

Visual Description: Tiled, semi-transparent photos of diverse people on a rainbow background with the title and presenter information in the middle.

*Disclaimer 1: Research is ever changing, so it is important to you reference the most current research when informing treatment decisions, policy matters, personal health decisions, etc. Please treat the studies cited in this presentation as a snapshot in time of the research available. Additionally, since each person will take their own lessons away from research, it is important that you read the studies for yourself before drawing any conclusions based on the information.

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***Citations: If you are citing the research discussed in this presentation, please review the research yourself and cite it directly. If you are citing information included on a slide without a direct citation, these are Amanda Montey and/or Ian Brown's ideas, so this presentation should be cited as your source, with Amanda & Ian listed as the authors.



Land Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge that we are meeting today on Treaty 6 territory, the homelands, travelling route, gathering place and meeting grounds of Indigenous groups including the Métis Otipemisiwak, Nehiyaw, Denesuline, Nakota Sioux, Anishnaabe, Siksikaitsitapi, Haudenosaunee, Esikisimu Nunangat, and Niitsapi peoples. We express my immense gratitude to the past and present keepers of the land we use, whose presence continues to enrich our community every day.

Two Spirit and Indigiqueer people have always been on Turtle Island. Homophobia and transphobia are a colonial construct, and challenging this discrimination and stigma is an integral part of making active reconciliation. We commit to loudly and consistently decrying transphobia and homophobia, and to fighting for safe spaces for Two Spirit and Indigiqueer people. I (Amanda) commit to providing therapy to 2SLGBTQIA+ folx in with accessibility options like a sliding scale, as informed by my evolving understanding of colonial roots in the oppression we often face.

On an individual level, we ask that each of you in your own way reflects on a way that you can commit to making Alberta a safer place for Two Spirit and Indigiqueer folx.

Visual Description: Semi-transparent wildflowers on a green background, with a green textbox layered over top. In the top right corner, there is the Two Spirit, Intersex Inclusive, Progress Pride Flag.

We respectfully acknowledge that we are joining this call today on Treaty 6 territory, the homelands, travelling route, gathering place and meeting grounds of Indigenous groups including the Métis Otipemisiwak (May-TEE Oh-TIH-pem-SOO-wuk), Nehiyaw (Ne-HEE-yo), Denesuline (DE-ne-SOO-leh-NAY), Nakota Sioux (Nah-KOH-da SOO), Anishnaabe (AH-nish-NAH-bey), Siksikaitsitapi (Sik-sik-AYE-sit-a-PEE), Haudenosaunee (Hoh-DE-noh-SHOH-nee), Esikisimu Nunangat (EE-see-KEE-see-mu Nu-na-NAT), and Niitsapi (Nee-itsee-TAH-peh) peoples. We express my immense gratitude to the past and present keepers of the land we use, whose presence continues to enrich our community every day.

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Introduction

ADHD, Autistic, Nonbinary, and Queer

I specialise in working with kids, teens, & adults who have or suspect that they have ADHD and/or Autism. Additionally, I specialise in supporting neurodivergent folks who identify with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.



Visual Description: Light yellow background with a drawing of a frog holding a trans flag heart in the bottom left of the image. Picture of the presenter, Amanda Montey, who is an individual with short brown hair, white skin, a black short sleeved shirt, and beaded progress pride flag earrings. Drawn heart details are near the image, and a banner above the image reads "Stay Queer". There is a text box on the left of the slide.

Special Guest:

Introduction

Suspected Autistic, Queer and Trans

Former high-risk youth worker, recovering from combined youth work and autistic burnout, and learning about my autism. Queer and trans community educator and volunteer of a queer and trans community library.



Ian Brown
They/Them
Queersulting



Visual Description: Light purple background with a picture of a black cat in the bottom left. On the right, there is a picture of the special guest, Ian Brown, who has short brown hair, a brown beard, white skin, with a dark green shirt with mid-length sleeves. Ian is holding the same black cat in this image. Also on the left is a trans pride coloured heart, rainbow hearts, and a stack of books. There is a text box on the left of the slide.

Agenda

- Housekeeping
- Use of language
- What is masking?
- How do I unmask?
- Unmasking and queer identities
- AuDHD, queerness, & physical intimacy/sex
- Next steps
- Question period!



Visual Description: Light green background with a textbox on the left. On the right is an aerial image of 4 people at a table colouring symbols associated with neurodiversity.

Housekeeping

- Respecting possible dual roles
- Questions: Clarifying questions throughout; in-depth questions during the Q&A
- Limitations of the information provided
- Respecting pronouns and identities
- Slides and speaker notes



Visual Description: Light blue background, with a textbox in the centre. In the bottom left, there is an image of an individual in a green jacket, with yellow headphones on, along with sunflower and infinity symbols for neurodiversity.

Notes:

Dual Roles: (Amanda)

- Amanda is a therapist, so folx may recognise them. To avoid dual roles, uphold confidentiality, and to avoid any concerns about special treatment, Amanda will treat each person as someone new that they are meeting, and they ask that you please don't identify them as your therapist or someone you know personally today.

Questions: (Ian)

- Ask clarifying questions at any point. Please save in-depth questions for the Q&A, or send these in the chat to be addressed as time permits.

Limitations:

- It is possible and quite likely that the information presented today will change.
- Research often doesn't accurately reflect the breadth of lived experiences within a community, so your lived experience may differ from the information we share today.
- Research and the content of the DSM-V significantly underrepresent the perspectives of BIPOC groups, gender-expansive individuals, diverse cultural belief systems, and other important perspectives.
- Please feel free to share corrections and/or add your lived experiences.

Pronouns & Identities: (Ian)

- Expected that folks will demonstrate respect for all persons of all identities.
- Showing this respect means sharing your pronouns if you're comfortable, and trying your best to honour the pronouns shared by an individual and making amends if needed.
- Zero tolerance for questions or discussions brought forward that call into question queer rights or the validity of queer identities. Questions asked with curiosity and the hope of better understanding are always welcome.

Accessibility:

- We will provide a copy of our slides along with our speaker notes
- Take notes if you find that helpful
- Speaker notes will not include information regarding personal anecdotes, questions asked, and they may not include incidental examples we may add to elaborate on the material.

Use of Language

- Identity-first language vs person-first language
- Aspergers, Autistic, & Autism
- Neurodivergent/AuDHD vs neurotypical (NT)
- Functioning vs masking language
- 2SLGBTQIA+
- Queer
- Sex vs gender
- General rule: Use your preferred language, & ask what language other people prefer



Visual Description: Light pink background, with a textbox on the left. On the right, there is an image of 2 people holding rainbow flags.

Notes:

Identity-First vs Person-First Language: (Amanda)

- We are using identity-first language (refer to an individual's condition as a part of their identity, for example by saying "Autistic" or "ADHDer").
- Some may be familiar with person-first language (states that person, then the experience, for example "person with Autism" or "person with ADHD").
- Generally, the Autistic community prefers identity first language because this honours our Autism as part of our identity.

Aspergers, Autistic, & Autism: (Amanda)

- The updated diagnostic manual grouped the previously named "Aspergers Syndrome" into Autism, and since there are mixed feelings in the Autistic community on the term, you'll hear us referring to the whole Autistic community broadly under the term "Autism" or "Autistic".
- It is valid for people to use the term "Aspergers" if that is how they identify.

Neurodivergent/AuDHD vs Neurotypical: (Amanda)

- "Neurodivergence" is a broad term to refer to the diversity of all people, we'll be using it as a short-hand, along with AuDHD, to refer to individuals with ADHD and Autism.
- "Neurotypical" refers to individuals who do not have a neurodevelopmental or other mental health condition.

Functioning vs Masking: (Amanda)

- Functioning labels serve to oversimplify our experiences, minimise the impacts of the hidden costs of masking, and dehumanise folk who benefit from daily support by equating the support they access to their ability to "function".
- We'll refer to how high masking folk are as this reflects how visible their disability is to others.

2SLGBTQIA+: (Ian)

- 2SLGBTQIA+ is an acronym for Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Aromantic/Asexual, and more.
- This term is used to refer to the queer community as a whole.

Queer: (Ian)

- Once used as a derogatory term for members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and some folks still have strong feelings regarding its use
- The broad community views the term as being reclaimed and adopted as a term to be used with respect.
- We will use this term to refer to folks whose gender identity and/or sexuality differ from societally expected norms.

