

Neurocultural Throttling: A Lived-Experience-Informed Framework for Understanding Intersectional Regulation of Neurodivergent Expression

Plain-Language Summary

For years, I used words such as *masking*, *camouflaging*, and *code-switching* to understand why I changed how I communicated or behaved in different places. Those words helped me make sense of a great deal, but I kept running into experiences that seemed to involve several things at once.

I am a Black autistic man with ADHD. The way people experience my neurodivergence does not happen separately from the way they experience my race. A direct question may take on a different meaning because it comes from a Black man. Quietness, frustration, intense preparation, limited eye contact, or an unusual communication style can also be read differently depending on who is doing it and where it happens.

I use *neurocultural* to describe what happens when the way a person's brain works and the identities other people see in them shape how each is understood. I use **Neurocultural Throttling** for the adjustments someone may make after learning that a behavior can carry different risks when neurodivergence and another marginalized identity are being read together. The word *throttling* is not meant to suggest that a person calmly chooses every adjustment. Some changes are deliberate, while others may become automatic after years of experience.

This framework does not replace masking, code-switching, minority stress, emotional labor, or other ideas that already help explain these experiences. It brings those ideas together around a narrower question: what happens when neurodivergent behavior is being read through another identity at the same time?

The framework also separates what a person expects from what an environment can actually be shown to do. I may believe that a behavior will be racialized because experience has taught me to expect that risk. That belief matters, but it does not prove why someone acted in a particular moment. At the same time, a lack of proof does not mean the concern was imaginary. A person can tell us what experience has taught them to expect, and it is the job of organizations and researchers to check whether similar behavior is actually treated differently.

The purpose of Neurocultural Throttling is therefore not to teach marginalized people how to regulate themselves better. It is to give people another way to recognize what they may already be doing and to ask why some environments appear to require more regulation from some people than from others.

Abstract

Autistic masking and camouflaging research has documented how autistic people regulate behavior in response to stigma, social expectations, safety concerns, and the desire for belonging. Parallel traditions examine racial code-switching, identity shifting, minority stress, concealable stigma, emotional labor, backlash, intersectional stereotyping, and the intertwined effects of racism and ableism. Emerging scholarship involving Black autistic people increasingly demonstrates that neurodivergence is experienced within, rather than apart from, race, gender, and other social locations.

This conceptual paper introduces **Neurocultural Throttling** as a lived-experience-informed framework for organizing one intersectional regulatory experience within these established literatures. Neurocultural Throttling describes context-responsive regulation when a person anticipates that the meaning or consequence of neurodivergent or culturally situated expression will change because neurotype and another marginalized identity are being

interpreted together. The framework does not propose a previously unknown mechanism of human regulation. Its intended contribution is conceptual organization, accessible language, and a set of distinctions that can guide future inquiry.

The framework distinguishes **perceived neurocultural risk**, what a person anticipates based on identity and prior experience, from **evaluative neurocultural risk**, whether observers demonstrably judge an expression differently according to intersecting identities. It similarly distinguishes **perceived latitude**, the behavioral range a person believes they have, from **granted latitude**, the range an environment actually allows without changing its response. A further hypothesis concerns whether visible compensatory neurodivergent effort, such as scripting, extensive preparation, or other self-accommodating strategies, can itself acquire identity-contingent meanings.

The paper situates these ideas within masking and camouflaging scholarship, intersectionality, DisCrit, Black disability studies, stigma and minority-stress models, racialized-organizations theory, backlash research, and emerging Black autistic scholarship. It also establishes boundaries against ordinary impression management, warns against organizational and clinical appropriation, and proposes participatory, experimental, and usability research. Neurocultural Throttling is offered as provisional language whose value should ultimately depend on whether the people whose experiences it seeks to describe find that it increases understanding rather than simply adding terminology.

Keywords: autism, neurodiversity, masking, race, intersectionality, camouflaging, code-switching, stigma, disability, Black autism, regulation

The Framework at a Glance

Level	Question	Language used in this framework	Primary responsibility
Lens	How do neurotype and other identities change the meaning of each other's expression?	Neurocultural	Anyone analyzing the experience
Person	What am I regulating, and what risk have I learned to anticipate?	Neurocultural Throttling; perceived risk; perceived latitude	None; this level supports understanding, not an obligation to change
Environment	Is comparable behavior interpreted differently depending on who does it?	Evaluative risk; granted latitude	Institutions, evaluators, and researchers
Research	Is visible compensatory neurodivergent effort judged differently across identities?	Adaptation-penalty hypothesis	Researchers
Boundary	Could an established concept already explain this adequately?	Masking, code-switching, emotional labor, stigma management, and related constructs retain their own roles	Anyone applying the framework

This table is not meant to turn a complicated human experience into a diagnostic checklist. Its purpose is to keep the levels of analysis separate enough that concern about bias is not confused with proof of bias, and a person's adaptation is not mistaken for the problem an institution should be trying to fix.

The Question Began Before I Had a Theory

Years before I had language such as masking or camouflaging, I was given a work assignment that was described as urgent. I took the urgency literally, concentrated intensely on the problem, and returned the analysis in roughly six hours. What stayed with me was not the

work itself but learning later that the speed and intensity with which I had responded had contributed to someone describing me as a “show-off.”

At the time, that interpretation confused me because I had not been trying to outperform anyone or demonstrate that I was smarter than my colleagues. Someone had asked for something as soon as possible, and I had understood that request to mean that producing it as soon as I reasonably could was the desired behavior. With hindsight, autism gave me language for part of what had happened. Literal interpretation, intense focus, urgency around resolving a defined problem, and the satisfaction of completing something quickly all fit patterns I would later understand differently.

