special Education, 37*(2), 69–76.

Helms, S.W., Sullivan, T.N., Corona, R., & Taylor, K.A. (2013). Adolescents' recognition of potential positive and negative outcomes in risky dating situations. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 28*(15), 3084–3106.

Howlin, P., & Moss., P. (2012). Adults with autism spectrum disorders. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 57*(5), 275–283.

Johnson, R.B., Onwuegbuzie, A.J., & Turner, L.A., (2007). Toward a definition of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*(2), 112–133.

Joseph, S. (2008). Positive psychology as a framework for practice. In B. Kelly, L. Woolfson & J. Boyle (Eds.), *Frameworks for practice in educational psychology: A textbook for trainees and practitioners* (pp. 185–196). London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Kelly, G.A. (1955). *The psychology of personal constructs.* New York, NY: Norton.

Levy, A., & Perry, A. (2011). Outcomes in adolescents and adults with autism: A review of the literature. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 5*, 1271–1282.

Makrakis, V., & Kostoulas-Makrakis, N. (2016). Bridging the qualitative-quantitative divide: Experiences from conducting a mixed methods evaluation in the RUCAS programme. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 54*, 144–151.

Marsick, V.J., & Watkins, K.E. (2001). Informal and incidental learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 89,* 25–34.

Mehzabin, P., & Stokes, M.A. (2011). Self-assessed sexuality in young adults with high-functioning autism. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 5*, 614–621.

Miller, W.R., & Rollnick, S. (2002). *Motivational interviewing: Preparing people for change.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Mitchell, P., Parsons, S., & Leonard, A. (2007). Using virtual environments for teaching social understanding to six adolescents with autistic spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 37*, 589–600.

Moran, H. (2001). Who do you think you are? Drawing the ideal self: A technique to explore a child's sense of self. *Clinical Psychology and Psychiatry, 6*, 599–604.

Moran, H. (2006). A very personal assessment: Using a personal construct psychology assessment technique (Drawing the Ideal Self) with young people with ASD to explore the child's view of the self. *Good Autism Practice, 7*(2), 78–86.

Morgan, D.L. (2007). Paradigms lost and pragmatism regained: Methodological implications of combining qualitative and quantitative methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*, 48–76.

Onwuegbuzie, A., & Leech, N. (2005). On becoming a pragmatic researcher: The importance of combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8*(5), 375–387.

Parsons, S., Leonard, A., & Mitchell, P. (2006). Virtual environments for social skills training: Comments from two adolescents with autistic spectrum disorder. *Computers and Education, 47*, 186–206.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Paulhus, D.L. (2002). Socially desirable responding: The evolution of a construct. In H.I. Braun, D.N. Jackson & D.E. Wiley (Eds.), *The role of constructs in psychological and educational measurement* (pp. 49–69). New Jersey, NJ: Erlbaum.

Poland, B. (1995). Transcription quality as an aspect of rigor in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 1*(3), 290–310.

Price, E.L., Byers, E.S., & the Dating Violence Research Team (1999). The Attitudes towards Dating Violence Scales: Development and initial validation. *Journal of Family Violence, 14*(4), 351–375.

Sayer, A. (2000). *Realism and social science.* London, England: Sage Publications.

Scott, D. (2005). Critical realism and empirical research methods in education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *39*(4), 633–646.

Stainton Rogers, W., & Stainton Rogers, R. (1997). Does critical psychology mean the end of the world? In T. Ibáñez & L. Íñiguez (Eds.), *Critical social psychology* (pp. 67–82). London, England: Sage.

Teddlie, C., & A. Tashakkori. (2003). Major issues and controversies in the use of mixed methods in the social and behavioral sciences. In A.Tashakkori & C.Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (pp. 3–50). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Vermeulen, P. (2015). Context blindness in autism spectrum disorder: Not using the forest to see the trees as trees. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 30*(3), 182–192.

Volkmar, F.R. (1998). Categorical approaches to the diagnosis of autism: An overview of DSM-IV and ICD-10. *Autism, 2*(1), 45-59.

Wellard, S., & McKenna, L. (2001). Turning tapes into text: Issues surrounding the transcription of interviews. *Contemporary Nurse, 11*(2/3), 180–186.

Wiggins, L.D., Robins, D.L., Adamson, L.B., Bakeman, R., & Henrich, C.C. (2012). Support for a dimensional view of autism spectrum disorder in toddlers. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 42*(2), 191–200.

Williams, J., & Hanke, D. (2007). Do you want to know what sort of school I want?: Optimum features of school provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. *Good Autism Practice, 8*(2), 51–63.

4. Appendices

4.1 Appendix A: Gatekeeper Letter

4.2 Appendix B: Head Teacher Consent Form

4.3 Appendix C: Parent/Guardian Information Sheet

4.4 Appendix D: Parent/Guardian Consent Form

4.5 Appendix E: Pupil Information Sheet

4.6 Appendix F: Pupil Assent Form

4.7 Appendix G: Attitudes Towards Dating Violence Scales

4.8 Appendix H: Participant Demographic Form

4.9 Appendix I: The Ideal Relationship Technique

4.10 Appendix J: Semi-Structured Interview Questions and Prompts

4.11 Appendix K: Debrief Form

4.12 Appendix L: Raw Data

4.13 Appendix M: SPSS Output of the two-way Analysis of Variance

4.14 Appendix N: An Example of a Coded Interview

4.15 Appendix O: Investigator Triangulation

4.16 Appendix P: Supporting Extracts for Each Theme and Subtheme

4.17 Appendix Q: An Example of Ideal Relationship Drawings

4.1 Appendix A: Gatekeeper Letter

Dear [Head teacher],

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. My name is Lucy Wilding and I am a trainee educational psychologist at Cardiff University. I am writing to ask your permission to conduct a research project, for my thesis, with a small group of Year 9 to 11 pupils attending your school.

I am currently undertaking my second year placement with the inclusion service within [Name of County Borough Council] and would like to explore pupil perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships. I would also like to compare the perceptions of typically developing adolescents to individuals with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). I am, therefore, selecting two schools to participate in the research. One of these schools will be a mainstream secondary school and one will be a special school or resource base (containing provision for pupils with a diagnosis of ASD).

This research will enable participating schools and the local authority to understand how this age group construct healthy and unhealthy relationships. Qualitative data regarding the perspectives of this age group is an important area of research, as partner violence has been evidenced to peak in mid-adolescence. This research may, therefore, offer some valuable insights regarding the prevention of partner violence within adolescent relationships.

I would very much like your permission for your school to be involved. If you agree, I would provide you with information sheets and consent forms for parents/guardians and pupils outlining the project and research process. Both parental and pupil consent will be required for any pupil to participate. All participants must have achieved a Level 3 in reading, as well as speaking and listening, to ensure that they will be able to participate in the research activities. The first step would be to identify participants who meet these criteria and I would then ask the school to send information sheets and consent forms to parents.

Within your school, eight female and eight male participants would be randomly selected to take part in the research, within which they will complete the activities outlined below.

(1) Demographic form and questionnaire (approximately 15 minutes)

Participants will complete a brief demographic form and then complete the Attitudes towards Dating Violence Scales (Price et al., 1999). The questionnaire asks participants to record their attitudes to different behaviours within relationships (e.g., boys should spend most of their time with their girlfriends; it is alright for a girl to force her boyfriend to kiss her; it is O.K. for a guy to slap his girlfriend if she deserves it). Please

see the attached document for a full list of the questionnaire items. The questionnaire will be completed anonymously.

(2) Ideal Relationship technique, with semi-structured questions and prompts (approximately one hour)

Participants will complete an adaptation of the Ideal Self technique (Moran, 2001). This will involve participants drawing and labelling characteristics of a relationship that they would/would not like to be in. Again, participants will not name their work.

Semi-structured questions will be prompted by the constructs shared during this activity and explore the following key research questions in greater depth:

- What do young people consider to be important features of a healthy relationship?
- What do young people consider to be important features of an unhealthy relationship?
- What might a young person consider to be the advantages and disadvantages of being in the 'healthy relationship'?
- What might a young person consider to be the advantages and disadvantages of being in the 'unhealthy relationship'?
- What do young people feel informs their understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships?

The discussion will be recorded, using a digital audio recorder, stored on a secure computer, confidentially, and only the researcher will have access to the information. Participants' responses will be anonymised two weeks after the research activities, so that information cannot be traced to individuals. Participants will be informed that the anonymised data may be retained indefinitely.

Following the research, participants will be debriefed concerning the purpose and value of the research and given the opportunity to ask questions. Participants will be provided with debrief forms containing contact information for any concerns or complaints.

A "Head teacher consent form" is enclosed and, if you are happy for your school to be involved in this research, I would be most grateful if you could read and sign this form.

In line with ethical obligations, I would like to reiterate that the school's participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and there is no obligation to participate. All data collected will be confidential (unless indicative of a person being at risk) and anonymised. Any feedback from the researcher regarding the outcomes of the research will, thus, be based on pooled data and will not refer to individual pupils. School procedures for disclosure of sensitive information will be followed.

Thank you again for your time in reading this letter and I look forward to hearing from you. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor, Simon Claridge, using the contact details below.

Kind Regards,
Lucy Wilding
Trainee Educational Psychologist
Cardiff University

Lucy Wilding
Trainee Educational Psychologist
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT
Tel: 029 20874007
Email: wildingl@cardiff.ac.uk

Simon Claridge
Professional Tutor
School Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT
Tel: 029 20876497
Email: claridges@cardiff.ac.uk

4.2 Appendix B: Head Teacher Consent Form

By signing below, I give permission/ agree that:

1. My school can be involved in this research project which aims to explore pupils' perceptions of healthy and unhealthy romantic relationships.

2. I have been provided with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the research project, including the nature of the group sessions.

3. I understand the information sheet provided.

4. I have been provided with contact details allowing me the opportunity to seek clarification on any matters of concern.

5. I will be asked to send information sheets and consent forms to parents of participants.

If you agree to the statements above, please sign below:

Head teacher name (printed):

Head teacher signature:

Date_____

4.3 Appendix C: Parent/Guardian Information Sheet

Dear Parents,

As a trainee educational psychologist at Cardiff University, I am currently conducting my thesis research project and would be most grateful if you would consider providing consent for your child to participate in my research. The nature of the research activities are outlined within this information sheet.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of my research project is to explore pupils' perceptions of healthy and unhealthy romantic relationships. The topic of relationships is a key aspect of Personal, Social, Health and Education (PSHE) within the National Curriculum and should, therefore, be a familiar subject for secondary school age pupils. Qualitative data regarding the perspectives of pupils may offer some valuable insights regarding how best to support young people in understanding healthy and unhealthy relationships.

The research will also compare perceptions of relationships from the perspectives of typically developing adolescents and individuals with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This is an under researched area, but may assist our understanding of how to support adolescents with ASD more effectively.

What will my child's participation in this research involve?

(1) Questionnaire (approximately 15 minutes)

Participants will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire to record their attitudes to different behaviours in relationships (e.g., boys should spend most of their time with their girlfriends; it is alright for a girl to force her boyfriend to kiss her; it is O.K. for a guy to slap his girlfriend if she deserves it). Please see the attached document for a full list of the questionnaire items.

They will express their feelings about each behaviour by rating how far they agree with the statement (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Participants will complete the questionnaire individually and anonymously.

(2) 'My Ideal Relationship' activity (approximately one hour)

Participants will then complete an adaptation of the Ideal Self technique (Moran, 2001). This will involve participants drawing and labelling characteristics of a relationship that they would/would not like to be in. They will complete this activity with me and I would like to record the discussions. Anything they share with me will be private, unless participants ask me to share information or if they share something that means that they and/or someone else may be unsafe.

If they change their mind during the study, they can choose to leave at any time, without reason, up until the point that the information has been anonymised. At this point, it will not be possible to identify the information provided by individuals.

Are there any risks involved?

There are no particular risks involved in this project and there is no deception. This research has been approved by the School Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University. In line with ethical obligations, participation in this research project is, of course, entirely voluntary and there is no obligation to participate.

Should you have any questions regarding the research, please do not hesitate to contact myself, or my research supervisor, Simon Claridge, using the contact details below. Alternatively, please leave a message with the school and I will return your call.

If you are happy for your child to be considered for taking part in this research, please complete the attached consent form and return it to the school. Your child will also need to provide consent to be considered for this project.

Participants will be randomly selected from those who have agreed to take part. If your child is selected for the research, the activities will be arranged during school hours and will take place within your child's school setting.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Lucy Wilding
Trainee Educational Psychologist
Cardiff University

Lucy Wilding	Simon Claridge
Trainee Educational Psychologist	Professional Tutor
School of Psychology	School of Psychology
Cardiff University	Cardiff University
Tower Building	Tower Building
Park Place	Park Place
Cardiff	Cardiff
CF10 3AT	CF10 3AT
Tel: 029 20874007	Tel: 029 20876497
Email: wildingl@cardiff.ac.uk	Email: claridges@cardiff.ac.uk

4.4 Appendix D: Parent/Guardian Consent Form

The aim of this study is to find out about the views of young people regarding healthy and unhealthy relationships. The researcher is Lucy Wilding (School of Psychology, Cardiff University) and the supervisor is Simon Claridge.

Please tick the boxes to indicate your agreement with the statements below:

	Agree
I have read and understood the information sheet.	
I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I have been given contact details of the researcher and research supervisor, so that I can ask questions at a later date.	
I agree for my child to take part in the activities to explore his/her perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships. I know this will involve a questionnaire and the Ideal Relationship activity.	
I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and he/she can withdraw at any time, without providing a reason.	
I understand that only the researcher will see/hear the information my child gives and will not share this with anyone unless it suggests that the child/someone else might be unsafe.	
The information given will be stored on a secure computer and anonymised after two weeks, so that it cannot be traced back to individuals. This data may be retained indefinitely.	

Please sign below to indicate consent to your child's participation in this research.

<u>Parental consent</u>

Parent/guardian name:

Parent/guardian signature:

Date:

4.5 Appendix E: Pupil Information Sheet

Dear young person,

My name is Lucy, I am a trainee educational psychologist and I would like to find out about young people's views on healthy and unhealthy romantic relationships.

What will the research involve?

Questionnaire (this will take about 15 minutes)

You will complete a brief questionnaire to share whether you agree with different behaviours in relationships (e.g., boys should spend most of their time with their girlfriends; it is alright for a girl to force her boyfriend to kiss her; it is O.K. for a guy to slap his girlfriend if she deserves it). Your work will not be named, so no one will know it was you.

'My Ideal Relationship' activity (this will take about one hour)

You will draw and talk about relationships that you would/would not like to be in. I would like to record our discussions, but anything you share with me will be private. This means that I will not be telling anyone what you have said unless you ask me to or you tell me something that means that you and/or someone else might be unsafe.

If you would like to be considered for taking part in this research, please complete the consent form and return it to your form teacher. Your parent/guardian will also need to provide consent for you to be considered for this project. Participants will be randomly selected from those who have agreed to take part.

If you change your mind during the study, you can choose to leave at any time, without reason, up until the point that your information has been anonymised and cannot be traced back to you.

Please contact me if you have any questions, using the details at the end of this letter.

Thank you,

Lucy Wilding
Trainee Educational Psychologist
Cardiff University

Lucy Wilding
Trainee Educational Psychologist
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT
Tel: 029 20874007
Email: wildingl@cardiff.ac.uk

Simon Claridge
Professional Tutor
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT
Tel: 029 20876497
Email: claridges@cardiff.ac.uk

4.6 Appendix F: Pupil Assent Form

The aim of this study is to find out your views about healthy and unhealthy relationships. The researcher is Lucy Wilding (School of Psychology, Cardiff University) and the supervisor is Simon Claridge.

I have read the information sheet and understand the purpose of the study.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had these answered. I know I can ask questions at any time or contact the researcher/ supervisor.

I understand what I say will be recorded and typed up, but only the researcher can look at/listen to this. My name will not be written anywhere so no one will know it is me. This data may be retained indefinitely.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw at any point, without giving a reason. I know I can say NO to any questions I don't want to answer. I know I can say NO at any time.

I understand that only the researcher will see/hear the information I give and will not share what I draw/say with anyone, unless something I draw/say suggests that I/someone else might be unsafe.

I know I will be told more about the research, after the activities.

Please sign below if you are happy to take part (complete a questionnaire and the Ideal Relationship activity).

Your name:

Your signature:

Date:

4.7 Appendix G: Attitudes Towards Dating Violence Scales

Participants completed the following questionnaires (Price et al., 1999) to record their own attitudes to the statements.

N.B. Items marked with * are negatively worded items. These ratings were reversed before scores were added.

Instructions to participants

The statements on the questionnaires describe attitudes toward different behaviours in relationships.

There are no right or wrong answers, so please answer each question honestly.

Please share your feelings about each statement by circling whether you: (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Mildly Disagree; (3) Neither Disagree nor Agree; (4) Mildly Agree; (5) Strongly Agree.

You can miss out any questions you do not want to answer.

