



Personal Health

Helen Ellis (UK)



This project has been funded with the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.



Main gender-related issues

- Masking

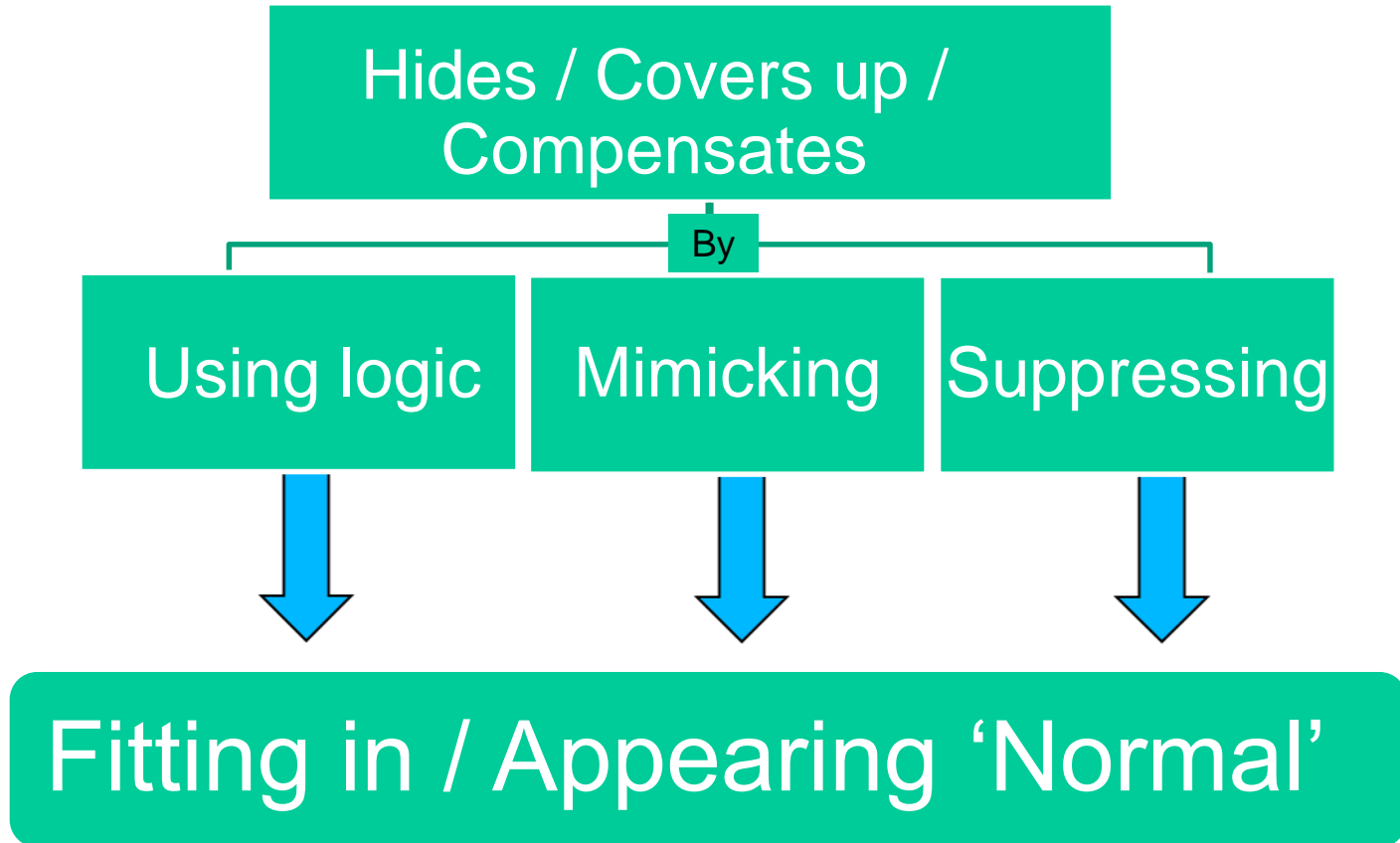


- Stereotyping



But remember that everyone is an individual

'Masking' and autism



Why try to fit in / appear 'normal'?



Why try to fit in / appear 'normal'?

1



She can't say that!



From your voice on the phone, I thought you were younger

2



She's so RUDE!



Outline of Masking

Superficial Effects:

- Stick out less
- Appear more 'normal'
- Behave more 'appropriately'

Urge to mask may be instinctive?

We fit in better, stick out less

MASKING

Using logic

Mimicking

Suppressing

Conscious rather than instinctive. Always trying to figure things out

More effort and energy required, can't relax

Takes longer

Can't be our true selves

Make more mistakes

exhaustion

Lack of sleep

Low energy

Low resistance - illness

stress

People misjudge

depression

Low self esteem

anxiety

PHYSICAL HEALTH

MENTAL HEALTH

Health and medical professionals

Doubt and disbelief of diagnosis

Doubt, disbelief and lack of understanding of some of our difficulties:

- The 'triad' associated with autism
- Some sensory stimuli can be agonising for us
- We can find recognition, identification and communication of symptoms extremely difficult

Recognising, identifying and communicating symptoms: My checklist

EARS

Can I hear (the radio) clearly?

