Why Stimming Is an Essential Part of My Life With Autism

Stimming is a big part of my life. It is something I do all day every day. I’ve had a love-hate relationship with stimming. On the one (flapping) hand, it is a coping mechanism that is critical to my success in life. On the other, it seems to upset or bother a lot of people when they see me do it.

When I stim in public, I get a lot of stares. Since most people don’t “see” my autism, when I stim, it looks very strange to them. I’ve even been told I was “imitating special needs people” and how rude that is. This is one of the reasons I used to hide my stimming in public. I was encouraged not to stim as a child. Up until very recently, stimming has been seen as a behavioral issue rather than a coping mechanism. I wish I had the words and ability as a child to tell my parents, doctors, teachers etc. that stimming would have helped the behaviors go away or at least deescalate the situation. Having to bottle up the stimming and emotions in public played a huge part in contributing to my intense meltdowns at home.

My stimming is different based on what is causing it. Any emotional overload, be it happy or sad, is too much for me to handle. I feel things on a very deep level. Stimming helps me alleviate those intense emotions. When I’m happy, I tend to run, jump and squeal. If I like the way a word sounds, I repeat it. When I’m upset, I rock more and groan. When I’m nervous or [**overloaded sensory-wise**](https://themighty.com/2018/07/sensory-overload-how-to-help/), I stim with my fingers and hands. Sometimes my stimming indicates I want deep pressure. For people with autism, many of whom have communication issues, our stimming is a language unto itself. It’s time for the world to learn our language instead of insisting we don’t use it.

The biggest thing I want people to take away is when I am stimming, it doesn’t mean something is wrong or I’m having a difficult day. It means I’m letting myself be autistic. I’m not trying to hide it just because the public doesn’t understand what is going on. If a little flapping in public stops a meltdown later on at home, I’m all for it. As part of the neurodiversity movement, we want to do away with the [**stigma of stimming**](https://themighty.com/2019/01/autism-stimming/). It is part of who we are and we are not ashamed.

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