Sex vs Gender: (Ian)

- Research studies often categorise their data based on the sex that a participant was assigned at birth.
- Sex may differ from the participants gender identity, though studies rarely state whether this factored in, so we will refer to the groups mentioned by the terms identified in the research papers.
- Outside of research specific information, we will refer to groups based on their affirmed gender identities.
- Cisgender refers to those whose identity matches the labels they were assigned at birth, whereas transgender and gender expansive people have gender identities that differ from what they were assigned at birth

General Rule: (Amanda)

- Use the language you feel most comfortable with, as long as it does not harm others
- Ask others what language they prefer

Content Warning:

Mention of suicide, self-injury, substance use, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, & racism

Note: We will discuss kink & physical intimacy, with notice for folx to step out if needed



Visual Description: Light purple background with a textbox on the left. Image on the right depict 2 overlapped forearms and hands in different skin tones, with flowers gathered behind them. Content warning reads "Mention of suicide, self-injury, substance use, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, & racism"



Visual description: Light green background with an image in the centre that depicts a person waving and smiling. Behind them, is a semi-transparent version of themselves holding their head in their hands.

So, what is masking?

Camouflaging: Attempting to hide or obscure neurodiverse traits

Compensation: Using strategies to “overcome” challenges and impairments related to disability

Assimilation: Performing and/or pretending to be neurotypical based on learned behaviours and mannerisms

Hull et. al, 2019; Price, 2022



Visual Description: Light yellow background, with a textbox on the left. The right shows an image of a person with fabric over their eyes, being held in place by hands that do not belong to them that are not connected to a visible figure. The person has their hands wrapped around the hands holding the fabric.

Notes:

- Masking often is something that is expected of those who demonstrate the ability to do it, and it is made up of 3 core features:
- Camouflaging: Involves conscious or unconscious efforts to obscure one's unique qualities and struggles as a disabled person, effectively trying to hide these from others.
- Compensation: Involves crafting little hacks and cheats to help you get your needs met when you either feel that you can't, or literally can't you request the accommodations you require.
- Assimilation: The act of consciously or unconsciously performing neurotypical traits based on learned mannerism and behaviours in an attempt to blend in and avoid detection.

Common Ways People Mask

Camouflaging

- Monitoring & adjusting body language & expressions
- Adjusting tone
- Overly accommodating
- Attempting to convey interest in others
- Using activities to mask potential differences
- Choosing settings with clearly defined social rules
- Role of substance use

Compensation

- Learning social cues from media & people watching
- Analysing social interactions to identify errors
- Practicing facial expressions & body language
- Researching environments & people in advance
 - Scripting interactions
- Role of substance use

Assimilation

- Conversation with others feels forced/calculated
- Social chameleon
- Neurotypical "uniform"
- Need others' support to socialise
- Felt inability to be authentic while socialising
- Judging/bullying others to avoid personal persecution

Hull et. al, 2019; Price, 2022

Visual Description: Light purple background with 3 textboxes spread out across the screen (pink, blue, and green).

Notes:

Camouflaging:

- Monitoring your body language & facial expressions while trying to obscure differences that might make you stick out to others by copying the body language & facial expressions of others
- Can include mirroring body language "too" closely and lead to an uncanny valley effect where you look "just" different enough that others feel uncomfortable around you, defeating the purpose of your mirroring
- Monitoring eye contact often involves tracking how long you've been looking at someone, evaluating whether you should look away, etc., often at the expense of paying attention--> Can lead to overly intense eye contact
- Autistic women, gender expansive folxs, and BIPOC people in particular have to appear friendly as a means of survival (Price, 2022), which can look like speaking in an animated tone
- Tendency to be overly accommodating to appear flexible, and avoid judgement
- Attempting to convey interest in others through the use of body language, facial expressions, appropriate comments made to show you are listening, and more.
- Also involves trying to disguise things that may be interpreted as disinterest, like fidgeting,

looking around, not asking questions, etc.

- Sometimes involves intentionally selecting activities to do at social events that give you time to think, explain delayed responses or distractibility, meet sensory needs, & more.
- Example: Crocheting or knitting

- Can mean intentionally seeking out social interactions in settings that have clearly defined social rules and/or an activity to focus on so you know what is appropriate to discuss & do

- Some AuDHDers overly rely on substance use in large social settings to act natural & have any possibility of resting

Compensation:

- Studying "appropriate" neurotypical social skills by watching popular media and through people watching

- Analysing, & often overanalysing social interactions to evaluate how you did, typically with a focus on perceived negatives

- Practicing facial expressions & body language so you can seem "natural"

- Example: practicing smiling "naturally" in the mirror, or rehearsing laughter

- Researching in depth what the environment will be like and the people you will be seeing so you can thoroughly prepare in advance

- Scripting social actions refers to the act of practicing what you will say in common social interactions, ranging from brief small talk, up to longer conversations

- Example: practicing what you will order before going up to the till at a restaurant

- Substance use is a way that some AuDHDers attempt to manage sensory overwhelm, distractible thoughts, under stimulation, and more.

Assimilation:

- Conversation with others often feels forced & calculated because you're trying to say the "right thing", not what you actually want to say

- Tendency to become a social chameleon who constructs their personality and interests based on the people they're around

- Can lead to constructing a neurotypical "uniform" of clothing that is socially acceptable, often

meaning you become disconnected from things that bring you passion & joy

- May lead to leaning on strong personalities around you to lead social interactions, and to make it feel comfortable to socialise with others
- Felt inability to be authentic while socialising due to fear associated with potential rejection
- Can lead to joining in on judgement and/or bullying of others out of the fear that you could become the next target if you do not join in



*"...gender roles and ableism both conspired and pushed [him] to hide parts of himself that his neurotypical peers would look down on and punish"
~ Price, 2022*

Masking, Gender, & Sexuality

- Performing gender to cope with social confusion
 - Benefits of clearly defined gendered expectations for attire, hair, social activities, acceptable interests, etc.
- Impacts of not having gender and sexual diversity clearly explained & normalised
 - Tendencies toward rigid thinking can lead to assuming you must align with the cis-hetero majority
- Risks of further differentiating yourself, so some claim cis-heteronormativity as a safety mechanism
- Impacts of trying to balance the capacity required to manage AuDHD needs alongside gender/sexuality journeys

Price, 2022

Visual Description: Light blue background with an image on the right of a person scribbling over their eyes while looking in a hand held mirror. There is a quote in the bottom left that reads "...gender roles and ableism both conspired and pushed [him] to hide parts of himself that his neurotypical peers would look down on and punish" (Price, 2022). There is a textbox on the right of the slide.

Notes:

- Gender is a performance that is comprised of what you wear, how you style your hair, how you do your makeup, the ways you hold yourself physically, how you speak, & more
- If you don't intrinsically understand the social expectations others have for you, there is a certain appeal to following along with the clearly delineated social norms assigned within a binary view of gender
- When diverse genders & sexualities are not explained to AuDHDers, our tendency toward rigid thinking may lead to not realising that there are options outside of the very cis-heteronormative worldview that we are primarily exposed to through media, our education, & our interactions with the world
- May not realise that not everyone has to perform gender norms, given that some folx just experience things that align with the cisgender & heteronormative view of gender
- Even if you do recognise that you are queer, you may try to hide this due to the fear that you may be further persecuted if you present yourself as "more different" by embracing queerness on top of being AuDHD

- May feel safest to pretend you are cis-het as a means of not standing out
- Managing your needs associated with AuDHD takes a lot of capacity, so for some folk, they may simply not have the capacity to invest in the process of coming out, advocating for yourself, transitioning, & more

Why do people mask?

- Gain social acceptance and minimise the risk of rejection
 - Make and maintain friendships/relationships
- Avoid prejudice, stigma, and discrimination
- Compensate for communication differences between AuDHDers and NTs
- Lack of broad acceptance and understanding of neurodivergent experiences
 - Lack of models to raise awareness of AuDHD experiences
- Increase employability

National Autistic Society, n.d.; Price 2022



"Members of these marginalised groups are simply not given as much social latitude to be strange or disruptive" ~Price (2022)

Visual Description: Light pink background with a textbox on the left. On the right, there is an image of a person who appears scared while walking through a dark forest with eyes peering out of the darkness. Underneath this image is the quote "Members of these marginalised groups are simply not given as much social latitude to be strange or disruptive" (Price, 2022)

Notes:

- If you successfully mask most of the time, you're more likely to be accepted by others and minimise the risk of being rejected by others
- Masking can make it easier to make & maintain friendships & relationships, though this is often as the expense of other areas of your wellbeing
- If people do not realise that you are AuDHD, you're less likely to face prejudice, stigma, & discrimination for your disability
- Often reinforced by the stigma we see low masking AuDHDers face
- Communication differences result out of the double empathy problem, where both AuDHDers and NTs have challenges taking each other's perspectives
- Masking can help with managing communication differences between AuDHDers & NTs
- Consequences associated with miscommunication are typically assigned to the AuDHDer in the dynamic, with us often being labelled as defiant, argumentative, bossy, etc.
- When you live in a society that does not understand & accept neurodivergence, it is less likely that you will have peers & adults in your life to bring your awareness to the possibility that you

may be AuDHD

- If you aren't exposed to AuDHDers' experiences, you may think that everyone tries as hard as you do to navigate social settings, sensory overwhelm, etc. leading to the sense that there must be a problem with you if you find life challenging, not something like a diagnosis that could explain your experiences

- For many high maskers, it can feel like your ability to be employed is reliant upon your ability to mask

- Limited societal understanding of AuDHD can mean that unmasked AuDHDers have a harder time finding accepting workplaces



Reflect on the parts of your mask that you're currently aware of.

