

Effects of Identity on Autistic Masking



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Introduction

1. Social camouflaging ("masking") conceals autistic traits that might be seen as rude or unusual.
2. Masking behavior is associated with poor mental health outcomes for autistic adults.
3. Previous studies have found higher rates of non-straight sexual orientations among autistic individuals and those with higher levels of the broad autism phenotype (BAP).

Objectives

This study, which is ongoing, aims to identify patterns of masking behavior in multiply-marginalized autistic adults and gather preliminary information about relationships between identity disclosure and well-being. This preliminary analysis focuses on sexual orientation.

Methodology

The study consisted of an online survey (N=64) of autistic adults with no Intellectual Disability. It employed several measures (the Camouflaging Autistic Traits Questionnaire, BAP-Q, Nebraska Outness Scale, Transgender Congruence Scale, and PHQ-9) to determine respondents' sexual and gender identities, levels of openness about those identities, and well-being. The preliminary sample was divided into straight (N=26), not straight (N=31), and questioning (N=6). Questioning respondents were excluded from preliminary analysis due to high variability and the size of the sample. Welch's independent samples t-tests were run for the CAT-Q, NOS subscales, BAP-Q, and PHQ-9.

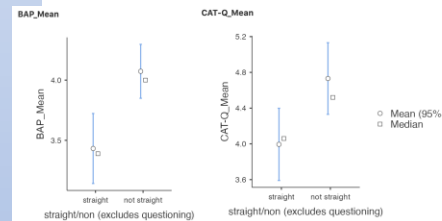
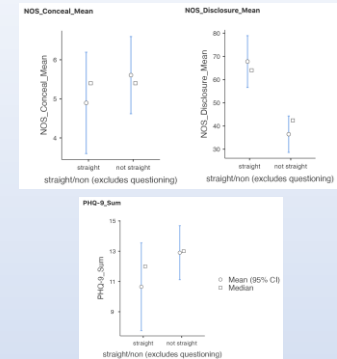
Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
18-25	24	37.5%	37.5%
25-35	22	34.4%	71.9%
35-45	12	18.8%	90.6%
45-55	2	3.1%	93.8%
55-65	4	6.3%	100.0%

Results

Compared to straight respondents, non-straight respondents displayed more drastic masking tendencies.

1. Significant effects were present for the CAT-Q, NOS disclosure subscale, and BAP-Q.
2. Non-straight respondents had significantly higher BAP scores than straight respondents, consistent with previous research.
3. High variability was present in responses to the PHQ-9 and the NOS concealment subscale.

		Statistic	df	p
CAT-Q_Mean	Welch's t	-2.537	47.9	0.014
NOS_Disclosure_Mean	Welch's t	4.503	43.0	<.001
NOS_Conceal_Mean	Welch's t	-0.854	47.2	0.397
BAP_Mean	Welch's t	-3.424	46.0	0.001
PHQ-9_Sum	Welch's t	-1.295	37.8	0.203



Recommendations

Further research is necessary to explore identity and masking patterns in autistic adults. Preliminary results from this study indicate a potential relationship between social camouflaging and non-heterosexual orientations. This should be expanded upon with a larger sample and more detailed analyses.

Acknowledgements

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Conclusion

Preliminary results indicate a greater tendency to mask autistic traits among non-straight autistic adults. Given the high prevalence of co-occurring mental illness in both autistic and LGB+ populations, as well as growing evidence that masking correlates with higher rates of mental illness in autistic adults, further analysis of well-being should be prioritized as the sample expands.