

Unmasking Identity: Exploring Its Role in the Mental Health of Black Autistic Emerging Adults

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Introduction

Black autistic emerging adults face overlapping developmental, racial, and neurodiverse challenges that impact mental health (Davis et al., 2022; Nelson & Lichwa, 2025).

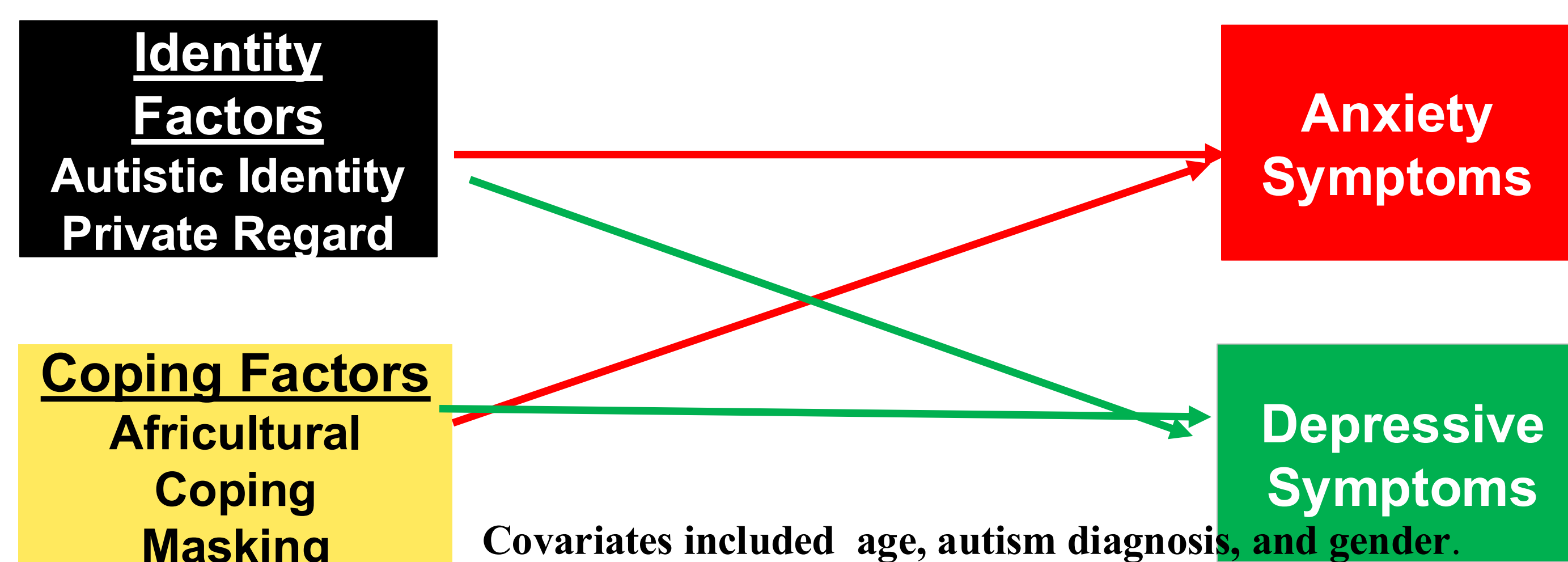
- Autistic individuals commonly report experiencing anxiety & depressive symptoms (Posar et al., 2015).
- Private regard & positive autistic identity may predict lower anxiety and depression (Davies et al., 2024; Reynolds et al., 2017).
- Africultural coping may reduce anxiety & depression (Utsey et al., 2019).
- Masking may increase anxiety & depression symptoms (Hull et al., 2021).

Gaps in the Literature

1. Black autistic emerging adults remain understudied (Ames et al., 2022).
2. There is a lack of research on population and how IV's impact population (Lamash et al., 2025; Malone et al., 2022; Reynolds et al., 2017; Utsey et al., 2000).



Hypotheses



Method

Recruitment: Direct outreach, and Cloud Research.

Participants: $N = 155$ (18-45 years old, $m\ age = 29.48 (SD = 6.832)$ 54.8% women, 40.0% men)

Measures:

Private Regard (Sellers et al., 1998)

Autistic Identity (McDonald, 2017)

Africultural Coping (Utsey et al., 1999)

Masking (Hull et al., 2018)

Anxiety & Depression (Henry & Crawford)

Bivariate Analyses

- Africultural coping positively associated with private regard ($r = 0.55$) and family ethnic socialization messages ($r = 0.26$).
- Masking is positively associated with higher anxiety symptoms ($r = 0.26^{**}$).
- Private regard is negatively associated with autism diagnosis ($r = -0.19^*$).

Discussion

- Differences in diagnosis type and presentation of anxiety and depression symptoms.
- Exposure to race- and autism-related stigma plays a role in mental health.
- Environmental context influences mental health outcomes

Linear Regression Full Sample: Anxiety

Variable	Beta	SE	95% CI		β	p
			LL	UL		
Constant	-2.208	5.643				0.696
Africultural Coping	-0.156	0.098	0.348	0.036	-0.156	0.112
Autistic Socialization	0.075	0.035	0.006	0.144	0.177	0.037*
Private Regard	0.122	0.091	-0.066	0.144	0.177	0.037
Masking	0.186	0.056	0.076	0.296	0.272	0.001**

Note * $p < 0.05$
** $p < 0.01$

Linear Regression Full Sample: Depression

Variable	Beta	SE	95% CI		β	p
			LL	UL		
Constant	-2.208	5.643				0.696
Africultural Coping	-0.22	0.106	-0.428	-0.012	-0.202	0.040*
Autistic Socialization	0	0.039	-0.076	0.076	0	0.996
Private Regard	0.188	0.1	-0.008	0.384	0.18	0.062
Masking	0.174	0.061	0.055	0.293	0.233	0.005**

Note * $p < 0.05$ * $p < 0.01$

Linear Regression: Formal Diagnosis & Anxiety

Variable	Beta	SE	95%CI		β	p
			LL	UL		
Constant	-10.712	8.573				0.217
Africultural Coping	-0.182	0.141	-0.458	0.094	-0.181	0.201
Autistic Socialization	0.148	0.054	0.042	0.254	0.341	0.008**
Private Regard	0.079	0.141	-0.197	0.355	0.082	0.581
Masking	0.341	0.082	0.18	0.502	0.511	<0.001**

Note * $p < 0.05$ * $p < 0.01$

Limitations & Future Directions

- To address extant limitations, future work should:
1. Develop culturally sensitive measures for Black autistic populations.
 2. Explore these links longitudinally.
 3. Consider the role of developmental stage (e.g. emerging adulthood vs. adulthood).