Questionnaire 1: Attitudes towards male psychological partner violence

1. A guy should not insult his girlfriend. *

2. A guy should not tell his girlfriend what to do.*

3. A girl should ask her boyfriend first before going out with her friends.

4. Relationships always work best when girls please their boyfriends.

5. There is never a reason for a guy to threaten his girlfriend.*

6. Sometimes guys just can't help but swear at their girlfriends.

7. A girl should always change her ways to please her boyfriend.

8. A girl should always do what her boyfriend tells her to do.

9. A guy does not need to know his girlfriend's every move.*

10. There is never a good enough reason for a guy to swear at his girlfriend.*

11. It is understandable when a guy gets so angry that he yells at his girlfriend.

12. It is o.k. for a guy to bad mouth his girlfriend.

13. There is never a reason for a guy to yell and scream at his girlfriend.*

14. A girl should not see her friends if it bothers her boyfriend.

15. It is important for a girl to always dress the way her boyfriend wants.

Questionnaire 2: Attitudes towards male physical partner violence

1. A girl should break-up with a guy when he hits her.*

2. Some girls deserve to be slapped by their boyfriends.

3. It is never O.K. for a guy to hit his girlfriend.*

4. Sometimes guys just cannot stop themselves from punching girlfriends.

5. There is no good reason for a guy to push his girlfriend.*

6. Sometimes a guy cannot help hitting his girlfriend when she makes him angry.

7. There is no good reason for a guy to slap his girlfriend.*

8. Sometimes jealousy makes a guy so crazy that he must slap his girlfriend.

9. Girls who cheat on their boyfriends should be slapped.

10. Sometimes love makes a guy so crazy that he hits his girlfriend.

11. A guy usually does not slap his girlfriend unless she deserves it.

12. It is O.K. for a guy to slap his girlfriend if she deserves it.

Questionnaire 3: Attitudes towards male sexual partner violence

1. When a guy pays on a date, it is O.K. for him to pressure his girlfriend for sex.

2. Guys do not own their girlfriends' bodies.*

3. When guys get really sexually excited, they cannot stop themselves from having sex.

4. Guys should never get their girlfriends drunk to get them to have sex.*

5. A guy should not touch his girlfriend unless she wants to be touched.*

6. It is alright for a guy to force his girlfriend to kiss him.

7. Often guys have to be rough with their girlfriends to turn them on.

8. To prove her love, it is important for a girl to have sex with her boyfriend.

9. A girl who goes into a guy's bedroom is agreeing to sex.

10. It is no big deal to pressure a girl into having sex.

11. It is alright to pressure a girl to have sex if she has had sex in the past.

12. After a couple is going steady, the guy should not force his girlfriend to have sex.*

Questionnaire 4: Attitudes towards female psychological partner violence

1. There is no excuse for a girl to threaten her boyfriend.*

2. There is never a good enough reason for a girl to swear at her boyfriend.*

3. Girls have a right to tell their boyfriends how to dress.

4. A guy should always do what his girlfriend tells him to do.

5. If a girl yells and screams at her boyfriend it does not really hurt him seriously.

6. Girls have a right to tell their boyfriends what to do.

7. It is important for a guy to always dress the way his girlfriend wants.

8. Sometimes girls just can't help but swear at their boyfriends.

9. A guy should always ask his girlfriend first before going out with his friends.

10. It is O.K. for a girl to bad mouth her boyfriend.

11. It is understandable when a girl gets so angry that she yells at her boyfriend.

12. Sometimes girls have to threaten their boyfriends so that they will listen.

13. A girl should not control what her boyfriend wears.*

Questionnaire 5: Attitudes towards female physical partner violence

1. It is O.K. for a girl to slap her boyfriend if he deserves it.

2. It is no big deal if a girl shoves her boyfriend.

3. Sometimes girls just cannot stop themselves from punching their boyfriends.

4. Some guys deserve to be slapped by their girlfriends.

5. Sometimes a girl must hit her boyfriend so that he will respect her.

6. A girl usually does not slap her boyfriend unless he deserves it.

7. A girl should not hit her boyfriend regardless of what he has done.*

8. There is never a reason for a guy to get slapped by his girlfriend.*

9. Pulling hair is a good way for a girl to get back at her boyfriend.

10. It is never O.K. for a girl to slap her boyfriend.*

11. Some girls have to pound their boyfriends to make them listen.

12. A guy should break-up with a girl when she slaps him.*

Questionnaire 6: Attitudes towards female sexual partner violence

1. A girl should not touch her boyfriend unless he wants to be touched.*

2. There is nothing wrong with a guy changing his mind about having sex.*

3. A guy should breakup with his girlfriend if she has forced him to have sex.*

4. A girl should only touch her boyfriend where he wants to be touched.*

5. A guy who goes into a girl's bedroom is agreeing to sex.

6. It is alright for a girl to force her boyfriend to kiss her.

7. Girls should never get their boyfriends drunk to get them to have sex.*

8. If a guy says "yes" to sex while drinking, he is still allowed to change his mind.*

9. After a couple is going steady, the girl should not force her boyfriend to have sex.*

10. Girls should never lie to their boyfriends to get them to have sex.*

11. To prove his love, it is important for a guy to have sex with his girlfriend.

12. It is O.K. for a girl to say she loves a guy to get him to have sex.

4.8 Appendix H: Participant Demographic Form

In order to learn about the range of people taking part in this research, it would be useful if you could complete this form. All information provided will be stored anonymously.

 Please tick a box to indicate your responses to questions 3 and 4.

1. How old are you?

2. How would you describe your racial/ethnic background (e.g., White, Black, White Jewish, Asian Muslim)?

3. I am: Male ☐   Female ☐   Other ☐

4. Are you offered free school meals?   Yes ☐   No ☐

4.9 Appendix I: The Ideal Relationship Technique

The following technique is a modified version of the Ideal Self technique (Moran, 2001, 2006). Participants were asked to complete the following three parts of the technique:

1) Drawing the kind of relationship you would not like to be in

Think about the kind of relationship you would not like to be in. Make a quick sketch in the middle of your page to show this relationship. Write three words to describe a relationship that you would not like to be in.

The birthday present

In this relationship, what would you want for your birthday from your boyfriend/girlfriend? Sketch and label the present.

With family

In this relationship, what would you be like when spending time with your family? Sketch and give three descriptions.

With friends

In this relationship, what would you be like when spending time with friends? Sketch and give three descriptions.

At school

In this relationship, what would you be like at school? Sketch and give three descriptions.

Greatest fear

Everyone is afraid of something. In this relationship, what would you be most afraid of? Sketch and label this fear.

History

What would lead a person to be in this kind of relationship?

Future

What would your future be like? What will become of you and this relationship? What will be the outcomes of this relationship?

2) Drawing the kind of relationship you would like to be in

These steps (above) will be repeated so that the participant can create a further labelled drawing to represent the kind of relationship they would like to be in.

3) Scaling

Place the two drawings on the table, with the first on the left. Place a plain piece of paper in a landscape position on the table, in between the two drawings, and draw a horizontal line the length of the page. Mark the midpoint on the line.

Place a mark on the line to show which drawing (you imagine) that you would prefer your own relationship to be most similar to. What would your friends think?

4.10 Appendix J: Semi-Structured Interview Questions and Prompts

Further semi-structured questions to be asked, where appropriate, throughout the tasks:

- Which parts/aspects/features/characteristics of these relationships do you think are healthy?
- Which parts/aspects/features/characteristics of these relationships do you think are unhealthy?
- What do you think makes a relationship healthy?
- What do you think makes a relationship unhealthy?
- What might be the good things and bad things about being in a healthy relationship?
- What might be the good things and bad things about being in an unhealthy relationship?
- Where have you learnt about what is healthy and unhealthy in relationships?

Further prompts:

- Can you tell me more about this?
- Can you give me an example of this?
- Can you tell me what you mean by.....?
- How would you know whether this is healthy or unhealthy?
- What would this look like?
- What do you mean by the word....?
- What does the word... mean to you?
- Why would you like/not like that in a relationship?

4.11 Appendix K: Debrief Form

Thank you very much for taking part in this research on young people's views about healthy and unhealthy relationships.

You completed a questionnaire and shared ideas about healthy/unhealthy relationships. This has helped me to get some ideas about how schools can help young people to stay healthy within relationships.

Our chat was recorded on a tape recorder and typed up on a computer, but your name is not used anywhere, so no one can trace the information back to you. The data may be retained indefinitely.

If you have any concerns, please talk to the head teacher or the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) in your school. The following websites may also be useful if you would like to find out more about the issues discussed:

http://www.relate.org.uk/ - the UK's largest provider of a range of relationship support services. Call: 03001001234

http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk/ - the National Domestic Abuse Helpline. Call: 0808 2000 247

You can also contact me or my supervisor, Simon Claridge, using the contact details below. To make a complaint, please contact the School Research Ethics Committee directly using the contact details below.

Thank you again for your time.

Lucy Wilding

Lucy Wilding	Simon Claridge	Research Ethics Committee
Trainee Educational Psychologist	Professional Tutor	School of Psychology
School of Psychology	School of Psychology	Cardiff University
Cardiff University	Cardiff University	Tower Building
Tower Building	Tower Building	Park Place
Park Place	Park Place	Cardiff
Cardiff	Cardiff	CF10 3AT
CF10 3AT	CF10 3AT	Email: psychethics@cf.ac.uk
Tel: 029 20874007	Tel: 029 20876497	

4.12 Appendix L: Raw Data

Participant number	Gender (1 = female, 2 = male)	Neurological development (1 = TD, 2 =, ASD)	PV tolerance score
1	1	1	105
2	1	1	135
3	1	1	135
4	1	1	157
5	1	1	210
6	1	1	119
7	2	1	192
8	2	1	134
9	2	1	112
10	2	1	198
11	2	1	149
12	2	1	143
13	2	1	142
14	1	2	165
15	1	2	88
16	1	2	89
17	1	2	12
18	1	2	103
19	2	2	113
20	2	2	238
21	2	2	148
22	2	2	129
23	2	2	200
24	2	2	170

4.13 Appendix M: SPSS Output for the two-way Analysis of Variance

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[b]
Corrected Model	7839.735[a]	3	2613.245	1.886	.164	.221	5.659	.414
Intercept	492514.209	1	492514.209	355.543	.000	.947	355.543	1.000
Gender	5555.421	1	5555.421	4.010	.059	.167	4.010	.479
NDevelopment	360.998	1	360.998	.261	.615	.013	.261	.078
Gender * NDevelopment	2680.801	1	2680.801	1.935	.179	.088	1.935	.263
Error	27704.890	20	1385.245					
Total	546253.000	24						
Corrected Total	35544.625	23						

a. R Squared = .221 (Adjusted R Squared = .104)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

Note. Gender = independent variable 1 (male or female), NDevelopment (neurological development = independent variable 2 (TD or ASD), Dependent Variable = PV tolerance scores

4.14 Appendix N: An Example of a Coded Interview

The table below explains the notation system used to transcribe the following interview (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Notation	Explanation of use
(.)	A short pause (i.e., one second or less).
((pause))	A significant pause (i.e., a few seconds).
((long pause))	A longer pause (i.e., longer than a few seconds).
((laughs))	Signals a speaker laughing.
((inaudible))	For speech sounds that were completely inaudible.
()	When it is unclear what was said, single parentheses were used to signal a best guess.
erm/mm/mm-hm	For non verbal utterances.
' '	Single quotation marks were used for reported speech.
...	For trailing off speech.

Participant 15: Female with ASD, 'Molly' (pseudonym)

Interviewer: So (.) can you try to imagine just an imaginary partner that would be someone that you really wouldn't want to be with first of all

Molly: Erm (.) okay

Interviewer: Yeah (.) and then in this space in the middle don't worry about the headings for a minute but just here could you do a drawing that shows either what that person is like or what your relationship would be like with that person (.) can be any drawing doesn't matter about the quality of your drawing (.) just like a quick sketch

Molly: Okay erm ((pause)) hmm ((pause))

Interviewer: Could be like an object that would remind you of that relationship or something that would happen in that relationship it could be a sketch of that

Molly:	((drawing)) that might be a bit confusing ((drawing)) do horses have ears I have no idea (.) obviously they have ears but...	
Interviewer:	Thinking what do they look like?	
Molly:	Yeah ((drawing))	
Interviewer:	I think that looks about right	
Molly:	Okay (.) I have no idea how (.) I can't even remember how these look now (.) something like ((drawing)) that's a picture of a really basic interpretation of Buckaroo	
Interviewer:	Okay okay that's interesting (.) so why did you think of Buckaroo?	
Molly:	I just (.) the kind of explosive kind of...	An explosive relationship
Interviewer:	Okay	
Molly:	You do something and it just kind of blows up kind of thing	Self-blame? Unpredictable
Interviewer:	Ah okay that's interesting (.) thinking outside the box there (.) so is that the are you thinking that you would do something and your partner would explore or the other way round or...	
Molly:	Either way	Reciprocal nature of unhealthy relationships
Interviewer:	Either way	
Molly:	Either way would be quite bad	
Interviewer:	Yeah and by 'explode' what kind of things would be happening?	
Molly:	Just get angry or erm start screaming or anything like blowing it way out or...	Negative emotions (anger); Verbal aggression/abuse; Reactions out of proportion
Interviewer:	Okay so screaming so sort of verbal stuff	
Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	Anything else?	
Molly:	Erm (.) any kind of like abuse would just be a really bad sign for me	Abuse

Interviewer:	What would you count as abuse like where do you draw the line as to where it turns into abuse?	
Molly:	Erm (.) any kind of (.) harmful physical activity	Physical aggression/abuse
Interviewer:	Okay	
Molly:	Basically anything like that	
Interviewer:	So anything physical (.) sort of hitting that kind of thing (.) and what about you said sort of screaming where would you consider that becomes abusive? Is it abusive straight away if someone's shouted at you or...	
Molly:	When it's consistent I think	Importance of context (frequency of incidents)
Interviewer:	Okay	
Molly:	So like it happens all the time	
Interviewer:	Daily? Weekly?	
Molly:	Erm (.) it depends erm (.) I think (.) twice a week would probably be pretty bad (.) that would probably be my guideline kind of thing	Importance of context (frequency of incidents)
Interviewer:	And how long do you think you could or you would put up with that for?	
Molly:	Not very long (.) probably like don't know how I'd get into a relationship likethat but like (.) couple of days maybe	Would leave an unhealthy relationship
Interviewer:	Okay so once it'd happened a couple of times	
Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	Okay and how do you think you would react if you were in that situation where someone started either screaming or physically harming you what do you think you would do?	
Molly:	Erm (.) in the situation I'm currently oh erm (.) just leave and go back to my...	
Interviewer:	Yeah so you'd just try to get away	
Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	Okay okay and this might seem like an odd question but just go with it (.) this heading here 'birthday'	

Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	If you were with this imaginary person (.) what do you think that they would get you for your birthday present?	
Molly:	Oh erm ((pause)) erm (.) I don't know just something normal I guess 'cause I feel like in relationships like that it's not like they buy you a knife for your birthday or anything	Element of 'normality' within unhealthy relationships
Interviewer:	Yeah	
Molly:	It's just like they're nice some of the time and then sometimes it's...	Blurry distinction between healthy and unhealthy relationships
Interviewer:	Okay (.) so it wouldn't be anything out of the ordinary for your birthday?	
Molly:	Yeah just something average	
Interviewer:	Okay so when you say that you know 'You wouldn't get a knife for your birthday' that kind of thing do you mean that could that person be like normal most of the time but then there would be these explosions?	
Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	Is that how you're imagining it?	
Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	Okay (.) so quite unpredictable	
Molly:	Mm-hm	
Interviewer:	Okay (.) so how do you think you would know when they were going to explode or when they were going to be normal or would it be too difficult?	
Molly:	I suppose that's part of it really erm (.) I guess there would it would be more like that there's usually probably like triggers or like erm (.) saying certain stuff or not doing what they want or stuff like that	Controlling behaviour
Interviewer:	Okay (.) what do you think would be the most likely trigger that would cause someone to explode?	
Molly:	Erm (.) probably just doing something that makes them angry I guess	Self-blame?

