

Perceptions of self and other: Social judgments and gaze patterns to videos of adolescents with and without autism spectrum disorder

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Neurotypical (NT) adults often form negative first impressions of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and are less interested in engaging with them socially. In contrast, individuals with ASD actively seek out the company of others who share their diagnosis. It is not clear, however, whether adolescents with ASD form more positive first impressions of ASD peers when information about the diagnosis is not explicitly shared. We asked adolescents with and without ASD to watch brief video clips of adolescents with and without ASD and answer questions about them. We wanted to know the impressions of participants about the social skills of the individuals in the video and also whether participants would be willing to interact with adolescents in the videos. While participants watched the video clips, we also recorded whether they were looking at the adolescents in the videos. None of the participants were informed of whether the adolescents in the videos were autistic or neurotypical. We found that participants with and without ASD spent less time looking at adolescents with ASD in the videos. All participants also provided more negative judgments of autistic than NT adolescents in the videos. For questions about the social skills of the adolescents in the videos, autistic participants rated autistic adolescents lower than the NT participants did. We conclude that - without knowing about the ASD diagnosis - adolescents with ASD form negative first impressions of ASD adolescents that are similar to, or lower, than those formed by NT peers.