**Title**: Understanding Autistic Adolescents' Willingness to Disclose their Diagnosis to Friends and their Feelings about their Diagnosis

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**Introduction**: The decision to disclose one’s autism or other disability is a complex process and can involve a significant amount of planning and stress (Kaushansky et al., 2017; Thompson-Hodgetts et al., 2020). Stigma often serves as a barrier to diagnosis disclosure among autistic adolescents and adults (Jones et al., 2015; Thompson-Hodgetts et al., 2020). When individuals with autism diagnoses choose to disclose, they are often most willing to share their diagnosis with people who can provide tangible support (e.g., family members who can assist them in accessing medical/mental healthcare, professors who can provide accommodations), as opposed to friends or peers (Frost et al., 2019; Kaushansky et al., 2017). Most extant studies that examine diagnosis disclosure among autistic adolescents focus on disclosure experiences from parents’ perspectives (Riccio et al., 2021; Kiely et al., 2020), rather than the adolescent’s first-hand experience. Very few studies have examined adolescents’ willingness to disclose their autism diagnosis to peers or friends, and how willingness to disclose may relate to one’s feelings towards their diagnosis.

**Method**: Thirty-six autistic adolescents (*M*age = 16.5, *SD* = 1.1, range = 14.9-18.6; IQ range: 89-141) living in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area participated in semi-structured interviews prior to their participation in an executive functioning intervention. Most participants identified as White (80.6%), Non-Hispanic/Latino/a/x (94.4%), and male (69.4%). All participants had a parent-reported autism diagnosis, confirmed by an expert clinician utilizing DSM-5 criteria (American Psychological Association, 2013), or an ADOS-2 (Lord et al., 2012). As part of the interview, participants were asked the following two questions about their diagnoses: “Do you tell your friends?”  and “what do you think about your diagnoses?” Participants’ responses to the disclosure interview question were coded as yes/no, and qualitative valence coding was used to assign a valence (i.e., positive, negative, or neutral) to each participant’s reported feelings towards their autism diagnosis. We conducted a Spearman’s rank-order correlation to assess for an initial relationship between diagnosis disclosure and feelings about diagnosis. A Chi-squared test was used to compare across levels of each variable of interest (disclosure to friends and feelings about diagnosis) and to examine descriptives within each group (e.g., frequency of positive feelings about diagnosis among those who chose to disclose to friends). To aid in the interpretation of quantitative findings, we conducted a preliminary thematic analysis of keywords in participants’ responses to the diagnosis disclosure interview question.

**Results**: There was a significant positive association between willingness to disclose one’s autism diagnosis and feelings about one’s diagnosis (rs(34) = .33, *p*=.047, N = 36). The majority of this sample of autistic adolescents reported a willingness to tell their friends about their diagnosis (64%, n=23). Participants’ feelings about their diagnosis were mixed, with most adolescents feeling neutral (42%, n=15), some feeling positive (31%, n=11), and the minority feeling negative (28%, n=10). Among those who are willing to tell their friends, people most commonly felt positive about their diagnosis (44%, n=10), while some had neutral feelings (35%, n=8) and negative feelings (22%, n=5). Among autistic adolescents who did not report willingness to tell their friends about their diagnosis, there were more neutral feelings (54%, n=7) and negative (38%, n=5) feelings, and less positive feelings (8%, n=1). The relationship between disclosure to friends and feelings about one’s diagnosis was not statistically significant *X*2 (2, *N* = 36) = 5.042, *p* = .08). In examining the open-ended interview question about whether participants disclose their autism diagnosis to friends, one preliminary theme emerged: presence of neurodivergent friends/community was common among those who chose to disclose.

**Discussion:** Our findings highlight the nuances and complexities surrounding diagnosis disclosure decisions for autistic adolescents, particularly in relation to disclosing to friends or peers. Our results suggest that there is an association between willingness to disclose autistic identity and one’s feelings about their diagnosis (whether they feel positively, negatively, or neutral). In addition, a preliminary theme emerged from participants’ responses to open-ended questions that the presence of neurodivergent friends/community was common among those who told their friends about their diagnosis. Given that few studies have examined autistic adolescents’ decisions to disclose to friends, these findings represent a preliminary step toward understanding the relationship between disclosure and feelings about diagnosis. Future studies should utilize larger sample sizes to gain deeper insights and conduct in-depth examinations of the multitude of factors impacting autistic adolescents’ decisions to disclose their autism diagnosis to friends.

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