Interviewer:	Okay what do you think would make this imaginary person angry?	
Molly:	Probably definitely breaking something of theirs or like even an accident like smashing a plate or something or...	Does not matter if it's an accident?
Interviewer:	Okay okay and that could cause them to explode?	
Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	Okay (.) erm then this one here with your family	
Molly:	Mm-hm	
Interviewer:	I want you to imagine that you take this person home to meet your family and you're all spending time together (.) could you do a quick sketch of what that would be like if this person was with your family?	
Molly:	Okay erm	
Interviewer:	Again it can be the situation itself or it can be like your Buckaroo it can be something that reminds you of what that would feel like or what it would be like	
Molly:	Erm ((drawing)) this is not to scale at all but...	
Interviewer:	Don't worry	
Molly:	Erm (.) something like that	
Interviewer:	Okay	
Molly:	That's as close to a bomb as I'm ever going to get	
Interviewer:	Yep yeah that's good	
Molly:	Actually probably should have drawn a circle one erm would have been a bit easier erm (.) and then that's just like family I guess	
Interviewer:	Okay so what does the bomb represent to you?	
Molly:	I suppose it'd just be like I suppose you're probably just really into the relationship for whatever reason	
Interviewer:	Yeah	Anger/temper
Molly:	I'd be scared that something would set them off like that they'd have one of their episodes with my family and they'd like...	Fear of partner's reaction or behaviour

135

Interviewer:	Okay so when you were with them you'd be worried about that happening in front of your family	
Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	And how do you think your family would react if that bomb did go off?	
Molly:	They'd probably just tell me to leave the person or erm (.) yeah just (.) they'd be very upset	
Interviewer:	Okay and how would you feel in that situation when if your family haven't seen it and you kind of know that this person has this explosive side to them how would you be feeling in that situation?	
Molly:	It'd feel like kind of walking on eggshells like just stopping people from saying things that I don't think he'll like or...	
Interviewer:	So you think you would jump in to try and keep things calm?	
Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	Okay okay and then with your friends the same question really how would it affect your friendship group being with the person spending time with your friends how would that change if you had this person as your partner?	
Molly:	Erm ((pause)) gonna be very symbolic in this one ((laughs)) ((drawing)) okay ((inaudible))	
Interviewer:	So what've you drawn there?	
Molly:	A mouth with stitches over it	
Interviewer:	Okay and what does that mean to you?	
Molly:	Erm (.) just that you wouldn't be able to say anything 'cause you'd be (.) I'm quite like friendly with my friends and make a lot of jokes and that and I feel like that I'd be a lot more tense so I wouldn't wanna say something wrong	
Interviewer:	Okay so would that be when he was with you and your friends together?	
Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	What about when he wasn't there? What would you be	

136

	like then?	
Molly:	Erm (.) I think it'd just be normal I think	
Interviewer:	Yeah	
Molly:	Don't know	
Interviewer:	So do you think you would be able to keep the two separate?	
Molly:	I think so	
Interviewer:	Yeah (.) and what do you think your friends would (.) do you think your friends would firstly know what was going on? Would you have told them or...	
Molly:	Erm (.) I don't know I'm pretty close to my friends but obviously I've never been in this kind of situation so I don't...	
Interviewer:	Yeah	
Molly:	Yeah I don't (.) I don't...	
Interviewer:	What might stop you from (.) saying something?	
Molly:	Erm (.) not even sure I just (.) I don't know it's just like that kind of you just don't tell people that kind of stuff	Relationships are a private topic
Interviewer:	Mm bit too private maybe?	
Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	Okay do you think there would get a point where you would need to speak to somebody?	
Molly:	Oh yeah	
Interviewer:	Who would you choose to speak to?	
Molly:	Probably one of my parents	More likely to speak to parents than peers
Interviewer:	Rather than your friends?	
Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	Any reason for that or...	
Molly:	Erm (.) I just (.) feel like my friends are there for emotional support but my parents do something	Peers provide emotional support
Interviewer:	Oh okay	

Molly:	So it's more of a I'd go to them after the issue had been solved but if I wanted the issue to be solved I would go to my parents	Parents provide practical support and solutions
Interviewer:	So they've almost got more like power to do something than your friends would?	
Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	Okay that's interesting (.) and if your friends sort of knew what was going on what would they do do you think?	
Molly:	They'd probably tell me to just get rid of the person	Friends would disapprove
Interviewer:	Okay (.) what if it was somebody in school? How would that would that be different then? Would that be more difficult? Would it be easier?	
Molly:	Yeah because then you'd be kind of trapped in the same area even if you did break up with them which means you can't really go just shove 'em out of your life	Feeling trapped; May have to move to a different school after an unhealthy relationship
Interviewer:	Okay and so if this was your partner how would it affect your school life generally and your school work?	
Molly:	Erm it'd probably get worse I'd erm (.) I'd just move to a different school at point	May have to move to a different school after an unhealthy relationship
Interviewer:	So if they were in this school you might feel like you had to leave school?	
Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	Why would you feel you needed to leave so that you could get away or...	
Molly:	Yeah I think (.) yeah I just I don't think I could handle that environment of knowing they're still around	Possible conflict after breaking up
Interviewer:	What would you be worried about if they were still around? What would you be worried about happening?	
Molly:	Erm (.) just like any kind of confrontation I guess	Fear of partner's behaviour or reaction
Interviewer:	Okay do you think that's something that teachers in school would be able to help you cope with or do you think it's out of their hands?	
Molly:	Well I think they could they could like keep everything separate probably and do all that kind of stuff but I just (.) I just feel like it wouldn't be very helpful like if I was	

coming out of a situation like that to like see him around all the time and...

Interviewer: Yeah okay and would it affect your if say this person wasn't in your school

Molly: Mm-hm

Interviewer: Would it still affect your school work do you think?

Molly: Erm

Interviewer: While you were together with them

Molly: Yeah 'cause typically when I'm stressed out school work just falls off of the edge and just like forget about it so...

Interviewer: So you think stress would interfere with your work

Molly: Yeah

Interviewer: Okay and this one here your 'greatest fear' what would you be most scared of if this was your partner? What would you be most worried about happening?

Molly: Erm ((pause)) I suppose just not getting out of the relationship just getting stuck in it

Interviewer: Being stuck forever (.) could you draw something to show what your greatest fear would be?

Molly: Okay erm ((drawing)) yeah so ((drawing)) (I don't know what all those lines are)

Interviewer: So what've you drawn there somebody...

Molly: Erm (.) that's quick sand I guess and it's just kind of a those lines don't link together that's gonna irritate me erm (.) just the kind of thing of like you're stuck there and the more you struggle the less you get out I guess

Interviewer: Okay okay

Molly: Kind of thing

Interviewer: So do you feel that it would be like that in this relationship the more you try to struggle the more stuck you would get?

Molly: Erm I feel like after awhile of being like if you tried to get out right at the start I feel like it would be easy but the

longer you're in there and the more you...

Interviewer: Okay

Molly: Yeah

Interviewer: So why's that then? What happens over time do you think?

Molly: I just feel like it's a expectancy thing after awhile you kind of like fall into it you start excusing it I guess like

Interviewer: Okay sort of get used to it a bit?

Molly: Yeah

Interviewer: So erm what because you're thinking your greatest fear would be that you'd be stuck and you said there's a bit of expectancy there

Molly: Mm-hm

Interviewer: What else might stop you from getting away do you think?

Molly: Erm (.) just being scared I guess if erm scared of him of the person hurting you if you left or like hurting family members of something like that

Interviewer: So how they would react to it? Okay and the history bit here is I want you to think about 'cause obviously some people do end up in relationships like this don't they?

Molly: Uh-huh

Interviewer: What do you think are the factors that lead someone to end up being with somebody like this?

Molly: Erm (.) I suppose (.) I always thought that a lot of the time they just don't realise how bad the person is until they get into the relationship

Interviewer: Yeah

Molly: Just it's like people always seem kind of nice at the start 'cause like you don't really know 'em enough

Interviewer: Yeah yeah okay and do you think there's anything that might make someone more vulnerable?

The longer you are in an unhealthy relationship, the more difficult it becomes to leave

Shifts your expectations of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour

Fear of partner's behaviour or reaction; The aggression may impact on others

Hidden nature of unhealthy relationships

Partner seems nice at the beginning, then changes – fake?

Molly:	Erm (.) I suppose just having a lot of relationships where they've been broken up with and wanting a stable one and...	Vulnerability to unhealthy relationships
Interviewer:	Yeah	
Molly:	Or (.) just like abandonment issues or something like that	Link to attachment difficulties?
Interviewer:	Okay and if you had a boyfriend like this what do you think your future would look like?	
Molly:	Erm (.) not good erm (.) I'd probably (.) and if I stayed in the relationship?	Future would not look good
Interviewer:	We can do both if you like so well do you think you'd be more likely to stay in it or more likely to end it?	
Molly:	I think I would be more likely to end it	Would end the relationship
Interviewer:	Okay so if you ended it (.) how would it affect you afterwards in the future?	
Molly:	I think it'd make me more wary about relationships like the kind of people I got into but other than that I don't (.) depending on how deep into it I got I don't think I'd be too affected by it	Negative impact on future relationships – trust
Interviewer:	Okay (.) and if you got stuck your greatest fear and you stayed with this person and you couldn't get out what would your future look like?	
Molly:	Erm (.) not good I'd probably just have a miserable life and I'd probably end up having kids at one point and it'd probably pass on to them and the cycle continues and...	Cyclical nature of unhealthy relationship behaviours
Interviewer:	Pass on to them in what way?	
Molly:	Erm the abuse would probably continue onto them	
Interviewer:	As in your boyfriend may be abusive towards the children	
Molly:	Yeah and then the kind of they grow up and sometimes they end up doing it as well and it's kind of turned into a...	Cyclical nature of unhealthy relationship behaviours
Interviewer:	Yeah yeah so they might learn some of those behaviours as well (.) okay that's great so that's your worst nightmare relationship you don't want so now we'll do exactly the same process for a relationship that would be ideal for you	
Molly:	Okay	

Interviewer:	So we'll start off again with a sketch in the middle here that shows what that relationship would be like
Molly:	Okay erm ((drawing)) okay
Interviewer:	Okay so what've you drawn there?
Molly:	That's a very weird book
Interviewer:	((laughs))
Molly:	Erm
Interviewer:	What kind of book is it?
Molly:	Just a normal book
Interviewer:	Okay
Molly:	Kind of paperback hardback whatever
Interviewer:	And how does that for you show a relationship that you'd like?
Molly:	Erm (.) just the kind of like calm kind of it doesn't change and not so much that it doesn't change but kind of it's it stays relatively the same and like only the kind of minor details of it change in it
Interviewer:	Oh that's interesting so you'd like something that wouldn't change too much?
Molly:	Or too quickly I guess like books have a kind of gradual kind of start finish end and they kind of have a formula to 'em and that
Interviewer:	Yeah
Molly:	Nice and set out
Interviewer:	Mm-hm
Molly:	And erm just kind of like (.) it doesn't do anything too surprising or...
Interviewer:	Okay so quite predictable
Molly:	Yeah
Interviewer:	And why is that something that you look for in a relationship?

Annotations (right margin):
- Calm / Stability / Predictable
- Slow pace / Stability / Predictable / Rules
- Predictable / Routine
- Predictable

142

Molly:	Erm ((pause)) it's just kind of nice to know what you're doing just erm (.) just not having to think about what you're gonna say or like if this is gonna be okay or whatever just kind of knowing what you what's the rules	Freedom Less anxiety due to rules and predictability
Interviewer:	Yeah okay so knowing what the rules are (.) so what kind of rules do you think you would both follow in the relationship?	
Molly:	Just kind of be nice to each other and like reasonable	Caring and reasonable
Interviewer:	Mm-hm so not having those explosive times where you overreact to something and...	
Molly:	Reacting like according to how bad the thing is	Proportionate reactions to conflict
Interviewer:	Okay so reasonable (.) yeah? Okay and if you were with this person what do you think they would get you for your birthday? Would it be different to the other or...	
Molly:	Erm ((pause)) just like something I like that has some sort of meaning in relation to the relationship I guess	Meaningful, deeper relationship
Interviewer:	Okay so that one might be something normal but not too meaningful	
Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	Whereas this one would...	
Molly:	Have like some like something I'd use or like but like something hints at some sort of memory or something	Meaningful, deeper relationship
Interviewer:	Okay and why do you think this person would be able to do that and this person wouldn't? What's different about them?	
Molly:	I suppose there's just more of an emotional connection of like understanding whereas that one's based on more of a kind of you do what I want and just like eggshells kind of thing so that there's more of a like room to foster a kind of (.) understanding of what each other likes and...	An emotional connection Understand each other Fewer anxieties
Interviewer:	Yeah	
Molly:	Yeah that kind of thing	
Interviewer:	Okay great and could you do a sketch for this one of what it would be like with your family if you took this person home to meet them and you're all spending time together?	

Molly: Erm ((drawing)) don't really have any picturey ideas for this one so...

Interviewer: That's okay

Molly: Can I draw a settee? This is the question

Interviewer: ((laughs))

Molly: Don't think so

Interviewer: That's not too bad

Molly: Ish

Interviewer: It's much better than I could do

Molly: ((drawing)) how do stick people sit? That looks like it's lying down ((drawing)) they can sit on the floor ((drawing)) you get the point ((drawing)) ((inaudible)) erm (.) I don't know I just feel like kind of like average like I don't really have to worry about it or anything just fine

Fewer anxieties

Interviewer: So it would be kind of similar to how it is with your family anyway

Molly: Yeah

Interviewer: You wouldn't really notice the difference if they were there or not

Molly: Yeah ideally

Interviewer: And what would your parents think of the person?

Molly: Ideally they'd just be okay with it erm (.) yeah like 'em I guess but...

Family approve

Interviewer: What kind of person do you think they would hope you were...

Molly: ((laughs)) I have no idea

Interviewer: No idea? ((laughs))

Molly: Erm (.) I don't know I think my mum just wants grandkids that's all she's gunning for right now

Interviewer: ((laughs))

Molly: Does he like kids? And that's where it ends

Interviewer:	Yeah (.) how do you feel about that?	
Molly:	Yeah	
Interviewer:	((laughs)) so do you think if you were happy they would be?	
Molly:	Yeah I think so	Parents may respect choice of partner if happy
Interviewer:	And what about with your friends then could you just sketch of what it would be like with your friends how it would affect your friendship group if you were in this relationship?	
Molly:	((drawing)) this is gonna be kind of cheesy ((drawing)) erm I just my friends always love to make fun of people who are in relationships	
Interviewer:	Ah okay	
Molly:	So just that kind of like easy like you can make fun of people without (.) them getting offended as long as it's like an okay joke	Easy going Fun
Interviewer:	Yeah okay and how would they feel about spending time with you and your boyfriend together?	
Molly:	Ideally okay	
Interviewer:	Yeah	
Molly:	Erm (.) yeah I'd hope they were alright with it	
Interviewer:	And would you want your boyfriend to become part of your friendship group or would you want to keep it separate or...	
Molly:	Erm (.) I think I'd like 'em to be like friendly but I'd want some kind of separation of my friends your friends kind of thing so there's not like anything I tell my friends she's gonna repeat back to you	Time with friends away from partner is important Importance of maintaining an independent social network
Interviewer:	Okay and why's that important to you that you would have that?	
Molly:	I just feel like there's gotta be some sort of separation of not up each other's throats all the time	Importance of time/space apart from each other
Interviewer:	Mm-hm what do you think can go wrong in a relationship if you don't have that separation and...	

| Molly: | You'd just get kind of sick of each other and start squabbling over little things | |

Molly: You'd just get kind of sick of each other and start squabbling over little things

[margin: Importance of time/space apart from each other]

Interviewer: Okay and how would being in this relationship affect your school work?

Molly: Erm (.) I don't think much would change and I think it'd decrease a little bit 'cause I've got less time probably but...

[margin: Healthy relationships still impact on school work, due to less time]

Interviewer: Yeah so they might take up some of your time

Molly: Yeah but other than that I think it would be about the same

Interviewer: Okay

Molly: Especially if they're good at subjects I'm not

[margin: May be able to help and support each other]

Interviewer: So you think they might be able to help you with...

Molly: Ideally

Interviewer: With some subjects

Molly: 'Cause maths is hell

Interviewer: ((laughs)) so you're looking for a mathematician then?

Molly: Yeah

Interviewer: ((laughs)) and what about sort of generally around school would it affect your school life and...

Molly: Erm

Interviewer: If maybe they were also at this school

Molly: If they were also at this school I'd probably like spend more time with them and probably a little bit less with my friends I guess unless they were part of the friend group

*[margin: Less time with friends
Fear of fast paced relationships]*

Interviewer: Yeah

Molly: Erm (.) but other than that probably not

Interviewer: Okay and what would your greatest fear be? Could you do a sketch of what you'd be most afraid of happening in this relationship?

[margin: Importance of education/balancing education and relationships]

Molly: Erm ((drawing)) erm that's a slug by the way looks a bit weird erm (.) I just I feel like if it went to fast it would just

[margin: Fear of fast paced relationships]

146

weird me out a bit

Interviewer: Okay so you'd wanna go at your own pace

Molly: Yeah like kind of (measures)

Interviewer: Okay

Molly: 'Cause like I've got a lot of stuff to do in the next couple of years that I'm not really

Interviewer: Yeah what kind of things do you think might go too quickly for you?

Molly: Erm (.) just the relationship getting too serious too quick like at this point I'm so focused on my education that any kind of relationship would have to be secondary 'cause I'm not willing to give up what I want to do for that kind of thing

Interviewer: Yeah and why do you feel like that at this point that your sort of education first?

Molly: Erm (.) I just have things I wanna do that require kind of higher education and I erm just don't wanna lack in that 'cause I've spent a couple of years when I was younger doing stuff that wasn't related to that

Interviewer: Okay that's fair enough (.) and how do you think you might find a relationship like this so for the history bit what might cause someone to end up finding this kind of ideal relationship that you're looking for?

Molly: Erm ((pause)) I guess just meeting someone through your friends group or erm somewhere you go or like in a hobby place you go or something like that

Interviewer: Okay and why might you be more likely to find them in like a friendship group do you think?

Molly: Just like people have the same kind of humour as you or like the same like if you got the same kind of friends you've got like a similar-ish personality so...

Interviewer: So do you think with this person that you didn't want to be with (.) would they be unlikely to be your friend do you think?

Molly: I think so

147

Importance of education/balancing education and relationships

Importance of education/balancing education and relationships

Importance of education/balancing education and relationships

May have similar interests

Similar interests/ personality traits

Interviewer: Okay why's that?

Molly: I just (.) I think on the surface most people would be okay with them I wouldn't think my friendship group would like hate them or anything (.) just the kind of like not the same kind of humour 'cause they'd be a bit too tetchy I guess (.) not willing to take a joke

Interviewer: Yeah okay and what do you think your future would look like if you were in a relationship with this person?

Molly: Erm (.) ideally I'd just go on to do what I want if it gets more serious after I'm okay with that then fine but I'd rather it ideally it'd just be just wherever it goes

Interviewer: Okay and do your education stuff first and...

Molly: Yeah

Interviewer: Do you think it would be likely to last a long time do you think?

Molly: Erm (.) I don't know erm (.) suppose it depends on the other person if they're willing to do the whole slow thing and they've got like kind of like-minded thing of like education then probably I guess

Interviewer: So do you think that would help if you were with someone else who also wanted to do some higher education?

Molly: Yeah 'cause then it's just kind of like casual thing whereas if not then I think it might be a bit short but...

