

Masking among gender minority autistic adults

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Background

Masking is the conscious or unconscious management and modification of self and identity.

Masking can help a person to avoid stigma (Pearson and Rose, 2021), or to make a positive social impression (Hull et al. 2017)

Masking may be comparable to forms of identity management used in other marginalised populations, such as concealment (Botha and Frost, 2020).

Many autistic people experience intersecting forms of stigma, e.g. being autistic and part of a sex or gender minority (Strang et al. 2018)

Aims

To explore the experience of masking among autistic adults who are also part of a sex and gender minority.

Method

Participants: Two hundred and twenty three people took part (mean age = 25.3).

Questions: We asked people to tell us how they masked, the contexts they masked in, their motivations for masking, and the impact it had on their personal identity.

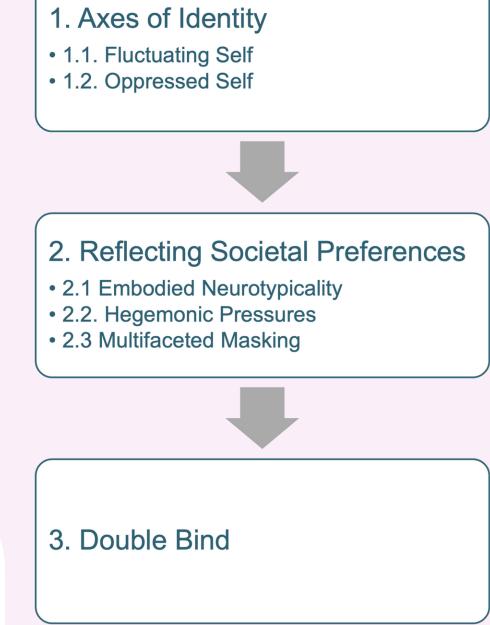
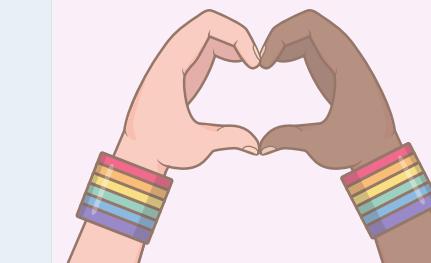
Procedure: Participants completed a wider survey on qualtrics, with the qualitative questions presented with an open text box to respond



Findings

I just don't want to be seen, i want to be forgotten, i don't want to make impressions on people

Being trans is the most obvious one I hide most of the time, but I also mask as much more neurotypical than I actually am by habit due to having spent my entire childhood being trained on how to be a neurotypical person



I have to pass as neurotypical or I will be ostracized. My physical appearance is dependent on who I'm going to be with, but I'm not a girl.

Discussion

Masking involved both suppressing core aspects of self, and projecting a more acceptable self

Masking was used to avoid stigma and 'punishment', avoid being negatively judged, and to make other people feel comfortable.

Many of the strategies used to mask were based on the idea of what 'normal' (i.e. cis, neurotypical) people did in social situations.

Masking led to a double bind, where people felt socially isolated because of their lack of authentic connection, but also allowed them to stay safe

Masking gender and autistic characteristics made people feel dissociated from their own identity

References

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