

Autistic social identity and how to safely foster authenticity

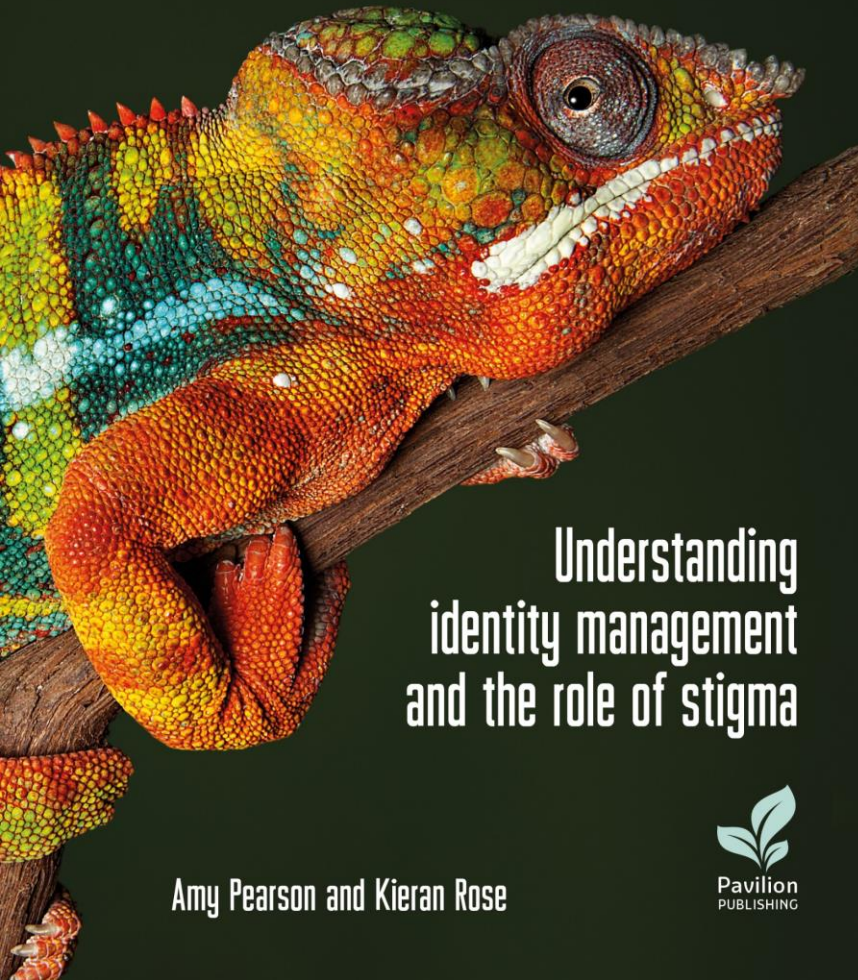
With

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Authors of

Autistic Masking:
Understanding identity management
and the role of stigma

Autistic Masking



Understanding
identity management
and the role of stigma

Amy Pearson and Kieran Rose





- **Autistic (Diagnosed in 2021)**
- **Author**
- **Independent Consultant**
- **Trainer**
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- **Published Academic Researcher:**

Specialising in Autistic Masking, Interpersonal Victimisation, Stigma, Monotropism and Identity development

- **Background:**

In addition to my academic work with autistic children and adults, I have provided support in an autistic school, and delivered 1-2-1 support as part of a play-based childhood intervention.

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Kieran Rose



- **Autistic (Diagnosed in 2003) and parent to 3 Autistic children**
- **Author, Trainer and Advocate**
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- **Honorary Research Associate:**
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- **Published Academic Researcher:**
Specialising in Autistic Masking, Interpersonal Victimization, Stigma, Monotropism and Identity development
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Newcastle University, University of Sunderland, University College London, Northumbria University, Middlesex University, University of East London, University of Kent, Anna Freud Centre for Families and Children
- **Lead trainer & Content Developer**
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- **Background:**
Mainstream Primary Education supporting Autistic children; Service provision for disabled children (Sure-Start); Local Authority service delivery for adults with Learning Disabilities.

www.theautisticadvocate.com



Masking?
Camouflaging?
Assimilating?
Projecting Acceptability?
Adaptive Morphing?
Passing?

What is it, who does it, and why?



An ecology of stigma, trauma,
pathologisation and invalidation

What can Autistic people do to safely foster authenticity?

