

Shifting Frames: A Textual Analysis of the Depiction of Neurodivergent Women in Major
U.S. Newspapers

By

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Dedication

To my family — your unwavering love and patience never fails to inspire me. Emma and Weston, I am beyond thankful that I get to be in your lives. You encourage me to be a better version of myself every day.

This work is also dedicated to every neurodivergent person whose story deserves to be told. Your experiences are valid, and I hope you find communities that make you feel seen, heard, and appreciated.

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Introduction

One of the most popular topics on social media and in news coverage over the past several years has been neurodiversity and ADHD (Yeung, Ng, & Abi-Jaoude, 2022). With conversations about these conditions becoming more prevalent, others have started sharing their personal experiences online (Yücel, 2023). Social media, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other neurological and environmental factors have been attributed with this increase of diagnoses in recent years (Abdelnour, Jansen, & Gold, 2022). But while some news outlets have increased their coverage of their condition, mainstream media has not always been good about this, especially with including women who often go under-diagnosed (Attoe & Climie, 2023).

Very little research has been done on the media's impact on how the public perceives women with ADHD (Driver & Chester, 2021). Many of the articles written about the condition when it was first observed included misinformation, biases or stereotypes within them (Conrad & Potter, 2000). Through expanded research and the emergence of social platforms, we now have a better understanding how ADHD presents in people of all ages and genders (Hartnett & Cummings, 2023). Further discussion on how ADHD and neurodiversity were viewed in the 1990s versus the 2020s can help us understand where these stereotypes came from and how to continue to challenge these outdated perceptions (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024). Communities and families have been able to seek assistance and find information on these topics through the internet and large publications since the discovery of these conditions (Abdelnour, Jansen, & Gold, 2022). Although, these discoveries have primarily focused on the experiences of young boys with ADHD (Abdelnour, Jansen, & Gold, 2022).

This study is an in-depth textual analysis and examination of how two major news outlets have framed and portrayed neurodivergent traits in the media. By conducting a qualitative

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analysis of 48 articles from *The New York Times* and 51 articles from *The Washington Post*. Studying how ADHD and neurodiversity were framed by large publications can help future generations analyze gendered narratives, trends, communication styles and the overall history of these conditions (Maiese, 2013). Research questions for this study include: What themes emerged in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* coverage of neurodivergent women? How did *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* frame neurodivergent women?

Neurodiversity Context

The term “neurodivergence” is used to describe people whose neurological development diverges from what is considered typical or “neurotypical” (Hennekam, Kulkarni, & Beatty, 2024, p. 3). An Australian sociologist, Judy Singer, introduced the terms “neurodiverse” and neurodivergent as an alternative to deficit-based language such as “disorder” (Singer, 2017, p. 6). Since the term’s first use, Singer stated that she wanted to recognize that everyone has a different unique perspective and that the human brain develops divergently (Baumer & Frueh, 2021).

Neurodiversity looks different for everyone, shaped by their personal experiences and varying traits (Baumer & Frueh, 2021). Baumer and Frueh (2021) explain that neurodiversity includes conditions such as Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), dyslexia, and other conditions that have cognitive and developmental differences. These traits can present themselves in both women and men. Prior to the term being coined in the late 1990s, those who went undiagnosed or had other mental health issues were typically placed in mental institutions if they were deemed different than the neurotypical (Grob, 1994).

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When Disorders Were Established

Before the late 20th century, neurological differences such as autism or ADHD were not accurately depicted in educational or entertainment areas (Smith, 2017). ADHD was not considered a disability until 1990, and prior to that, those who displayed symptoms of ADHD were labeled as problematic (Tarantella, 2023). Early on, ADHD was labeled as emotional condition in children and autism was seen as a psychiatric disorder (Cohmer, 2014). There was a stigma around the parents and more specifically, mothers, for how they parented their children. Terms like “refrigerator mother” were created to label mothers for the lack of parental warmth towards their autistic child (Cohmer, 2014). Parents of children with ADHD were considered bad parents for not disciplining their children (Yonathan, Rachman, Gunari, Nanda, & Endyarni, 2017). These conditions were typically treated with behavior modifications instead of understanding the neurological background. With more research on stimulant medications such as Adderall and Ritalin, the public’s perception began to shift on ADHD (Singh, 2008). While there has been a shift in how people view these conditions, there is still stigma surrounding those who have ADHD labeling them as unmotivated and lazy (Singh, 2008).

