

Letter to the Editor

Role of collectivism in camouflaging behavior: a comparative look at autistic and non-autistic individuals

Sir,

In today's era, the pressure to adhere to societal norms and expectations is evident. This trend is markedly prominent in collectivist societies where collaborative harmony and uniformity has a significant impact on an individual's personality. It is hypothesized that collectivism will be a significant predictor of camouflaging behavior in autistic and non-autistic individuals.

Social camouflaging stems from autistic individuals adopting certain roles and behavior as a way on how to act in social settings.¹ Our topic explores how collectivism influences camouflaging behaviors within autistic and non-autistic individuals, highlighting the parallels and contrasts between their experiences.

Owing to the persistent stigma surrounding autistic individuals in some areas of the modern world, people with autism will substitute certain roles and behaviors for their unique personal characteristics in order to conform to the 'standard' that is set forth by society and culture. Autistic people often exhibit peculiarities in their social interactions and communication and tends to focus on certain hobbies and exhibit sensitivity to the sensory stimuli.²

Camouflaging is concerned with controlling one's behavior, that is, not expressing any features that would be outside of the 'societal norm'. A study of Chinese and American undergraduates revealed that the former, coming from a collectivist culture, demonstrated less attitudinal but more behavioral self-control than the latter. Second, it was discovered that individual-level individualism and collectivism linked adversely and positively with attitudinal self-control, respectively. Individual-level collectivism has also been associated to higher levels of behavioral self-control.³

Non-autistic people also camouflage their behavior. They do so by altering their opinion or values to adjust themselves according to societal norms. They often compromise their core values to somehow fit in the society. This social backdrop has a huge impact on how people camouflage. In another study on culture, community collectivism was examined using the social dynamic technique. The study focused on how community collectivism might influence societal evolution. Interventions aimed at changing individual attitudes and behaviors may not be effective in

collectivist societies because they prioritize the interests of the collective over the needs of the individual.⁴

Autistic people in collectivist societies face enormous pressure to comply. The overwhelming need to adjust might make it difficult to camouflage leading to high levels of anxiety and stress. At some instances they might feel obligated to hide their shortcomings to defend themselves against social criticism. Contrary to that non-autistic individuals may perceive it as a way of conforming to social standards rather than concealing a part of their identity. It might impact their beliefs and thoughts but still it cannot be compared with identity suppression autistic people face.

Realizing the societal pressure exerted by collectivist standards might help people empathize with autistic persons, leading to more understanding and encompassing situations. Learning how collectivist principles shape their own camouflaging actions might help non-autistic people relate more compassionately with others, especially those who may be disguising their neurodivergent features.

Implementing mechanisms that access the function of collectivism to conceal behaviors that can aid us to program more successful therapies. Providing awareness regarding autism and decreasing stigma can also help autistic and non-autistic individuals to meet social demands with greater efficiency.

Cultural impacts on an individual's behavior in a social setting is important to investigate, especially in regard to Pakistani autistic individuals, who often face stigma in society. This writing will help to bridge the gap that exists between these two variables, and can help to lay a framework for further research on this area.

By realizing the fact how principles of collectivism impact camouflaging methods, we can create an environment that protects and respects various needs, vowing towards promoting a softer hearted and reassuring society for every individual.

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