Is there any increase in auditory sensitivity?

Is there any ringing/echoing in the ears when there is no sound in the room?

EYES

Is my vision clear and normal?

Any double vision/ghosting?

Are both eyes seeing the same?

Is one more blurry than the other?

Can I focus on a close object (hand/clock/phone)?

Can I focus on a faraway object (door/outside the window)?

HEAD

What level of pain is there in my head?

Is it a 'normal' headache at the front of the skull? (Dehydrating or interrupted sleep)

Is it a sharp spiky headache? (Sensory sensitivity or stress)

Is it severe enough for painkillers?

INTERNAL

Is my stomach in pain?

Is it gurgling/echoey? (Hungry)

Is it tight/cramping? (Stress/Menstruation)

Is it jumpy/feeling similar to motion sickness? (Anxiety)

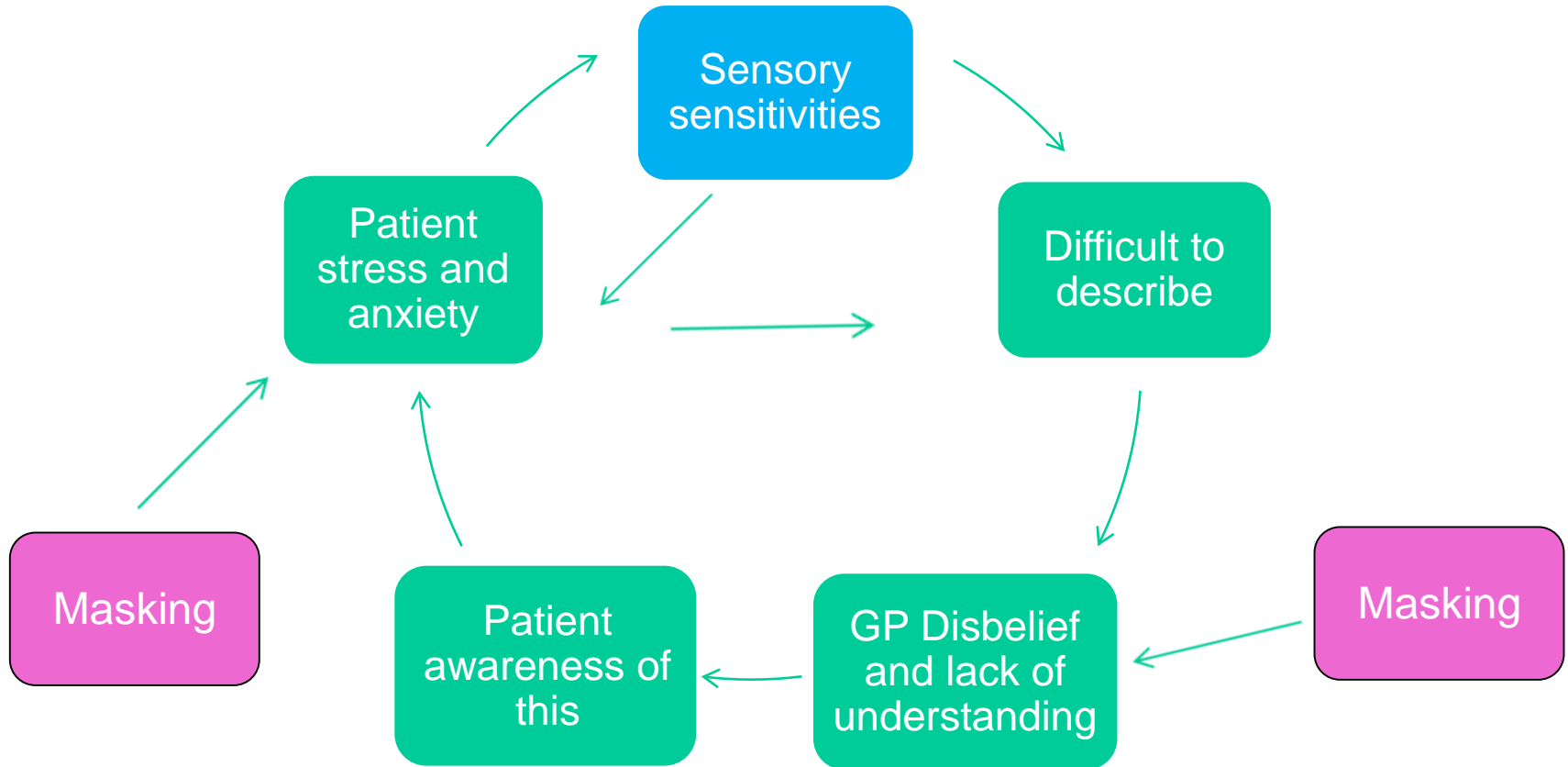
BREATHING / PULSE *Does my chest hurt when I breathe?*

If so is it a sharp pain or heavy pressure?

