

Autistic Adolescents' use of social media

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Adolescence of autistic people

Childhood

Adolescence: Biological and social role changes

Adulthood

Autism includes difficulties with:

- Social perspective taking
- Social relating
 - Change
- Executive function
- Sensory processing
 - Emotional understanding
- Emotion regulation

Some tasks of adolescence

- Accepting change in the body
 - Identity formation
- Acceptance by a peer group / intimate relationships
- Greater autonomy in decision making
- Planning and future-orientated thinking
- Understand and regulate powerful and complex emotions
- Gain sophistication in perspective taking

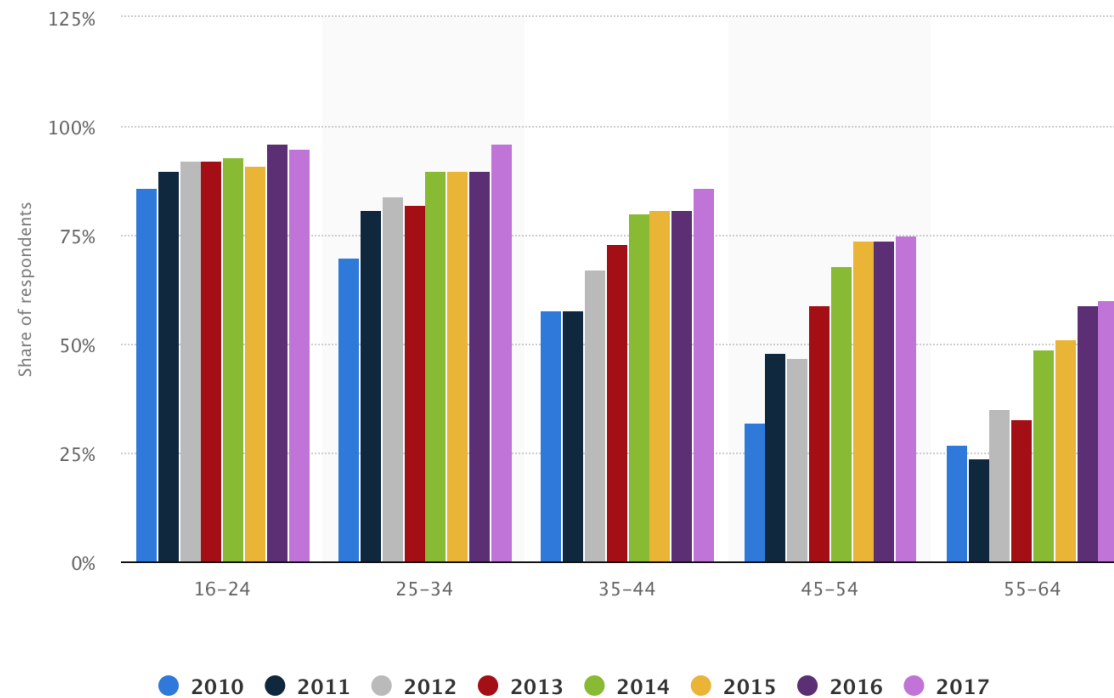
Poor outcomes for autistic people

- Increasing mental health probs
- Poor quality of life
 - Social isolation
- Unemployment and underemployment
- Educational under-attainment
- Lack of independence

Social media usage by adolescents



Share of respondents who have set up their own social media profile by age in the UK, 2010-2017



“Social media is not an alternative to the real world – it is the real world”

Can we promote happier, healthier adolescence for autistic people by gaining a better understanding of how they use social media?

To what extent do they participate in the benefits of social media? Can we enhance these benefits?

- Identity formation – ‘finding your tribe’
- Broadcasting your perspective



Alis Rowe @curlyhairedalis · Oct 8

I have difficulties with #unstructured times and #gaps in the day. I always need to be doing something. I have learned to be very good at occupying myself. Can you relate?

'I do not like any 'in-between times', such as gaps in the day, queues and waiting, or any times when there is nothing officially to do. I always need to be doing something. When I'm not, I feel highly uncomfortable. I experience those times as very inefficient.'

Alis Rowe

facebook.com/thegirlwiththecurlyhair



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To what extent do they suffer costs of social media usage? Can we minimise these risks?

