

# WHAT'S IN A LABEL? THE FUNCTIONS AND CONSEQUENCES OF A SELF-DIAGNOSIS AND MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS OF AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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A diagnosis constitutes the naming of a disease or disorder through the recognition of signs and symptoms located in the body. It is a critical feature of the medical profession, simultaneously identifying the nature of the 'problem' and determining treatment options. Self-diagnosis is a newly emerging and under-researched phenomenon. With a wealth of information and diagnostic tools available online, there appears to be a growing number of adults diagnosing themselves as autistic. This project aims to understand (1) why people seek a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in adulthood, and (2) what determines whether they self-diagnose or seek a medical diagnosis. The first question relates to the functions of a diagnosis: what do individuals hope to gain from the identification of ASD in adulthood, particularly as there are no treatments and few specialist services available? What *social* benefits might the label confer? The second question will allow me to examine core beliefs and assumptions about the epistemic authority of the doctor and challenges to it, and also about the nature of autism itself. If an adult self-diagnoses, do they see this as a precursor or an alternative to medical diagnosis? In this study I will use a qualitative design involving individual in-depth interviews with people who have identified themselves as having ASD in adulthood, both those who have sought or are seeking a medical diagnosis and those who eschew that route and choose to self-diagnose.