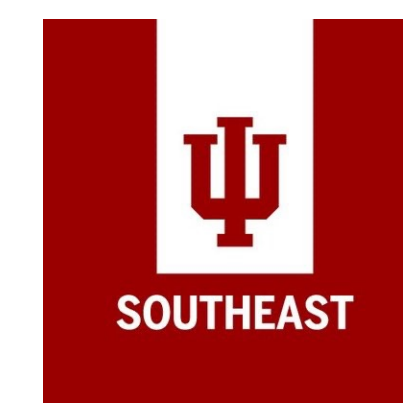




Intersectionality in Autistic Camouflaging: A Literature Review



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Introduction

- ✦ Camouflaging is the conscious or unconscious attempt to mask or suppress autistic traits (Hull et al., 2018)
- ✦ Camouflaging may hinder timely and accurate diagnosis, preventing access to adequate support, and is associated with negative health outcomes (Hull et al., 2018)
- ✦ The Camouflaging Autistic Traits Questionnaire (CAT-Q) was developed and validated as a self-report measure of camouflaging (Hull et al., 2018)
- ✦ Are there are differences in camouflaging by autistic individuals who have other stigmatized identities?
- ✦ This is a review of the current literature I found on autistic camouflaging and demographics in one semester
- ✦ I intend to use it as a foundation for research (in my senior seminar and beyond) on how intersecting marginalized identities affect autistic camouflaging

Conclusions

- ✦ The research I reviewed found:
 - Camouflaging is associated with negative mental health outcomes
 - Camouflaging may interfere with autism diagnosis
 - Differences exist in camouflaging based on gender
 - Disparities exist in diagnosis based on gender and race
- ✦ However, data for most demographic groups was missing
- ✦ Future autism research needs to use an intersectional lens to identify and address disparities in diagnosis and treatment
- ✦ I want to conduct a survey of CAT-Q scores and autistic traits and analyze them by demographics—including race/ethnicity, sex/gender, sexual/romantic orientation, disability status, and socioeconomic status—oversampling to collect adequate sample sizes of minority groups

“It was only through talking to my therapist about masking that I realised I’d been doing it my entire life. I just assumed that social situations were mentally taxing for everyone and that everyone was exhausted”
(Autistic man, 36) (Miller, 2021).

Review Articles

Common themes amongst six relevant review articles:

Camouflaging may result in late/missed diagnosis or misdiagnosis, preventing timely and adequate support

(Allely, 2019; Hull et al., 2020; Libsack et al., 2021; Tubio-Fungueiriño, 2020).

Camouflaging is associated with higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and suicidality

(Allely, 2019; Cook et al., 2021; Hull et al., 2020; Libsack et al., 2021; Rujeedawa & Zaman, 2022; Tubio-Fungueiriño, 2020).

Cisgender females camouflage more than cisgender males

(Allely, 2019; Cook et al., 2021; Rujeedawa & Zaman, 2022; Tubio-Fungueiriño, 2020).

More cisgender males are diagnosed with autism than cisgender females

(Allely, 2019; Hull et al., 2020; Rujeedawa & Zaman, 2022; Tubio-Fungueiriño, 2020).

Autism appears to be underdiagnosed in cisgender females without intellectual disability

(Allely, 2019; Hull et al., 2020; Tubio-Fungueiriño, 2020).

CAT-Q Sample Questions

The CAT-Q has 25 questions. Responses use a seven-point Likert scale, from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’

“I have researched the rules of social interactions (for example, by studying psychology or reading books on human behaviour) to improve my own social skills”

“In social interactions, I do not pay attention to what my face or body are doing” (reversed scoring)

“In social situations, I feel like I’m ‘performing’ rather than being myself”

(Hull et al., 2018).

CAT-Q Studies

Hull et al. (2018)

- ✦ Created the CAT-Q and validated it across four groups: **male diagnosed autistic, female diagnosed autistic, male non-autistic, and female non-autistic**
- ✦ Did not validate the instrument for non-binary gender or no reported gender
- ✦ Did not report on gender identity, race/ethnicity, sexual/romantic identity, or disability status

Hull et al. (2019)

- ✦ Analyzed camouflaging and gender in allistic vs. diagnosed autistic subjects
- ✦ Found **autistic female** subjects consistently scored higher than **autistic male** subjects
- ✦ Found **genderqueer autistic subjects** scored highest of all (but sample size was small)
- ✦ Did not report on gender identity, race/ethnicity, sexual/romantic identity, or disability status

Cage & Troxell-Whitman (2019)