- Bullying
- Sexual risk
- FOMO
- Manipulation by commercial and political interests

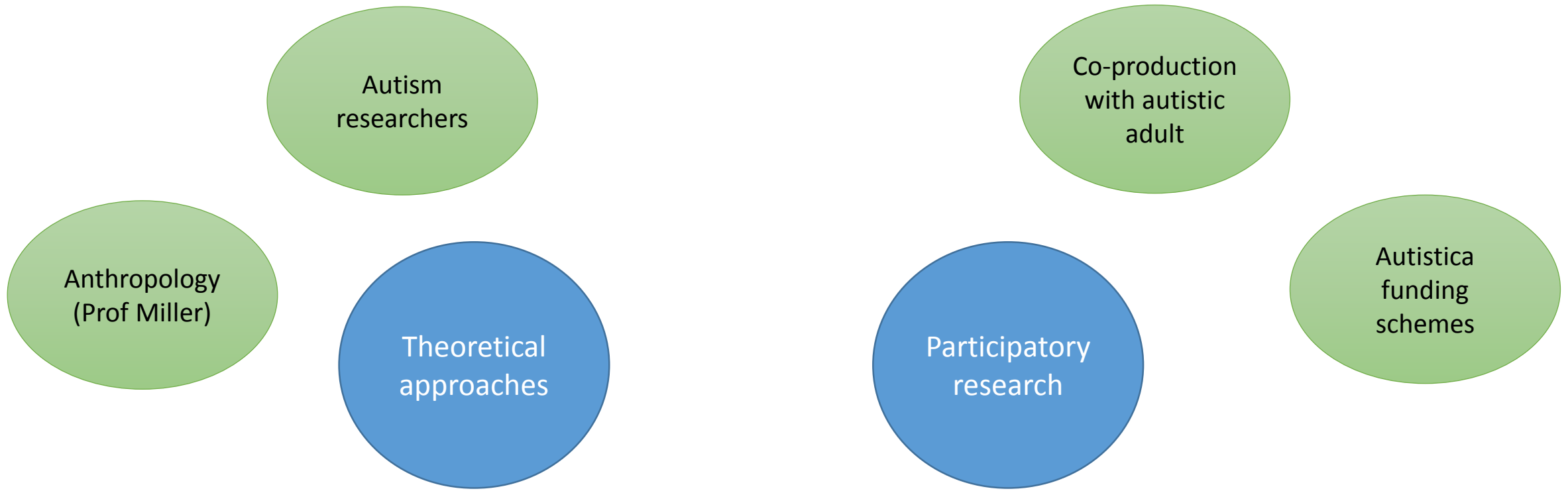
How can we study autistic teenager's use of social media?

- Anthropology – Prof Danny Miller
- Autistic co-researchers
- Smartphones?

How do autistic teenagers use social media to construct identity and build communities?



