**Title**: Exploring valence of feelings towards autism diagnoses in teens.

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**Introduction**: Current literature on autistic identity among adolescents reveals that young people who have more positive feelings about their autistic identity tend to also have better mental health outcomes (Davies et al., 2024), including decreased social-anxiety and better mental wellbeing (Cooper et al., 2023). Broader studies on mental health show that self-stigma around diagnoses is related to lower quality of life (Holubova et al., 2016; Rüsch et al., 2010). One study, from Jones et al. (2015) found that many autistic teens absorb autism as an aspect of their identity but still experience self-stigma and struggle with the aspects of their diagnosis that are stigmatized by others. While other studies have examined the benefits of positive feelings, and the negative effects of self-stigma, few have reported on the demographics of participants more likely to fall into these groups. This study aimed to examine which teens are expressing negative versus positive feelings towards their autism diagnoses.

**Method**: Fifty-two autistic teens (Mage = 16.56, SD = 1.17, range = 14.77-18.57) living in the Washington, D.C metropolitan area participated in semi-structured interviews prior to their participation in an executive functioning intervention. The participants were primarily white (76.9%), with 11.5% identifying as Black, 1.9% identifying as Asian, and 7.7% identifying as more than one race; 7.7% of the sample identified as Latine. Based on participant self-report, most of the participants were male (69.2%), with 23.1% identifying as female, and 5.8% identifying as nonbinary. Participants’ sex assigned at birth was 71.2% male and 28.8% female. The average full-scale IQ of this sample was 110.5 (SD = 12.83, range = 89-141). All participants were diagnosed autistic according to parent-report, confirmed by an expert clinician utilizing the Social Communication Questionnaire (Rutter, Bailey, & Lord, 2003), DSM-5 criteria (American Psychological Association, 2013) and/or an ADOS (Lord et al., 2012). Interviews asked the teens to describe their current diagnoses and their feelings towards those diagnoses. Two coders separately examined responses about autism diagnoses for positive, negative, and neutral feelings and coded this valence, and then confirmed reliability between coders. We collapsed the positive and neutral categories to create a binary variable, based on previous literature focusing on the presence of self-stigma, or negative valence. We examined the differences between different demographic groups in relation to this binary variable using chi square tests (gender, sex assigned at birth, race, ethnicity), independent sample t-tests (IQ), and Wilcoxon rank-sum tests (age).

**Results**: Most participants reported positive (29%) or neutral (44%) feelings toward their autism diagnoses, with only 27% reporting negative feelings. There was not a significant difference in feelings toward diagnosis based on sex assigned at birth, gender identity, race, or ethnicity (p’s > .05). Participants with non-negative feelings had a higher mean IQ, but this difference was not significant (p > .05). There was a significant difference between mean ages in those who reported negative and non-negative feelings, such that those with negative feelings tended to be older (p < .01).

**Discussion:** We can conclude that most participants either feel positive or neutral feelings toward their diagnoses, and that this does not differ based on demographic variables, such as gender, sex, race, or ethnicity. While those with negative feelings tended to be older than those with positive or neutral feelings, it is unclear what drives this difference. Further research could explore this difference by asking teens more about the reasons for their feelings and examining other factors such as age at diagnosis and time since diagnosis. While the difference in IQ between those with positive/neutral and negative feelings was not significant, this sample did not represent a full range of IQs, and analyses should be repeated in a sample that includes participants with a wider range. We know that feelings toward diagnoses are an important factor in mental health and quality of life. Understanding who is most likely to feel negatively toward their diagnosis is the first step in comprehending the factors that contribute to self-stigma and how to approach them.

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