

# Consideration of the Psycho-social Meaning of Face Mask-Wearing

– A kind of “shield” for managing feelings of anxiety and fear –

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In recent years, there has been increased attention on people who are using face masks for non-medical purposes. When used outside the original purpose, such masks are also known in Japan as the “Date Mask.” The present study aims to elucidate social interaction between people when they are wearing such masks.

For this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the author with four participants wearing a “Date Mask,” agreeing to be participants. The results showed that there are four situations whereby one will put on a mask and 10 ways to use the masks. Some points can be seen in the four participants. The participants tend to emphasize more non-verbal communication when interacting with another person, when wearing a mask. This meant that they over-react to such interactions, as they pick up non-verbal cues such as messages that cannot be expressed through words, and sometimes, even fictitious messages. Furthermore, they themselves use non-verbal cues and expect the other party to recognize the cues as well. With that said, there was an inclination whereby the participants were able to put aside fear due to anxieties felt in social interaction and to head out to interact with others while wearing the mask, sometimes to the point of deceiving others, as the masks can act as a “shield.” The present research attempts to explain not just the protective use of the masks, which has been discussed before, but also the many other uses for the masks and the intentions behind those who actively use such masks.