Autism did not give me certainty about the other person's interpretation. I was also a Black man working inside institutions where visible competence, ambition, confidence, and intensity had never felt completely neutral to me. I could imagine the possibility that what looked like diligence from someone else might read as arrogance or self-promotion coming from me, but I cannot travel backward and prove that race produced the comment. Personality, workplace culture, the relationship between us, my own behavior, or something I never saw may have contributed instead. That uncertainty eventually became more important to me than finding a tidy answer because it reflected a problem I kept encountering: I was often making decisions about how I would be read without ever being able to know exactly which part of me another person was reading.

As my career progressed, those calculations became easier to notice. I could enter a meeting, identify something in an argument that did not make sense, and find myself deciding how many questions I was willing to ask. I might rewrite a question before speaking because the first version in my head sounded too direct, watch my facial expression while listening to an

answer I found frustrating, or leave a second question unasked because continuing to press seemed more professionally risky than leaving the inconsistency unresolved. Some of those adjustments may be well described as masking; others resemble racialized self-presentation, emotional labor, or ordinary professional judgment. What interested me was why they could become so difficult to separate from the inside.

What the Language We Already Have Explains

Autistic masking and camouflaging scholarship offers substantial language for this terrain. Hull and colleagues (2017) documented strategies autistic adults described using to fit in or reduce the visibility of autistic differences. Lai and colleagues (2017) operationalized camouflaging partly as a discrepancy between outward social presentation and underlying autistic characteristics, and Cook and colleagues' (2021) systematic review found that the multiple methods used to measure camouflaging broadly clustered around internal-external discrepancy and self-report approaches, while also showing substantial variation across studies. Pearson and Rose (2021) situated autistic masking within stigma and examined how autistic people may consciously or unconsciously inhibit their usual responses and use different behaviors in their place. These traditions already make clear that masking can be constrained, costly, learned, and only partly deliberate.

Lawson's (2020) concept of adaptive morphing is particularly important to my thinking because it directly challenges any easy association between autistic adaptation and deceit. Adaptive morphing instead frames at least some adaptation as a response to social threat. That distinction matters to me because I have never experienced most of my own regulation as an attempt to trick a room into believing I am someone else. More often, I have been trying to understand what the room is likely to do with what it sees.

Race scholarship offers a different but overlapping vocabulary. McCluney and colleagues (2021) describe racial code-switching as changes in self-presentation that Black people may use to obtain favorable outcomes within environments organized around dominant White norms, and their experimental work found that code-switching could increase perceptions of professionalism. Dickens and colleagues (2019) similarly describe identity shifting among Black women in relation to hypervisibility, discrimination, and organizational context. These are not merely racial versions of autistic masking; they have different histories, mechanisms, stakes, and bodies of scholarship.

Other traditions help explain aspects of the same experience without becoming interchangeable with either masking or code-switching. Goffman's (1963) work on stigma examined information management, passing, and covering. Hochschild's (1983) emotional-labor framework described institutional expectations around feeling and display. Emotion-regulation research has examined how people alter emotional responses and the consequences of suppression (Gross, 1998; Gross & John, 2003). Minority-stress theory describes chronic stress produced by stigma, discrimination, anticipated rejection, and concealment (Meyer, 2003), while Botha and Frost (2020) extended minority-stress thinking to autistic adults. Pachankis's (2007) model of concealable stigma further shows how ambiguity and the possibility of discovery can produce cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consequences.

These theories operate at different analytical levels. Masking describes patterns of behavior; minority stress describes a stress process; intersectionality provides an analytic framework; emotional labor concerns institutionally shaped feeling and display; DisCrit examines the interdependence of racism and ableism; racialized-organizations theory asks how organizations themselves produce unequal agency and resources. I bring them together because

the lived question that led me here crosses those levels. I am not proposing that they are separate labels for one underlying process.

Why an Intersectional Lens Remains Necessary

Intersectionality makes it difficult to treat autism and race as two independent variables that happen to occupy the same person. Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) foundational work demonstrated how people occupying intersecting marginalized positions can experience forms of exclusion that are obscured when institutions analyze one category at a time. DisCrit brought Critical Race Theory and Disability Studies together to examine how racism and ableism can become mutually constitutive within education and other institutions (Annamma et al., 2013). Black feminist disability scholarship likewise challenges analytical traditions in which race and disability are each treated as complete without the other (Bailey & Mobley, 2019; Schalk, 2022).

Research on stereotypes also demonstrates that intersectional meaning is not always additive. Ghavami and Peplau (2013) found that gender-by-ethnic stereotypes contained unique characteristics that could not simply be reconstructed by combining separate gender and ethnic stereotypes. The implication for the present framework is not that every neurodivergent behavior becomes uniquely intersectional when displayed by a racialized person. It is that there are plausible circumstances in which the combination changes the *kind* of meaning attached to the behavior rather than merely increasing the amount of stigma.

That distinction matters when I think about directness. Direct communication is frequently discussed within autistic experience. If an autistic Black man regulates directness because he anticipates that it may be interpreted through racialized expectations about aggression, authority, or threat, the behavior being changed may still be autistic communication.

Blackness is not necessarily the content being suppressed. Race may instead be altering the social meaning attached to the autistic expression.

The direction can also run the other way. A Black autistic person may regulate culturally situated speech, humor, enthusiasm, or other expressions because neurotype changes how those behaviors are read. Within a Black community, for example, an autistic person's speech patterns, intense interests, sensory needs, or social style may complicate expectations about racial belonging in ways that differ from the pressures encountered in predominantly White environments. The purpose of the neurocultural lens is to make room for those reciprocal interactions without presuming that every identity interaction produces the same outcome.