As the term became more widely known, autism, ADHD, and other neurodiverse conditions began to gain more media attention (Lewin & Akhtar, 2020). While the term neurodiverse was becoming more known and discussed, the continued portrayal of these traits only in the male population continued (Craddock, 2024). A 2014 study showed around 80% of adults with ADHD live their lives undiagnosed and untreated. Along with ADHD, 87% of adults with these traits also have at least one comorbid psychiatric condition like major depressive disorder (60%), substance use disorder (57%), and anxiety (56%) (Kuntz, 2022).

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Throughout the 2000s, awareness of ADHD significantly increased with more news coverage surrounding the condition (Abdelnour, Jansen, & Gold, 2022). Despite the continued rise in coverage, some information was often inaccurate thus leading to less understanding around diagnoses and treatment. ADHD was usually portrayed as a condition that impacted young, hyperactive boys (Williamson & Johnston, 2015). The misrepresentation of neurodiversity only surrounding young men led to the underdiagnosis and lack of research surrounding how ADHD presented in women and girls (Vincenti, Galea, & Briffa, 2023).

Stereotypes of decreased self-esteem, anxiety, or hyper emotional attributes were usually depicted of women who presented neurodivergent traits (Attoe & Climie, 2023). Other characteristics such as being forgetful, chaotic, messy, hypersensitive, and impulsive were reported as well (Volpe, 2021). To cope with these characteristics and challenges associated with the societal and personal issues of ADHD, individuals often turn to masking strategies to alleviate feelings of being stigmatized or misunderstood. Masking is a social-relational adaptation that many people who dealt with being labeled by some of these stereotypes attempted to hide their neurodivergence to fit into a neurotypical world (Leong & Graichen, 2024). By hiding aspects of themselves to suppress ways that they felt like their ADHD presented, some studies found that people who masked their ADHD were more at risk for other co-occurring symptoms such as depression, obsessive checking and anxiety (Leong & Graichen, 2024).

Underdiagnosis, Particularly With Women

Since neurodivergence presents itself differently in women, many have been left undiagnosed and have lacked a support system (Craddock, 2024; Owens et al, 2017; Solden et al, 2019; Attoe & Climie, 2023). Women were commonly misunderstood and thus, a continuous

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cycle of misdiagnosis followed (Driver & Chester, 2021). Recent studies have shown that women have been historically underdiagnosed or misdiagnosed (Vincenti, Galea, & Briffa, 2023). Most of the research done on neurodivergence and the traits that exemplify themselves under the term has been focused primarily on male presentation and behavior (Craddock, 2024). With a significant lack of information on women with ADHD in media coverage and scientific studies, there was a continued lack of support, treatment, and understanding around how ADHD and other neurodiverse conditions present themselves in women (Attoe & Climie, 2023). This would lead to continued challenges in managing symptoms and how to portray women with ADHD in the media (Yücel, 2023).

The media's portrayal of neurodivergent women has evolved since the term neurodivergent was originated in 1998 (Singer, 1999; Harris, 2023). As more women have been diagnosed, their neurodivergent traits often show different signs or present differently which has caused further challenges on diagnosing women, their treatment, and how their experiences are presented on a global scale (Driver & Chester, 2021). In some studies, women portrayed fewer hyperactive/impulsive symptoms than men which has a large impact on how women are depicted (Williamson & Johnston, 2015). Hyperactivity was one of the key elements surrounding how boys and men with ADHD behaved. Studies later showed that girls with ADHD more often exhibit traits such as forgetfulness or difficulty concentrating (Johnson, Morris, & George, 2020). These inattentive symptoms and behaviors were usually disregarded as anxiety or other mood disorders rather than ADHD (Johnson, Morris, & George, 2020).

The way ADHD is viewed in society also attributes to how it is portrayed in the media. With the rise of awareness and research done on neurodiversity, studying the way in which the media portrays ADHD can help offer better framing and portrayals while seeing how issues of

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sexism and misrepresentation persist (Craddock, 2024). Despite the progress made on how ADHD is framed, women with neurodivergent traits often continue to face stereotypes and gender bias in how their stories are told (Driver & Chester, 2021). Women who have neurodivergent traits are often seen as eccentric or desirable, thus making them sexualized while also not being taken seriously or seen as someone who can do things independently (Craddock, 2024).

