



# Autism and Camouflaging Strategies



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## Mini Review

Autism has been defined on the basis of communication and social problems and repetitive behaviors, which can vary in people along a continuum of severity [1]. In general, autism is understood to be a neurodevelopmental condition. The characteristic symptoms of autism can be distinguished from typical development as early as 18-24 months of age. Diagnosis most often occurs during childhood, but some individuals are being diagnosed later in adulthood [2]. As far as epidemiology is concerned, recent studies continue to report an increase in measured prevalence over time. The international community witnessed tremendous positive improvements in public awareness and public health response for autism, however, neither a cause nor a cure have been found so far. Thus, there is an urgent need for further investigation of this phenomenon.

Autism has been pathologized as disease or disorder. Although autistic individuals do not understand themselves within the model of pathology, they feel that society sees their autism as a negative trait to have [3,4]. For this reason, they attempt to reduce the visibility of their autistic characteristics via the conscious or unconscious use of camouflaging strategies [5]. It has been noticed that adults with more autistic traits report greater engagement in camouflaging. Moreover, recent evidence suggests that camouflaging strategies may be used by individuals who are not diagnosed with autism but have high levels of such traits [6,7]. Examples of camouflaging strategies include forcing eye contact, using learnt social strips and suppressing repetitive hand movements [8]. Many times, individuals are caught between disclosing that they are autistic and concealing it, but feel they are treated negatively either way.

Empirical research on camouflaging emerged recently. The research of camouflaging mainly involved qualitative methods,

examining the experiences of both genders. The multiple methods used to measure camouflaging broadly fell under two different approaches: internal-external discrepancy and self-report approaches. The internal-external discrepancy approach aimed to measure camouflaging by quantify differences between internal autistic state and observable behavioral presentation. Contrariwise, the self-report approach measured self-perceived engagement in camouflaging independent of observable behavioral presentation. The results showed that camouflaging strategies were used by both autistic males and females, often despite negative consequences for themselves. Two previous systematic reviews specifically focused on camouflaging in autistic females [9,10]. However, to the best of our knowledge, no published study has systematically appraised the current evidence base pertaining to camouflaging in children and adults of all genders. Thus, the relative research evidence is scant. A critical evaluation of camouflaging research is needed in order to identify consistencies in the current evidence as well as to fill the gaps that require further research.

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