Emerging Black Autistic Scholarship Changes What Can Be Claimed

Black autistic people are no longer entirely absent from scholarship on masking, identity, and stigma, and this framework should reflect that developing literature. Nelson and Lichwa (2025) interviewed four Black autistic girls aged 16 and 17 in the United Kingdom and identified themes involving belonging, social expectations, race, gender, autism, sensory overload, and relational support. Their analysis explicitly combines intersectionality and DisCrit rather than treating masking as an autism-only behavior.

Jones and colleagues (2025) interviewed 32 autistic adults, evenly divided between Black and White participants. Black participants described layered forms of exclusion involving both race and autistic traits, while women and LGBTQ+ participants across racial groups described additional forms of marginalization and erasure. These findings do not establish exactly how other people were interpreting the participants in each encounter, but they demonstrate that autistic stigma is experienced inside other identities rather than in isolation.

Zanders's 2025 dissertation, *Unseen: Black Autistic Women's Masking Practices, Pressures, and Possibilities*, places Black autistic women's masking at the center of inquiry rather than treating race as a demographic footnote. Franklin and colleagues' (2025) conceptual analysis similarly uses a Black Feminist Disability Framework to argue that camouflaging and belonging must be examined intersectionally, including the recognition that unmasking may be a privilege that is not equally available across social locations. Morénike Giwa Onaiwu's community scholarship has also challenged the Whiteness of mainstream autism research and representation, including the consequences of that narrowness for autistic people of color.

This literature means that Neurocultural Throttling should not be positioned as opening an unexplored field. It belongs inside a developing conversation. Its possible contribution is to organize one recurring regulatory question within that conversation and make it easier to move between individual experience, social interpretation, and institutional responsibility.

What I Mean by Neurocultural

The word *neurocultural* also has a history that predates this framework. Ekman's (1972) early neurocultural work on emotion used the term in a different theoretical tradition involving biological emotion processes and culturally learned display rules. Cultural neuroscience later developed as an interdisciplinary field examining reciprocal relationships among culture, psychological processes, brain function, and biology (Chiao et al., 2010). More recently, Pliskin and Crehan (2024) discussed neurocultural competence and humility as part of neurodiversity-affirming psychotherapy. These traditions should not be conflated with one another or with the use proposed here.

Within this paper, **neurocultural is an analytic lens for examining how neurotype and socially situated identities shape the meaning of one another's expression within cultural and institutional systems of power.**

The word *cultural* requires explanation because race is not simply culture. Racialization is a process through which social meaning, status, opportunity, threat, and constraint become attached to perceived racial categories. Racism depends on power and institutions, not merely on cultural difference. I retain *cultural* because interpretation itself is socially learned and culturally situated. Ideas about professionalism, competence, danger, masculinity, emotion, disability, authority, politeness, and appropriate behavior do not arrive with universal meanings; institutions and societies teach people how to interpret them.

My use of *neurocultural* therefore differs from cultural neuroscience, which is concerned with relationships between culture and neurobiological processes, and from uses that conceptualize neurotypes themselves as cultures. Here the emphasis is interpretive: how meanings assigned to neurodivergent expression change when that expression is encountered through racialization, gender, class, language, disability beyond the neurotype under discussion, or other socially situated identities.

A practical example makes that less abstract. Imagine two autistic employees using unusually formal, carefully prepared speech during a high-stakes meeting. Autism may help explain why scripting supports communication. Race may influence whether that preparation is read as diligence, distance, defensiveness, or calculation. The neurocultural question is not simply whether the employee masked or whether racial bias exists. It asks what happens when those interpretive systems meet in the same behavior.

Why I Still Use Throttling

My discomfort with camouflage is personal because I learned the word in the military as a practical technology. You change what an observer can see so that the observer has greater difficulty identifying what is actually there. That makes sense for some autistic experiences, but it has never completely described mine. Most of the time I was not trying to disappear. I was trying to work out what I could safely allow to be perceived in the first place.

A throttle came closer to that experience because the image directs my attention toward regulation of flow rather than successful concealment. I do not mean that a human nervous system functions like an engine, nor that there is an operator somewhere inside the person calmly deciding where to place a lever. Regulation may be deliberate in one moment and almost automatic in another. Repetition, prior consequences, trauma, habit, sensory conditions, and immediate power can all shape behavior before a person experiences anything resembling a conscious decision.

I therefore use **Neurocultural Throttling** to describe context-responsive regulation of neurodivergent or culturally situated expression when a person anticipates that its meaning or consequence may change because neurotype and another marginalized identity are being interpreted together.

The term remains provisional. Because this is intended as lived-experience language as much as analytical language, its usefulness cannot be settled by argument alone. Future participatory research should ask racialized neurodivergent people directly whether *throttling* helps them describe what they experience, whether its mechanical or violent associations create barriers, and whether another term fits more closely. If the people whose experiences the

framework is meant to illuminate consistently experience the word as alienating or inaccurate, retaining it for the sake of distinctiveness would defeat the purpose of the framework.

Perceived Risk and Evaluative Risk

One of the easiest mistakes in writing about discrimination is moving too quickly from what a person fears will happen to a claim about why another person actually behaved as they did. My opening story cannot tell me whether race changed the meaning assigned to my work, even though racialized interpretation was one possibility I carried with me.

For that reason, the framework separates **perceived neurocultural risk** from **evaluative neurocultural risk**. Perceived risk refers to the person's appraisal that an expression may carry a different consequence because of intersecting identities. Evaluative risk asks whether observers actually judge the same expression differently according to the identities of the person displaying it. The first can be studied through lived experience, interviews, and experience sampling. The second requires designs capable of examining evaluators, patterns of outcomes, or controlled comparisons.

