



THE FIVE MINUTE

The Autistic Masking Checklist

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ADAPTED FROM LAURA HULL'S CAMOUFLAGING AUTISTIC
TRAITS QUESTIONNAIRE (CAT-Q)



What is Autistic Camouflaging?

Autistic camouflaging encompasses three distinct features: **Compensating**, **Masking**, and **Assimilation**.



COMPENSATING

Compensation involves mimicking and copying allistic people.

Autistic masking involves actively suppressing Autistic traits.



MASKING



ASSIMILATING

Assimilation is when we push ourselves to engage in behaviors that don't come naturally to us and often cause significant discomfort.



This categorization of Autistic Camouflaging comes from the work of Laura Hull et al., 2019: <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2018-54421-001>

Autistic Compensation Checklist



- Creating scripts to use in social situations
- Repeating phrases exactly as others have said them
- Watching others in order to understand social skills
- Practicing facial expressions and body language
- Researching social skills to improve your own
- Learning & using social skills seen on TV & movies
- Using behaviors learned from watching other interactions
- Deliberately copying someone else's behaviors, body language, or expressions during interactions



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Autistic Masking Checklist



- Monitoring body language to appear relaxed
- Always thinking about the impression you make on others
- Adjusting body language to appear interested in the conversation
- Heightened awareness about the impression you make on others
- Monitoring body language and facial expressions to appear interested in the other person
- Heavily focused on own facial expression and body language in social situations
- Adjusting body language and/or facial expression to appear relaxed
- Feeling the need to make eye contact with others, even if you don't want to



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Autistic Assimilation Checklist



- Feeling as if conversations do not naturally flow when talking with others
- Feeling like you're pretending to be "normal" in social situations
- Feeling that you have to force yourself to interact with others in social situations
- Believing you cannot be your true self with others
- Feeling the need to put on an act to get through a social situation
- Trying to avoid interacting with others in social situations
- Needing the support of other people in order to socialize
- Feeling a sense of "performance" versus being authentic in social situations



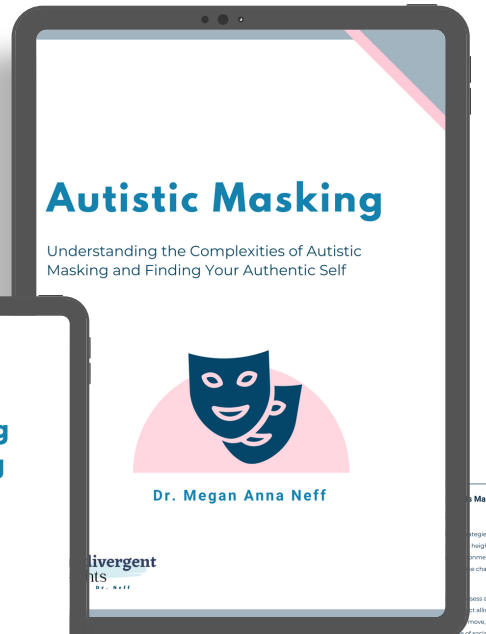
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WANT TO LEARN MORE?



Check out the **Autistic Masking Workbook** for more.

<https://neurodivergentinsights.com/neurodivergentstore/p/autistic-masking>



Follow Your Pleasure

By chasing my pleasure, I learned so much about myself. I learned I like soft, black, gender-neutral clothing, that I prefer not to leave my house unless going to stores, and that I enjoy pressure and weighted blankets, swinging chairs, and stem songs. I learned that when I am excited nervous while watching a favorite show, I like to fix my hair. I learned I prefer to work with ideas more than people. So the first step is to follow your pleasure with curiosity!

Embrace Your Pleasure, Explore with Curiosity

Every experience, whether it's the question "Do I like this?" might seem to be excessively daunting. To ease into the process, begin with small, low-stakes experiences. You can start by asking, "What do I like about this?" or "What do I dislike about this?" Throughout your day, as you encounter various experiences, set these small "goals" for yourself. This systematic approach can help you explore the practice of connecting with your preferences and interests.

Autistic Masking AT A GLANCE

Autistic body language to be used in the conversation

Practicing facial expressions and body language

Using behaviors learned from watching other interactions

Coping with Vulnerability: Nurturing Resilience on the Unmasking Journey

Ideally, you want your ability to cope with vulnerability and level of unmasking to be even.

When your ability to manage vulnerability aligns with your unmasking progress, you experience a harmonious equilibrium.

However, when your vulnerability resilience hasn't kept pace with your unmasking progress, the situation might look like this: as you reveal your true self and encounter negative responses, you could experience shutdowns and sometimes even spiral into vulnerability hangovers.

NEUROQUEERING PRACTICES AT A GLANCE

Subverting ingrained habits of neurotypicality and heteronormativity

Embracing the queering of your self-recognitive process

Embracing your neurodivergence, and/or neuroqueering your neurodivergence as a form of queerness

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The Unmasking Mask

Understanding the genesis of certain superficial masking narratives requires diving into the unfolding history of the unmasking concept itself. Examining how narrative takes shape becomes particularly significant in the context of masking and unmasking.

The concept of masking originated within the autistic community and eventually found its way into academic discourse. Early academic realizations portrayed unmasking in a somewhat light, painting it as an option predominantly accessible to autistic women.

This portrayal suggested that masking was a deliberate choice, undertaken to seamlessly fit into social norms. According to this narrative, individuals could opt to mask and later decide to unmask at all. This simplified version of unmasking gained traction within the autistic community, gaining momentum through social media channels. The progression of this process is mapped out on the following page.