Interviewer: Okay so for the last bit what I'm gonna do is put the relationship you don't want to be in there and the one you do want to be in there (.) put this scale in the middle

Molly: Okay

Interviewer: And on the scale I want you to put a cross somewhere to show where you think your future relationship is most likely to be so (.) if it's gonna be exactly the same as this one you'd put a cross up this end (.) if it's gonna be exactly like this one you'd put a cross here

Molly: Okay

Interviewer: It could have elements of both and be somewhere in the middle or you can go anywhere along that line that you think

148

Molly: Erm ((drawing))

Interviewer: Okay

Molly: There abouts

Interviewer: So why've you chosen that place?

Molly: I just feel like (.) I'd want someone who has most of like the good sense of humour and kind of personality wise and okay with my family and friends and all that but (.) I feel like in most relationships you're gonna have issues and you're gonna have like times when you get angry at each other and...

Some issues in relationships are okay/expected

Blurry distinction between healthy and unhealthy relationships

Interviewer: Yeah

Molly: Not the abuse part of it but just there's gonna be...

Importance of considering the context of behaviour (frequency, severity)

Interviewer: Ups and downs

Molly: Some issues

Interviewer: Yeah so you think that you'd have bits of that but not to the extent

Molly: Yeah

Interviewer: Of abuse

Molly: Yeah

Interviewer: Okay and do you think there are any parts of this relationship that are healthy at all?

Molly: Erm ((pause)) erm ((pause)) I suppose (.) maybe the start before all of the stuff but other than that I don't really think so

Unhealthy relationships may have been okay to begin with; Hidden nature of unhealthy relationships

Interviewer: And do you think there's any parts of it that anyone you know or anyone you can imagine might find appealing about that relationship?

Molly: Erm ((pause))

Interviewer: Or do you think most people you know would think 'No I don't want that'

Molly: I think (.) no I don't think so

Interviewer: Okay and what about this one (.) what do you think are the

healthy parts of that relationship?

Molly: Just the kind of understanding that like you can have separate lives and still communicate and still be fine and stuff like that and...

Interviewer: And are there any parts that you think could be considered unhealthy at all?

Molly: Erm ((pause)) I don't know I don't think so

Interviewer: Okay and if your friends were gonna put a cross on this line somewhere to show the relationship they would want (.) where do you think they would put a cross?

Molly: Erm ((pause)) I think it would somewhere in like this area so like anywhere from like here like middle point upwards to about well up to about there

Interviewer: So you think some of your friends might be happy to go a little bit further towards this one?

Molly: Yeah but not to the point where it's more this one than that one

Interviewer: Okay so it's always got more of that

Molly: Yeah I think so

Interviewer: Okay and why do you think some people might be more happy to accept those things than you are?

Molly: Erm (.) I just I feel like they'd be less erm (.) kind of focused on the whole friends thing of like getting along with your friends and family so they'd lean a little bit more that way of like not very sure about that kind of thing

Interviewer: Okay so they might be okay with sort of feeling a bit uncomfortable around their family (.) they might not mind as much as some people

Molly: Yeah

Interviewer: And other people might be more worried about it

Molly: Yeah I'm very close to my family so it'd be very bad for me if they didn't get on

Interviewer: Okay that's great and then my last question is where do

150

you think you learn about relationships from?

Molly: Erm (.) seeing how your parents interact with each other and erm siblings if they're old enough I guess and then just people around you

Interviewer: So what do you think you've learnt from your parents? Anything in particular that you've seen that you think that works that doesn't work or...

Molly: Just talk a lot I think

Interviewer: They communicate a lot with each other? Or you talk a lot with them?

Molly: Yeah just (.) yeah just talk a lot and make sure everything's out and understanding that kind of thing

Interviewer: Okay and what about your friends (.) do you learn much from your friends or do you think you learn more from your parents?

Molly: Erm (.) I think from friends you learn more along the lines of like how to (.) how to not be so serious all the time and like not focusing so much on the kind of (.) almost business aspects of being in a relationship which are like finance and that kind of thing but just making it more casual I guess

Interviewer: More the fun stuff?

Molly: Yeah

Interviewer: Okay so you learn different things from different people?

Molly: Yeah

Interviewer: So is it more of the serious stuff that you think you learn from parents?

Molly: Yeah kind of someone who you think is gonna be stable and stuff like that

Interviewer: Yeah and what about in school do you learn anything in school about relationships from teachers or lessons?

Molly: Erm ((pause)) I mean there's the they occasionally come in and like talk about healthy and unhealthy relationships and...

Interviewer:	Yeah	
Molly:	Like sex ed and that erm	SRE
Interviewer:	Yeah	
Molly:	So you learn a little bit but it's mostly just (.) I feel like there's this a lot of (information) on TV kind of gives out the kind of information of what is and isn't healthy in a way	Influence of the media Learn from TV programmes
Interviewer:	Yeah what kind of things have you seen on TV?	
Molly:	It's just like stuff like it'd bad but Jeremy Kyle where like you basically see the worst of...	
Interviewer:	Yeah	
Molly:	It's a kind of like everything not to go for kind of situation	Learn from TV programmes
Interviewer:	Mm so do you think those programmes can be helpful in that way showing...	
Molly:	In a way (.) I wouldn't use them as like (.) 'This is what a relationship is' but erm	Learn from TV programmes
Interviewer:	Yeah	
Molly:	Yeah I suppose if you're old enough to understand what's going on with them	Learn from TV programmes
Interviewer:	Yeah	
Molly:	They're kind of useful as an indicator of like what can go wrong	
Interviewer:	Mm-hm okay and do you think there's anything that schools could do more of that would be helpful for teenagers?	
Molly:	Erm (.) I think just (.) they focus too much on physical abuse and not (.) like mind games kind of	School focuses too much on physical abuse, not psychological abuse
Interviewer:	Okay	
Molly:	They don't (.) there's so focused on like if someone ever hits you or whatever that they don't focus on just if it's just a bad relationship what do you do	Need an understanding of continuum of healthy to unhealthy relationship behaviours, not just the extremes
Interviewer:	Okay so you think you'd like some more advice on more of the emotional and psychological side (.) what kind of	

	psychological warning signs are you already aware of do you think?	
Molly:	Erm just (.) if someone tries to control what you're saying or who you talk to or anything like that that's a bit of a no go	Controlling what you say and do
Interviewer:	Okay that's great that's it	
Molly:	Okay	
Interviewer:	Thank you very much	

4.15 Appendix O: Investigator Triangulation

How are young people, with and without ASD, similar in their perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships?

Theme title	Theme number
An emotional connection	1
The hidden nature of unhealthy relationships	2
Unhealthy responses to conflict	3
Unhealthy relationships – obstructive to school work and life goals	4

Extract	Coder 1 (Researcher)	Coder 2	Agree/Disagree
Just be nice to each other and care for each other	1	1	Agree
I suppose there's just more of an emotional connection of like understanding [...] so that there's more of a like room to foster a kind of (.) understanding of what each other likes	1	1	Agree
Because I prefer that it would be confidential up to the point where I'd like to report that to the authorities	2	2	Agree
I'm not you know as a simple thing yeah it's just because it's a case of pride and things like that I don't wanna go up to my family and say 'Hey I've got this girlfriend and this	2	2	Agree

whole thing is not working out' yeah I don't wanna show all of the faults I wanna show all the good things			
I'll end up with an 'F' [...] for not completing it [...] because of her	4	4	Agree
If they got seriously hurt you'd be seriously hurt sort of like they might be like (.) in hospital but you wouldn't wanna leave their side you'd always wanna be with them	1	3	Disagree
Like living in like quite being like quite poor 'cause you would be trying to work hard in school because then she'd be like trying making you not concentrate on your school work so you might not pass your GCSEs or something	4	4	Agree
Erm looking after them when they're in need	1	3	Disagree
It's just like you wouldn't be able to be honest and like I'm honest with my Mum about everything like even the little things so I think if I wasn't honest with her it would just be like a nightmare 'cause you just feel like there's a massive elephant in the room and like my friends have had relationships where that's happened and it's just horrible they just they lose their relationship with their Mum for like months and months and months until they find the courage to finally end it and then it's just kind of like	2	2	Agree

I could probably if they if they don't hurt me I could probably lash out one day and hurt them or erm (.) if I do get with someone else I could probably be violent towards them	3	3	Agree
Yeah I would push her away	3	3	Agree
Try and stop them [...] physically yeah	3	3	Agree
I think he'd like or he or she whoever it is erm would like put up a front to like make you seem like nothing's wrong	2	2	Agree
And it should be happy because you should love that person very much but I'd just punch him in the face and go anyway	3	3	Agree
I think she would affect my school work a lot I think	4	4	Agree
Yeah 'cause typically when I'm stressed out school work just falls off of the edge and just like forget about it so	4	4	Agree

Yeah (.) it's dark by five o'clock so you can't go out and then but if you have a girlfriend you do go out and then it gets dark and then people look at you as a thug and then your grades go down 'cause you didn't do the homework didn't do the revising you're on your phone more (.) so it does affect it	4	4	Agree
What I'd be most afraid of is (.) I think what I would be most afraid of in the relationship is simply physical violence like I mean from myself or from the partner involved if it's (.) er so let's say at some point I just lose my temper like really really badly or let's say I'm someone with anger issues and I lose my temper my biggest fear at that point would be that I accidentally hurt them 'cause although I dislike the relationship I don't wanna hurt anyone obviously don't wanna hurt anyone erm and obviously there might be a case where I lose my temper to a point where I just can't take it any more so I end up maybe doing something that hurts them and that you know that then can lead on to charges you can get arrested for assault that kind of stuff erm (.) and it's that sort of thing it's a case of you just lose your mind to a point where you lose your temper or you just end up losing your mind because of it	3	3	Agree
But like if you just go and like 'Ah here's some roses darling I think you're great' like 'Ah this person isn't bad after all' because they're hiding what they really are	2	2	Agree

In what ways do TD adolescents and individuals with ASD differ in their perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships?

Theme title	Theme number
ASD - reassured by rules and systems	1
Expectations of sameness	1.1
Healthy, unhealthy or abusive - does context matter?	2
Understanding a partner's direct and indirect behaviours	3
Direct or indirect responses to conflict?	4
TD participants - the benefits of unhealthy relationships	5

Extract	Coder 1 (Researcher)	Coder 2	Agree/Disagree
Calling me a 'window licker'	3	3	Agree
Because I wouldn't wanna go round with a big black eye or (.) around a public place I wouldn't want him being extremely violent kicking me on the floor and everything	3	3	Agree
Or like if I was like drunk being like 'Oh like you're so embarrassing' or like 'Why are you doing that?' like if I was having a good time like a genuinely good time and they were doing that	3	3	Agree

I don't know they'd probably get you like erm (.) like maybe like the latest phone something like that to try and like make up for (.) stuff they've done	3	3	Agree
Mm scared of (her) I'm scared of her having sex with me	3	3	Agree
I wouldn't want him swearing at me	3	3	Agree
Yeah just to make her boyfriend jealous	4	3	Disagree
Erm like this has gone too far you're trying to make me get fat ((inaudible)) you smoke and this is not happening any more ((inaudible))	4	4	Agree
Erm just like (.) just doesn't wanna talk to you or anything (.) and just going off and not telling you anything about what's happening in their lives	3	3	Agree
I wouldn't mind them being super attractive as long as we both agree on the same things	1.1	1.1	Agree
I don't like people who are contraries	1.1	1.1	Agree

Well actually having an affair	3	2	Disagree
Erm (.) don't know I don't know really (.) maybe like if she's like seeing someone else at the time or something	3	3	Agree
Something like a man forces a girl into having sex with them and then if they say no it would be stuff like 'Oh well you're (.) ((inaudible)) they just come out with it something nasty for a girl	3	3	Agree
Mm they would do things behind your back	3	3	Agree
Her abusiveness of course and then I would like to say I'm actually giving you one last and if I get a lousy grade I will re-sit then and I will give her one last chance you don't do it again or else we will have immediate divorce	1	1	Agree
Yeah she'd like talk to other people like boys and that sorta thing	3	3	Agree
It's the most the most illegal you can think of I can think of	1	?	Disagree

Them not saying 'I'm going out with my friends' just like leaving like without no warning or anything and leaving all night and then coming back in like early hours two days later or something like cheating	3	3	Agree
They would hurt and would like hit you every single time	3	3	Agree
I guess just meeting someone through your friends group or erm somewhere you go or like in a hobby place you go or something like that	1.1	1.1	Agree
I would like to give her three warnings any more and I'm done with her	1	1	Agree
I'd phone the police and get a court order	1	1	Agree
You both disagree on multiple things even though you love each other very much it's not working out so you kind of you know just gotta split	1.1	2	Disagree
Or too quickly I guess like books have a kind of gradual kind of start finish end and they kind of have a formula to 'em and that	1	2	Disagree

I'd go through a couple of tests secretly that don't harm her but analyse that it works so I'd put her in certain situations and that normally works	4	1	Disagree
Because having a perfect relationship isn't always happy like (.) it could get kind of not boring	5	5	Agree
In obviously a relationship you do like then for the most part you both agree on you agree on multiple things there are either enough things that you get along well or you get along with everything you both agree on exactly the same things so you both agree that a BMW is better than a Toyota you both agree that you prefer literature as opposed to the movies you both agree that sometimes the news lies or something like that you know just those kinds of stuff in that case you might as well be hanging out with yourself again	1.1	1.1	Agree
I will start to hate her more and eventually (.) we wouldn't even like each other and pretend that we never saw each other even if I had enough then I would have to reject her and pretend and the next time I ever ever see her I shall pretend that we never seen or met each other	4	?	Disagree
Yell at her (.) for all the things she caused me	4	4	Agree

Yeah just to make her boyfriend jealous	4	3	Disagree
Yeah and make sure he doesn't like and text him like every day to make sure of that (.) and know that if he was the right one for me and that	4	4	Agree
I say that would be a one-off but if it continues then I am going to get tougher and reject her	1	4	Disagree
I'd probably just like either ignore them or not kind of participate	4	4	Agree
Well some girls might like bad boys and like wanna have sex with them	5	5	Agree
You know it's okay to have arguments in a relationship but these would be unhealthy sort of arguments where they'd happen constantly and it'd be over sometimes minor things simplistic things or er just things you disagree about or agree about	2	4	Disagree
If he hit me or something or pushed me or broke any really expensive stuff (.) 'cause a cup who cares if he broke a cup? But smashing a computer or a T.V. or something purposefully	2	2	Agree

No (.) it's the rules	1	1	Agree
Yeah yeah unless like that unless they had a really really good reason I would just call it off	2	2	Agree
Well if it's if it's just like an argument and she's really annoyed for something and it's just a one off then fair enough after that you could you know make up and everything but if it's continuous then like yeah continuing on over and over again then yeah I wouldn't want that ((laughs))	2	2	Agree
That's why you've gotta be smooth 'cause if they don't find out what you don't know can't hurt you	4	3	Disagree
Erm (.) hitting me (.) I'd never hit a girl ever never happen (.) hitting me would probably be a big one but I think if it was so much anger that she done it I think I would forgive her once or twice but if it was just like hitting me hitting me hitting me like abusive then I'd leave	2	2	Agree
'Cause they're normally not ugly if they're gold diggers	5	1	Disagree

Extract	Coder 1 (Researcher)	Coder 2	Agree/Disagree
It like depends 'cause if like that girls like popular or something they might think like I'm cooler because I'm seeing someone that's more popular	5	5	Agree
People like that are often like really elusive and kind of mysterious and I think a lot women like and as well a lot of women er like like a someone who's a bit interesting and like difficult and like a bit of like a bad guy like it just attracts 'cause like girls are like attracted to like problems I think and like everyone wants a bit of gossip and stuff like that and I think that satisfies that aspect of their lives	5	5	Agree

Are the perceptions of TD adolescents and individuals with ASD influenced by different sources of information?