Attributional ambiguity helps explain why this distinction matters. Crocker and colleagues (1991) examined how people with stigmatized identities may face uncertainty about whether interpersonal feedback reflects prejudice. That uncertainty is not a defect in perception; it is part of living in conditions where prejudice is plausible but rarely labels itself.

Recent autism research makes the distinction even more valuable because evaluative effects do not always move in the direction a simple “more marginalized means more negative” model would predict. Jones and Sasson (2026) studied first impressions of 29 Black and White autistic adults using videotaped conversations and non-autistic raters. Black autistic adults were rated as more likable and trustworthy than White autistic adults, and Black autistic men did not

receive the same unfavorable gender pattern observed among White autistic men. The study was small and concerned brief first impressions rather than conflict, authority, disagreement, or high-stakes evaluation, but it demonstrates something this framework needs to preserve: intersecting identities can alter social interpretation without necessarily worsening it.

A person's anticipated risk may therefore differ from what an evaluator actually does, and both can remain important. Years of previous experience can shape current regulation even in a setting that might respond differently. Conversely, a person may feel little risk in a setting that later proves less equitable than expected. The absence of evidence showing evaluative bias in a particular event should not be turned into “that was only your perception.” Perceived risk is information about what a person has learned to anticipate. Determining whether an institution grants equal treatment is an institutional and empirical responsibility, not a burden the individual must personally prove before their experience can be taken seriously.

Latitude: How Much Room Does the Environment Actually Give?

The decisions I make in meetings are partly about how much room I believe I have. I may know that disagreement is technically welcome while remaining less certain about how direct, persistent, emotional, or visibly neurodivergent I can be before the meaning of my behavior changes.

I use **perceived latitude** for the expressive range a person believes they have before consequences change, and **granted latitude** for the range an environment actually permits before its evaluation or behavior changes. These are descriptive terms rather than claims of a new psychological construct.

Hollander's (1958) idiosyncrasy-credit theory provides an important predecessor. He proposed that status and prior conformity can create social credit that permits greater deviation

from group expectations. The theory helps explain why the same departure from a norm may be tolerated from one person and punished in another. I use that insight descriptively, not normatively. The fact that people may earn permission to deviate through status or prior conformity does not mean organizations should require marginalized people to conform first before they earn the right to behave differently.

Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations pushes the analysis further by treating organizations themselves as racial structures that can distribute agency, resources, legitimacy, and constraint unevenly. This means behavioral expectations cannot always be understood as neutral rules to which people respond differently. Formal rules may coexist with unequal interpretation in practice.

Consider two employees of comparable rank who challenge the same decision with similar intensity. If one is described as rigorous and appropriately skeptical while the other is repeatedly characterized as difficult, threatening, inflexible, or disrespectful, the organizational question is not whether each person communicated perfectly. It is whether equivalent deviation from the expected norm received equivalent latitude.

The relationship between risk and latitude gives the framework its basic structure. Throttling is a response to perceived risk and perceived latitude at the person level. Evaluative risk and granted latitude describe what the environment actually does. Those levels may correspond closely, or they may diverge.

When Compensation Becomes Visible

Whether an adaptation can itself create another interpretation is a question existing scholarship has already begun to answer.

Backlash and double-bind research has long shown that behavior used to satisfy one social expectation can create another penalty. Rudman (1998), for example, found that women's self-promotion could increase perceptions of competence while producing social costs. Livingston and colleagues (2012) later reported that race altered penalties associated with dominant leadership behavior, illustrating that intersectional evaluation can produce patterns that are not predictable from gender alone.

That particular 2012 result now deserves an additional caution. Liu and colleagues (2026) conducted a high-powered registered replication and extension with 1,996 participants and did not reproduce the original race-by-gender pattern. In their study, dominant behavior produced status penalties across Black and White women and men. The conflicting findings do not erase backlash research, but they warn against assuming in advance how race and gender will alter a given evaluation.

The question that remains especially relevant to Neurocultural Throttling concerns **compensatory neurodivergent effort**. Autistic and ADHD people may use scripts, notes, extensive preparation, practiced phrasing, structured routines, or other strategies that help them communicate, remember, regulate, or participate. These behaviors can function less like optional impression management and more like self-provided accommodations.

I do not have a single personal incident that I can responsibly present as proof that one of my compensatory strategies was racialized in exactly this way, and I do not want an autobiographical anecdote to do work that requires empirical study. The question is nevertheless testable: when the outcome is held constant, does visible evidence of compensatory effort change how someone is judged, and does the person's race, gender, or another identity change the meaning assigned to that effort?

Existing research gives us rival explanations that such work would need to beat. Tsay and Banaji (2011) found a preference for “naturals” over equally accomplished “strivers,” suggesting that information about effort can shape judgments of equal accomplishment even when race and disability are not involved. Impression-management research similarly shows that behavior perceived as strategic may be discounted. The narrower hypothesis worth testing is whether effort that functions as neurodivergent self-accommodation is interpreted in identity-contingent ways, such as the same preparation being read as diligence in one person and rigidity, distrust, or calculation in another.

I use the phrase **adaptation penalty** descriptively for that possibility, while locating the phenomenon within existing double-bind, backlash, naturalness-bias, and impression-management traditions. The phrase is useful only if it helps isolate a research question, not if it encourages the paper to reclaim mechanisms that already have intellectual histories.

