Double Masking

When hiding your neurotype meets code-switching

Masking

Hiding or compensating for neurodivergent traits to fit in: copying others' social behaviour, rehearsing conversations, holding back stims. Researchers also call it *camouflaging*.

Hull et al., 2017

Code-switching

Adjusting speech, appearance and behaviour to put others at ease, often in exchange for fair treatment and opportunity. A long-standing strategy for Black people in white-majority spaces.

McCluney et al., 2019

When both happen at once, all day, people in neurodivergent communities call it DOUBLE MASKING. *Queer and trans neurodivergent people may be managing a third layer too.*

Why people mask

To keep jobs and school places, make friends, and avoid bullying and exclusion. Stigma is the main driver.

Cage & Troxell-Whitman, 2019; Perry et al., 2022

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What it protects

Safety, belonging and income. Autistic adults report more bullying and harassment when they don't camouflage.

Cage & Troxell-Whitman, 2019

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What it costs

More camouflaging is linked to depression, anxiety and stress. Code-switching is linked to burnout and distress.

Cook et al., 2021; McCluney et al., 2019

The stakes aren't equal

Whether unmasking feels safe depends on how others are likely to read you. For some people, being seen as different has brought discipline or danger rather than support. In those spaces, masking is protection, not dishonesty.

Safety changes the equation

Accepting, inclusive spaces lower the need to camouflage (Cage et al., 2018). Your nervous system sets its guard by how safe people and systems have been. Felt safety is where unmasking becomes possible.

Mapping my masks

	What I hide or change	Why, or what I'm protecting	What it costs me after
Work or school			
Family			
Community or culture			

Who taught you when to mask or switch? Was the lesson about safety, belonging, or both?

Where can you set down even one layer? What is different about that place or those people?

What is one small way you can recover after a heavy masking day?

Unmasking is a choice, not a test. You decide where it's safe,
and you never owe it to a space that hasn't earned it.

SOURCES

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This handout summarises research. It does not speak for any community.