- The 'unmasking' fallacy
- Community connectedness
- Keeping safe
- Boundaries
- Self-exploration, understanding & identifying needs
- Meeting needs
- Curating agency & Autonomy

But
Autistic
people are
already
doing all
the
heavy
lifting



An ecology that nurtures



Shifting
responsibility

The key objectives and the eight pillars that make up the **Advoc8** framework



Key objectives (The Four A's)	Descriptions
Acceptance	To accept oneself internally by understanding one's own needs; and to be accepted externally, by others.
Agency	Understanding oneself and being understood by others offers the opportunity for choice and the ability to make meaningful decisions around one's wants and needs
Autonomy	Making choices requires the ability to act on them. Autonomy means to be enabled and supported to act on those choices, either independently, or interdependently with support.
Authenticity	The enablement of agency and autonomy leads to feeling in more control of oneself and one's environment, creating a feeling of greater safety which offers the opportunity for authenticity to develop.
The eight pillars	Descriptions
Understanding the societal & historical narrative	Using constructive & positive sources of knowledge to understand the context within which autistic people are framed. This provides the opportunity for greater understanding and the validation of the experiences of autistic people beyond a pathological lens. It also helps understand and remedy the lack of intersectional recognition. It provides an opportunity for decolonisation.
The Neurodiversity Paradigm	Provides a humanising and intersectional framework that focuses on individual needs and provides context for shared experiences, rather than focusing on a deficit model which suggests there is a 'perfect person'. This offers the opportunity for services and systems to be flexible and responsive to need rather than a 'one size fits all' approach.
Utilising Double Empathy	A Double Empathy approach forces us to reflect on the inequality in how people are treated and the barriers faced by some that are not experienced by others. It requires us to reflect on our thinking and practice and develop thinking that focuses on equitable intersectionality. →

Cultural diversity in social intelligence	Evolving from double empathy to focus on communication differences instead of deficits, and on diverging social motivations rather than an inability to socialise. A cultural or even neuro-cultural framework creates an environment that focuses on translation rather than a colonialist imposition of social requirements.
Understanding Monotropism	The key factor in difference between autistic and non-autistic attentional, sensorial, emotional and behavioural divergences. Understanding monotropism is a step toward understanding autistic experiences
Diversity in movement, sensory, neurobiology & trauma response	Recognising the impact of trauma on Autistic people & how trauma is received and experienced differently by them is key to the validation of autistic experience. Understanding this diversity in experience offers us the opportunity to validate communication, sensory, behavioural & experiential differences; allowing us to meet & be led by those needs.
The Environment	Along with an understanding of the impact of sensory input, focusing on the environment allows us to reflect on the impact of carer/peer/practitioner behaviour on autistic people. It provides a reframing of the notions around challenging behaviour and other pathologising and reductive ideologies that ignore the impact of other people and their behaviour. This also allows us to focus on removing confirmation bias & societal conformity/norms/expectations
Identity and it's relationships with stigma, masking, burnout and mental health outcomes	Focusing on positive and constructive self-identity, promoting that via family, services & peers, and societally. Preventing neuronormative ideologies and reducing stigma allows us to understand and mitigate the impact on autistic mental health and wellbeing.

Table 12.1: Rose 2020 Advoc8 framework. (© Kieran Rose, 2023)

Dimensions	Descriptions
Objectification to Insiderness	Valuing the subjective experiences of the person. Seeing past diagnostic expectations to unique perspectives, strengths, and challenges.
Passivity to Agency	Promoting autistic decision making in collaboration with caregivers and practioners. Supporting personal dignity.
Homogenisation to Uniqueness	Recognising the unique aspects that make up an autistic person's identity (e.g. friend, male, son, pupil). No one size fits all approach.
Loss of Meaning to Sense Making	Listening to autistic interpretations of their own experiences. Enabling autistic people to make sense of their experiences and the contexts of the situations they are in, is an important aspect of humanising practice.
The importance of Personal Journey	Recognising and faciliating individual pathways and aspirations. Humanising practice recognises the importance of maintaining a sense of continuity. It seeks to keep people connected to their histories and plans for their future.
Dislocation to a Sense of Place	Ensuring autistic people feel included and welcome across different environments. Imagine having everything you know stripped away from you, with no access to the familiar, with nothing to remind you of love or comfort. Where the things or activities you hold dear are seen as representing a risk to yourself or to others. Contrast this with a humanising approach or place that feels more like 'home'.

Reductionism to Embodiment	Exploring the experience of autistic being without defaulting to a deficit narrative and enabling them in their personal development.
Isolation to Belonging	Creating a safe place for autistic people to share their worries and joys. Build a sense of community and belonging.

Table 12.2: Lifeworld Framework (Pavlopoulou, 2020)

Using Georgia Pavlopoulou's Lifeworld Framework to validate peer relationships and community spaces and foster authenticity





Change the narrative,
change the future

Time for questions