The Cost of Regulation

Camouflaging research has documented associations between greater self-reported camouflaging and poorer mental-health outcomes, while also raising continuing questions about measurement and causality (Cook et al., 2021). Emotional-labor and emotion-regulation scholarship has long examined the effort and consequences associated with controlling expression. Minority-stress theory similarly provides language for the cumulative burden of vigilance, concealment, and anticipated rejection.

Research on racialized striving offers a useful parallel without proving anything specific about Neurocultural Throttling. Brody and colleagues (2013) found that rural African American youth who demonstrated strong psychosocial competence under high socioeconomic risk could

simultaneously show elevated allostatic load at age 19. This “skin-deep resilience” work illustrates that outward competence and physiological cost can coexist.

Weathering (Geronimus et al., 2006) and John Henryism (James, 1994) scholarship likewise provide ways to think about accumulated physiological burden and high-effort coping under chronic social adversity. These literatures should not be used to claim that Neurocultural Throttling causes disease. Their relevance is more modest: successful adaptation should not be assumed to be inexpensive simply because observers experience the person as functioning well.

That distinction is useful in organizational settings where employees who appear polished, calm, highly prepared, or socially fluent may be assumed to need little support. Observation alone cannot tell us how much effort produced the presentation, and fatigue alone cannot tell us what caused the effort. Sensory demands, ADHD-related task load, anxiety, ordinary workload, racism, autistic camouflaging, trauma, and many other factors can overlap. The framework should make regulation more visible without turning every difficult day into evidence of Neurocultural Throttling.

The Stakes Extend Well Beyond Professional Reputation

My own examples return frequently to work because much of my adult life has unfolded inside large institutions, but reputational risk is only one place where interpretation matters. Education provides an earlier setting in which neurodivergent behavior can be interpreted through race and gender. Nelson and Lichwa's Black autistic participants described masking within school contexts shaped by belonging, social expectations, sensory experience, and intersecting racial, gendered, and autistic identities. Those experiences demonstrate why racialized neurodivergent regulation cannot be treated merely as an executive or professional phenomenon.

Healthcare creates a different power relationship. Hoffman and colleagues (2016) demonstrated racial bias in pain assessment and treatment recommendations and showed that false beliefs about biological differences between Black and White people were associated with racial differences in pain judgments. That research does not tell us how clinicians evaluate Black neurodivergent patients specifically, but it establishes why racialized credibility can matter in a setting where a neurodivergent patient may also be regulating communication, affect, sensory distress, memory demands, or processing time.

Physical safety raises the stakes further. A qualitative study of 43 Black caregivers of Black autistic youth found concerns about police training, autistic behaviors being inappropriately policed, and explicit threats of harm or death during police interactions (Yates Flanagan, Cola, et al., 2025). A second qualitative study of 43 Black caregivers found that caregivers wanted police officers to use nonthreatening body language and basic helpful communication skills during encounters with Black autistic youth (Yates Flanagan, Peele, et al., 2025). These findings do not show that every Black autistic person consciously throttles behavior around police, but they demonstrate that racialized interpretation of autistic behavior can have consequences far beyond belonging or career advancement.

Giwa Onaiwu (2020) similarly connected the racial narrowness of mainstream autism representation with real experiences of autistic people of color who have been mistreated by law enforcement. In those settings, reduced eye contact, delayed processing, unusual movement, failure to respond quickly, literal interpretation of commands, or sensory dysregulation may be encountered within systems that already carry racialized assumptions about threat and compliance.

The framework also needs to travel beyond predominantly White institutions. Racialized neurodivergent people may regulate within their own ethnic or cultural communities when disability stigma, communication norms, expectations about gender, or ideas about racial belonging make certain neurodivergent expressions difficult to interpret. If Neurocultural Throttling can describe only what happens when a Black person enters a White workplace, then the concept is narrower than the name suggests.

What Falls Outside the Framework

The framework should remain difficult to invoke casually. Having several marginalized identities is not enough, and ordinary professionalism does not qualify merely because the person is neurodivergent. Choosing more formal language during an interview or changing humor around an unfamiliar audience is common contextual behavior. Existing concepts such as impression management explain much of that territory.

Single-axis masking also does not need to be renamed. If autism-related stigma adequately explains why someone suppresses stimming, changes eye contact, scripts a conversation, or alters affect, masking and camouflaging remain more established and parsimonious terms.

The same principle applies to racial code-switching. A neurodivergent person adjusting speech or appearance in response to racialized professional norms is not automatically Neurocultural Throttling. The interaction becomes relevant when neurotype materially changes the *kind* of interpretation or consequence anticipated or observed, or when racialization materially changes the meaning of neurodivergent expression.

At the perceived level, a person does not have to prove that an interaction objectively occurred. The experience belongs within this framework when the person attributes the

anticipated consequence to the combination of identities, while acknowledging that the attribution may remain uncertain. At the evaluative level, stronger claims require evidence that the identities actually interact in observers' judgments or institutional outcomes.

Meltdown, shutdown, loss of speech, or collapse in the ability to sustain compensation also should not be described as “throttling up.” Those experiences may involve reduced regulatory capacity rather than a decision, conscious or learned, to permit more expression.

Finally, these boundaries are analytical rather than legal or moral. They should never be used by an employer, clinician, investigator, or court to argue that race is irrelevant because a particular behavior could also be described as autistic masking, or that disability is irrelevant because racial code-switching also occurred. Crenshaw's original critique of antidiscrimination law arose precisely because institutions often forced intersectional experiences into categories that erased the interaction.