- ✦ Studied reasons for, contexts for, and costs of camouflaging
- ✦ Found **autistic women** camouflaged to get by in work or education more than **autistic men**
- ✦ Included, but did not analyze, data on mental health, sexual identity, and ethnicity
- ✦ Included predominantly White subjects
- ✦ Did not report on gender identity or physical/intellectual disability status
- ✦ Recommended more demographic diversity in future studies

Beck et al. (2020)

- ✦ Studied levels of autistic traits and camouflaging in **women**
- ✦ Found camouflaging scores significantly predicted **psychological distress**, but severity of autistic traits did not
- ✦ Reported ethnicity and race; subjects were overwhelmingly White and non-Latinx
- ✦ Did not report on gender identity, race/ethnicity, sexual/romantic identity, or disability status

McQuaid et al. (2022)

- ✦ Studied whether later autism diagnosis is associated with camouflaging
- ✦ Found participants **assigned female at birth** scored higher than participants **assigned male at birth**
- ✦ Found **transgender spectrum** participants scored higher than **cisgender** participants
- ✦ Found participants **diagnosed in adulthood** scored higher than those **diagnosed in childhood or adolescence**
- ✦ Included ~10% Latinx participants and ~10% mixed race participants, but subjects were otherwise predominantly White
- ✦ Did not analyze data based on ethnicity or race
- ✦ Did not report sexual/romantic identity or disability status
- ✦ Recommended investigating how camouflaging interacts with stigma associated with marginalized identities to impact mental health

“I didn’t learn that I only get suicidal during meltdowns until I removed all masking obligations
...I spent 13 years burnt out”
(Autistic nonbinary person, 34) (Miller, 2021).

Demographics Articles

Race/Ethnicity

Steinbrenner et al. (2022)

- ✦ Did a systematic review of autism research to examine the inclusion and reporting of race and ethnicity
- ✦ Found **racial and ethnic disparities** in diagnosis and services for autistic persons
- ✦ Found that autism research has underreported and underexamined race and ethnicity
- ✦ Recommended **increasing reporting and inclusion** of participants across minoritized racial and ethnic groups

Lovelace et al. (2021)

- ✦ Found the current autism research base is **unable to support intersectional analysis** because most literature:
 - Did not include race or ethnicity descriptors
 - Did not include ethnicity or race considerations when determining research outcomes or findings
 - Was dominated by White participation when race, ethnicity, or nationality were recorded
- ✦ Recommended that future autism research **prioritize Black autistic women and girls**

LGBTQIA+

DeWinter et al. (2017)

- ✦ Compared sexual identity and romantic experience between autistic subjects and general population peers
- ✦ Found **greater variance in sexual orientation** amongst autistic subjects
- ✦ Found **high levels of genderqueer identity** amongst autistic subjects, especially those assigned female at birth
- ✦ Suggests that autistic persons with minority gender or sexual identities may face additional challenges and risks

George & Stokes (2018)

- ✦ Compared gender variance in autistic vs. allistic subjects
- ✦ Found **greater variance in gender identity** in autistic subjects
- ✦ Found **greater variance in sexual orientation** amongst autistic subjects
- ✦ Recommended researching mental health outcomes for gender and sexual minority autistic persons

Walsh et al. (2018)

- ✦ Compared cognitive autism traits and sensory differences in transgender spectrum vs. cisgender individuals
- ✦ Found **significantly higher representation of transgender spectrum identities** in the autistic sample than the general population
- ✦ Found **more cognitive autism traits** in transgender spectrum subjects
- ✦ Found **lower visual and auditory hypersensitivity** in transgender spectrum subjects
- ✦ Suggested that gender variant autistic persons may need access to specialized care

Hillier et al. (2020)

- ✦ Collected first-hand accounts of LGBTQ+ autistic persons
- ✦ Found themes of:
 - **Intersectional effects** of dual identity
 - **Multiple minority stressors**
 - **Isolation**
 - **Lack of service provision**
- ✦ Recommended autism research include larger samples of LGBTQIA+ subjects

Tate et al. (2013)

- ✦ Tested data collection methods to determine how to reliably capture transgender spectrum identities
- ✦ Found that a two-question method provided higher response rates and greater inclusion of genderqueer identities
- ✦ Recommended that medical and social sciences **collect gender information using a two-question method**

Intersectional

Appelbaum et al. (2018)

- ✦ Wrote the American Psychological Association’s journal article reporting standards for scientific research
- ✦ Recommended **reporting major demographic characteristics**
- ✦ Specified **sex and ethnicity**, but not race, gender identity, sexual/romantic attraction, or disability status

Cascio et al. (2021)

- ✦ Did a systematic review of autism research ethics literature
- ✦ Found that **exclusion from research** of autistic persons of marginalized subgroups is a **major ethical concern**
- ✦ Recommended that autism researchers **prioritize intersectionality**

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