Theme title	Theme number
Social and observational learning	1
The influence of the media	2
Opportunities for incidental versus formal learning	3

Extract	Coder 1 (Researcher)	Coder 2	Agree/Disagree
Probably Facebook (.) just big rants on there all the time	2	2	Agree
Yeah but also like friends what they what your friends say may influence like your	1	2	Disagree

opinion			
A lot of my sort of a lot of where I get this just comes from watching like a lot of it comes from the internet and things like that and also comes from just seeing like dramas and things like that so stuff like oddly enough stuff like Eastenders and all that stuff where you get a clear case of this is a bad relationship this is a good relationship this is what works and this is what doesn't	2	2	Agree
I've been reading about them in a book I found from the [anonymised] library	3	3	Agree
I think friends I think (.) yeah like (.) when like your friends have relationships and that and you like learn from that and stuff so and see how it's done and stuff ((laughs)) so yeah like obviously like when you're younger and that your parents tell you about stuff and that but (.) yeah but when obviously I think you talk (.) like I talk about relationships and that more with my friends so yeah	1	3	Disagree
So you learn a little bit but it's mostly just (.) I feel like there's this a lot of (information) on T.V. kind of gives out the kind of information of what is and isn't healthy in a way	2	2	Agree
I'm not too sure what I think I remembered something quite recently about something called something called 'Helpline'	2	2	Agree

Pretty much anything but especially teachers	3	3	Agree
Erm (.) seeing how your parents interact with each other and erm siblings if they're old enough I guess and then just people around you	1	1	Agree
Mm yeah ((inaudible)) my family could pick one	3	3	Agree
Because I found him in Seven M class Seven M	3	3	Agree
Erm (.) definitely older people (.) when we see them around and erm your parents (.) erm (.) your friends what they say and what you hear from siblings	1	1	Agree
Erm ((inaudible)) doing lots of lessons about this sort of stuff	3	3	Agree
Like sex ed and that erm	3	3	Agree
If you're in an environment where healthy relationships are like common place like if your parents are happy if you know what to find in healthy relationships so then you	1	1	Agree

know what makes an unhappy relationship so you understand the distinction between the two			
I'd say definitely like PSE lessons	3	3	Agree
Yeah like I've seen like how a relationship didn't work out and how they did work out	1	1	Agree
No I only see her in school	3	1	Disagree
I think a lot of the time you learn what not to do rather than what to do (.) and I think the way you respond to situations about other people tells you a lot about what like what your values are	1	1	Agree
'Cause like one of my friends she got was in a relationship with a boy who was older than her (.) and he was like really nasty to her (.) and it's like we would go out on like a Saturday and he'd have to be there (.) it's like if we would go somewhere and we wouldn't come back	1	1	Agree
Like get counselling sign you up for counselling and help you to realise what to look out for like all the signs on the boys	3	3	Agree

I know erm like people in other schools in the area they're just learning about like sex education in biology or something (.) they don't have like (.) the facilities and like our teacher brings in loads of different support groups like cancer trust and like drugs and alcohol and then we had one about relationships and like healthy and I think that quite affects you (.)	3	3	Agree
Definitely older people (.) when we see them around	1	1	Agree
I did take I did ask her out but she wasn't ready [...] I felt very upset (.) and then my dad says keep being nice to her	3	3	Agree
'Cause like even with er we watched two videos in PSE and they were (.) I don't think they like (meant to do this) it like happens to both men and women but in the example in was just women who were being ((pause)) yeah so sort of like that	3	3	Agree
I think just (.) they focus too much on physical abuse and not (.) like mind games kind of. they don't (.) there's so focused on like if someone ever hits you or whatever that they don't focus on just if it's just a bad relationship what do you do	3	3	Agree
I don't know when I'm going to see her again after she leaves	3	?	Disagree

169

4.16 Appendix P: Supporting Extracts for Each Theme and Subtheme

The table below explains the notation system used to transcribe the data shown in following data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Notation	Explanation of use
(.)	A short pause (i.e., one second or less).
((pause))	A significant pause (i.e., a few seconds).
((long pause))	A longer pause (i.e., longer than a few seconds).
((laughs))	Signals a speaker laughing.
((inaudible))	For speech sounds that were completely inaudible.
()	When it is unclear what was said, single parentheses were used to signal a best guess.
erm/mm/mm-hm	For non verbal utterances.
' '	Single quotation marks were used for reported speech.
...	For trailing off speech.

How are young people, with and without ASD, similar in their perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships?

Theme/subtheme	Supporting extracts
1. An emotional connection	Jack (ASD): Mm she's caring
	Jack (ASD): Sensual nice and polite
	Oliver (ASD): Kind ((pause)) helpful
	Molly (ASD): I suppose there's just more of an emotional connection of like understanding [...] so that there's more of a like room to foster a kind of (.) understanding of what each other likes
	Grace (ASD): It's just doing something innit to show you care
	Grace (ASD): My grades would probably go up 'cause anything I would be struggling in school he would there to help me wherever

he could and I would do the same for him

Amy (ASD): And it should be happy because you should love that person very much

Tom (TD): Erm looking after them when they're in need

Tom (TD): Then you look after them (.) like if someone's died then you help 'em

Zack (TD): Just be nice to each other and care for each other

Lily (TD): If they got seriously hurt you'd be seriously hurt sort of like they might be like (.) in hospital but you wouldn't wanna leave their side you'd always wanna be with them

Lily (TD): Some relationships always want what's best for the relationship so you'd also try and probably try harder for them to work in school

Emma (TD): But I think if you've obviously known them and you're comfortable and that you wouldn't be worrying a lot and thinking about them so much

Imogen (TD): He's more loving and caring

Ava (TD): Erm really kind take me out for a nice meal at a restaurant and er (.) just give me piggy backs

Daisy (TD): You want someone that's gonna be listening to you like understanding your emotions

Daisy (TD): Because I think like in life like especially as I'm getting older now I just think I need someone that's just gonna be there and just gonna listen to me vent everyday

Daisy (TD): I would still want them to be able to listen to my problems and not judge me for them and like just be able to respond the way I wanted them to to how I'm feeling

Daisy (TD): He'd understand that like a card means more than like a big expensive present and Mum always says that she always says like you should always get people cards because like that's the thoughtful element of it maybe

	Daisy (TD): I think if they like loved you or liked you or whatever I think they'd want you to succeed in whatever you were good at and in no way would they hold you back like if you said 'I have homework to do tonight' they wouldn't be like 'Oh for God's sake like come on' like they'd be like 'Oh yeah you need to do it like I'd love to see you but you really need to get that done' and I think the same in kind of reverse for that Sarah (TD): They'd have like erm ((long pause)) like support each other Sarah (TD): So like erm (.) with school or like if one of them wants to go to university or something like that they can support each other and like if (.) like I think my dad and my step-mum are quite like when they have a bad day at work they like sort of they know and (they know to like) comfort each other and stuff like that Sarah (TD): Yeah and then I'd support them so it wouldn't just be like oh 'me me me' (.) I'd wanna support them as well
2. The hidden nature of unhealthy relationships	Daniel (ASD): But I don't want to reveal to the world that I've got a terrible relationship with this person and I'm still in this relationship Daniel (ASD): I'm not you know as a simple thing yeah it's just because it's a case of pride and things like that I don't wanna go up to my family and say 'Hey I've got this girlfriend and this whole thing is not working out' yeah I don't wanna show all of the faults I wanna show all the good things Daniel (ASD): We had to find good things about her that I can talk about or I'd have to make some up Daniel (ASD): I would probably just keep my mouth shut about most of it and try and think of good things to say so that way it sort of looks like it's working out Daniel (ASD): I can't help but explain that away with it depends erm (.) if I had friends who I hang out with a lot erm and this girlfriend was rather picky and preferred me to stay with her as opposed to staying with my friends would prefer it if I stayed away from my friends and prefer to stay with her instead then it would be a case of maybe they would try and find out what's going on or

maybe they would feel something else entirely because it might be a case of er they look at my absence and think 'Ah hang on maybe this isn't working out maybe we're not really friends any more maybe he's found some other people that he likes more than me' or you know it might you know just sort of it's the thing with psychology basically you fill in the blanks when you're not given the information so they would fill in they would think 'Oh hang on maybe he doesn't like me any more' as opposed to thinking 'Hang on maybe it's a problem with him or maybe it's a problem with part of his new lifestyle' or in this case with his girlfriend

Daniel (ASD): I'd probably be miserable because I couldn't get out of this relationship and she's not letting me see my friends unless it's of course I sort of strong handle it and just go out and see my friends anyway that will lead to more arguments later on

Harry (ASD): Well not (talk about it) unless I put her onto the to a big risk of divorcian or rejection

Harry (ASD): Because I prefer that it would be confidential up to the point where I'd like to report that to the authorities

Matthew (ASD): Erm (.) could (embarrass you) (.) 'What in god's name have you got here?'

Tia (ASD): Because why? Why would you do that? If he hits you then and if your parents are very fond of him then they don't see that he hits you

Grace (ASD): Erm ((pause)) very painful and harsh and everything feeling of the feeling of being alone and everything like no one cares 'cause he's pushing away from your family and friends and then being horrible to them

Tia (ASD): You'd probably never socialise with anyone anymore

Tia (ASD): Because he'd probably tell you who to like who to not like

Amy (ASD): I think if something like that happened I think I wouldn't even bring them I think I would say like 'Oh I'm just going somewhere out with just (.) like go but like I'm just going out to a conference' but then I'd just secretly just go and speak with my family 'cause like he probably he will probably want to go and try to meet them to seem happy to them to see that nothing's going

wrong so I think either I wouldn't bring them at all or if they did it would be really awkward and I would want to leave as soon as possible

Amy (ASD): Or I would secretly like (.) just I don't even know I think I'd just not bring them in the first place and in the worst case scenario just like be really awkward

Amy (ASD): Like this is a person like trying to still act all innocent and charming so they would send nice presents or unless they really or unless like they really just didn't like me but like I feel like people like them would probably try to remain charming to like other people it's like if I had like a birthday party they'd just probably give me really nice present although they're absolutely horrible because they want to be appear charming and nice to others

Amy (ASD): Because if they if the person just came up to me and was like 'Oh it's your birthday here's like er I dunno a quid here you go I don't really care about your birthday' and walks off and just drinks or something then like that gives off the bad vibe that maybe this person isn't a great person in a relationship

Amy (ASD): But like if you just go and like 'Ah here's some roses darling I think you're great' like 'Ah this person isn't bad after all' because they're hiding what they really are

Amy (ASD): It depends if like I told them what was really going on but like if I didn't they'd probably be quite fooled by it unless they like noticed my face and my body language erm but I think they'd be quite fooled

Amy (ASD): I think the person would try to like be nice to them come across as charming and fine and like nothing's really bad happening and stuff like that but like and like the family would be like 'Oh it's okay what's wrong [anonymised]?' I'd be like 'Ahh stuff'

Amy (ASD): I think he would be like 'Ah yes my perfect opportunity to be charming and great and they don't suspect I'd beat my girlfriend all sorted'

Amy (ASD): Yeah and then I'd just feel really annoyed with myself I guess

174

Amy (ASD): Well I wouldn't say annoyed with myself I guess I would be I'd be annoyed that I didn't like wouldn't like like in this scenario I'd probably just like be like 'No I don't wanna do it' and probably push them away but like if it didn't work I'd just be annoyed because I should've probably pushed them harder but then I remember it isn't really my fault I just feel like I should probably find another boyfriend

Amy (ASD): They'd feel way too guilty and like they hate themselves for even getting into this in the first place

Molly (ASD): A mouth with stitches over it

Molly (ASD): Erm (.) just that you wouldn't be able to say anything 'cause you'd be (.) I'm quite like friendly with my friends and make a lot of jokes and that and I feel like that I'd be a lot more tense so I wouldn't wanna say something wrong

Molly (ASD): Erm (.) not even sure I just (.) I don't know it's just like that kind of you just don't tell people that kind of stuff

Jacob (TD): I think it'd be an awkward atmosphere yeah depending on whether they'd try to act nice in front of the family or not but...

Jacob (TD): Yeah yeah and they're probably wondering why I'm not speaking so maybe unless they are trying to be nice in front of the friends again

Jacob (TD): Erm ((pause)) well I just (.) erm (.) well I'd just think they're like completely fake and that 'cause ((laughs)) yeah erm I don't know whether I'd carry on taking them to like family stuff and that if they were like that yeah

Jacob (TD): Erm (.) they I reckon I would probably be quieter around my friends

Jacob (TD): Yeah yeah and they're probably wondering why I'm not speaking

Tom (TD): She might be like try and be nice around them but not around me

Tom (TD): You wouldn't be yourself

	Tom (TD): Well erm ((pause)) erm ((pause)) they might she might like draw them away like push them away (peers)
	Tom (TD): By like (.) keeping you in (.) don't letting you out or anything
	Ryan (TD): She'd probably just act nice and that in front of other people
	Ryan (TD): Lying
	Ryan (TD): Acting nice for them
	Ryan (TD): By the sounds of it I wouldn't be allowed out with my friends
	Ryan (TD): Probably because I wouldn't be able to see my friends round school
	Ryan (TD): Well I wouldn't have any friends
	Zack (TD): Just being there like if they knew about it it would be quite awkward
	Zack (TD): Try and make it sound like she's sweet and innocent
	Zack (TD): So other people think she's nice
	Zack (TD): Just don't know erm can't really think erm like they'd probably be stopping me seeing them or like she would stop me seeing them
	Imogen (TD): ((long pause)) Being forced into not going out with family friends
	Imogen (TD): You'd be all on your own so you'd be like (.) if your family don't want you near him there's just gonna be something like your family's just gonna go so you won't have any family they're just gonna disown you and then all your friends will so you'll have no one (.)
	Imogen (TD): Not being able to see my friends and family
	Imogen (TD): If like if they stop me from like seeing my family

friends or stop me going out

Imogen (TD): You try and gotta and get your family back

Imogen (TD): I don't know it could be stuff like erm (.) having like a relationship and the boy forcing you to doing having sex (.) if they could teach us to like people not to do it (.) so it would be like in PSE lessons or something like that

Daisy (TD): It's just like you wouldn't be able to be honest and like I'm honest with my Mum about everything like even the little things so I think if I wasn't honest with her it would just be like a nightmare 'cause you just feel like there's a massive elephant in the room and like my friends have had relationships where that's happened and it's just horrible they just they lose their relationship with their Mum for like months and months and months until they find the courage to finally end it and then it's just kind of like...

Daisy (TD): Yeah I think she would make it clear that she wasn't happy with it and she would kind of distance herself from me like they always something that always works better is like 'I'm disappointing in you' than 'I'm angry with you' so I think she'd just make it clear that she was disappointed that I've had that little self-worth that I was in the relationship

Daisy (TD): My friends have had relationships where that's happened and it's just horrible they just they lose their relationship with their Mum for like months and months and months until they find the courage to finally end it and then it's just kind of like...

Daisy (TD): Not if they were like that I would be embarrassed I would feel really really embarrassed and I just...

Daisy (TD): Because I think that's like quite like a bigger issue that would a bigger thing like that would be like a therapy kind of session

Sarah (TD): Yeah it's like (.) an object is like someone owns you (.) so like you can't go anywhere and like you're supposed to like just sit there and smile or something like that

Sarah (TD): Yeah but you wouldn't be with like your family or stuff it would just be (.) the two of you

Sarah (TD): Erm I think he'd like or he or she whoever it is erm

would like put up a front to like make you seem like nothing's wrong...

Sarah (TD): Erm well I'd say that the family could like (.) they could get on well ((writing)) erm they could get on well but erm and like (.) it could be the same as this that they could like feel happy with them and ((inaudible)) erm but then I think the victim would like put on a face like or a mask or something

Sarah (TD): Erm like sort of when they you put the mask on or something 'cause that could apply with your friends as well (.) like I've obviously done person alone (.) they could also (.) it could be flipped that they put the mask on and they just act normal like nothing's wrong

Sarah (TD): Yeah I think 'cause like especially for like if it was a man (.) they'd be like embarrassed (.) 'cause like I know it's just it's not just men and women it's not women being the victim men are as well but men (.) they don't wanna like speak out about it

Sarah (TD): But like if I was with my friends I'd sort of become like the shy one and like say I don't know we went to like a bar or something (.) and like erm we would meet people and stuff and sort of like hang round at the back like (.) trying not to be noticed

Sarah (TD): I think it's because you don't want people to notice like what's going on you think like 'cause it's happening to you you think it's only happening to you (.) and like no one else

Sarah (TD): Yeah I think I'd be like they'd go off to like get drinks and I'd sort of just be standing with the bags and the coats and stuff like that

Sarah (TD): 'Cause I know I think that we're like one of the only schools who actually have a permanent PSE teacher

Sarah (TD): I know erm like people in other schools in the area they're just learning about like sex education in biology or something (.) they don't have like (.) the facilities and like our teacher brings in loads of different support groups like cancer trust and like drugs and alcohol and then we had one about relationships and like healthy and I think that quite affects you (.)

Lily (TD): Erm (.) to make healthy choices we could talk to someone experienced about that choice before we actually make

that choice ourselves

Lily (TD): Like a PSE teacher like [anonymised] [...] Or the nurse [...] Erm (.) also biology teachers as well because (.) it's like (.) 'cause they know I know it's not always like intimate but they know how to talk to you about stuff like that as well

Lily (TD): 'Cause (.) if you're with him you'd probably be a bit cautious of what you say

Lily (TD): Different when you're with your family because like when I said earlier about you'd be you'd act different with them (.) if when you're with them than without them

Lily (TD): Erm I don't know because it (.) er (.) it would depend on if he would want me to go because being in (.) nine times out of ten in a being in a violent relationship they don't let you go out with your friends

Lily (TD): You'd want to tell them what's happening but you can't because he's there (.) and you know he'd if you got went home with him he'd probably like (.) be violent

Lily (TD): Being scared to say something to someone and then (.) you're the partner finding out that you've told and then being (.) more violent towards you

Ava (TD): I think he might go like really angry 'cause I'd tell them stuff that what he's been doing to me like hitting me and all that then if my friends mentioned it then he'd go really nuts

Ava (TD): So it looks like that they've been really happy together but they haven't

Ava (TD): 'Cause they don't wanna tell their families what has actually happened

Ava (TD): Like (.) how many times they've cheated on each other and how much drugs they've took and that and how much alcohol and arrested and all that

Ava (TD): Yeah and that's why I don't tell half of my friends about my relationship with him

Ava (TD): Like get counselling sign you up for counselling

179

	Emma (TD): Erm (.) quite isolated from them (people at home)

Emma (TD): ((laughs)) Like obviously the family talking and her just in the corner just moping around

Emma (TD): Erm ((pause)) just the thought of people seeing asking you 'Are you're with so and so?'