Efforts For Destigmatization

In recent years, there has been an effort to destigmatize and more accurately diagnose women with ADHD (Nussbaum, 2019). Social media has been a significant component that has allowed open conversations and discussions regarding mental health and correct representation (McDermott, 2022). ADHD advocates have utilized their platforms to amplify their experiences and lives to help with awareness, research and correct diagnoses (Ginapp, Greenberg, Macdonald-Gagnon, Angarita, Bold, & Potenza, 2023). Studies indicate that a higher number of personal narratives and increased visibility has helped progress the way doctors are able to recognize ADHD traits in women which has directly correlated with diagnosing earlier and further challenging stereotypes that have become attached (Lynch & Davison, 2022; Hartnett & Cummings, 2023; Zenone, Ow, & Barbic, 2021; Attoe & Climie, 2023). This shift in narratives portrayed by media entities has been a vital factor in combating the narratives that ADHD women are “disorganized” or “scatterbrained” (McDermott, 2022, p. 74).

Despite these advancements, sexism continues to permeate conversations surrounding ADHD, particularly when it comes to the intersectionality of gender and mental health (Nussbaum, 2019). Women with ADHD often face additional barriers, including societal expectations and stereotypes that can exacerbate their struggles (Quinn & Madhoo, 2014). The

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narrative surrounding ADHD must evolve further to include discussions about the unique challenges women face, including the need for tailored support and advocacy. Until then, the stigma surrounding women with ADHD will persist, highlighting the need for continued efforts in education and awareness to dismantle these outdated perceptions (Nussbaum, 2019).

Framing

This study utilizes framing theory to determine how U.S. newspapers portray neurodiversity. Some academic scholars have stated that media and news “mirror” aspects and events within society (Roslyng, 2022; Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2019). Framing theory centers around the idea that news and media are created or “framed” in a certain light to sway the audience to feel one way or another (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Frames help define how we perceive a subject over time and serve as socially shared and lasting organizing principles that symbolically shape our understanding of the social world (Reese, 2001). Frames play a role in shaping long-term perceptions and impact the way audiences view a subject or a group of people, reinforcing the nature of societal understanding and importance (Ray & Hinnant, 2009; Takemura, 2014).

Framing happens both intentionally and unintentionally, since all writers and journalists have their own internal biases (Morstatter, Wu, Yavanoglu, Corman, & Liu, 2018). Both the subject matter and the way in which the articles were written as it pertains to ADHD were based on the journalists’ decisions and the factual evidence they gather (Davis & Kent, 2013). Frames are necessary to tell a story and unavoidable in all types of media and are created through the information that is available at the time (Entman, 1993). Media frames reference how news entities present information in a way to change or shape the public’s perception or to make sense

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of the subject matter, while audience frames are based on the individual meanings that people construct due to their own personal beliefs and experiences (Scheufele, 1999). This study will focus only on media frames, as audience frames are not applicable since it is not looking at audience perception directly.

Framing is important for this study because the ways in which the news is framed from all perspectives shifts the public's perception on the given information (Entman, 1993). Media frames are applicable and relevant to all the news sources and articles chosen from this study. The rise of social media and how the audience can actively participate and help shape news from anywhere in the world also has an impact on how neurodiversity has been framed (Borah, 2011). With the rise of social media and online discourse, it has also shaped how topics are covered and creates a dialogue for people to discuss how media impacts them once it is out into the world (Güran & Özarslan, 2022).

Framing helps identify key terms and themes expressed through news publications, and the interest and publicity of neurodiversity has grown significantly in recent years. With a large increase in public knowledge and media coverage, people have more context around the stigmas that surround ADHD today (Abdelnour, Jansen, & Gold, 2022). Traditional forms of media, such as newspapers, have seen a shift in how they frame stories based on personal narratives along with continued research on neurodivergence (Wendorf Muhamad & Yang, 2017). The media's portrayal of autism and ADHD commonly frame the disorders and neurodivergent individuals in limiting, stereotypical manners, focusing on their social awkwardness, ineptness or eccentricity (Craddock, 2024). Through framing, newspapers can have an impact on the public's perception of women with ADHD by the information that they shared or did not share. This has impacted how neurodiverse women have been viewed and treated due to many of these stories have been

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framed and focused on the male experience with neurodiversity and ADHD (Williamson & Johnston, 2015).

Gender-Specific Framing/Stereotypical Portrayals (Sexism Vs. Science)

While scholars and journals have extensive research and background on neurological conditions and framing, there are only a few studies that focus on how women with these neurodiverse traits have been framed in U.S. media coverage (Ray & Hinnant, 2009; Vincenti, Galea, & Briffa, 2023; Cilia Vincenti et al, 2023; Owens et al, 2017). Stereotypical portrayals of women in media often show that societal expectations such as being organized, and nurturing is the opposite of common ADHD symptoms (Ray & Hinnant, 2009). The way that women are framed show that there is a gap in how gender is interpreted and distributed in media coverage. Gendered framing affects and dismantles the public's perception of women with ADHD through reinforced stereotypes (Ray & Hinnant, 2009). This causes women to internalize symptoms that may be affecting their everyday lives and further delays finding a diagnosis (Vincenti, Galea, & Briffa, 2023). Some women found this underdiagnosis to impact large portions of their everyday life.