What purpose might these parts of your mask be serving for you? Would your feelings about this part of your mask change if you didn't have to always "wear" it?

*Option to share your reflections time permitting

Visual Description: Light green background with a textbox in the centre. There is an image of a person hold two masks on the left of the slide. The reflection prompt reads "Reflect on the parts of your mask that you're currently aware of. What purpose might these parts of your mask be serving for you? Would your feelings about this part of your mask change if you didn't have to always "wear" it?"

Reflect on the parts of your mask that you're currently aware of.

What purpose might these parts of your mask be serving for you? Would your feelings about this part of your mask change if you didn't have to always "wear" it?

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Visual Description: Light purple background with the reflection prompt from the previous slide across the top, and 3 textboxes from the slide on ways that people mask. On the right of the slide is an image of a person holding 2 masks. The reflection prompt reads "Reflect on the parts of your mask that you're currently aware of. What purpose might these parts of your mask be serving for you? Would your feelings about this part of your mask change if you didn't have to always "wear" it?"

Ian anecdote

"All too often, the difference between who gets perceived as an innocent, shy Autistic and who gets viewed as creepy, awkward, and obviously disabled is more a function of things like race, gender, body size than it is any innate difference in personality or behavior." ~Price (2022)



Visual Description: Light yellow background with a textbox in the centre. In the bottom left, there is an image of two people with one arm around each other, and their other arm holding a heart together.



"While the need to mask is based on ableist views... it also protects high-maskers from physical violence, institutionalisation, poverty, and loneliness." ~Price (2022)

Masking & Safety & Barriers to Unmasking

- Code switching & masking
- Race & racism in relation to diagnostic criteria
- Impacts of gendered assumptions
- Interactions with law enforcement
- Potential impacts on employability
 - Limitations of the available financial supports
- Impacts on the ability to meet your needs and those you care for
- Cultural and/or religious beliefs surrounding mental health
- Stigma surrounding fat bodies
- Impacts of limited social support systems

National Autistic Society, n.d.; Price, 2022

Visual Description: Light blue background with an image on the left of an individual sitting with their knees bent, & their head down in a bird cage. Underneath the image is a quote that reads "While the need to mask is based on ableist views... it also protects high-maskers from physical violence, institutionalisation, poverty, and loneliness (Price, 2022)." There is a textbox on the right of the slide.

Ian anecdote

Notes:

- It is essential consider the role that situational & prolonged masking plays in safety, & the role that privileges plays in when, where, & how someone can unmask

Code Switching & Unmasking:

- Code switching: effortful process of signalling you "belong" in a space, and of knowing when to hide the sides of yourself that the majority will be oppressive towards (Price, 2022)

- Code switching is commonly experienced by members of the BIPOC and queer communities

- For multiply marginalised people, there are added risks associated with unmasking as they also have to consider whether it is safe and possible for them to stop code switching

Race & Racism:

- Impacts of diagnosis criteria originating out of a wealthy, white worldview that prioritised white male experiences (Price, 2022)--> tendency for cultures that were more emotionally expressive or less filtered to be pathologised as irrational, oversexualised, and aggressive

- Diagnostic criteria often fail to consider differences in normative behaviours across cultures
- Increased likelihood for BIPOC individuals to be given highly stigmatising diagnoses, regardless of whether these are the most accurate diagnosis for them
- "Broken arm" metaphor--> BIPOC individuals are more regularly denied access to care due to practitioners "not specialising in their community"

Gendered Assumptions:

- White neurodivergent men are often seen as the "tortured genius" when they are aloof, whereas a woman or person of colour is seen as being obstinate for not being emotionally expressive

Law Enforcement:

- It is essential to consider the role the difference in how BIPOC and visibly queer people are responded to by law enforcement as compared to cis-het, white peers
- An unmasked Autistic white boy who has a meltdown in front of a police officer is substantially more likely to
- > Price, 2022 Eyad Hallaq (Palestinian autistic man with an intellectual disability was shot in 2020 when they could not follow directives from the Israeli police)

Employability:

- Need to work to live, or get financial aid, and not every person has access to financial aid
- Potential worries about how employers will perceive you if you are unmasked at work
- Financial aid doesn't increase with the amount of needs you have

Caring for Yourself and Others:

- Many folx experience skill-regression (difficulties accessing skills they relied on while they were in fight or flight), meaning they need to relearn how to take care of their needs and those of their loved ones
- Need to feel safe to be able to unmask, and to feel safe, you need to know your needs will be met
- Can mean relying on support from others to meet your needs while you relearn skills, and not all folx have access to this kind of support

Cultural/Religious Beliefs:

- Mental health is experienced with an individual's cultural context
- Some cultures and religions welcome individuals to explore their mental health, and others carry a significant amount of stigma and shame
- Collectivistic belief systems often struggle with the individual prioritisation that goes into an individual exploring their mental health needs
- Some AuDHDers in collectivistic societies thrive as a result of belief systems that prioritise supporting one another, and honouring the different roles we're each meant to play
- Some AuDHDers in individualistic societies may suffer as a result of the emphasis on individual

responsibility for meeting your needs, and the de-emphasis on seeking community-based support

Fat Bodies:

- Stigma related to fat bodies can lead to shame or stigma where individuals are told that if they unmask and happen to connect with more sedentary behaviours like reading or playing video games, this somehow makes them responsible for being fat (and applies the assumption that being fat is bad)
- Stigma surrounding fat bodies often makes it challenging to receive adequate medical care due to the tendency for doctors to assume that a person's struggling must be due to their weight, which could lead to not investigating AuDHD as a contributor to challenges with motivation, task initiation, socialisation, etc.

Support Systems:

- Not all people have access to community and support to the same degree (e.g., queer, immigrants, socioeconomic status, etc.)

"Privilege is not something we experience, it is what we do not experience" - Rae Madge

ADHD Burnout

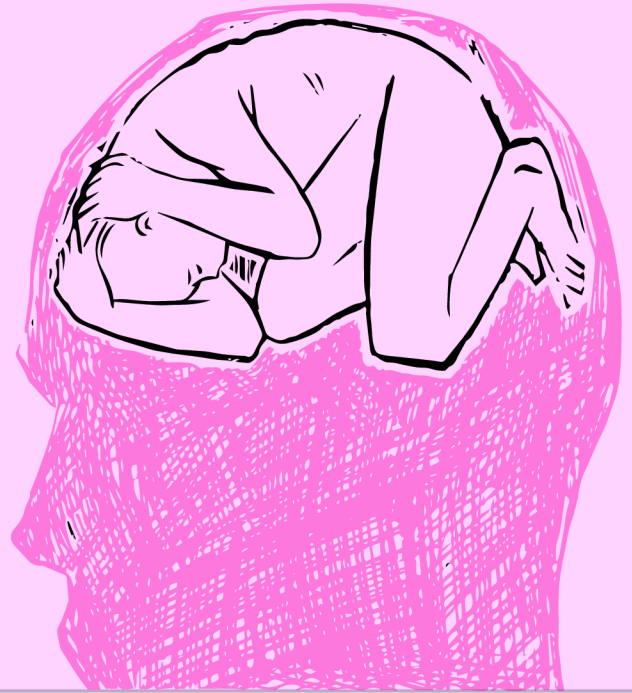
- State of physical, mental, & emotional exhaustion along with feelings of overwhelming fatigue, reduced productivity, & a sense of hopelessness or despair
- Caused by long-term, unmanaged ADHD symptoms and stressors

Neff, 2022

Autistic Burnout

- State of long term (3+ months) of exhaustion, loss of functioning, & reduced tolerance for stimulus
- Results from chronic stress & mismatch between expectations & abilities without adequate accommodations and supports

Raymaker, 2022



Visual Description: Light pink background with two textboxes on the left. Pink image of an individual curled up in a ball while holding their head, set in the place where a brain would go on the silhouette of a person's head.

Ian anecdote

Notes:

ADHD Burnout:

- Physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion
- Reduced productivity, overwhelming fatigue, hopelessness, and despair
- Results from unmanaged ADHD symptoms and associated stressors

Autistic Burnout:

- 3+ months of exhaustion, loss of functioning, and reduced tolerance for stimulus
 - Results from chronic stress and a mismatch between expectations and abilities in an environment where you are not accommodated or supported appropriately
- Now imagine that you also have to constantly advocate for your identity and/or sexuality.

Why would I want to unmask?