What Organizations and Clinicians Should Do With This Framework

The framework becomes dangerous if organizations interpret it as a more sophisticated way to teach marginalized people how to regulate themselves. The person-level concepts can help explain experience, but organizational use should focus on evaluative risk and granted latitude. An institution can ask whether comparable communication is described differently across groups, whether some employees receive more forgiveness for violating norms, whether requests for clarification affect credibility differently depending on who asks, or whether disability disclosure changes how earlier competence is interpreted.

Those questions should be examined through patterns of evaluation, promotion, discipline, qualitative experience, and other evidence rather than through a superficial survey

followed by an organizational declaration that no latitude gap exists. A favorable climate score is not proof that comparable people receive comparable treatment.

The framework should not be used to identify employees who “throttle,” score their regulatory ability, coach them toward a supposedly optimal setting, pressure them to disclose neurodivergence, or turn visible adaptation into a leadership-development issue. Evidence that compensatory effort is being penalized should indict the unequal evaluation, not become feedback telling the affected employee to compensate more convincingly.

The perceived-versus-evaluative distinction also requires protection from misuse. “That is only your perceived risk” would invert the purpose of the framework. Perceived risk is legitimate information about what a person has learned to expect. Lack of evaluative evidence is not evidence of equal treatment, and institutions should carry responsibility for examining their own patterns rather than requiring individual employees to prove bias before concern is taken seriously.

Hollander's idiosyncrasy-credit framework deserves a similar warning. It may help explain how status and conformity produce latitude, but it should not become “earn your latitude.” Marginalized people should not have to accumulate enough conventionality before receiving the freedom to deviate.

Clinical use should remain equally cautious. Neurocultural Throttling is not a symptom and should not become chart language implying dysfunctional self-regulation. A clinician might use the framework to explore how a patient understands the social risks surrounding communication, disclosure, or behavior, but the goal should be understanding context rather than diagnosing the adaptation.

Affinity groups, mentoring programs, or identity-based support may be helpful, but they are not substitutes for examining how the broader institution interprets behavior. An organization cannot solve unequal latitude by giving the people who receive less of it a support group and leaving evaluation practices unchanged.

What Research Should Come Next

The first research priority should be participatory rather than psychometric. Racialized neurodivergent people should be asked whether the framework resembles their experience, what they already call that experience, which parts feel inaccurate, and whether *throttling* clarifies or alienates. Existing work by Nelson and Lichwa, Zanders, Jones and colleagues, and Franklin and colleagues has already established much of the broader experiential terrain. New qualitative research should focus specifically on whether people recognize a connected regulatory experience and whether the proposed language adds anything to the terms they already use.

A second line of research should extend the perceived-versus-evaluative distinction. Jones and Sasson's (2026) first-impressions study shows that race, gender, and autism can interact in evaluations in counterintuitive ways. Future studies could move beyond friendly first impressions into disagreement, leadership, visible stress, direct communication, or other situations closer to the risks participants report anticipating.

The compensatory-effort hypothesis offers another test. An experimental design could vary target race, neurodivergence, and visible evidence of compensation while holding performance constant. Examples of compensation might include detailed notes, scripted phrasing, structured preparation, or deliberate processing pauses. The relevant outcome would not simply be whether Black autistic people are evaluated more negatively. Researchers would ask whether the *meaning assigned to visible effort* changes across identity combinations after

accounting for general naturalness bias, autism stigma, and established stereotype processes. Tsay and Banaji's work on preferences for naturals over strivers provides one obvious rival explanation such a study would need to address.

Research on granted latitude could similarly examine whether disclosed neurodivergence widens or narrows tolerance for the same behavior and whether that effect differs by race, gender, or context. The answer should not be assumed to be negative. The Jones and Sasson findings, as well as conflicting results in the backlash literature, make clear that intersectional effects can sometimes buffer rather than intensify a penalty.

Finally, the framework's actual usefulness should be tested because usefulness is one of its central claims. A simple study could compare how racialized neurodivergent adults describe a difficult interaction before and after reading a brief explanation of the framework. Does the framework help them distinguish what they anticipated from what can be established about the environment? Does it give them more precise language without increasing hypervigilance or self-monitoring? Does it reduce the tendency to interpret every difficult interaction as a personal deficit? Similar work with managers, educators, or clinicians could test whether exposure to the framework produces more environment-focused questions rather than more advice about how marginalized people should regulate.

If racialized neurodivergent participants overwhelmingly prefer existing language such as *intersectional masking*, if the word *throttling* is experienced as harmful or inaccurate, or if the framework does not improve how people describe and analyze these situations, there would be little reason to preserve the terminology merely because it is distinctive.

Limitations and Positionality

This framework comes from a particular social location. I am a Black autistic man with ADHD whose professional life has included military service, higher education, corporate institutions, public service, and inclusion work. I have experienced forms of racialization and neurodivergent misunderstanding, but I have also occupied positions of authority, economic stability, and professional status that provide forms of latitude unavailable to many other racialized neurodivergent people.

My experience therefore cannot serve as the default model. Black autistic women encounter racialized and gendered expectations that differ from mine. Black autistic children experience adult authority, school discipline, diagnostic systems, and policing in ways I do not experience as an established professional. Non-speaking autistic people, people with intellectual disabilities, people with higher support needs, immigrants, queer and trans people, hourly workers with little discretion, and people living outside the United States may encounter regulation, coercion, and interpretation in forms this framework does not yet anticipate.

The empirical literature supporting this paper is also disproportionately about autism. My own experience includes ADHD, and the broader neurocultural lens may eventually prove useful across other neurotypes, but the paper should not use the experience of one autistic person with ADHD to imply an evidence base that does not yet exist. Racial and ethnic disparities in adult ADHD diagnosis and care have been documented (Alai et al., 2024; Fairman et al., 2020), but that literature does not yet establish the specific regulatory interactions proposed here.

