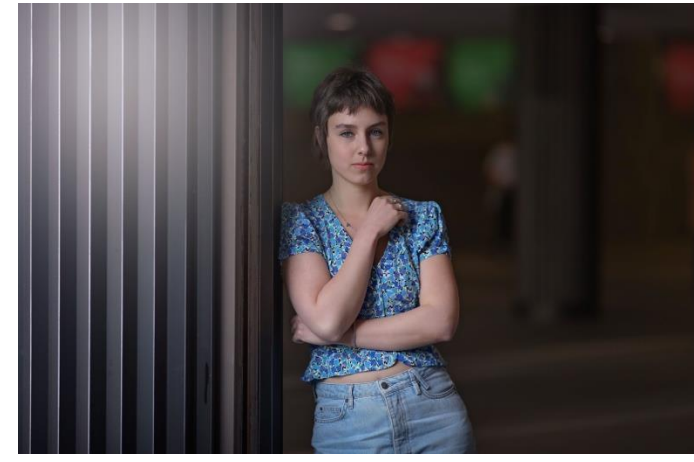


# Amplifying Voices

## Empowering Autistic Women through Candid Portraits and Stories on Instagram

M. Stevens, & E.M.A. Blijd-Hoogewys, MSc, PhD



## Background

- **FANN: Female Autism Network of the Netherlands** is a collaborative platform comprising therapists, researchers, and autistic women.
- Through our **Instagram** account, @FANN\_autisme (+6500 followers), we shared empowering stories of autistic women. Each post features a captivating photograph taken by a female autistic photographer (MS) and a written interview (EBH).
- These **interviews** focused on a concise self-description, the influence of autism on their lives, notable achievements, and invaluable tips for fellow autistic individuals. They serve as compelling narratives, showcasing diverse paths towards personal recovery, highlighting challenges, resilience & authenticity (INSAR poster 2022).
- **Objectives:** gain deeper insights into their experiences during the photoshoots and to understand the profound impact of the Instagram posts on their lives.

## Results

- **Motivations for participating:** (1) Awareness about female autism (77%), (2) sharing personal experiences (61%), (3) challenging stigma surrounding autism (41%), (4) cultivating self-acceptance (27%) & (5) obtaining a nice portrait (25%).
- **During photo shoot:** (1) feeling at ease with the photographer (86%), (2) initially feeling tense (14%), (3) enjoyable time (89%), (4) feeling appreciated/satisfied (45%), (5) grateful for the opportunity (19%), (6) educational/enriching experience (8%) & (7) liberating (3%).
- **Reactions from family & friends:** overwhelmingly positive responses (92%), including increased understanding & numerous compliments. No negative reactions were reported, though a few mentioned neutral responses (8%).
- **Social media reactions:** predominantly positive/supportive (89%), with abundance of compliments & support. No negative reactions were reported.
- **Participation led to:** (1) increased self-acceptance (52%), (2) personal growth & empowerment (36%), (3) community connection (33%) & (4) acknowledgment (23%).

