What is masking?

Masking is generally considered a behavioral process of altering one's own genuine or authentic personality features (such as moods, emotions, tones, body language, communication, etc.) to align with or mimic the presumed or stated norms, presentations, pressures, expectations, and demands of a social situation. Theories around masking and unmasking have proliferated recently in tandem with improved understanding and increased conversations about the ism, other neurodiverse realities, and how we all kinda sorta do it to varying degrees. Masking is also analogous to code switching, a common practice of shifting, highlighting, and diminishing certain personality traits to better assimilate into dominant norms — a common experience for people of color in white majority spaces especially, as well as for any and all marginalized or minoritized individuals generally. Due to the inherently repressive nature of masking and code switching, both are typically experienced as major sources of significant stress, tension, dysphoria, dissociation, and resentment for the person masking or code switching, and towards the social situations or relationships that activated the real or presumed need for masking or code switching. Masking often socially presents an individual as regulated, despite their internal reality being rife with contradiction and overwhelm.

What are some ways that I mask and what is the timeline of when I began masking in those ways?

What is emotional regulation / regulating?

Emotional regulation is a psychological theory concerning the ways we influence our own sense of homeostasis, especially regarding emotional and cognitive equilibrium. Essentially, regulation includes both processes and goals of what and how one wants to feel, think, behave, and relate. Regulation as process refers to the specific, intentional, and unconscious ways we attempt to sustain and / or alter our ~vibez~ so to say. Our bodies are always regulating — mediating between parts and functions, balancing between resources and tasks, such as breathing, digesting, our hearts beating, etc. Somehow our thoughts and emotions are organic matter and so consequently we are also regulating our thoughts and emotions without constant conscious awareness. That said, when we reference regulating in a therapeutic context, we typically are referring to what we consciously and intentionally do to reach the goal of regulation. Regulation as goal is the general experience of homeostasis, balance, peace, calm – more or less whatever chillmaxxing means for the individual seeking maxd chill. Regulating is both inevitable and generally speaking the desired state of being in any given context.

How does masking keep me safe socially? How does unmasking keep me safe existentially?

What are the differences between masking and regulating?

thерapeutic journal prompts

What do they do for me?

What do they take from me?

How do I differentiate them for myself?

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What is the relationship between capacity and masking for me?

More questions about regulating and unmasking on flip side of this zine. Follow directions below:

Reach out to
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What does unmasking mean for me? How do I unmask? What does unmasking do for me? What does it do for my relationships?

REGULATED/ING

Disregulated/ing

Masked/ing

Unmasked/ing

What is the 4-square venn diagram of masking, unmasking, regulating, and disregulating?

How do I navigate and manage the tensions and contradictions present in how I receive immediate external validation from masking despite masking being internally stressful, yet I often can feel regulated through external validation as well?

What are the differences between masking and regulating?

therapeutic journal prompts

What do they do for me?

What do they take from me?

How do I differentiate them for myself?

part 2

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What is the relationship between self awareness and regulation?

How would I describe what regulating is for me? What does it feel like? And what does disregulation feel like for me?

What is the relationship between capacity and regulation or disregulation?

What are things I do to regulate? How long have I done those things? What do I think and how do I feel about those things?