The terminology itself remains another limitation. *Throttling* helps me because it directs attention toward regulation rather than disguise, but other racialized neurodivergent people may hear machinery, coercion, or physical violence before they hear regulation. No theoretical

defense should overrule that response. Participatory research should therefore treat the name as something to test rather than something participants are expected to learn.

The framework also cannot determine from an individual story whether discrimination occurred. Perceived risk may be grounded in extensive experience and still differ from the behavior of a particular evaluator. Evaluative findings may show group-level differences while remaining unable to explain one person's experience. Keeping those levels separate is not a concession that bias is rare; it is a requirement for making claims that are no stronger than the evidence.

Conclusion

What remained for me after reading the masking, stigma, racialization, disability, and organizational literatures was an experience that sat between them. My neurodivergence was never entering the world without a body, and my Blackness was not waiting patiently while people interpreted the autism first. A direct question, intense preparation, visible frustration, silence, unusual affect, eye contact, or the way I attacked an urgent assignment could acquire meanings through several systems at once, leaving me to make decisions without necessarily knowing which interpretation I was trying to prevent.

That uncertainty is no longer something I think the framework should solve. In many ways, it is part of what the framework needs to preserve. The distinctions between perceived and evaluative risk, and between perceived and granted latitude, are there to keep that uncertainty honest, and Neurocultural Throttling names the regulation that can develop in the space between what a person anticipates and what a room actually does.

I use the term with less certainty than I did when this inquiry began, and that uncertainty now feels appropriate. If other racialized neurodivergent people encounter the framework and

recognize something they have struggled to name, the language may have value. If they tell me that masking, code-switching, double binds, or another term already serves them better, that matters too. A framework designed to make marginalized experience more legible should not become another piece of language imposed on the people it claims to describe.

The early work assignment that stayed with me for so many years still does not tell me why someone decided I was showing off. What it tells me is how easily behavior can leave one person carrying one meaning and arrive in someone else's mind carrying another. Later, I learned to anticipate that gap and sometimes to regulate around it.

The more useful question now belongs to the environments in which those calculations happen. When some people are spending extraordinary effort trying to predict how their neurodivergence will be interpreted through everything else the world already believes about them, the task is to understand why those calculations became necessary and whether the same room is asking anything comparable of everyone else, rather than teaching the person to predict more effectively.

References

Alai, J., Callen, E. F., Clay, T., Goodman, D. W., Adler, L. A., & Faraone, S. V. (2024).

Differences in primary care management of patients with adult attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) based on race and ethnicity. *Journal of Attention Disorders*, 28(5), 923–935. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10870547231218038>

Annamma, S. A., Connor, D., & Ferri, B. (2013). Dis/ability critical race studies (DisCrit):

Theorizing at the intersections of race and dis/ability. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 16(1), 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.730511>

- Bailey, M., & Mobley, I. A. (2019). Work in the intersections: A Black feminist disability framework. *Gender & Society*, 33(1), 19–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243218801523>
- Botha, M., & Frost, D. M. (2020). Extending the minority stress model to understand mental health problems experienced by the autistic population. *Society and Mental Health*, 10(1), 20–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156869318804297>
- Brody, G. H., Yu, T., Chen, E., Miller, G. E., Kogan, S. M., & Beach, S. R. H. (2013). Is resilience only skin deep? Rural African Americans' socioeconomic status-related risk and competence in preadolescence and psychological adjustment and allostatic load at age 19. *Psychological Science*, 24(7), 1285–1293. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612471954>
- Chiao, J. Y., Hariri, A. R., Harada, T., Mano, Y., Sadato, N., Parrish, T. B., & Iidaka, T. (2010). Theory and methods in cultural neuroscience. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 5(2–3), 356–361. <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsq063>
- Cook, J., Hull, L., Crane, L., & Mandy, W. (2021). Camouflaging in autism: A systematic review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 89, Article 102080. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2021.102080>
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, 139–167.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.

- Crocker, J., Voelkl, K., Testa, M., & Major, B. (1991). Social stigma: The affective consequences of attributional ambiguity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60(2), 218–228. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.60.2.218>
- Dickens, D. D., Womack, V. Y., & Dimes, T. (2019). Managing hypervisibility: An exploration of theory and research on identity shifting strategies in the workplace among Black women. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 113, 153–163. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.10.008>
- Ekman, P. (1972). Universals and cultural differences in facial expressions of emotion. In J. Cole (Ed.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, 1971* (Vol. 19, pp. 207–283). University of Nebraska Press.
- Fairman, K. A., Peckham, A. M., & Sclar, D. A. (2020). Diagnosis and treatment of ADHD in the United States: Update by gender and race. *Journal of Attention Disorders*, 24(1), 10–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1087054716688534>
- Franklin, M. D., Taylor, E. E., Floríndez, D. C., Guzman, M., Lawson, T. L., Rios, J., & Angell, A. M. (2025). An occupational science contribution to camouflaging scholarship: Centering intersectional experiences of occupational disruptions. *Autism in Adulthood*, 7(3), 238–248. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2023.0070>
- Geronimus, A. T., Hicken, M., Keene, D., & Bound, J. (2006). “Weathering” and age patterns of allostatic load scores among Blacks and Whites in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health*, 96(5), 826–833. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2004.060749>
- Ghavami, N., & Peplau, L. A. (2013). An intersectional analysis of gender and ethnic stereotypes: Testing three hypotheses. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 37(1), 113–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684312464203>