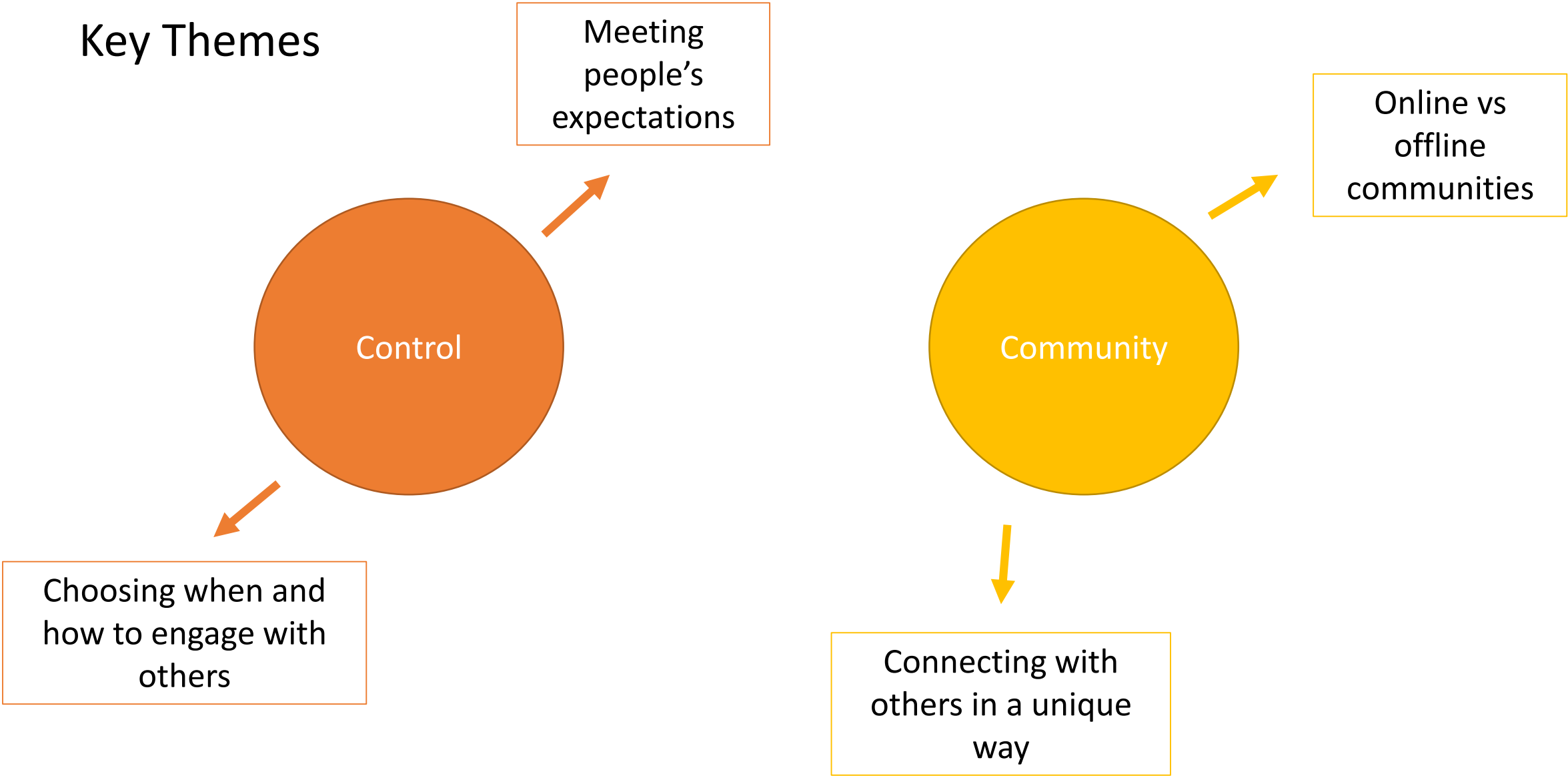
Focus
Groups and
Interviews



we measure how

How do ↑ autistic teenagers use social media to construct identity and build communities?

Key Themes



Choosing when and how to engage with others

“The games give him a chance to interact with people who share a similar passion, but **he can disconnect with that in a second** if he’s feeling uncomfortable” (Parent of 13 yr old)



Meeting people's expectations

“You have to reply really quickly in case someone goes offline. So, you could easily have a conversation and then you go to the toilet, come back and they're gone. **It gets quite stressful in the end**” (15 yr old)



Connecting with others in a unique way

“You make a lot of friends using voice chat while playing a game and **it’s really sociable** because of the competitive and team play side” (22 yr old)



Online vs offline communities



“lots of people at school have or want Instagram and Snapchat, but I really couldn’t think of anything worse. You know putting pictures up of me for people to judge, they can say nasty things and I think, I suppose that sort of thing means that **they can get to you even when you’re not at school**, so I wouldn’t do that” (13 yr old)

Implications

“It’s peopling completely on my terms”

“There are risks. You just have to be aware”

Use of Social Media

- Do autistic teens use social media in similar ways to non-autistic teens?
- Important for developing communities based on shared interests
- Individual control makes it easier

Safety Online

- Parents need to be up to date on current social media trends
- Good levels of safety awareness- but some autism-specific risks
- Online and offline bullying

“There is a huge conflict as a parent...it’s quite difficult because they have freedom of choice but also at the same time, they’re more vulnerable”

Transitions to Adulthood

- Can provide important social networks – but is this enough?
- Use of social media for work and relationships
- Independence vs security