Emma (TD): Erm ((pause)) obviously with the stress you wouldn't really wanna talk to them and then if they're constantly pressuring you like 'Oh what's wrong what's wrong?' (.) you're not gonna say

Emma (TD): 'Cause it's like you're own private thing it's like a relationship it's not (.) something that your family would really know what to talk about really |
| 3. Unhealthy responses to conflict | Daniel (ASD): What I'd be most afraid of is (.) I think what I would be most afraid of in the relationship is simply physical violence like I mean from myself or from the partner involved if it's (.) er so let's say at some point I just lose my temper like really really badly or let's say I'm someone with anger issues and I lose my temper my biggest fear at that point would be that I accidentally hurt them 'cause although I dislike the relationship I don't wanna hurt anyone obviously don't wanna hurt anyone erm and obviously there might be a case where I lose my temper to a point where I just can't take it any more so I end up maybe doing something that hurts them and that you know that then can lead on to charges you can get arrested for assault that kind of stuff erm (.) and it's that sort of thing it's a case of you just lose your mind to a point where you lose your temper or you just end up losing your mind because of it

Daniel (ASD): Obviously don't like I said I obviously don't wanna hurt anyone that's not on my priorities erm and in this sort of case I'd sort of like as I said before I'd sort of think I'm kind of finished I'm screwed because I've just hurt someone he or she is clearly gonna go off and press charges and I'm gonna get arrested for it and then I'm gonna serve like you know a couple of years in jail and then my life is incredibly limited at that point 'cause of the actions that you know 'cause of the actions that were that I have done

Jack (ASD): Yeah I would push her away |

180

	Tia (ASD): Punch him in the face ((laughs))
	Lily (TD): I could probably if they if they don't hurt me I could probably lash out one day and hurt them or erm (.) if I do get with someone else I could probably be violent towards them
	Imogen (TD): But I'd just punch him in the face and go anyway
	Imogen (TD): To defend yourself and (it would) like build up (.) I can't think of the word ((pause))
	Imogen (TD): 'Cause just your anger builds up and you just let it go
	Imogen (TD): Like happened yesterday it was just someone getting on my nerves and it was just building up and I just let it out
	Zack (TD): Try and stop them [...] physically yeah
4. Unhealthy relationships - Obstructive to school work and life goals	Harry (ASD): Lower grades
	Matthew (ASD): I think she would affect my school work a lot I think
	Matthew (ASD): It just I would be thinking of her while I was in trying to work
	Matthew (ASD): If they were there I'd just go off track
	Oliver (ASD): Can't complete it
	Oliver (ASD): I'll end up with an 'F' [...] for not completing it [...] because of her
	Oliver (ASD): ((inaudible)) Get everything wrong
	Ben (ASD): Can't concentrate
	Tia (ASD): It'd probably go like probably not working you'd probably think of something else
	Hannah (ASD): Because they do because they'd do mistakes

Molly (ASD): Yeah because then you'd be kind of trapped in the same area even if you did break up with them which means you can't really go just shove 'em out of your life

Molly (ASD): Erm it'd probably get worse I'd erm (.) I'd just move to a different school at that point

Molly (ASD): Yeah I think (.) yeah I just I don't think I could handle that environment of knowing they're still around

Molly (ASD): Yeah 'cause typically when I'm stressed out school work just falls off of the edge and just like forget about it so...

Grace (ASD): Erm (.) my grades would drop because I wouldn't be able to have the peace and quiet I need to study for exams 'cause I'd be worried about what he would do (.) and like worry about him wrecking my stuff or something or spreading rumours

Amy (ASD): I wouldn't concentrate enough I'd probably I don't think I would get the worst grades but I don't think I would work my hardest and yeah I think I'd probably just like if I I think probably just like take away and just go into work but I don't think I would do well I think I'd be more sadder I wouldn't be more enthusiastic

Amy (ASD): I'd be thinking about like I'd be considering like if it really like I'd be considering how bad it is and then if it is really bad who to tell and what to do like the worst case scenario

Jacob (TD): Erm it'd probably like affect grades and that maybe 'cause I'd be concentrating on her (.) and you know trying to fix that and instead of actually concentrating on like exams and work and that maybe and not paying attention in lessons maybe 'cause you're erm worrying about this ((laughs))

Jacob (TD): Yeah I reckon you'd constantly be looking maybe or something to see...

Tom (TD): It would do down I think

Tom (TD): 'Cause I wouldn't like be able to do anything for myself

Tom (TD): Because I would be like (.) made to do other things that I don't wanna do

Zack (TD): Be harder like 'cause you'd be like thinking about things that happened at home or whatever

Paul (TD): Like living in like quite being like quite poor 'cause you would be trying to work hard in school because then she'd be like trying making you not concentrate on your school work so you might not pass your GCSEs or something

William (TD): Like if it was quite a serious relationship and you caught her cheating you'd be quite distracted all the time for quite awhile a couple of weeks maybe a month maybe

Rhys (TD): Yeah (.) it's dark by five o'clock so you can't go out and then but if you have a girlfriend you do go out and then it gets dark and then people look at you as a thug and then your grades go down 'cause you didn't do the homework didn't do the revising you're on your phone more (.) so it does affect it

Ryan (TD): Oh actually (.) I wouldn't be able to do homework and that

Ryan (TD): Yeah 'cause I'd always have to speaking to her or something

Daisy (TD): I might get so involved in trying to resolve this relationship that like might not hand in a piece of homework

Daisy (TD): Yeah probably 'cause I'd just be feeling really low and like when you're feeling really sad you don't really sleep and then when you wake up it's just kind of like a bad cycle and you can't get out of it if you're in that situation

Sarah (TD): I don't know like erm ((pause)) maybe like you're not as confident to like participate in lessons and stuff

Sarah (TD): But then he could be like or she could be like erm like shouting like "you're stupid" and stuff and then you believe it that makes you fall behind so it could be like either way

Emma (TD): Erm ((pause)) obviously you'd have your mind trailing off a lot (.) thinking of (.) what are you gonna do at break ((laughs)) you're gonna have to see them or (.) maybe even how you try to break with them

Emma (TD): Always having your mind off 'cause you're thinking of them

Lily (TD): I think I'd be more worried about (.) erm (.) what's going on between me and the person than I would about my school work

Lily (TD): ((pause)) I don't know I (.) I think so because (.) having that on your mind you'd probably just try and ((inaudible)) pay attention and do your work but you're constantly thinking of that so you can't (.) and you're there trying to concentrate on the work and (.) it's just everything you're hearing is just going through that ear and out of the other (.) so you can't exactly concentrate and do the work so I think it could have a big impact on it

Lily (TD): Erm ((pause)) having a big impact on school (.) not being able to concentrate (.)'cause I know you can have some motivation to work for them as well but it'd be (.) you'd be (.) you be thinking about them probably every quite often so you'd probably think about them more than what you would about school work and stuff so I think that'd be a bit unhealthy

Imogen (TD): Then if you're down the wrong path and do drugs and try and do stupid stuff in other words

Imogen (TD): You'd be scared to go into school then in case he's following you if he's like a year older than you and you're in your last year of school and he's gone you're thinking that he's gonna follow you in or get people of his type of friend who are in my year to follow

Imogen (TD): So you'd be scared and then you won't be able to do your work 'cause you're thinking

Imogen (TD): Yeah and you gotta try and get your school or GCSEs and all that back if you've failed everything

Ava (TD): With school erm (.) with the rumours then it would constantly make my like work grades go down

In what ways do TD adolescents and individuals with ASD differ in their perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships?

Theme/subtheme	Supporting extracts
1. ASD - reassured by rules and systems	Harry (ASD): ((pause)) I wouldn't want my girlfriend to do (.) is that (.) is that (.) is that I would like to give them warnings to any more and we are ejected (.) no buts nothing Harry (ASD): I would like to give her three warnings any more and I'm done with her Harry (ASD): About caution warning and danger (.) caution is that she has one she only has two more remaining of those things to do with me and then we are done and then we are never going to see or hear each other again Harry (ASD): Another time is say she does it again there will be one more and that means she in the that means she no if she actually hits me once I'll give her a caution saying that I might I will leave after you if you do it to me a couple times Harry (ASD): And warning is saying two times twice more and I'm done Harry (ASD): Danger means it's once more and I'm done Harry (ASD): And when she exceeds that danger limit I am divorced Harry (ASD): Actually I would give that would come as two strikes any more and she would be gone Harry (ASD): However sometimes those things are so serious so I might as well end it altogether Harry (ASD): Yes that means that she would lose points all the points Harry (ASD): And you would get a file for divorce Harry (ASD): Well (.) I'd probably think so ((inaudible)) if she well I don't know but what I can say is that if she actually tries if she attacks more than four times more than three times then I will take her reject her

Harry (ASD): Any more and then my likeness will go down and eventually when she exceeds the danger part then I'm not going back then when she goes through the dangerous part I will she will be reported it will be reported to the authorities and any more and I don't see you anymore (.) if she actually ((inaudible)) then it will be reported to the authorities for a custody for custody for custody I tell you

Harry (ASD): Looking at naked women without their permission

Oliver (ASD): It's the most the most illegal you can think of I can think of

Oliver (ASD): No (.) it's the rules

Oliver (ASD): Haven't brushed their teeth properly

Oliver (ASD): Yeah and eat and drink more drink more water

Matthew (ASD): ((inaudible)) One she would be a smoker which is not good for people anyway isn't it so ((inaudible)) they are obese

Matthew (ASD): Erm (.) ((inaudible)) something (probably something nasty) like due to the smoking stuff she's gonna buy me buy me buy a box of cigars

Matthew (ASD): Erm the afraid of happening is she might try and get me to eat what she eats and stuff and let me go obese and stuff

Tia (ASD): Because (.) it's against the law ((laughs))

Tia (ASD): Call the police

Tia (ASD): I'd phone the police and get a court order

Molly (ASD): Erm (.) just the kind of like calm kind of it doesn't change and not so much that it doesn't change but kind of it's it stays relatively the same and like only the kind of minor details of it change in it

Molly (ASD): Or too quickly I guess like books have a kind of gradual kind of start finish end and they kind of have a formula to 'em and that

186

	Molly (ASD): Nice and set out
	Molly (ASD): And erm just kind of like (.) it doesn't do anything too surprising
	Molly (ASD): Erm ((pause)) it's just kind of nice to know what you're doing just erm (.) just not having to think about what you're gonna say or like if this is gonna be okay or whatever just kind of knowing what you what's the rules
1.1 Expectations of sameness	Daniel (ASD): It would be a case of I obviously don't like this person we have differences that go way too far for it to be you know for it to stick
	Daniel (ASD): Well things that would make it go on and on are usually an argument usually stems from them disliking something they don't like something so for instance the husband doesn't like furniture in the house it's too er let's say colourful it should be a little be more bland but the girl is perfectly okay with the furniture and wants it stay now a healthy argument is one where you come to a resolve so let's say maybe we move some furniture er or you know in some cases
	Daniel (ASD): Mm something (.) you because you disagree on a lot of things it might be something that they misinterpret as an attempt to try and cooperate with you
	Daniel (ASD): They don't know you well they don't understand you well because you have differences you have similarities we've all got similarities but at the same time it's t differences that impede the progress and impede what they might what you know what they might want to buy you what they want to buy another person basically
	Daniel (ASD): You both disagree on multiple things even though you love each other very much it's not working out so you kind of you know just gotta split
	Daniel (ASD): In obviously a relationship you do like then for the most part you both agree on you agree on multiple things there are either enough things that you get along well or you get along with everything you both agree on exactly the same things so you both agree that a BMW is better than a Toyota you both agree that you

prefer literature as opposed to the movies you both agree that sometimes the news lies or something like that you know just those kinds of stuff in that case you might as well be hanging out with yourself again

Daniel (ASD): For the most part you're probably going to encounter someone who is you know is obviously a lot like you you both agree on the same things and that's what generally what pushes us on

Daniel (ASD): You end up with relationships where it's unhealthy where you end up disagreeing on multiple things you'll end up with someone who you really really you know you think is really really gorgeous or you know sexually attractive too but at the same time you disagree with so many different things that it just becomes a massive problem

Daniel (ASD): If you go out and see something you'll decide on for instance what movie to watch if you don't like specific kinds of movies then that kind of thing

Daniel (ASD): In this kind of healthy relationship where they both agree on what they watch so you know let's say they're both watching Eastenders or something they'd obviously both agree on the show they'd obviously agree on the programme

Daniel (ASD): I obviously know what we like because we have lots of similarities it's a lot easier than an unhealthy relationship there's a lot less you have to stress with (.) so erm like let's say for instance there's a lot less like stuff you have to put up if you both agree on the same things there'll be less arguments

Daniel (ASD): But for the most part you will agree on a lot of things so you will both decide maybe we should have like a green chair or something as opposed to a red chair

Daniel (ASD): You know that's what people talk about talk about you know the Eastenders show or talk about what they were interested in and talk about the similarities between you two that kind of thing

Daniel (ASD): It's all just er with unhealthy maybe I would not wanna talk about her or him erm but in a healthy one I wouldn't be I wouldn't feel bad about talking her or him because we agree on things and we all you know it's something I can obviously talk

about so...

Daniel (ASD): If you just talk and meet new people who you are sort of you know attracted to then you end up in a situation where maybe one of them agrees with a lot of things you agree on so it might be a case that you two get together

Daniel (ASD): I prefer a person who is good is you know I actually have similarities with

Daniel (ASD): I wouldn't mind them being super attractive as long as we both agree on the same things

Daniel (ASD): What's the line between maybe not maybe not acceptable with the similarities and differences and then acceptable for similarities and differences so let's say I meet someone it's the same sort of case with what makes them friends and what makes them you know potential soul mates or potential partners is the level of similarities you're obviously not gonna date someone just because they have one similarity and that's it that's what leads to unhealthy relationships

Jack (ASD): Yeah and interests

Jack (ASD): She would have er she would she would like Lady Gaga (.) pop music and R n B

Jack (ASD): They might have similar interests

Harry (ASD): Same interests and possibly yeah and yes same interests

Harry (ASD): Is that we'd liked each other's stuff

Matthew (ASD): Yeah the family don't smoke and I wanna keep it that way really

Matthew (ASD): Erm the afraid of happening is she might try and get me to eat what she eats and stuff and let me go obese and stuff

Oliver (ASD): I don't like people who are contraries

Oliver (ASD): And annoy me

Oliver (ASD): Find a different girl (.) one that suits you

Oliver (ASD): They would they would it would suit she would suit me

Oliver (ASD): They would find her annoying they're not good with contraries

Oliver (ASD): We like some of the same things

Oliver (ASD): We both like Mexican food like enchiladas

Oliver (ASD): A bit upset

Oliver (ASD): You have to have something in common

Molly (ASD): Erm ((pause)) I guess just meeting someone through your friends group or erm somewhere you go or like in a hobby place you go or something like that

Molly (ASD): Just like people have the same kind of humour as you or like the same like if you got the same kind of friends you've got like a similar-ish personality so...

Molly (ASD): Erm (.) I don't know erm (.) suppose it depends on the other person if they're willing to do the whole slow thing and they've got like kind of like-minded thing of like education then probably I guess

Grace (ASD): Erm (.) through your interests like say you liked hiking you would join a hiking club and maybe you'll meet someone there or it could be as simple as going to a cafe and then they're in the line behind you and you start talking

Amy (ASD): Because the person would probably come across as a very humorous sweet nice person who er has quite a lot in common with me I guess

Amy (ASD): I think like you've gotta have some things that are different like not everything can be the same 'cause otherwise it'd just be really boring but like I mean I guess some opposite people could like each other but like you've gotta have like something in common with each other

Amy (ASD): Like maybe your sense of humour or just maybe something like most things but not all of it

190

2. Healthy, unhealthy or abusive - does context matter?	Daniel (ASD): You know it's okay to have arguments in a relationship but these would be unhealthy sort of arguments where they'd happen constantly and it'd be over sometimes minor things simplistic things or er just things you disagree about or agree about
	Daniel (ASD): Unhealthy things are long arguments over small simplistic things so if for instance they were having a big argument about that little thing being put there that's unhealthy
	Daniel (ASD): If it's resolved quickly then yeah it's a healthy argument it's okay you know we argue about small things all the time
	Daniel (ASD): It takes a bit longer but again it shouldn't go on for days or hours or anything like that
	Daniel (ASD): Yeah it's also how it starts off too that's another thing it like how it starts off if you were just simply trying to bring a discussion about it as opposed to an actual argument about it
	Daniel (ASD): Probably same thing as I sort of fear I would probably go off and press charges if I disliked the person then I would go off and press charges and then it's I obviously put in the questions list that you know you shouldn't hurt your partner no matter what but if it comes to a point like I said where they are extremely cross and can't help it or you know they have anger issues and things like that I might forgive them if the injuries are minor so let's say erm I got cut or something it wasn't big it was small erm wasn't deep or anything like that so you know I got a couple cuts and they weren't big or deep you know that's nothing to be super you know crazy about an apology would be in order definitely but apart from that erm I suppose I could be fine with that if it's big deep cuts then maybe yeah then I'd probably press charges but that's only if that then is only if it's someone I er like if it was a relationship I did wanna be in 'cause it like 'cause you've gotta sort of forgive everyone has everyone sort of goes through different things in their life like stress and you know mid-life crises and things like that erm and again in some case forgiveness is a better alternative to getting them arrested or something for minor cuts or something like that along those lines
	Molly (ASD): When it's consistent I think
	Molly (ASD): So like it happens all the time

Molly (ASD): Erm (.) it depends erm (.) I think (.) twice a week would probably be pretty bad (.) that would probably be my guideline kind of thing

Molly (ASD): I feel like in most relationships you're gonna have issues and you're gonna have like times when you get angry at each other and...

Grace (ASD): I would listen but I wouldn't actually take it on for awhile until it gets worse and then...