- Giwa Onaiwu, M. (2020). "They don't know, don't show, or don't care": Autism's White privilege problem. *Autism in Adulthood*, 2(4), 270–272.
<https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0077>
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Prentice-Hall.
- Gross, J. J. (1998). Antecedent- and response-focused emotion regulation: Divergent consequences for experience, expression, and physiology. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(1), 224–237. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.1.224>
- Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. (2003). Individual differences in two emotion regulation processes: Implications for affect, relationships, and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(2), 348–362. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.2.348>
- Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. University of California Press.
- Hoffman, K. M., Trawalter, S., Axt, J. R., & Oliver, M. N. (2016). Racial bias in pain assessment and treatment recommendations, and false beliefs about biological differences between Blacks and Whites. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113(16), 4296–4301. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1516047113>
- Hollander, E. P. (1958). Conformity, status, and idiosyncrasy credit. *Psychological Review*, 65(2), 117–127. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0042501>
- Hull, L., Petrides, K. V., Allison, C., Smith, P., Baron-Cohen, S., Lai, M.-C., & Mandy, W. (2017). "Putting on my best normal": Social camouflaging in adults with autism spectrum conditions. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 47(8), 2519–2534.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3166-5>

- James, S. A. (1994). John Henryism and the health of African-Americans. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 18(2), 163–182. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01379448>
- Jones, D. R., Botha, M., & Sasson, N. J. (2025). “I'm kind of stuck in the middle. I don't know where to go”: Race, autism, and intersectional stigma among Black and White autistic adults. *Autism in Adulthood*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/25739581251374440>
- Jones, D. R., & Sasson, N. J. (2026). Intersectional effects of race and gender on first impressions of Black and White autistic adults. *Autism*, 30(2), 452–465. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613251389291>
- Lai, M.-C., Lombardo, M. V., Ruigrok, A. N. V., Chakrabarti, B., Auyeung, B., Szatmari, P., Happé, F., Baron-Cohen, S., & MRC AIMS Consortium. (2017). Quantifying and exploring camouflaging in men and women with autism. *Autism*, 21(6), 690–702. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361316671012>
- Lawson, W. B. (2020). Adaptive morphing and coping with social threat in autism: An autistic perspective. *Journal of Intellectual Disability - Diagnosis and Treatment*, 8(3), 519–526. <https://doi.org/10.6000/2292-2598.2020.08.03.29>
- Liu, C. X., Blair, A., & Tenney, E. R. (2026). Registered report: Can agentic Black women get ahead? An experiment revisited. *Psychological Science*, 37(5), 347–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976261436988>
- Livingston, R. W., Rosette, A. S., & Washington, E. F. (2012). Can an agentic Black woman get ahead? The impact of race and interpersonal dominance on perceptions of female leaders. *Psychological Science*, 23(4), 354–358. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611428079>

- McCluney, C. L., Durkee, M. I., Smith, R. E., II, Robotham, K. J., & Lee, S. S.-L. (2021). To be, or not to be...Black: The effects of racial codeswitching on perceived professionalism in the workplace. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 97, Article 104199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2021.104199>
- Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(5), 674–697. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674>
- Nelson, T., & Lichwa, H. (2025). The lived experiences of masking Black Autistic girls in UK education: “Before people see the autism, they see my race.” *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 41(4), 417–438. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2025.2541211>
- Pachankis, J. E. (2007). The psychological implications of concealing a stigma: A cognitive-affective-behavioral model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 133(2), 328–345. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.133.2.328>
- Pearson, A., & Rose, K. (2021). A conceptual analysis of autistic masking: Understanding the narrative of stigma and the illusion of choice. *Autism in Adulthood*, 3(1), 52–60. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0043>
- Pliskin, A. E., & Crehan, E. T. (2024). Moving toward neurodiversity-affirming integrated psychotherapy with autistic clients. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 34(3), 338–350. <https://doi.org/10.1037/int0000340>
- Ray, V. (2019). A theory of racialized organizations. *American Sociological Review*, 84(1), 26–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122418822335>

Rudman, L. A. (1998). Self-promotion as a risk factor for women: The costs and benefits of counterstereotypical impression management. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(3), 629–645. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.3.629>

Schalk, S. (2022). *Black disability politics*. Duke University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478027003>

Tsay, C.-J., & Banaji, M. R. (2011). Naturals and strivers: Preferences and beliefs about sources of achievement. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 47(2), 460–465.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2010.12.011>

Yates Flanagan, A., Cola, M., Yu, N., Peele, H., Dicette, K., Hicks, G., Pelella, M. R., King-Pointer, A., Owens, J., Truong, D. M., Hauptmann, A., Pacheco, J., Russell, A., Lee, A., Schillinger, S., Covello, M., Lyons, M., Solórzano, R., Turnacioglu, S., ... Parish-Morris, J. (2025). Policing Black autistic children: A qualitative approach to understanding Black caregivers' concerns. *Autism*, 29(5), 1303–1317.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613241303549>

Yates Flanagan, A., Peele, H., Obus, E., Dicette, K., Hill, T. L., Yu, N., Hicks, G., Pelella, M. R., King-Pointer, A., Owens, J., Truong, D. M., Hauptmann, A., Cola, M., Weaver, N., Pacheco, J., Russell, A., Lee, A., Schillinger, S., Covello, M., ... Parish-Morris, J. (2025). A critical exploration of police officers' interactions with Black autistic youth and the guidance Black caregivers hope police officers will follow. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-025-06994-7>

Zanders, C. J. (2025). *Unseen: Black Autistic women's masking practices, pressures, and possibilities* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan]. Deep Blue Repositories.

<https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/items/254a842d-1090-4d17-9a1e-8a73b7973fbf>