Common Consequences of Prolonged Masking:

- Increased likelihood of meltdowns/shutdowns
- Exhaustion & AuDHD burnout
- Increased likelihood of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, & self-injury
- Increased risk of disordered eating & substance use issues
- Dissociation & detachment
- Feelings of isolation & loneliness
- Low self esteem
- Loss of personal identity
- Increased risk of PTSD & C-PTSD

Common Benefits of Unmasking:

- Sense of purpose
- Stronger sense of self and improved self-esteem
- More authentic relationships
- Ability to advocate for your needs
- Fostering more sustainable ways of navigating the world
- Access to accommodations
- Improved overall mental health outcomes



"Masking perpetuates the idea that the only disabled lives worth living are those who can be highly productive" ~Price (2022)

Autism.org.uk, N.D.; Price, 2022

Visual Description: Light green background, with a textbox on the right of the screen. In the bottom left corner, there is an image of an individual hugging their knees on the ground with a blue circle over their head, while a large hand reaches through an open door toward the person.

Notes:

Common Consequences of Prolonged Masking:

- Increased likelihood of meltdowns/shutdowns
- Exhaustion & AuDHD burnout
- Increased likelihood of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, & self-injury
- Increased risk of disordered eating & substance use issues
- Dissociation & detachment
- Feelings of isolation & loneliness
- Low self esteem
- Loss of personal identity
- Increased risk of PTSD & C-PTSD
- In summary: While situational masking may be necessary at times to protect your safety, prolonged masking asks our bodies, brains, and hearts to operate in ways they are not built to, and that can have drastic consequences

Common Benefits of Unmasking:

- Sense of purpose as you connect with yourself and your interests
- Stronger sense of self and improved self-esteem
- More authentic relationships--> people get to know you, not your mask

- Ability to advocate for your needs
- Fostering more sustainable ways of navigating the world
- Access to accommodations
- Improved overall mental health outcomes
- In summary: Essentially, you see the consequences of prolonged masking start to subside, and you begin to thrive in ways you potentially never have been able to before

Part 2:
Ok, but how
do I unmask?



Visual description: Light yellow background with a textbox on the left of the screen. On the right, there is an image of a person looking out through a large doorway that appears to have a galaxy on the other side.



Visual Description: Light purple background with a textbox on the right. On the left, there is an image of someone hugging their reflection, with text "I <3 myself" written on the mirror above their reflection.

Notes:

- Disability is not a dirty word or a bad thing
- Disability does not mean you are incapable
- Disability acknowledges the added effort and capacity required to accomplish the things you have, and underscores the importance of receiving support and accommodation

Learning About AuDHD & Masking

- Source of validation & normalisation
- Increased awareness of ways you may be masking
- Feeling of “permission” to explore accommodations & support
- Fosters a sense of community & connection
- Benefits of accessing community held knowledge & evidence-based findings
- Realising that you don't have to constantly overextend may begin the process of “organically” un-masking



Visual Description: Light blue background with a textbox on the left. On the right, there is an image of a flashlight casting a shadow on the silhouette of a person, and the shadow being cast is in the form of a question mark.

Ian anecdote

Notes:

Source of Validation & Normalisation:

- There is nothing wrong with you, and you aren't lazy
- You're disabled and living in a world that was built for other brains, so it makes sense that things have been hard

Increased Awareness of Masking:

- To unmask, you need to know what masking is, and how you are doing it
- Learning about how others mask and unmask can lead to self reflection on ways that you mask and unmask

Feeling of “Permission” to Explore Accommodations & Support

- You are not taking anything from anybody else
- You deserve to be supported, just as much as anyone else

Community & Connection:

- Connecting with other AuDHDers can lead to the sharing of ideas, companionship, compassion,

and more

Accessing Community Held Knowledge & Evidence-Based Findings:

- Research is great when it is led by us, for us, with our dignity and needs as the priorities
- Community members have been learning how to survive and thrive with AuDHD for decades (centuries more realistically), so the community has a significant amount to share (especially when affirming research is not available)

You Don't Have to Constantly Overextend:

- May begin the process of “organically” un-masking as your brain, heart, and body realise that it is okay to slow down
- Ability to start to assess what your actual capacity is, not just what you can accomplish when you're in fight or flight



Visual Description: Light yellow background with a textbox on the right. On the left, there is an image of a person looking in a mirror that is full of flowers.

Ian anecdote regarding the positive affirmation

Notes:

- Fostering self compassion can be challenging if you're not used to showing yourself kindness, and especially when you're used to receiving criticism from others
- AuDHDers are used to receiving constant feedback and correction (e.g., sit still, pay attention, look at me, etc.) that can make it challenging to accept ourselves
- We deserve love, acceptance, and compassion as much as any other person

Internalised Ableism:

- Who's voice/words do you hear when you start to criticise yourself?
- Would you say the same thing to another disabled person?
- What informed this belief?

Empowering & Validating Language:

- We are allowed to rewrite our story by using language that honours our neurodiversity, rather than critiquing it
- Means acknowledging the important need these traits meet for you
- "Bossy" □ "Self-Assured"
- "Blunt" □ "Direct"

- “Sensitive” □ “Perceptive”

Neurodivergent & Queer Positive Affirmations:

- If you don't connect with standard positive affirmations, it is okay to write your own (or find them online) to match your lived experience and your needs for love and support
- “I do not have to earn care, the right to have needs, or support”
- “I choose what my identity means to me”

What are you grateful that
your AuDHD and/or
queerness has given you?

*Option to share your reflections time
permitting



Visual Description: Light pink background with a textbox on the left. On the right, there is an image of a person jumping up with their hands in the air, while surrounded by yellow droplets bursting out around them.

Notes:

- For many of us, there are experiences that we never would have had were it not for our AuDHD and queerness, and it is important to show gratitude to ourselves for these moments where we were gifted something by our uniqueness/divergence



Visual Description: Light green background with a textbox in the center. Surrounding this are the following paired images: person wrapped in a blanket and a person in a sensory swing; person chewing gum and person using chewlery; person tapping on a table and a person flapping their hands; person tapping their foot and a person rocking in their chair.

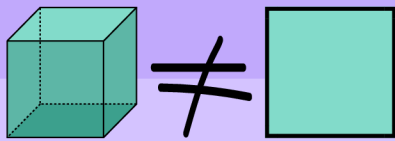
Notes:

- Often, there are small things we have been doing to support our sensory and regulation needs, whether we previously realised it, or not
- For highly masked folx, these coping skills often start out with behaviours that are considered more "socially acceptable" by the dominant neurotype
- We can start to understand our more unmasked stims by reflecting on what our masked stims may look like:
 - Deep pressure from a blanket--> sensory hammock/swing
 - Chewing gum--> chewlery
 - Tapping your fingers on your desk--> hand flapping
 - Tapping your foot--> rocking in your chair
- Important to reflect on how the ways you meet your needs through stimming may vary based on what is possible in the environment, safety factors, the needs of others in the space, and more
- Important to explore options for harm reduction if a particular stim is causing harm to yourself,

someone else, an animal, or your space/things

Finding Your People

- Ways to find people to connect with
 - Start with an activity
 - Start with a group
 - Make your own space
- Exploring online communities
- Looking more closely at folk already in your network
- Nurturing relationships with strong allies for neurodivergent & queer folk



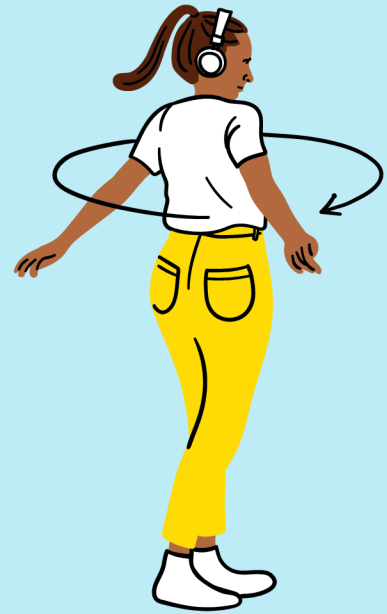
Visual Description: Light purple background with a textbox on the left. On the right, there is an image of three people hugging. At the bottom, there is an image of a cube, an equals not sign, and a square.

Notes:

- Finding your people can play a significant role in unmasking
- Ways to find people to connect with include: signing up for an activity you enjoy (people like you will have similar interests); join a group like a support group or social group; if you don't see a space that fits your needs, see if you (potentially with the help of others) can create the space you want to be in!
- Connecting with other AuDHDers and queer folk online can provide you with access to information, help you feel more seen; see diverse representations of neurodiversity; connect with community knowledge like strategies; find validation and normalisation; and more
- Often, neurodivergent and queer people tend to gather together- whether or not we were aware of these parts of our identity when we formed these relationships
- Furthermore, it's entirely likely that you will already have found some folk who are strong allies of the AuDHD and queer community who will be ready and willing to receive your newly understood identity with love and support

Embracing Autistic Joy

- “Autistic joy is the sense of elation or euphoria unique to autistic people, typically experienced when engaging in special interests and realized with stimming” (O'Malley-Knudson, 2024)
 - Does not have a NT equivalent
- Accepting Autistic joy is an act of radical self-acceptance & resistance
- Common triggers for Autistic Joy (Katy, 2023):
 - Connecting deeply with special interests
 - Info-dumping
 - Discovering new sensory joys
 - New hyperfixations
 - Connecting with other Autistics
 - Building collections



Visual Description: Light blue background with a textbox on the left. On the right, there is an image of a person wearing headphones while spinning in circles.