Grace (ASD): Erm (.) if he hit me or something or pushed me or broke any really expensive stuff (.) 'cause a cup who cares if he broke a cup? But smashing a computer or a TV or something purposefully

Amy (ASD): Like unless like in like the worst case scenario that husband was really really horrible and you had to like defend or fight back there shouldn't really be a reason in the first place

Amy (ASD): Yeah or if like if like I dunno just like if you were trying to self defend the person like even if they had cheated on you or something like that you shouldn't really fight back because you don't deserve to what I mean not that you don't deserve to I mean you shouldn't waste your time hitting like someone if you know like if someone's cheated on you you just you shouldn't deserve to like hit them because you shouldn't waste your time on them anyway

Amy (ASD): Yeah yeah unless like that unless they had a really really good reason I would just call it off

Amy (ASD): If like if like if the whole thing was forced or like it was like an accident probably not an accident but if it was like forced or anything like that

Amy (ASD): Erm because that would mean that if they were like bad mouthing me that would mean they don't necessarily really like me and then they'd be and then I'd get confused why they'd be in the relationship in the first place if they really don't like me but then if they were just casually talking about me and making a slight joke about one of my imperfections I'd be alright because everyone's got imperfections but if they were purposefully then it'd feel like that I'd lost some of their trust

Jacob (TD): Well if it's if it's just like an argument and she's really annoyed for something and it's just a one off then fair enough after that you could you know make up and everything but if it's continuous then like yeah continuing on over and over again then yeah I wouldn't want that ((laughs))

Jacob (TD): Yeah yeah (.) if it's like obviously continuous like

Jacob (TD): I don't know just no relationship will ever be perfect like they'll always have their disagreements and that but (.) that kind of (.) makes maybe you need that otherwise you'd just seem really fake if...

Ryan (TD): They might not be completely honest

Paul (TD): It like depends if it's like really bad then I'd probably like finish with them but if it's like talk to you but not like that much then I wouldn't mind that much but...

Zack (TD): 'Cause it's hard to find people who are not doing anything bad and people always make mistakes

Zack (TD): They might make a few mistakes or something or accidents

William (TD): No 'cause you don't accidentally cheat

William (TD): Erm (.) hitting me (.) I'd never hit a girl ever never happen (.) hitting me would probably be a big one but I think if it was so much anger that she done it I think I would forgive her once or twice but if it was just like hitting me hitting me hitting me like abusive then I'd leave

William (TD): How much anger there was because she done it

William (TD): Just like if we've been arguing for a long time (.) and I'd done something bad like say if I cheated which I'd never do but if I cheated she I could allow that like if she forgave me for that but it's like no chance

William (TD): Yeah I wouldn't just like a petty argument and then she hits it's just not enough anger to do that

Daisy (TD): I think some people like arguments I think some

193

	people like having an argument I think in this relationship they wouldn't really have many so I think someone would miss like the venting of their feelings
	Sarah (TD): Yeah (.) 'cause I wouldn't want to be right at the very end 'cause then (.) it could be like one small argument or something (.) because you like haven't had an argument it could just like just break down
	Sarah (TD): There's like some problems like there will be arguing there will be like problems that life gives you but then hopefully you can overcome it ((laughs))
	Sarah (TD): I'd say like arguments are healthy 'cause like if you didn't have an argument with someone that you married for the whole (.) it'd be a bit weird ((laughs)) you can never find someone who agrees with you 100%
	Lily (TD): Yeah and it's (.) it's not natural like ideal relationship if you're not arguing not no if you're not if you don't argue so it's...
3. Understanding a partner's direct and indirect behaviours	*Direct behaviours*
	Ben (ASD): Mm mess ((inaudible)) you're stuff up things
	Ben (ASD): Mess (.) wreck your things
	Ben (ASD): Yeah mess up you're things
	Harry (ASD): Attempted murder
	Harry (ASD): If she actually tries to attack me
	Harry (ASD): But what I can say is that if she actually tries if she attacks more than four times more than three times then I will take her reject her
	Matthew (ASD): They would hurt and would like hit you every single time
	Harry (ASD): Or as well as looking at naked bodies without them with looking at naked women without their permission
	Jack (ASD): Mm scared of (her) I'm scared of her having sex with

194

me

Jack (ASD): And being raped

Harry (ASD): Alright I would not like to be in alright so I would not like to be in ((longpause)) in sexual content when I'm not prepared

Harry (ASD): Which means I am not totally not ready for that

Harry (ASD): If she actually was being a (.) if she actually tries to she tries to have tried to sexual content with me without me without authorised permission from me

Daniel (ASD): That might end up er hitting them and things like that er it's that sort of thing

Daniel (ASD): Yeah in a sense a bit more aggressive as it goes on so it might go from 'Ah I don't like this' to 'Ah I don't like this this this and this why did you put this all in here' that sort of thing

Daniel (ASD): As it progresses you end up raising your voice or something like that er you know aggressive stances

Daniel (ASD): In an unhealthy argument 'Why did you put this thing in here this thing is stupid and ugly why the hell would you even bother to put this in here?' you know it's a little bit more aggressive

Daniel (ASD): In an unhealthy relationship the partner might respond a bit more aggressively

Jack (ASD): Erm I wouldn't like I wouldn't like a girl to shout at me

Jack (ASD): Because (.) because she might look sound angry

Oliver (ASD): One that swears

Hannah (ASD): ((drawing)) Calling me a 'window licker'

Hannah (ASD): Yes 'bad [anonymised]'

Hannah (ASD): He needs to be nice and not swear

	Grace (ASD): He's swearing at her
	Grace (ASD): I wouldn't want him swearing at me
	Grace (ASD): He would just be really horrible and call them names
	Tia (ASD): I don't know (.) him trying to kill you
	Tia (ASD): They didn't have like a short temper and all that
	Molly (ASD): I just (.) the kind of explosive kind
	Molly (ASD): You do something and it just kind of blows up
	Molly (ASD): Probably definitely breaking something of theirs or like even an accident like smashing a plate or something
	Tia (ASD): Erm their like facial expressions and stuff
	Tia (ASD): And their face goes like bright red
	Tia (ASD): The way they acted how they were
	Tia (ASD): Erm (.) don't know (.) I just know it's wrong to hit a girl and it's wrong to hit a boy
	Hannah (ASD): Yes that [anonymised] punches me
	Hannah (ASD): Because he hurts me quite a lot
	Molly (ASD): Erm (.) any kind of (.) harmful physical activity
	Grace (ASD): Erm (.) if he hit me or something or pushed me or broke any really expensive stuff (.) 'cause a cup who cares if he broke a cup? But smashing a computer or a TV or something purposefully
	Grace (ASD): Erm (.) him being violent all the time in front of everybody and in the house
	Grace (ASD): Because I wouldn't wanna go round with a big black eye or (.) around a public place I wouldn't want him being extremely violent kicking me on the floor and everything

Tia (ASD): A man hitting a woman

Amy (ASD): Erm (.) the person is beating and the other person

Amy (ASD): Because in a relationship you're supposed to like (.) in a relationship unless like you're supposed to have like a trusting nice relationship you're supposed to love each other there wouldn't be really much of a reason why you would hit each other

Amy (ASD): I'd probably be dead like I'd probably get like beaten really badly to the point then to the point where there would just be a night where they'd beat me so much I'd probably just accidentally die and then he'd probably just bury me and then he'd forget everything that happened

Amy (ASD): Yeah it probably like if they beat me up enough to like a pulp they'd just eventually kill me

Amy (ASD): Yeah and eventually probably like strangle me or something

Amy (ASD): Yeah or just like being strangled 'cause like ((drawing)) or just like hitting me over the head or something but basically I would immediately get out because either I would have like scarring like mental scarring or just something happens to my brain or just something like that or possibly basically death

Amy (ASD): I'm thinking of like that I wouldn't want someone to force me into like sex or anything in a relationship

Amy (ASD): Well like if I was just like really tired and they were like 'Oh let's do it' I'd be like 'No I don't wanna do it!' but then I end up doing it I'd just I'd feel quite like they'd feel more I wouldn't like to be the dominant person but like I would feel less dominant I'd feel like the tiny one in the relationship

Lily (TD): (Forced to) ((pause)) have sex and stuff like that

Ava (TD): Erm (.) so they can probably get drunk and force them to have sex and that

Daisy (TD): ((laughs)) ((drawing)) Okay so either physically hurt and that is just like never okay

Sarah (TD): Either it could be like (.) erm (.) violence like hitting and stuff like that

Lily (TD): Violent

Lily (TD): If like (.) my boyfriend was hitting me or I was hitting him I wouldn't like that

Lily (TD): 'Cause the violent one there's no love there there's just (.) he's only with you for the pleasure of beating you or something

Lily (TD): They'll be so violent one day that they'll (.) do so much damage to me that I'll either (.) won't wake up or (.) be end up in hospital

Ava (TD): Then he sees her and then it just kicks off and then he just slaps her and chucks her out and she has nowhere else to go

Ava (TD): He hits her and chucks her out

Jacob (TD): Yeah trying to punch you or something ((laugh))

William (TD): Erm low temper so doesn't get angry at like stupid things

Tom (TD): Well if they a woman has liked killed someone or beaten them so much

Tom (TD): Murder

Zack (TD): Someone slapping someone

Zack (TD): Er someone forcing someone to do something or like attacking

Zack (TD): Being with her and getting slapped and getting like abused

Zack (TD): Death

William (TD): Erm (.) hitting me (.) I'd never hit a girl ever never happen (.) hitting me would probably be a big one

Jacob (TD): Yeah and like if they're constantly aggressive like

whenever you try to speak to them they'd just be like you know shouting stuff at you ((laughs)) and all that yeah

Ryan (TD): Argumentative

Paul (TD): Don't know it's just kind of don't know it's kind of like annoying (.) like if they swear as well 'cause like it's dunno like when girls swear it just doesn't sound right

Indirect behaviours

Lily (TD): ((pause)) I don't know erm ((pause)) by (.) showing it once in a while and (.) if they ask me a question a serious question I say 'no' they'll er accept it

Daisy (TD): 'Cause if they don't know you then they don't care to spend the time to get to know you and they haven't listened to you and I think that's like if someone doesn't listen to what I'm saying then that's obviously gonna be a big factor you want someone that's gonna be listening to you like understanding your emotions

Daisy (TD): Or like if I was like drunk being like 'Oh like you're so embarrassing' or like 'Why are you doing that?' like if I was having a good time like a genuinely good time and they were doing that

Daisy (TD): Yeah or like 'You look like a tart' or 'Why are you dressed like that?' 'Why are you dancing like that?' all of that type of stuff would just make me flip like I would be so upset

Sarah (TD): I don't know they'd probably get you like erm (.) like maybe like the latest phone something like that to try and like make up for (.) stuff they've done

Imogen (TD): Something like a man forces a girl into having sex with them and then if they say no it would be stuff like 'Oh well you're (.) ((inaudible)) they just come out with it something nasty for a girl

Imogen (TD): 'Cause like one of my friends she got was in a relationship with a boy who was older than her (.) and he was like really nasty to her (.) and it's like we would go out on like a Saturday and he'd have to be there (.) it's like if we would go somewhere and we wouldn't come back

	Ava (TD): Yeah just to make her boyfriend jealous
	William (TD): 'Cause like I've seen like my mother's friend her husband he's really really nice sometimes but there's part where some stupid things will happen like [anonymised] her name is she forgets something and he'll go crazy and shout and walk out the house and not come back for a couple of hours so it's like I wouldn't want something like that to happen I'd just want we'd sort it out and agree to disagree
	Jacob (TD): Erm just like (.) just doesn't wanna talk to you or anything (.) and just going off and not telling you anything about what's happening in their lives
	Paul (TD): Like have a girlfriend but then she doesn't like talk or nothing
	Paul (TD): Be like quite annoying 'cause like you go talk to her and she like just always like ignores you
	Molly (ASD): Erm (.) I think just (.) they focus too much on physical abuse and not (.) like mind games kind of
	Molly (ASD): They don't (.) there's so focused on like if someone ever hits you or whatever that they don't focus on just if it's just a bad relationship what do you do
4. Direct or indirect responses to conflict?	Harry (ASD): ((pause)) I wouldn't want my girlfriend to do (.) is that (.) is that (.) is that I would like to give them warnings to any more and we are ejected (.) no buts nothing
	Harry (ASD): I would like to give her three warnings any more and I'm done with her
	Harry (ASD): About caution warning and danger (.) caution is that she has one she only has two more remaining of those things to do with me and then we are done and then we are never going to see or hear each other again
	Harry (ASD): Another time is say she does it again there will be one more and that means she in the that means she no if she actually hits me once I'll give her a caution saying that I might I will leave after you if you do it to me a couple times

Harry (ASD): And warning is saying two times twice more and I'm done

Harry (ASD): Danger means it's once more and I'm done

Harry (ASD): And when she exceeds that danger limit I am divorced

Harry (ASD): Actually I would give that would come as two strikes any more and she would be gone

Harry (ASD): Well (.) I'd probably think so ((inaudible)) if she well I don't know but what I can say is that if she actually tries if she attacks more than four times more than three times then I will take her reject her

Harry (ASD): I will start to hate her more and eventually (.) we wouldn't even like each other and pretend that we never saw each other even if I had enough then I would have to reject her and pretend and the next time I ever ever see her I shall pretend that we never seen or met each other

Harry (ASD): ((pause)) Her abusiveness of course and then I would like to say I'm actually giving you one last and if I get a lousy grade I will re-sit then and I will give her one last chance you don't do it again or else we will have immediate divorce

Harry (ASD): Any more and then my likeness will go down and eventually when she exceeds the danger part then I'm not going back then when she goes through the dangerous part I will she will be reported it will be reported to the authorities and any more and I don't see you anymore (.) if she actually ((inaudible)) then it will be reported to the authorities for a custody for custody for custody I tell you

Harry (ASD): I say that would be a one-off but if it continues then I am going to get tougher and reject her

Matthew (ASD): I would try and do it like do it gently and that not do it really harshly and stuff ((inaudible)) a text or a letter or something like that

Matthew (ASD): Erm like this has gone too far you're trying to make me get fat ((inaudible)) you smoke and this is not happening

any more ((inaudible))

Matthew (ASD): As I'm opening my own bank account some time this week I would say to her 'Don't buy me any gifts and put some money into my account'

Oliver (ASD): Mad

Oliver (ASD): Angry

Oliver (ASD): Send her a message

Oliver (ASD): A written message

Oliver (ASD): I'm fed up [...] with you

Oliver (ASD): Yell at her (.) for all the things she caused me

Oliver (ASD): Yes I'd rather be with another girl

Daisy (TD): Yeah I don't think I would respond very well to that 'cause like if I miss someone I can't say 'I miss you' I have to I'm like I get angry and then I start being nasty so I like I don't deal very well with telling people like that I miss you or anything nice I kind of just go straight to the negative

Daisy (TD): I'd probably just like either ignore them or not kind of participate like if they were like 'Oh do you wanna go out for a meal?' I'd be like 'Uh' like I feel like I don't wanna participate as fully in the relationship if they're kind of not as present

Ava (TD): Yeah just to make her boyfriend jealous

Ava (TD): Erm (.) if my friends were all girls then I probably wouldn't like it 'cause then he'd like if me and him broke up then he'd get with one of my friends and that would make me really mad and all that so I just wouldn't that's why I keep my friends and him separate

Ava (TD): Yeah and make sure he doesn't like and text him like every day to make sure of that (.) and know that if he was the right one for me and that

Ava (TD): Like 'Where did you go today?' 'What did you do?' erm 'Did you (.) get anything like buy clothes?' erm...

Ava (TD): And I ask him all sorts of questions and that just to make sure and like if we were to go and see a movie or something I'd make sure that he'd stay with me and all of that

Ava (TD): Erm (.) they'd show me things and like if I wanted like say if I wanted to go and see a sunset or a movie go to the beach and that and then like if they take me and that then I'd be really happy then

Ava (TD): I dunno I just don't like him being I wouldn't like him being on his own with my friends 'cause I'd probably get that feeling that I know something's gonna happen

Rhys (TD): I'd go through a couple of tests secretly that don't harm her but analyse that it works so I'd put her in certain situations and that normally works

Rhys (TD): And it wasn't his and it's not like it's his fault for erm monitoring it 'cause it's his house so obviously you're gonna have CCTV and er she shouldn't have slept with someone

Rhys (TD): Oh she wouldn't find out I'd make sure that she'd never find out

Rhys (TD): It would be in a position where she would never if she did find out

Rhys (TD): That's why you've gotta be smooth 'cause if they don't find out what you don't know can't hurt you

Rhys (TD): My future (.) it would probably end up with (.) her being normal (.) her dealing with it 'cause at the end of the day she'd rather be with me than someone on benefits in [anonymised]

Rhys (TD): So she'd probably adjust a little bit she's still getting the car she's just not gonna get fifty of them

Rhys (TD): Because I'd because she'd know what to do and she wouldn't be gossiping about things (.) my mum doesn't like gossiping to be honest with you and er (.) yeah she'd make jokes out jokes that are acceptable in family situations 'cause she would know like I do and if she doesn't I would be like 'Make a joke' she would know what I'm on about

5. TD participants - the benefits of unhealthy relationships	Paul (TD): It like depends 'cause if like that girls like popular or something they might think like I'm cooler because I'm seeing someone that's more popular

Paul (TD): I don't know 'cause like if her friends are popular as well they might not like me

Paul (TD): Don't know 'cause like I don't really like go out much 'cause they might like go out to like parties and that but I don't I like stay in (.) I go out but I don't go to parties or nothin'

Paul (TD): 'Cause she might be popular she might (.) just not like me that much and then she knows someone who's like more popular or something

Paul (TD): Nah 'cause like if she's popular than you'd be like liking it 'cause you're getting more popular

Rhys (TD): Probably won't but they'll probably all be jealous of me

Rhys (TD): The looks probably

Rhys (TD): 'Cause they're normally not ugly if they're gold diggers

Rhys (TD): Normally good looking

Rhys (TD): 'She's hot'

Rhys (TD): Yeah they flaunt it

Rhys (TD): Yeah it's like a car well they're not like a car 'cause you get more benefits with a car but it is it's like you get to show them off and they get to show you off and it's like a symbol that you made it

Rhys (TD): Yeah because people can't see your bank account when you walk past them in the street but they can see your girlfriend (.) so that's cool

Lily (TD): Because having a perfect relationship isn't always happy like (.) it could get kind of not boring but ((pause)) it could be the same erm (.) erm (.) forgotten the word (.) same like process or |

	something every day so it kind of just be...
	Lily (TD): Yeah (.) erm ((pause)) I don't know I reckon you should like have the perfect relationship but not so perfect that it you're gonna know what they're up to every day every second of every day
	Daisy (TD): People like that are often like really elusive and kind of mysterious and I think a lot women like and as well a lot of women er like like a someone who's a bit interesting and like difficult and like a bit of like a bad guy like it just attracts 'cause like girls are like attracted to like problems I think and like everyone wants a bit of gossip and stuff like that and I think that satisfies that aspect of their lives
	Ava (TD): Well some girls might like bad boys and like wanna have sex with them

Are the perceptions of TD adolescents and individuals with ASD influenced by different sources of information?

