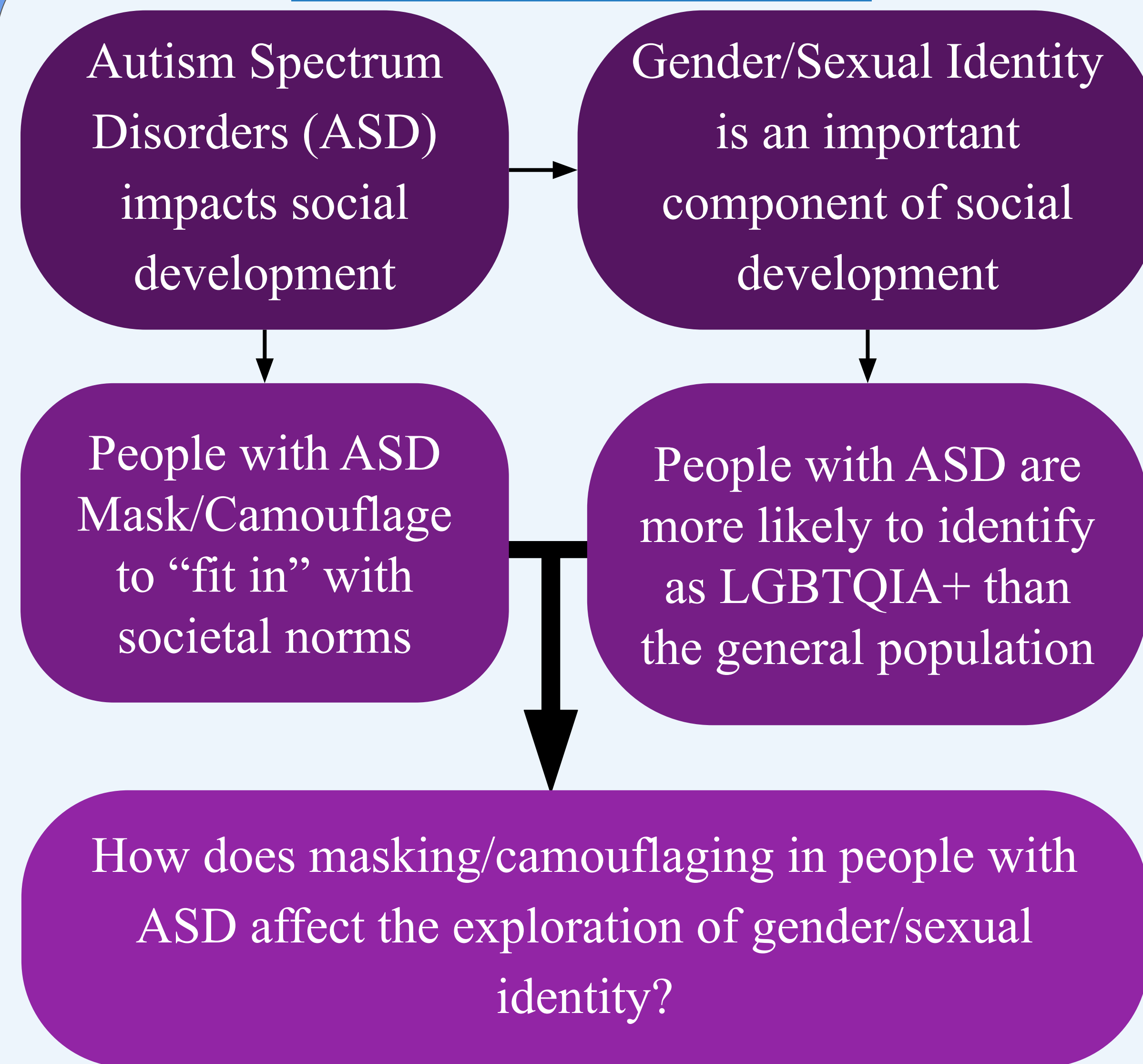


# The Impact of Masking on Sexual and Gender Identity Exploration in the Autism Spectrum Population

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## Background

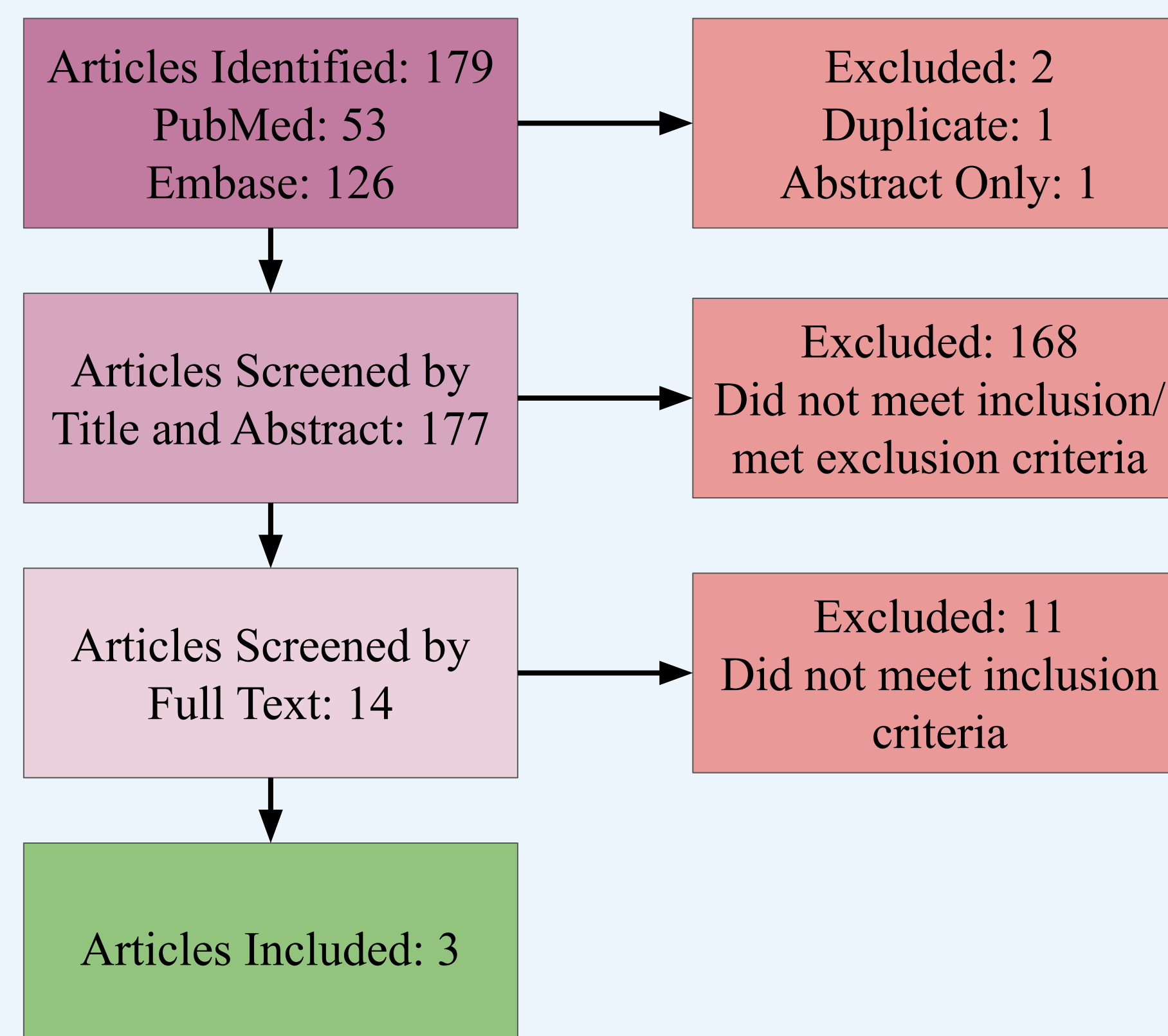


### Why is this important?

- Most research on ASD focuses on pediatric concerns and not concerns that arise during the transition into teenagers and then adults
- Gender related concerns may fall under social development which is impacted in those with ASD
- Many people with ASD have difficulty advocating for their needs and having their identity accepted - especially when it comes to gender/sexual identity

## Methods

Search String: ((sexual\* OR gender\*) AND (autism\*) AND (mask\* OR camo\*))



## Results

Negative mental health outcomes and reduced well being<sup>6,12</sup>

Intense pressure to conform to neurotypical gender norms<sup>12</sup>

Identity confusion, chronic stress, and feelings of inauthenticity<sup>3</sup>

Both women and men were more likely to endorse conventional reasons than relational reasons<sup>3</sup>

Felt misunderstood by non-autistic peers which did not allow for positive identity development<sup>6</sup>

The persistent psychological burden underscores the urgent need for supportive environments that allow authentic self-expression without penalizing autistic traits

## Conclusions

- Camouflaging/masking may offer short-term social benefits, however has significant long-term risks regarding mental health and identity development (including potential connections to sexual and gender identity exploration) in autistic individuals

## Limitations

- Limited research - quantitative and qualitative
- Scoping Review only performed in 2 databases and limited to articles after 2015
  - Did not look at gray literature
- Simple search string
  - May have missed potential articles due to limited search string
- Strict inclusion criteria
  - May have excluded articles looking at either gender/sexual identity or masking/camouflaging but not explicitly both

## Future Directions

- Expand scoping review to include other scientific databases and gray literature
- Survey to identify correlation between masking/camouflaging and gender/sexual identity in ASD
- Toolkit for providers to become more familiar with masking/camouflaging and importance of discussing sexual/gender identity with people with ASD

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## References