Ian anecdote

Notes:

- Autistic joy is an intense form of elation or euphoria that is unique to Autistics that is often triggered by special interests, and presents through stimming
- There is no neurotypical equivalent for Autistic joy--> this doesn't mean NTs don't experience joy, this type of joy is just unique to Autistics due to unique differences in our brain development
- Embracing Autistic joy is an act of radical self-acceptance and joy--> challenges the stereotype that our disability is something that only shows itself as distress
- Common triggers for Autistic joy include: Connecting deeply with special interests; Info-dumping; discovering new sensory joys; new hyperfixations; connecting with other Autistics; building collections; and more

Write or draw while reflecting on an experience where you felt truly accepted for who you are. If no memory comes to mind, imagine what this might feel like.

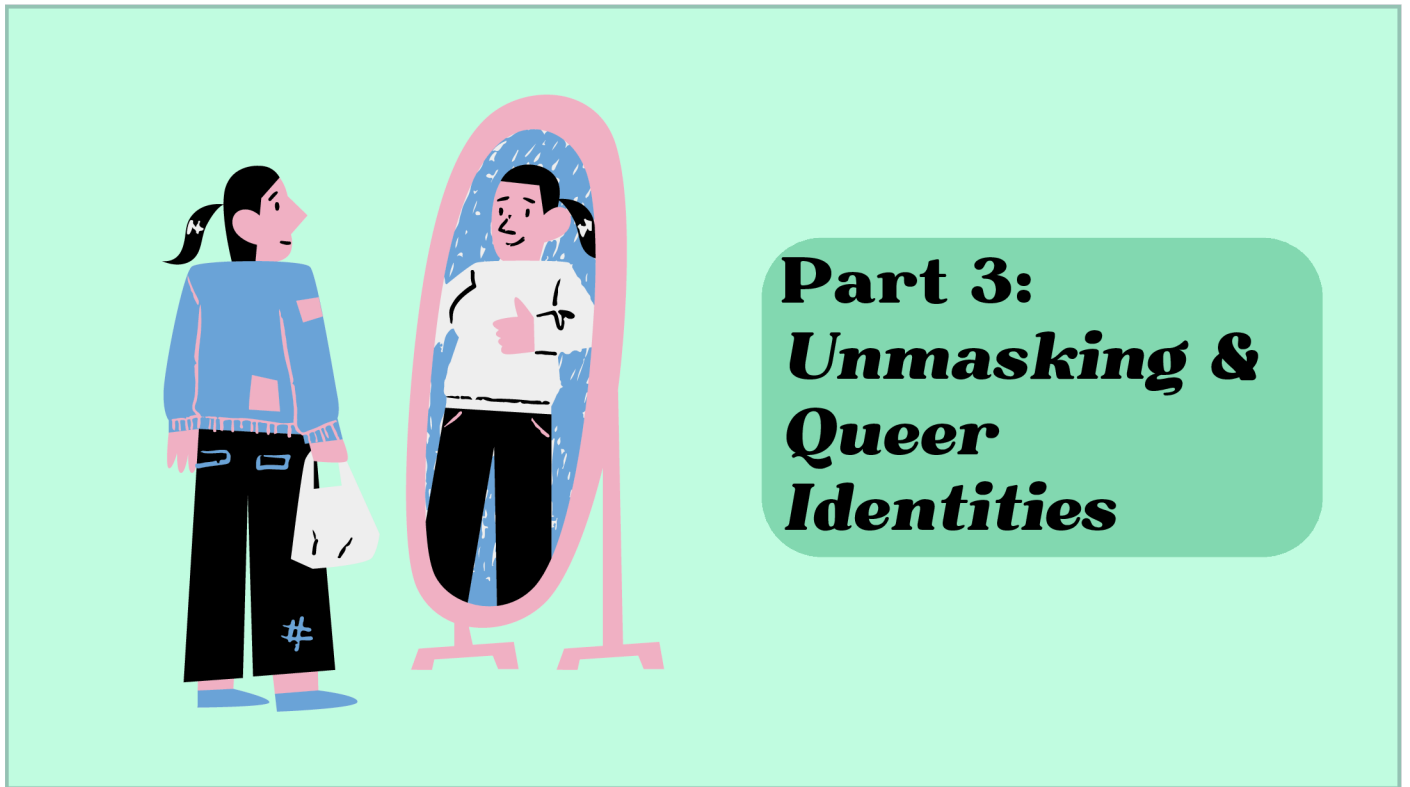
Consider what thoughts, emotions, and/or physical feelings come up when you look at what you made.

*Option to share your reflections time permitting



Visual Description: Light yellow background with a textbox on the left. On the right, there is an image of a person sitting on the ground, wearing headphones, and drawing. The person has a prosthetic leg. The prompt on the screen says "Write or draw while reflecting on an experience where you felt truly accepted for who you are. If no memory comes to mind, imagine what this might feel like. Consider what thoughts, emotions, and/or physical feelings come up when you look at what you made."

*Option to share your reflections time permitting



Visual Description: Light green background with a textbox on the right. On the left, there is an image of a transgender individual looking at themselves in the mirror where their reflection represents their affirmed identity who is giving them a thumbs up.



How Do Masking & Queerness Interact?

Learning cis-heteronormative worldviews as part of masking can lead to:

- Having a limited understanding of what romantic & sexual attraction are can lead to not realising queer sexualities are an option
 - Impacts of assuming that everyone experiences romantic/sexual attraction
- Lack of understanding that gender is something you feel, not something you are assigned
 - If you don't realise others "feel" like their gender, it may mean not realising that you DON'T "feel" like the gendered label you were assigned
- Viewing queerness as something 1-dimensional that presents in limited (stereotyped) ways that may or may not align with your experience



Visual Description: Light purple background with a textbox in the center. Surrounding this are images of people representing diverse identities with heads behind them. These include: person wearing the asexual flag; polyamorous and transgender triad; masc and femme individual each with a child on their shoulders; femme person in a hijab kissing a masc individual with pink hair who is wearing a shirt that says "still bi".

Notes:

- If you have grown up surrounded by cis-het people, watching media that depicts cis-het relationships, being taught history where everyone is assumed to be cis-het, it is entirely possible that you may not have encountered diverse representation of romantic and sexual attraction
- For literal, rigid thinkers, this could lead to not realising that queer sexualities are an option
- If you struggle to take the perspective of others, you may assume that everyone feels similarly to you--> if you don't intrinsically experience heterosexual romantic and sexual attraction which leads to you "choosing" to be with someone even if you aren't attracted to them, you may assume that everyone else's mind follows the same thought process
- If you are never taught that gender is something you "feel", not something you're assigned, you may not realise that other people "feel" like their gender
- It is possible that you're performing your gender because you've been told to, and gendered norms have become part of your mask, rather than expressing the gender that aligns with your internal sense of gender
- For many rigid and literal thinkers, you may not realise that you've been thinking of queerness as

something 1-dimensional that only shows up in stereotyped ways

- Can lead to thinking you must not be queer if your experiences don't perfectly map onto stereotyped portrayals of queerness (e.g., flamboyant gay, butch lesbian, hyper-femme trans woman, etc.)

Neuroqueering

Inyur-o-kwir-ing; verb

1. Queering (subverting, defying, disrupting, liberating oneself from) neuronormativity (N) and cis-heteronormativity (CH) simultaneously; referring to the practices associated with these goals



Visual Description: Light pink background with a textbox in the top left corner. On the right, there is an image of a diverse group of queer individuals surrounded by speech bubbles.

Notes:

- "Neuroqueer" was collaboratively coined by Dr. Nick Walker, Athena Lynn Michaels-Dillon, and Dr. Remi Yergeau

- Neuroqueering is "queering (subverting, defying, disrupting, liberating oneself from) neuronormativity and heteronormativity simultaneously; referring to the practices associated with these goals".

- Neuroqueering is a verb, or action word, that is embodied by the ways that some folk navigate the world

- Some folk have come to resonate with "neuroqueer" as an identity term that essentially means they see their gender and neurodivergence as being inseparably interconnected--> they navigate the world in a way that is inherently informed by both their AuDHD and queerness

- Another similar term that some folk resonate with is "Autgender"

- There are a variety of ways to actively engage in neuroqueering which include: embracing clothing and personal styling that embraces both AuDHD and queerness (e.g., gender affirming

clothing that also meets your sensory needs); making art that represents AuDHD and queer stories; challenging society's cis-hetero, and neuronormative expectations (e.g., asking for direct and clear communication regarding pronouns and affirmed names); and more (see the speech bubbles)



Embracing Queer Joy

- Queer joy is the happiness & pleasure we can find in expressing ourselves authentically (It Gets Better Canada, n.d.); moments where we can embrace a feeling of freedom & joy
 - An act of resistance to societal conventions around gender, sexuality, & gender expression
- Reclaiming space, visibility, autonomy, & agency

*Examples in following slides

Visual Description: Light blue background with a textbox on the right. On the left, there is an image of a femme presenting trans person who is shaving their face.