Theme/subtheme	Supporting extracts
1. Social learning opportunities	Molly (ASD): Erm (.) seeing how your parents interact with each other and erm siblings if they're old enough I guess and then just people around you
	Grace (ASD): Other people's relationships
	Tia (TD): I learnt from my mum's mistakes she was in a relationship
	Zack (TD): Not really it's the sort of thing where you have to learn yourself
	Zack (TD): Yeah sometimes they can be quite tragic between people
	Zack (TD): Because you spend more time round your family and they're kind of like obviously grown up
	Paul (TD): 'Cause like your mum and dad have like been together for like quite a long time so like they know what to do so if they don't like you going out with someone like that like they'd know

but they do like you going out with someone like that

William (TD): Don't think like I said I wouldn't get back with them if they were cheating I don't think they would want me to either because I think my mother's been through cheating once or twice and she's never gone back it

William (TD): Yeah the grandparents have been together since they were like eighteen and they're like eighty odd now they've got four kids and like exactly the same with the parents just obviously younger they've got three children grandchildren the grandparents have got great great grandchildren

William (TD): I reckon you gain experience from it like if it happened once you know what to expect if it happened again so like you would know if it's happening again or you'd know if 'Wow this isn't like last time I actually like this relationship'

Jacob (TD): I think friends I think (.) yeah like (.) when like your friends have relationships and that and you like learn from that and stuff so and see how it's done and stuff ((laughs)) so yeah like obviously like when you're younger and that your parents tell you about stuff and that but (.) yeah but when obviously I think you talk (.) like I talk about relationships and that more with my friends so yeah...

Jacob (TD): Erm (.) I don't know it's just maybe 'cause they're like 'cause they're my age maybe and like (.) yeah erm (.) 'cause (.) and they're like they can relate more

Jacob (TD): Erm (.) I think from seeing like how they act around them and everything and (.) yeah...

Jacob (TD): Kind of tells you what you're meant to do and stuff and yeah...

Jacob (TD): Yeah like I've seen like how a relationship didn't work out and how they did work out and...

Ryan (TD): Er ((pause)) Well I know one of my friends that's a couple is constantly with his girlfriend I wouldn't want that

Ryan (TD): ((pause)) Mum always told me never to lie stuff like that

Tom (TD): Just seeing it

Tom (TD): ((pause)) Erm probably would have to say family wouldn't you?

Tom (TD): 'Cause like you learn from them don't you like how to stay in a relationship

Emma (TD): Erm (.) definitely older people (.) when we see them around and erm your parents (.) erm (.) your friends what they say and what you hear from siblings and...

Daisy (TD): If you're in an environment where healthy relationships are like common place like if your parents are happy if you know what to find in healthy relationships so then you know what makes an unhappy relationship so you understand the distinction between the two

Daisy (TD): I think a lot of the time you learn what not to do rather than what to do (.) and I think the way you respond to situations about other people tells you a lot about what like what your values are because if my friend was doing something that I thought was out of order if I was in the situation I might not change anything because I'm in the situation myself and like sometimes you don't take your own advice and I think finding out what you'd say in those situations does tell you where your kind of levels of tolerance and stuff are

Daisy (TD): Yeah 'cause you only set yourself rules and like morals and guidelines for yourself like from like what you see and what you know and what you see are people and what you know is like in your heart like is this right is this wrong like that's your choice

Daisy (TD): I don't know 'cause like boys can like have bad like have a history like with their parents or something where like their dad behaves like that so he's used to that and his mum has low self-worth so it's kind of like learned behaviour for a man whereas with a girl I kind of think it's something that's happened to them (.) I think it's kind of like learned behaviour with...

Daisy (TD): I don't know 'cause like boys can like have bad like have a history like with their parents or something where like their dad behaves like that so he's used to that and his mum has low self-

	worth so it's kind of like learned behaviour for a man
	Imogen (TD): 'Cause like one of my friends she got was in a relationship with a boy who was older than her (.) and he was like really nasty to her (.) and it's like we would go out on like a Saturday and he'd have to be there (.) it's like if we would go somewhere and we wouldn't come back
	Sarah (TD): Your parents as well like if your Mum or your Dad and stuff their relationship
	Sarah (TD): Yeah but also like friends what they what your friends say may influence like your opinion
	Sarah (TD): 'Cause like even with er we watched two videos in PSE and they were (.) I don't think they like (meant to do this) it like happens to both men and women but in the example in was just women who were being ((pause)) yeah so sort of like that
	Lily (TD): My mum and (.) erm well my mum and my dad have split up but I've never ever seen my dad but (.) the one I live with now I've lived him all my life so my mum and dad have nev- like their my role models for relationships but I know some people's parents have split up so that's a bit harder for them (.) so it could be like (.) if they have a close friend like a really close friend and their parents are still together it could be like more of a (.) erm (.) motivation for a healthy relationship
	Ava (TD): Yeah (laughs)) erm well I just seen people do it and all that and I just wouldn't want to be in a relationship like that
	Ava (TD): Then I like I see people in school with their relationships
2. The influence of the media	Daniel (ASD): A lot of my sort of a lot of where I get this just comes from watching like a lot of it comes from the internet and things like that and also comes from just seeing like dramas and things like that so stuff like oddly enough stuff like Eastenders and all that stuff where you get a clear case of this is a bad relationship this is a good relationship this is what works and this is what doesn't
	Daniel (ASD): But I have friends on the internet I know either from games or just from simple stuff on the internet erm I know people

on the internet and we've all got lives I'm a gamer so I usually play video games and I meet people and I get new friends from the games obviously not actual friends but you get the chance to learn a bit about them erm and I've learnt a bit about some people over in places like America and how they have relationships what's a good relationship and what's not a good relationship

Oliver (ASD): I've been reading about them in a book I found from the [anonymised] library

Harry (ASD): ((pause)) Erm ((pause)) I'm not too sure what I think I remembered something quite recently about something called something called 'Helpline'

Hannah (ASD): Yes reading books and something

Molly (ASD): So you learn a little bit but it's mostly just (.) I feel like there's this a lot of (information) on TV kind of gives out the kind of information of what is and isn't healthy in a way

Molly (ASD): It's just like stuff like it'd bad but Jeremy Kyle where like you basically see the worst of...

Molly (ASD): It's a kind of like everything not to go for kind of situation

Molly (ASD): So you learn a little bit but it's mostly just (.) I feel like there's this a lot of (information) on TV kind of gives out the kind of information of what is and isn't healthy in a way

Molly (ASD): They're kind of useful as an indicator of like what can go wrong

Grace (ASD): 'Cause well (.) I've a lot of TV programmes where people end up like that and not many of them end up like that

Grace (ASD): Yeah and heard on the radio and everything er there was this thing on the radio not long ago that a boyfriend has murdered his girlfriend

Amy (ASD): I know from like just like reading books or watching TV

Amy (ASD): I don't know just general things overall including romance

William (TD): Yeah probably like (.) it sounds weird but have you seen the Benjamin Button yeah that almost 'cause they've got such an amazing relationship

William (TD): Yeah and then there's a relationship that I wouldn't want like there's a film called One Night Stand and they have a baby after a one night stand and they have to stay together

Rhys (TD): Erm (.) probably the media

Rhys (TD): Probably Facebook (.) just big rants on there all the time

Rhys (TD): Yeah you just unconsciously making notes about the posts there 'cause it's just non-stop talk about relationships it's kind of boring sometimes

Sarah (TD): Yeah but like I also think as well like erm the soaps as well they sort of like I think it was like Hollyoaks or something they did like a male like being beaten or something

Sarah (TD): I think that sort of 'cause like everyone watches like either Eastenders or Corrie something and they do cover them sometimes (.) which I think quite helps 'cause then they know like if it's on here they give like support numbers at the end which they can help both

Sarah (TD): And like also some adverts on TV as well

Sarah (TD): Like the even the stupid little experiments and stuff on Facebook that just pop up and you watch

Lily (TD): ((pause)) Erm (.) there's my favourite film's twilight and er ((pause)) erm the people who play Edward Cullen and you know

Lily (TD): Sorry erm the one who play Edward and Bella they they were in a relationship in real life weren't they [...] yeah and er she cheated on him [...] and I think that (.) that gives like an (.) I think that like broadcasts a negative light about relationships (.) but then you've got like Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt for instance and they've been like nearly every movie I've seen them in they're both in them together and they're always in a relationship (.) because I reckon that like sheds a positive light on it (.) so...

	Ava (TD): Like I look on the internet
3. Opportunities for incidental versus formal learning	Oliver (ASD): No I only see her in school Oliver (ASD): I don't know when I'm going to see her again after she leaves Oliver (ASD): I don't know how I'm supposed to deal with it Oliver (ASD): I maybe get contact (.) I got her phone number Oliver (ASD): Me ((drawing)) when she's not there I lose I can't control myself Oliver (ASD): Yes if if her family would let me Oliver (ASD): I have I must be invited Oliver (ASD): I did take I did ask her out but she wasn't ready [...] I felt very upset (.) and then my dad says keep being nice to her Jack (ASD): Mm yeah ((inaudible)) my family could pick one Jack (ASD): Mm school Harry (ASD): Pretty much anything but especially teachers Matthew (ASD): Erm ((inaudible)) doing lots of lessons about this sort of stuff Hannah (ASD): From the school Hannah (ASD): Because I found him in Seven M class Seven M Hannah (ASD): Yes I phoned up [anonymised] [...] [anonymised]'s mum Hannah (ASD): Because next year [anonymised]'s in my class and I've chosen [anonymised] to go to America Molly (ASD): Erm ((pause)) I mean there's the they occasionally come in and like talk about healthy and unhealthy relationships and...

Molly (ASD): Like sex ed and that erm

Jacob (TD): Erm (.) erm (.) I think friends I think (.) yeah like (.) when like your friends have relationships and that and you like learn from that and stuff so and see how it's done and stuff ((laughs)) so yeah like obviously like when you're younger and that your parents tell you about stuff and that but (.) yeah but when obviously I think you talk (.) like I talk about relationships and that more with my friends

Jacob (TD): You could have all the you know all the lessons you needed on how a good relationship works but if it's not the right person then it never will work

Jacob (TD): Yeah like I've seen like how a relationship didn't work out and how they did work out and...

Jacob (TD): Erm (.) I think from seeing like how they act around them and everything and (.) yeah...

Jacob (TD): Kind of tells you what you're meant to do and stuff and yeah...

Ryan (TD): Er ((pause)) well I know one of my friends that's a couple is constantly with his girlfriend I wouldn't want that

Zack (TD): Yeah sometimes they can be quite tragic between people

Zack (TD): Not really it's the sort of thing where you have to learn yourself

William (TD): I reckon you gain experience from it like if it happened once you know what to expect if it happened again so like you would know if it's happening again or you'd know if 'Wow this isn't like last time I actually like this relationship'
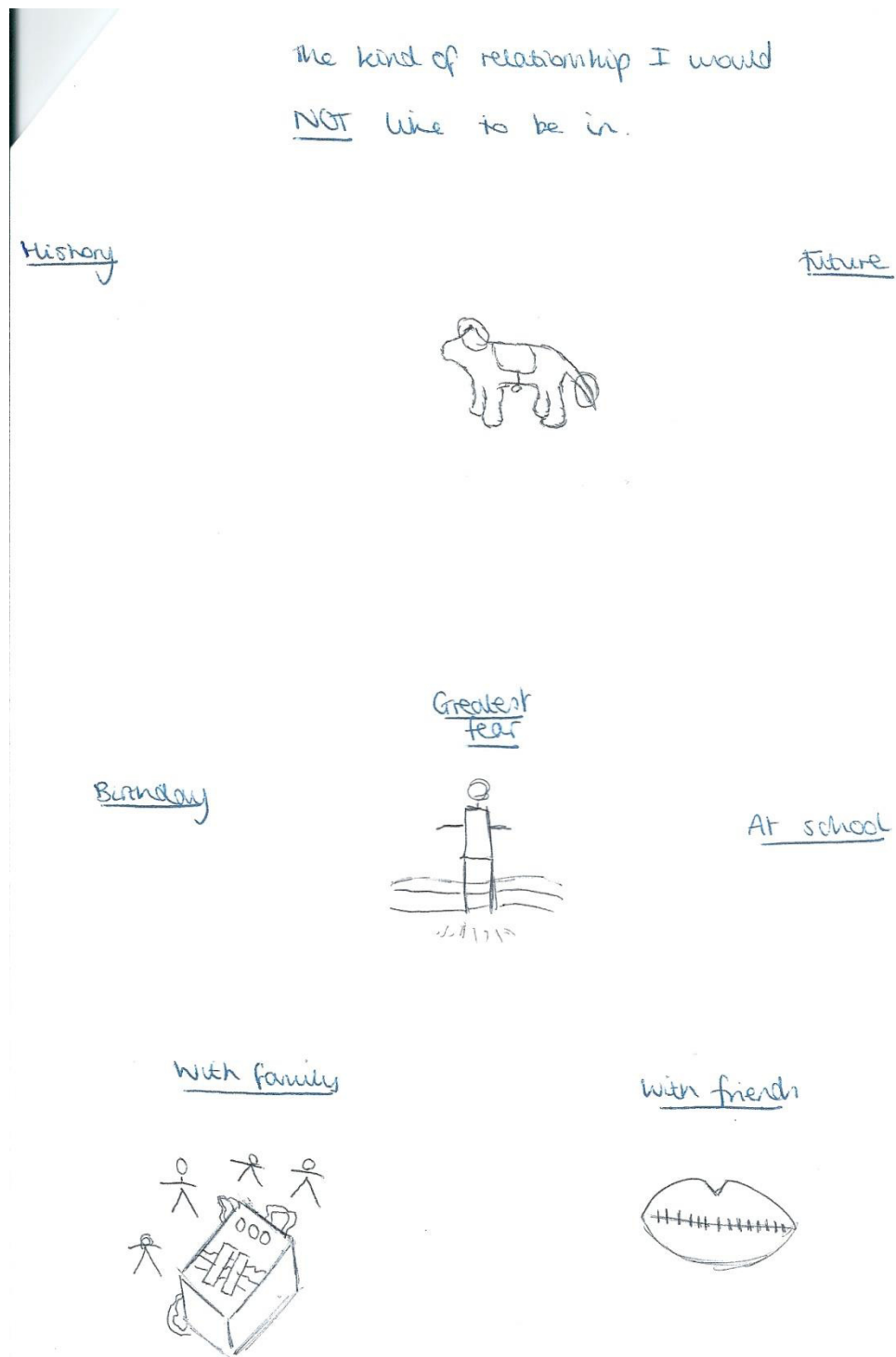
Daisy (TD): I think a lot of the time you learn what not to do rather than what to do (.) and I think the way you respond to situations about other people tells you a lot about what like what your values are

Daisy (TD): Divorce I think divorce is a massive one (.) erm if you lose like your grandparents then that is also a really big one erm (.)

yeah anything like that and like abuse rape all of that kind of category of really emotional horrible kind of stuff I think all that would

Imogen (TD): 'Cause like one of my friends she got was in a relationship with a boy who was older than her (.) and he was like really nasty to her (.) and it's like we would go out on like a Saturday and he'd have to be there (.) it's like if we would go somewhere and we wouldn't come back

Sarah (TD): I'd say definitely like PSE lessons

Emma (TD): Erm (.) definitely older people (.) when we see them around

Ava (TD): Erm like with some of my friends their relationships haven't gone well

Ava (TD): Then I like I see people in school with their relationships

4.17 Appendix Q: An Example of Ideal Relationship Drawings

(Molly, ASD)

The kind of relationship I would NOT like to be in.

History

Future

Greatest fear

Birthday

At school

With family

With friends

The kind of relationship I
would like to be in.

History   Future

· Greatest
fear

Birthday.   SLOW   At school
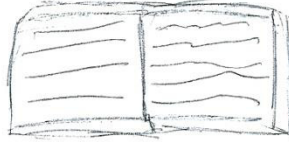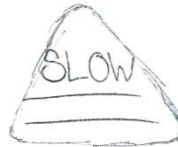
with family   with friends

                                    Ha
                                                              Ha
                                                    Ha