Coping with Vulnerability: Building Resilience and Self-Care Practices

Resilience-Building Activities: Engage in activities that challenge your resilience, such as journaling, meditation, or physical activity. These practices help you build resilience and cope with vulnerability.

Professional Support: Consider seeking professional support through therapy, coaching, or peer support groups. These resources can provide guidance, validation, and a safe space to explore your vulnerabilities.

Self-Care Rituals: Practice self-care rituals that nourish your mind, body, and spirit. This could include activities like reading, listening to music, taking baths, or spending time in nature. These rituals help you recharge and maintain your well-being.

Supportive Communities: Connect with others who understand your experiences. This could be through online forums, local support groups, or in-person meetups. Having a supportive community can provide validation, understanding, and a sense of belonging.

Autistic Masking and Unmasking Workshop Journal

Dr. Megan Anna Neff

Neurodivergent Insights

Social Chameleons

Understanding the complexities of autistic masking and finding your authentic self.

What is Autistic Camouflaging?

Autistic camouflaging involves changing your external presentation to blend into your surroundings. It encompasses three distinct forms: **Compensating**, **Masking**, and **Assimilating**.

COMPENSATING: Compensation involves mimicking and copying autistic people.

MASKING: Autistic masking involves actively suppressing autistic traits.

ASSIMILATING: Assimilation is when we push ourselves to engage in behaviors that don't come naturally to us and often cause significant discomfort.

CHAPTER 4: Unmasking Myths: Beyond the Superficial

Neurodivergent Insights

Autistic Unmasking Defined

First, let's get clear on some terms before we go further into this book...

Autistic Unmasking Defined...

Unmasking involves the process of recognizing, embracing, and expressing one's genuine autistic identity and traits. It entails breaking free from the constraints of masking and societal expectations to live authentically as an autistic individual. Unmasking involves self-discovery, self-acceptance, and self-advocacy, allowing us to develop a stronger sense of identity, well-being, and connection with our true selves and others. It often involves steps like getting connected with your autistic peers, events, preferences, interests, values, communication style, and more.

Stigma, Spoiled Identities, and Masking

Erving Goffman talks a sociologist writing about stigma in the 1950s. He also used stigma as something that communicates an identity as "spoiled." And when a person has a spoiled identity, they naturally attempt to hide, conceal, and distance themselves from it.

When a pathologized status comes the experience of stigma, stigmatization, and marginalization. **Stigma refers to the possession of an attribute that marks persons as deviant or "less desirable," marking them as "spoiled."** Stigmatized persons may attempt to conceal these spoiled aspects of their identity from others, attempting to "pass" or normal.

— Dr. Amy Pearson, and Brian Rose

Building Your Sensory Kit

Add a Personal Touch

Add the sentimental touch. Add items that are meaningful to you. Consider including photographs of your pet, loved ones, a handwritten note, or any other item that brings you a sense of connection, calm, or joy.

Include self-regulation strategies: include tools/rituals of self-regulation strategies that work for you. This may involve printed breathing exercises, grounding techniques, or calming affirmations. The book is a handy-to-remember, durable and focus when sensory overloaded. It is helpful to have visual reminders of relaxation strategies that work for you.

Breathing Instructions: Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds.

Change the Pattern: Rigid Acceptance

Complicating matters, many neurodivergent individuals struggle with emotional resilience in the context of emotional acceptance. For social acceptance, including emotional acceptance, is often harder for us than it is for neurotypical individuals. This is because we may have been told that certain emotions are "bad" or "wrong" and should be suppressed. This can lead to a lack of validation and acceptance of our emotions, making it more difficult to accept and express them.

We are more prone to have alexithymia. This can make it difficult to understand and make sense of our emotions, leading to avoidance of them or difficulty accepting them.

Many of us have experienced social or cultural stigma surrounding our emotions. For example, we may have been told that certain emotions are "bad" or "wrong" and should be suppressed. This can lead to a lack of validation and acceptance of our emotions, making it more difficult to accept and express them.

Many of us have experienced trauma or other negative experiences that have impacted our ability to process and regulate our emotions. This can lead to difficulty accepting and managing our emotions, especially in situations that may trigger memories of these experiences.

Direct acceptance of emotions may be more difficult for us, which means we are more vulnerable to fixating on the same, and negative spirals when experiencing painful feelings.

Unmasking Practices Find Your Pleasure

Unmasking practices are activities that help you connect with your true self and find joy in your life. These practices can include things like journaling, meditation, physical activity, and spending time in nature. They can also include things like setting boundaries, practicing self-compassion, and seeking out supportive communities.

Find your pleasure. Unmasking practices are activities that help you connect with your true self and find joy in your life. These practices can include things like journaling, meditation, physical activity, and spending time in nature. They can also include things like setting boundaries, practicing self-compassion, and seeking out supportive communities.

The Costs of Masking

While not an exhaustive list, here are some of the costs of masking:

- Requires significant energy resources
- Lack of true connection with others
- Lack of connection with self
- Depression of self-compassion
- Self-harm
- Inadvertently reinforces neurotypical standards and culture

Prefrontal-Cortex Fatigue

The intricate autistic people often exert more conscious energy from their prefrontal cortex to navigate social interactions, which incurs a great energy cost. This has been explained by sociologists can be particularly draining for many of us. Sociologists place significant demands on our prefrontal cortex, contributing to the overall exhaustion experienced during social encounters. Our social system is running on a software program that demands very more energy expenditure!