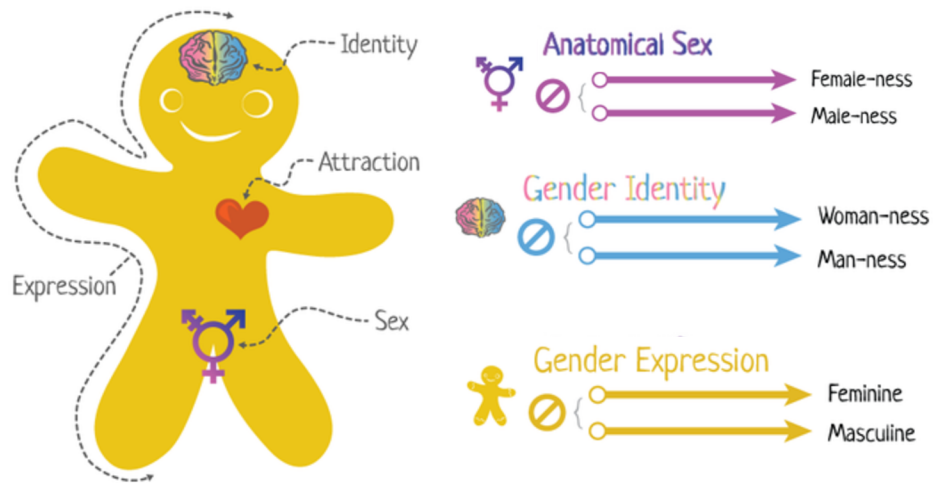
Ian

Notes:

- Queer joy is the happiness & pleasure we can find in expressing ourselves authentically which includes moments where we can embrace a feeling of freedom & joy
- Act of resistance to societal conventions around gender, sexuality, & gender expression
- Reclaiming space, visibility, autonomy, & agency
- Examples of queer joy will be provided on later slides

Gender & Gender Expression

The Genderbread Person v3.2 by its pronounced METROsexual.com



Killerman, n.d.

Visual Description: Light purple background with a textbox on the left. On the right, there is an image of the genderbread person, which is a gingerbread person form with a brain laid on the head, a heart on their chest, and a symbol representing feminine, masculine, and intersexuality over the crotch of the figure. There are spectrums representing the range of anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender expression presentations that are explained by this image.

Ian

Notes:

Anatomical sex:

-Primary and secondary sex characteristics, hormones, chromosomes. AMAB, AFAB, intersex. Spectrums versus boxes.

Gender identity:

-Bodies are complex and varied, brains are even more so. Internal sense of self. Spectrums vs boxes. Cisgender, transgender, non-binary.

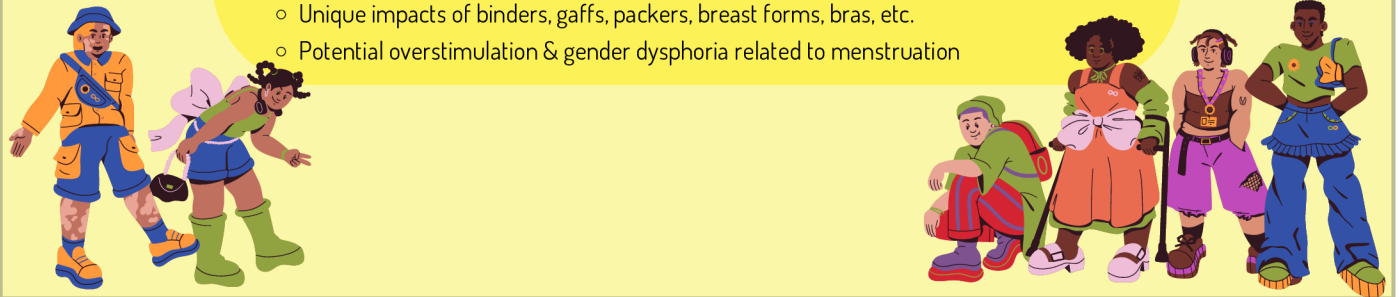
-Floating brain exercise

Gender expression:

-How you outwardly express yourself to the world, through clothes, accessories, hair, makeup, hobbies, interests, how we sit and walk. E.g. A man can wear a dress and still be a man, a woman can wear pants and still be a woman, non-binary people can wear whatever and still be non-binary.

Unmasking & Gender

- Stepping outside of binary gender boxes, wearing whatever you want
 - Cisgender people can also explore what gender expression feels affirming
- Changing names/pronouns & associated impacts:
 - Fear of people not being open & accepting benefits when people accept & fully see you
 - Education & advocacy work (on top of AuDHD needs)
 - Impacts of adjusting to change
 - Accidentally misgendering/deadnaming yourself
 - Imposter syndrome
 - Fears of inconveniencing others
- Balancing sensory needs with aesthetic choices:
 - Choosing clothing, makeup, hair, etc.
 - Unique impacts of binders, gaffs, packers, breast forms, bras, etc.
 - Potential overstimulation & gender dysphoria related to menstruation



Visual Description: Light yellow background with a textbox in the centre. At the bottom of the screen, there are 2 groups of diverse individuals showing a wide range of gender expressions standing in groups.

Ian

Notes:

- Embrace wearing what makes you feel good, not what you've been told you should wear
- Cisgender people can also explore what gender expression feels affirming
- Important to consider the impacts that changing names/pronouns can have:
 - There may be a fear of people not being open & accepting can lead to challenges with coming out, but there are also significant benefits when people accept & fully see you
 - Education & advocacy work (on top of AuDHD needs) can be significantly capacity and time demanding
 - For AuDHDers especially, it can be challenging to adjust to change, even when these changes are overall positive
 - It's natural that you may accidentally misgender/deadname yourself
 - Some folx may experience imposter syndrome where they worry that they are not "trans enough"
- Fears of inconveniencing others by asking them to use your affirmed name/pronouns
- AuDHDers often need to balance decisions about the aesthetics of their clothes/fashion with decisions about how best to meet their sensory needs

- Things that may seem like aesthetic decisions to others (e.g., clothing fit, layers, fabric, etc.), are also sensory decisions for AuDHDers due to the need to be able to feel regulated in your clothing
- Choices surrounding hairstyles and makeup also need to factor in sensory needs sensations like hair touching your face, or feeling like you cannot touch your face (for fear of messing up your makeup) can contribute to sensory overstimulation
- Binders, gaffs, packers, breast forms, bras, and other gender affirming attire is often essential for addressing gender dysphoria (including for cis-women who have had mastectomies), yet these garments also add sensory input that has to be considered
- For those who menstruate, the menses introduces a significant amount of sensory input between menstrual products, the sensations involved in menstruating
- Menstruation involves the forced performance of femininity which can be dysphoric for some non-binary, transgender, Two Spirit, and gender expansive people

Reflect on your relationship with your gender expression.

How might your experience with your gender expression be informed/influenced by societal expectations?





Are there ways you would change your gender expression if you were not burdened by societal norms?

*Option to share your reflections time permitting



Visual Description: Light green background with a textbox on the left. On the right, there is an image of a masc individual wearing a binder made of plantlife. The prompt on the slide reads "Reflect on your relationship with your gender expression. How might your experience with your gender expression be informed/influenced by societal expectations? Are there ways you would change your gender expression if you were not burdened by societal norms?"

*Option to share your reflections time permitting

Unmasking Sexuality & Relationships

- Cis-heteronormative worldviews can inform the roles we fill in relationships
 - Do you enjoy cooking, or were you given the messaging that femmes cook?
 - Does cooking feel affirming **because** it is femme coded?
 - Are you naturally stoic, or were you taught that mascs are the emotional “rock” of the family unit?
 - Does emotional stoicism feel affirming **because** it is masc coded?
 - Do you want kids, or did you learn that marriage & kids are markers of success and/or contributing to your family?
 - Does having kids feel empowering **because** you are doing this in a queer way?
- Double empathy problem & communication differences
- Impacts of Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD) on feelings of security & fears associated with break ups
- Importance of reflecting on ways that you mask with partner(s), & how this can impact your ability to form close relationships

Visual Description: Light blue background with a textbox in the centre. Surrounding this are images of people representing diverse relationship dynamics.