Along with gender bias, another way people with ADHD have been framed in media portrayals is that they are socially inept (Storebø et al, 2019). Common stereotypes of how people with ADHD are framed include being disorganized, hyperactive and socially isolated while also having a higher sensitivity to anger, fear and sadness (Lis et al, 2013). Culturally, this framing has reinforced the continued stigmas of people with ADHD with little research (Clarke, 2011). Through these frames, people with ADHD have often been cast out or excluded (Clarke, 2011).

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Framing theory as it pertains to this study, shows the differences and similarities between the two newspaper publications selected. It is important to highlight the key differences in how neurodiversity is framed to help understand the information or misinformation surrounding people with ADHD (Kaplan, 2006). By looking at how it affects women and how they are framed differently, this study gives some detail on audience perspective and levels of societal bias (Craddock, 2024). While framing theory can be difficult to measure on a large scale, analyzing the concept of why certain topics are framed as they are in national newspapers helps identify key terms and ideologies shared with a large audience (Entman, 1993).

As neurodiversity gains more accurate representations across all genders and ages, neurodiverse people still battle societal biases, gender stereotypes and a lack of research (Yücel, 2023). Accurate portrayals and framing of ADHD are becoming more normalized along with the reported use of stimulant drugs or behavioral therapy to help with ADHD symptoms (Rios-Davis, Sibley, Delgado, & Zulauf-McCurdy, 2022). Frames are commonly used to shape public opinion and discourse, which makes the study of large national newspapers highly important (Entman, 1993). Furthermore, understanding how news shapes public perception along with how ADHD has been framed in U.S. newspapers helps bridge the gaps of research, diagnosis and accurate portrayals.

Literature Review

How neurodivergence has been framed has been studied previously, but the emphasis on how it frames women has not been thoroughly researched. Neurodivergence has become an increasingly popular topic in social media which has impacted how others view the condition across the world (He, Firdaus, Gong, Dharejo, & Aksar, 2024). With more personal experiences

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and research being shared across all platforms, the way people view neurodivergence has changed through framing, public perception and policy. Mental health initiatives and cognitive diversity have continued to influence media and public perception in both public and academic spaces (Naslund, Bondre, Torous, & Aschbrenner, 2020). The growth of research on neurodiversity and social spaces online have impacts on future perceptions. This review focuses on studies that have centered around media portrayals of ADHD and neurodivergence along with other gendered narratives.

ADHD and Media

Research studies that examine how media portrays, and frames ADHD are fairly new due to the recent surge in diagnoses (Ray & Hinnant, 2009; Clarke, 2011; Yücel, 2023). Ray and Hinnant (2009) examined the coverage of ADD and ADHD in magazines between 1985 to 2008 and found that human-interest stories became more prevalent as time went on. With the shift towards human-interest stories over a 20-year time period, the amount of scientific information continued to increase but the primary focus was to highlight personal experiences (Ray & Hinnant, 2009). It was also noted that four out of 43 articles taken from magazines and used for this study were written by people who had a disability. As tone shifted, this study also found that while they stuck with scientific terminology most of the time, “danger terminology” was noted to have more prevalence when the author was describing someone with ADHD or ADD acting out (Ray & Hinnant, 2009, p. 11). The behaviors noted in the study included rage, kicking, hitting, or causing physical harm or danger to others. The use of drugs that aid with ADHD, such as Ritalin, were highlighted in one article from this study as, “mother blames her son’s ADD diagnosis and subsequent Ritalin prescription with his later drug habit and death from heroin overdose” (Peterson, 1999, p. 11). Focus and attention in the classroom were the primary ways people with

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ADHD were discussed in these articles. This study found that the way in which ADHD was depicted was almost never discussed outside of learning situations, negating how it impacts people's everyday lives (Ray & Hinnant, 2009).

As media are a fundamental part of knowledge and shared experiences, Clark (2011) examined the way ADHD was depicted through U.S. magazines from the same period, 1998 to 2008. Magazines were looked at for their role in sourcing public knowledge of health issues, which included mental health disorders (Cutilli, 2010). Through analyzing the articles selected for this study, Clarke (2011) found that representations of people with ADHD from 1998 to 2008 reflected the idea that personal narratives were becoming increasingly more available (Clarke, 2011). Another large theme from this study was that ADHD was viewed as not a real illness and the diagnosis was given "far too liberally" (Clarke, 2011, p. 627). The study went on to analyze the perspectives of doctors and psychiatrists that noted the dangers of not treating ADHD and the lifelong repercussions. Ritalin was also described negatively throughout many of the magazines gathered for this study. The association attributed Ritalin through negative themed qualities that make it addictive "along with its similarity to the powerful illegal street drug, cocaine" (Clarke, 2011, p. 630).

