DOCUMENT SUMMARY This 2021 commentary provides a sophisticated psychometric critique of the methods used to measure autistic camouflaging, arguing that both popular self-report questionnaires (like the CAT-Q) and "discrepancy" measures have significant, unaddressed validity concerns. The author questions the use of single total scores, highlights the tool's potential confounding with social anxiety, and introduces a more valid distinction between measuring "camouflaging intent" (the internal effort) and "camouflaging efficacy" (the external outcome). This paper is a powerful tool for arguing against the uncritical use of standardized camouflaging measures.

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McQuaid_2021_RESEARCH_research_article_Camouflaging_gender_late-diagnosis.md,
Lerner_2018_RESEARCH_handbook_chapter_ASD_Assessment_Critique_History.md

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Commentary: The construct validity of 'camouflaging' in autism: psychometric considerations and recommendations for future research

Why This Matters to Enlitens

This commentary is essential ammunition for our mission. It provides a deep, scientific critique from within the academic community that validates our skepticism of standardized questionnaires. The author systematically dismantles the uncritical use of the most popular camouflaging measure (the CAT-Q), providing us with the specific psychometric arguments (construct validity, confounding variables, measurement invariance) to explain *why* simple tests are insufficient for understanding a complex, lived experience like camouflaging.

Most importantly, the proposed distinction between **"camouflaging intent"** (the internal effort to mask) and **"camouflaging efficacy"** (the external social outcome) is a revolutionary concept. We can directly incorporate this framework into the Enlitens Interview to help clients separate their internal experience of exhaustion and effort from how "successful" they appear to others. This paper gives us the academic language to justify our nuanced, interview-based approach as a more valid and clinically useful alternative to flawed questionnaires.

A Deep Critique of the Camouflaging Autistic Traits Questionnaire (CAT-Q)

The author argues that while the CAT-Q is the most frequently used self-report measure of camouflaging, its validity has not been sufficiently established. Key psychometric weaknesses include:

- **The Problem with Total Scores:** Camouflaging is a multidimensional concept. The correlations between the CAT-Q's different subscales (Compensation, Masking, Assimilation) are "modest," which suggests that a single total score "does not represent a coherent 'general camouflaging' factor". Using a single score obscures the different strategies a person may be using.
- **Confounding with Social Anxiety:** A critical issue is that some CAT-Q items may be confounded with social anxiety (e.g., "I always think about the impression I make on other people"). This makes it impossible to interpret the relationship between high camouflaging scores and poor mental health, as the questionnaire may simply be measuring anxiety-related safety behaviors. The author warns that this makes cross-sectional findings "uninterpretable".
- **Measurement Invariance is Unproven:** It is unclear if the CAT-Q's questions function the same way or mean the same thing across different groups (e.g., autistic men vs. women, autistic vs. non-autistic people). Without establishing this "measurement invariance," any conclusions about group differences (like women camouflaging more than men) may be "substantially biased". The initial validation study had "inadequate power" to properly test this.

A Deep Critique of the "Internal-External Discrepancy" Method

Another common way to measure camouflaging is to calculate the discrepancy between an "internal" state (e.g., self-reported autistic traits or Theory of Mind scores) and "external" behavior (e.g., ADOS scores). The author argues this method is fundamentally flawed.

- **Component Measures are Not Pure:** The ADOS is supposed to measure "external" behavior, but some of its items (e.g., 'insight into typical social situations') actually tap into "internal states and social cognition," contaminating the measure.
- **Weak Link Between "Internal" and "External":** The entire method assumes that social-cognitive ability should strongly predict social behavior. However, recent studies have found only "very modest relationships" between lab-based social cognition tasks and real-world social outcomes. If the link is weak for everyone, then the discrepancy between the two is more likely to be meaningless statistical noise ("construct-irrelevant variance") than a true measure of camouflaging.

A Better Way Forward: Distinguishing Intent vs. Efficacy

The author proposes a more valid and clinically useful way to conceptualize and measure camouflaging by separating the internal effort from the external result.

- **Camouflaging Intent:** This refers to the *self-perceived engagement* in camouflaging—the conscious or unconscious effort and strategies an individual uses. This is what self-report questionnaires like the CAT-Q are best suited to measure.
- **Camouflaging Efficacy:** This refers to the *outcome* of those behaviors—the degree to which one *successfully* appears "less autistic" to others. This is better measured through experimental or observational methods that assess how a person's behavior is perceived by others.
- **Not Interchangeable:** These two concepts are "separate but related" and should not be viewed as "equivalent or interchangeable". They provide "nonredundant and complementary information".

Quotes We Might Use

- **On the problem with total scores:** "...correlations between various dimensions of camouflaging in empirical studies have been modest... potentially indicating that the CAT-Q total score does not represent a coherent 'general camouflaging' factor".
- **On confounding with anxiety:** "...cross-sectional relationships between these measures and mental health outcomes will remain uninterpretable due to the potential for reverse causality".
- **On group comparisons:** "DIF is important to consider when comparing test scores between groups that are hypothesized to differ in their true level of camouflage (e.g., autistic men and autistic women), as group differences in effect sizes may be substantially biased by the presence of DIF".
- **On the two types of camouflaging measures:** "...self-report and discrepancy measures should not be viewed as equivalent or interchangeable".
- **On the new proposed framework:** "...the CAT-Q measures self-perceived engagement in camouflaging ['camouflaging intent'], whereas a discrepancy in behavior ratings between experimental conditions measures observed behavior ['camouflaging efficacy']".