Ian anecdote

Notes:

- Important to consider the ways that cis-heteronormative worldviews inform the roles we fill in relationships

-- Many people who are socialised as women are taught to embrace cooking as part of their societal role, so it is important to ask yourself whether you actually enjoy cooking, and whether it is actually accessible for you

-- Most people socialised as men are taught their emotions are something that should be hidden, lest they be belittled, so it is important to reflect on whether this is actually serving you, and whether you want to find ways to express yourself

-- For many, we're taught that part of growing up is getting married and having kids, but these things are all technically optional--> it's okay to choose to marry or not, and to have kids or not

- The double empathy problems refers to a theory of Autism that proposes that idea that communication difficulties that happen between NTs and Autistic are NOT because Autistics are somehow bad communicators--> BOTH NTs and Autistics have a hard time taking each other's perspective to be able to communicate effectively with each other

- To support effective communication within mixed NT and neurodivergent relationships, it is important for BOTH parties to learn how to understand each other better, and how best to

accommodate each others' needs in conversation

- Many AuDHDers experience Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria which is a heightened sensitivity to both actual rejection (e.g., someone breaking up with you) and perceived rejection (e.g., your partner sighing, which you then read as them being upset)
- RSD can leave many AuDHDers paralysed by a constant fear that they will do something that leads to the end of their relationships
- Given that queer dating circles are smaller than cis-het dating circles, RSD can feel all the more intense because it feels like your chances of finding another partner are smaller
- Given that masking is often automatic and unconscious, you may not realise that you are masking with your partner(s)
- Part of forming healthy, connected relationships is finding ways to build the comfort to let down your mask and show up more authentically in relationships, or finding new relationships if your partner(s) do not make you feel safe to unmask around them

HOW TO SPEAK YOUR PARTNER'S ND LOVE LANGUAGE

@Dr.LizListens

Neurodivergent Love Language	Love Language Type	What to say	Things to Avoid	Actions to Take
 Info Dumping	Words of Affirmation	"Can I nerd out about Pokemon with you?"	Ignore, pretend to listen, criticize the topic	Actively listen, ask questions, remember their passions
 Deep Pressure	Physical Touch	"Can I get a big hug from you?"	No consent, rejecting, half-hearted action	Ask for consent, offer sensory soothing when they appear stressed
 Penguin Pebbling	Receiving Gifts	"I saw this meme and thought of you!"	Not responding, dismissing, annoyance	Thank them for sharing, share weird stuff with them
 Parallel Play	Quality Time	"Can we be in the same room and do different activities we enjoy?"	Excessive talking or interruptions, rejecting bid to connect	Honor sensory needs, social batteries, & personal space Use headphones
 Support Swapping	Acts of Service	"Can you ask me if I'm hungry when you notice you're hungry?"	Nagging, infantilizing, refusing to assist	Gentle reminders, doing chores/tasks together

Dr. Liz Listens, 2024

Visual Description: Light purple background with a chart in the centre that summarises different neurodivergent love languages and examples of these. On both sides, there are visual representations of the love languages including: a parent helping a child when they are hungry; two kids engaging in parallel play while one draws and the other is on a device; 3 adults engaged in parallel play at a table where one is listening to music, one is on a computer, and one is reading; an image of 2 people hugging; someone picking a flower with the silhouettes of 2 people in the background; and an image of one person talking and smiling while sharing with 2 other people.

Notes:

- AuDHDers often have unique ways of expressing and hoping to receive love and affection from others
- Some common AuDHD love languages are info dumping, deep pressure, penguin pebbling, parallel play, and support swapping



Reflect on how cis-heteronormative worldviews have influenced the roles you fill in relationships.

How might the roles you fill in relationships change if they were based on your needs and strengths, rather than on societal expectations?

*Option to share reflections with time permitting

Visual Description: Light yellow background with a textbox on the right. On the left, there is an image of two femme presenting individuals holding their child. The prompt on the slide reads "Reflect on how cis-heteronormative worldviews have influenced the roles you fill in relationships. How might the roles you fill in relationships change if they were based on your needs and strengths, rather than on societal expectations?"

*Option to share reflections with time permitting

Content Warning

On the next slide, we will be discussing **physical intimacy and sex** in the context of relationships.



Visual Description: Light pink background with a textbox on the left. On the right, there is an image of a rainbow that is small at the bottom of the page and gets wider toward the top of the page. In the bottom left, there is a warning symbol. Text reads "Content Warning: On the next slide, we will be discussing physical intimacy and sex in the context of relationships."

**Explanation to be provided by Terry

Dating & Physical Intimacy

AuDHD Considerations

(Young & Cocallis, 2023)

- Initiating & maintaining relationships
- Tendency toward routine, repetitive behaviours
- Hyper & hyposensitivity to physical contact
- Masking & unmasking
- Distractibility
- Increased risk of being taken advantage of
 - Learning the difference between wanting something, and wanting to want something (Price, 2022)



Queer Considerations

- Higher proportion of AuDHD individuals
- Societal stigma and bias
 - Increasingly hostile legislation
- Code switching
- Need to communicate identity factors
- Specific benefits of some queer relationship dynamics for AuDHD folx
 - E.g., Stone tops & pillow princesses



Visual Description: Light green background with two textboxes on the left. On the right, there is an image of two people dancing, and one of them is wearing a jacket with the trans flag on the back. In the bottom left, there is a sticker that shows a ghost and says "not all disabilities are visible".

Notes:

- For those with ADHD and/or Autism who are queer, there are several important ways their identity impacts dating, including physical intimacy and sex

AuDHD Considerations:

- Social differences central to AuDHD may contribute to unique approaches to and/or challenges with initiating romantic relationships and sexual interactions

- The tendency toward repetitive and restrictive behaviours plays a significant role in navigating the day to day dynamics of relationships including sharing a space, going for meals, sexual intimacy, building bedtime routines, and more

- People with hypersensitivity to touch may experience physical intimacy as unpleasant
- Those with hyposensitivity to physical touch may experience increased challenges becoming physically aroused and/or reaching orgasm

- It is often quite challenging to unmask upon initially meeting someone you're dating

- Once you unmask as you become more comfortable with a partner(s), your behaviours may change, which may be positively or negatively received
- Distractibility that occurs when talking to a partner, or being physically intimate, may leave the partner feeling ignored or disconnected--> With proper education and compassion, this can be managed, but can be especially challenging to navigate at the beginning of a relationship
- Zoning out during an important conversation may make you feel guilty or bad, and can lead to frustration when later trying to recall important details
- AuDHDers are at an increased risk of being taken advantage of due to increased rates of impulsivity, and increased challenges understanding unspoken motives of others
- Due to RSD, many AuDHDers may be more likely to act in a way that pleases a partner, even if it makes them uncomfortable
- Essential to learn the difference between wanting something, and wanting to want something

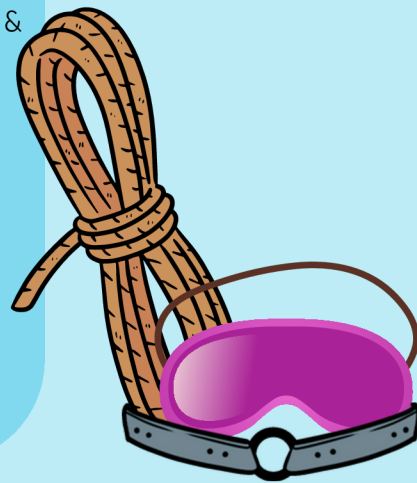
Queer Considerations:

- Higher proportion of AuDHDers in the queer community which means that queer individuals in the dating pool are more likely to be informed on neurodivergence, and are therefore more likely to provide safe and supportive environments for AuDHDers
- Due to societal stigma and biases, individuals who are visibly queer are more likely to feel unsafe going out in public to meet new partners or with an existing partner, making it even more necessary to meet partners in established safe spaces
- This can create a feeling of safety due to having a community around, but it can also prove challenging for AuDHDers to seek these spaces out if they are unfamiliar to them
- Code switching paired with AuDHD masking can make it challenging for folks to present authentically to prospective partners due to the felt need to keep yourself safe around new people and in new spaces
- When dating outside of heterosexual and cisgender circles, it becomes more important to be able to clearly articulate your gender identity and sexuality to potential partners which can prove challenging due to the complexities involved in communicating one's identity -- Especially challenging for AuDHDers with differences in communication styles from neurotypicals that may impact how each party interprets the information shared
- Some queer dynamics may be especially beneficial for AuDHDers given that relationship dynamics like stone tops & pillow princesses specifically honour roles in relationships that involve either only giving (stone tops) or receiving touch (pillow princesses), which can be highly compatible with common AuDHD sensory needs--> important to note that these are honoured roles and do not lead to judgement

Kink & Unmasking

There are many benefits of engaging with kink for AuDHDers:

- Practicing "safe sex" accommodated to common AuDHD needs:
 - Benefits of clear communication & explicit consent (Pearson & Hodgetts, 2024)
- Exploration of diverse sensory experiences
 - Alignment with seeking sensory joy & meeting sensory avoidant needs (Pearson & Hodgetts, 2024)
- Subverting neuronormativity & cis-heteronormativity
 - Collaboratively defining sexual dynamics based on individual needs & preferences (Pearson & Hodgetts, 2024)
- Many AuDHDers connect with BDSM due to the predictability and structure offered by having clearly defined roles, routines, and rituals (Pliskin, 2022)



Visual Description: Light blue background with a textbox on the left. On the right, there is an image depicting a variety of items commonly associated with kink including (e.g., clothing, sex toys, etc.).