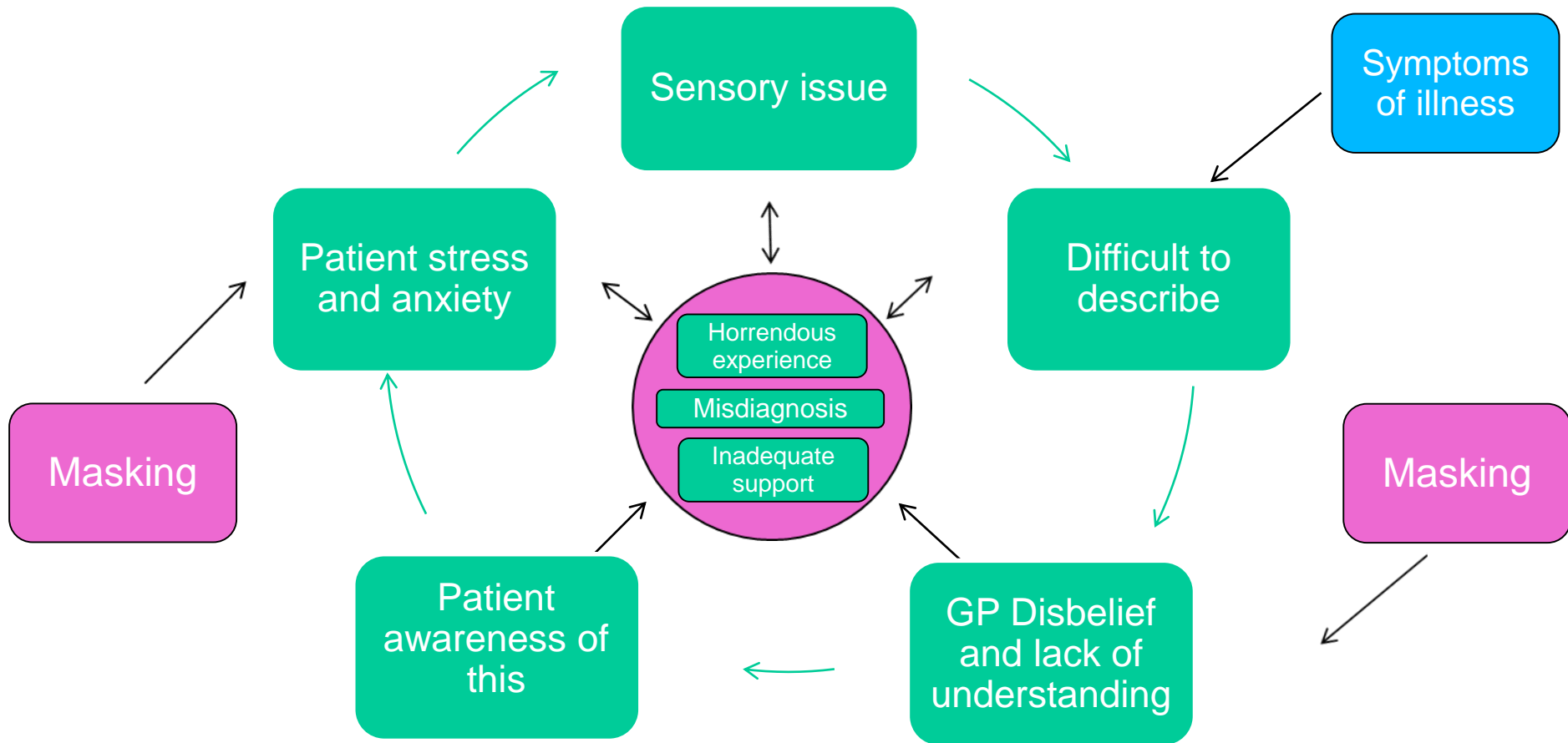
ETC...



Sensory differences



Medical appointments and treatment



Breaking the vicious circles

Understanding

- Masking
- What is being masked
- Sensory sensitivities
- Difficulties re explanation of difficulties
- Difficulties re recognition and communication of symptoms

Training:

- Gender dimension
- Masking
- Support and adaptation for sensory sensitivities
- Support and adaptation to recognise, identify and explain symptoms and difficulties

Doctors who are autism specialists?

Confidence building to help us to communicate more effectively with GPs

Hygiene



Conclusions

- Public awareness can and should be increased through projects like Autism in Pink.
- Understanding of autism is crucial
- Especially understanding of masking
 - The effort it takes
 - The way it hides so many difficulties and differences

Up Next

Personal Relationships