## Methods

### Participants

All 71 women portrayed received an online survey concerning

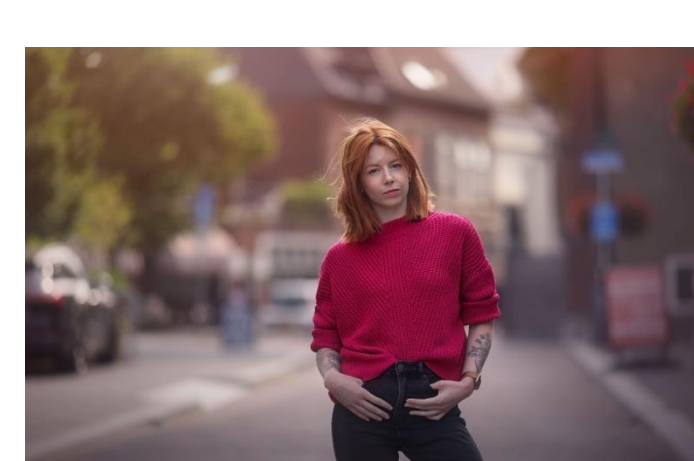
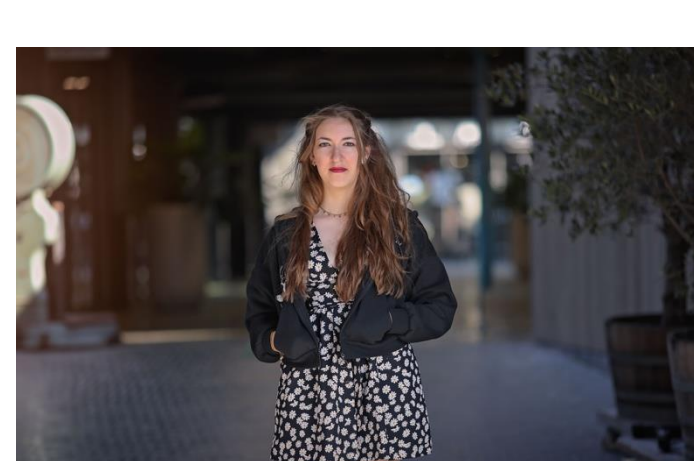
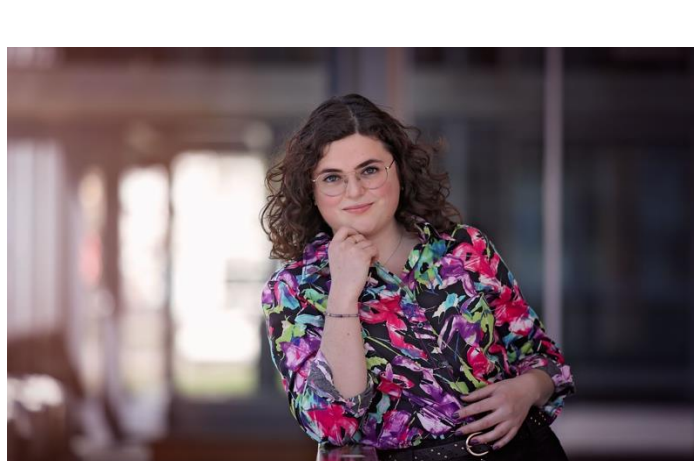
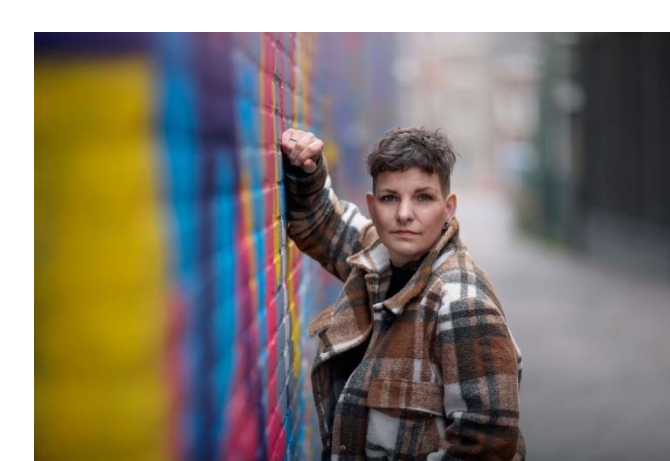
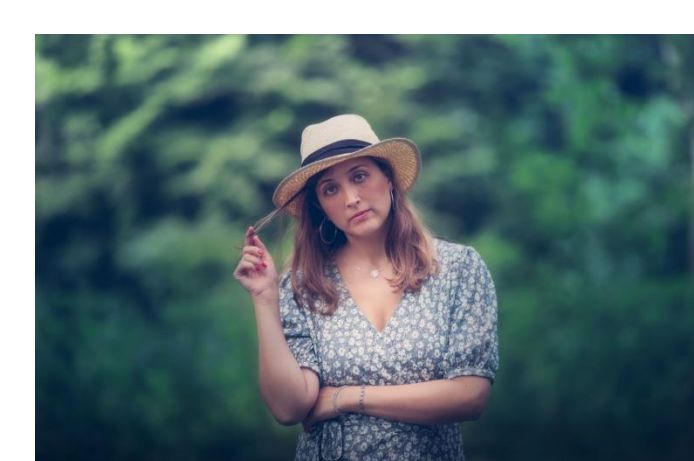
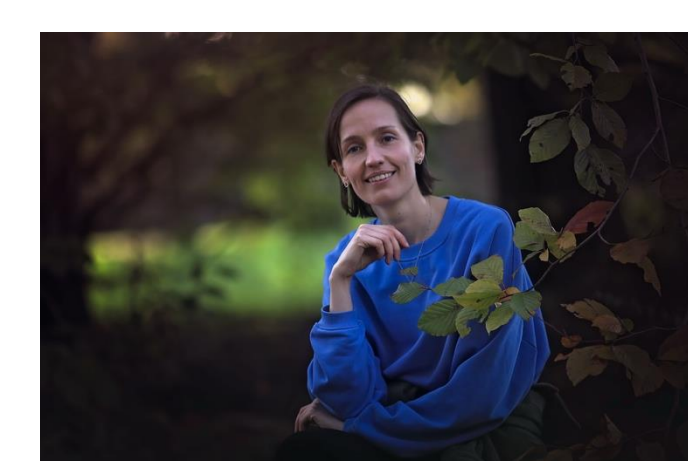
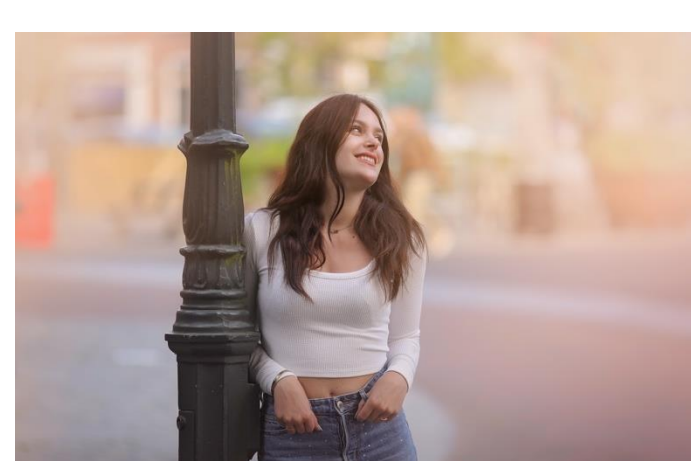
- (1) Their motivation for participating
- (2) Their feelings during the photoshoot
- (3) Reactions from family, friends & colleagues
- (4) Responses on social media
- (5) What this project meant to them

A total of 64 women (90%), of whom 2 identified as non-binary, responded (age:  $M = 33.17$  years,  $SD = 9.89$ ; 42 were in a romantic relationships; 5 lived with their parents, 5 had assisted/protected living arrangements). All reported being diagnosed with ASD (age of diagnosis:  $M = 27.94$  years,  $SD = 10.93$ ).

**Analysis:** Qualitative content analysis

## Conclusions

- The FANN Instagram photo project provided a dynamic platform for individuals to courageously share their narratives, defy stereotypes, and **contribute to a more inclusive comprehension of autism among women**.
- Despite initial nerves or apprehension of some, participants found the photoshoot to be a fulfilling and enjoyable experience.
- The **positive reactions** from participants' social circles served as a powerful source of support and validation, affirming the significance of their contributions.
- Similarly, the encouraging feedback on social media was affirming and uplifting, providing participants with a profound sense of connection and camaraderie.
- The FANN Instagram photo project served as a catalyst for transformative experiences, **cultivating acceptance, empowerment, and a profound sense of belonging** within the autism community.
- Further research into the portrayal, acceptance, and awareness of autism through the lens of social media is warranted.



Instagram



FANN.network@gmail.com