Ian

Notes:

- It is worth noting that there is preliminary research into ways that kink/sexuality and AuDHD interact, so we're speaking to a snapshot of the emerging research in this area
- Minimal study into area of kink/sexuality and autism/neurodivergence
- Autistic males and sexuality are more studied than autistic females and sexuality

"Safe Sex":

- In this context, "safe sex" doesn't refer to the use of barriers, which is of course important, but rather to sex that feels safe on an emotional and nervous system level
- Most kink communities involve sexual dynamics that prioritise clear communication and explicit consent, that can help avoid potential issues that could otherwise arise from the double empathy problem

Sensory Experiences:

- Kink invites the exploration of a wide array of sensory experiences that can be tailored to hyper and hypo sensitivities, along with personal preferences

Subverting Neuronormativity & Cis-Heteronormativity:

- Having the flexibility to collaboratively define sexual dynamics means that folx can align their dynamics based on their preferences and needs, rather than on social expectations (e.g., femmes can be dominant, not just mascs; people of any identity may or may not enjoy penetrative sex acts, etc.)

Predictability:

- Clearly defined boundaries and roles can provide a sense of calm and confidence for AuDHDers, given that it removes a lot of the social guesswork that otherwise might be involved
- Predictable rituals and routines can help: accommodate challenges with transitioning into initiating intimacy; offer lead-in for folx who do not often experience arousal, yet still are sex-positive; among other dynamics

Content Warning Concluded

We are done discussing sex and physical intimacy, so I invite you to turn on your audio again if it was off.



Visual Description: Light pink background with a textbox on the left. On the right, there is an image of a rainbow that is large at the bottom of the page and gets smaller toward the top of the page. In the bottom left, there is a check mark symbol. Text reads "Content Warning Concluded: We are done discussing sex and physical intimacy, so I invite you to turn on your audio again if it was off."

Part 4: Next Steps



Visual Description: Light yellow background with a textbox on the left. On the right, there is an image of a person speaking into a phone with the text "sounds GAY, I'M IN!"



Visual Description: Light purple background with a text box in the centre. Surrounding this, there are stickers that say: "I take things literally"; "LGBTQ"; "I like having a routine"; "Please do not change my plans"; "Switching is hard"; "Please don't rearrange my things!"; "I like knowing what happens next"; "Please give me my space".

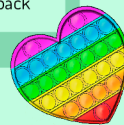
Notes:

- Communicating needs in advance or as they become relevant
- Expressing the ways you like to be addressed by others (e.g., greeted individually or in a group; affirmed names/pronouns, etc.)
- Collaboratively discussing how the needs of all people can be met in an interaction (e.g., if someone needs pre-planning, and another needs spontaneity, creative solutions should be explored)
- Asking details about a space/gathering (e.g., location, menu, guests, etc.) so you can prepare accordingly
- Knowing whether there are affirming bathrooms available is important
- Acknowledging that your needs will change with the circumstance, and as your self-knowledge develops



Advocating for Accommodations

Need Being Met	Environmental Accommodations	Personal Accommodations
Visual	Adjusting light levels& sources; reducing/adding visual input	Wearing sunglasses/hat/ hood; bringing things to look at
Auditory	Creating quiet spaces/hours, reducing noise, noise machines, allowing headphones/earplugs	Wearing headphones/earplugs, seeking out quiet spaces
Movement	Providing walking pads, wobble seats, fidgets	Bringing fidgets, engaging with stims, movement breaks
Identity Affirmation	Listing pronouns for all people, updating forms to use inclusive language, inclusive bathrooms	Wearing a pronoun pin, adding pronouns to your email signature, providing gentle corrections
Social Needs	Offering structured social gatherings, clearly defining breaks from socialising, providing direct instructions/feedback	Communicating your social battery, talking about topics you actually enjoy, asking for direct feedback



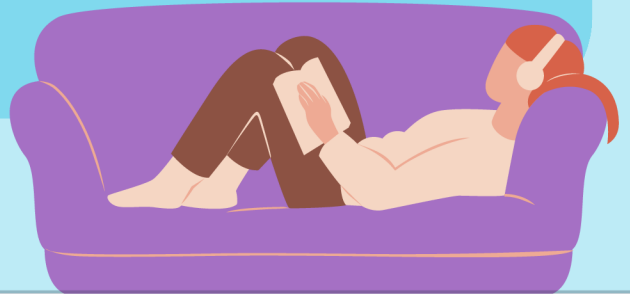
Visual Description: Light green background with a textbox in the centre. Surrounding this, there are: a heart with a banner that reads "they/them"; headphones with an infinity symbols and rainbow colours; a heart shaped fidget; rainbow heart sunglasses.

Notes:

- Asking for accommodations is a necessary part of unmasking, and it's important to remember- you deserve to be supported
- Depending on the level of control you have over an environment, and how comfortable you feel advocating for your needs, this can adjust the types of accommodations you might seek
- For example, if you have control over the environment or feel comfortable asking for others to help implement changes, you might meet your visual needs by adjusting light levels and source, or reducing/adding things to your visual environment
- If you have limited control over your environment, personal changes you could make are wearing sunglasses/hat/hood, or bringing things to look at

Self-Directed Resources

- **“Unmasking Autism”** by Dr. Devon Price (he/him)
 - Written by a trans and autistic author
 - Explores interactions between neurodivergence and queerness
- **“The Neurodivergent Friendly Workbook of DBT Skills”** by Sonny Jane Wise (they/them)
 - Written by a non-binary and AuDHD author
 - Workbook full of coping skills that intentionally account for neurodiverse needs
- **“Neuroqueer Heresies”** by Dr. Nick Walker (she/her)
 - Written by a neuroqueer author
 - Collection of essays exploring neuroqueerness
- Bonus Recommendation: Catieosaurus (she/they)



Visual Description: Light blue background with a textbox on the left. On the right, there is an image of a person wearing headphones and reading a book while laying down on a couch.

Notes:

“Unmasking Autism” by Dr. Devon Price (he/him):

- Written by a trans and autistic author
- Explores interactions between neurodivergence and queerness

“The Neurodivergent Friendly Workbook of DBT Skills” by Sonny Jane Wise (they/them):

- Written by a non-binary and AuDHD author
- Workbook full of coping skills that intentionally account for neurodiverse needs

“Neuroqueer Heresies” by Dr. Nick Walker (she/her):

- Written by a neuroqueer author
- Collection of essays exploring neuroqueerness

Bonus Recommendation: Catieosaurus (she/they)

- Educator on kin and sexuality related content for AuDHDers
- Short and long form content

Community Supports

• Queer resources:

- **Edmonton Two Spirit Society:** System navigation & access to healthcare; kinship, information & advocacy, etc.
- **Edmonton Pride Centre:** Support groups, pride library, affirming clothing, etc.
- **Fyrefly Institute:** Information & advocacy, youth camps, public education, etc.
 - Explores Indigenous experiences alongside broad 2SLGBTQIA+ identities
- **Skipping Stone:** Information & advocacy, support groups, medical support, etc.
- **Trans Wellness Initiative:** Information & Advocacy, research, etc.
- **Fitness Trans Formed:** Low to no cost Two Spirit, trans, & gender expansive fitness class led by trans & gender expansive, neurodivergent trainers

• ADHD Resources:

- **ADHD Edmonton:** Support groups, information & advocacy, etc.
- **Canadian ADHD Resource Alliance:** Information & advocacy, research, etc.

• Autism Resources:

- **Autism Edmonton:** Support groups, information & advocacy, system navigation, etc.
- **Centre for Autism Services Alberta:** Information & advocacy, skills programs, system navigation, etc.
- **AIDE Canada:** Online library of books, videos, and blogs on Autism



Visual Description: Light pink background with a textbox on the left. On the right, there is an image of 4 people playing a board game together.

Notes:

Queer resources:

- Edmonton Two Spirit Society: System navigation & access to healthcare; kinship, information & advocacy, etc.
- Edmonton Pride Centre: Support groups, pride library, affirming clothing, etc.
- Fyrefly Institute: Information & advocacy, youth camps, public education, etc.
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Autism Resources:

- Autism Edmonton: Support groups, information & advocacy, system navigation, etc.
- Centre for Autism Services Alberta: Information & advocacy, skills programs, system navigation,

etc.

- AIDE Canada: Online library of books, videos, and blogs on Autism

Questions?

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Visual Description: Light yellow background with a textbox in the center at the top of the page. Across the bottom, there are people holding signs that have positive affirmations that read: "You are enough"; "You matter"; "You deserve to take up space"; "You are who you were always meant to be"; "Your existence is valid"; "You are worthy of love as you are".

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