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Yücel (2023) studied how online news sites such as CNN and the BBC covered ADHD. During a time when health issues were the primary topics covered by every newspaper, mental health became a very important social and political issue (Yücel, 2023). With a higher rate of hospitalization and mental health crisis's, the COVID-19 pandemic heightened some of the symptoms of ADHD. As millions of people stayed indoors, worked from home and were displaced from a regular routine, neurodiverse traits and symptoms such as restlessness and difficulty focusing became main topics of discussion (Yücel, 2023). The

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author found that the media representation of ADHD and neurodiversity still came with negative traits attributed to them. Yücel (2023) found that CNN and the BBC framed ADHD as one of the main issues stemming from the pandemic and stated that there was still a significant gap in how women are diagnosed or misdiagnosed (Yücel, 2023).

Gendered Studies

Only a few studies have looked at ADHD in women (Ray & Hinnant, 2009; Vincenti, Galea, & Briffa, 2023; Cilia Vincenti et al, 2023; Owens et al, 2017; Quinn, 2005). However, women's marginalization in the media has been well researched (Carmines, Gerrity, & Wagner, 2010; Galuska, 2021; Gibbons, 2022; Jaworski, 2009; Santoniccolo et al, 2023). These psychological conditions in women and focus on women's issues in the media display how women are framed in other lights. By looking at studies that focus on women's issues and the lack of media coverage on women with ADHD, the broader picture painted will help in assessing why women are framed as they are and their underdiagnosis.

Described as the hidden disorder in women, ADHD is often underdiagnosed with traits such as depression and anxiety complicating being diagnosed (Quinn, 2005). In a 2023 study, women's issues ranging from higher rates of self-injury, sexual abuse, relationship difficulties, negative self-talk and issues with their overall health were all reported (Cilia Vincenti, Galea, & Briffa, 2023). These were significant increases reported in everyday issues that women and girls face. Women with ADHD said they had difficulties trying to meet other's expectations, specifically in their romantic and interpersonal relationships (Cilia Vincenti, Galea, & Briffa, 2023). In a larger scale study, Owens et al (2017) showed that self-injury and suicidal tendencies were present in 66.0% of women with ADHD. Women dealing with ADHD were also four times more likely to have considered suicide after dealing with trying to compensate for their ADHD

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symptoms such as depression, perfectionism and anxiety (Cilia Vincenti, Galea, & Briffa, 2023). Other large issues with daily life included parenting struggles, guilt and perinatal issues.

While there is limited research related on women with ADHD, understanding how women have been historically framed in the media is applicable to this study. Media plays a role in socialization and identity development. Women have been sexualized and objectified in media, which has posed risks to their mental health (Santoniccolo et al, 2023). Through this cultural climate and stereotypical nature, popularized media has solidified these ideas and led to the objectification that these ideas are normative (Santoniccolo et al, 2023). This is also applicable to other women's health related issues.

Reproductive rights and physical health issues have been framed to limit reproductive rights for women (Jaworski, 2009). Women are also statistically less likely than men to be present in newsrooms or be a news source which has also led to this stereotypical gendered bias (Baitinger, 2015). As of 2017, women are the minority in all major news organizations (Watson, 2020). Through disproportionate issues with race and gender, women were more often written about in ways that discussed their gender, sexuality, family, physical appearance and other feminized traits (Gibbons, 2022).

Social Media Studies

Through exploring gendered bias and stereotypical ideologies, critical examination of ADHD and women's issues has been directly impacted through today's highly digital age (He, Firdaus, Gong, Dharejo, & Aksar, 2024). The emergence of social media allows the audience to actively participate and shape news worldwide, further impacting the framing of research and personal narratives (Kang, Ha, & Velasco, 2016). The shift in public perception, shared experiences, and media portrayals has seen a massive shift since the rise of platforms that lift

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voices from various experiences (Kang, Ha, & Velasco, 2016). Social media apps such as TikTok, Instagram and X (Twitter) have created spaces where these shared stories or experiences have a larger impact and can reach tens of millions of people (Hartnett & Cummings, 2023). On TikTok, ADHD is one of the most popular health related hashtags with 7.1 billion tagged video hashtag views (Zenone, Ow, & Barbic, 2021). With social apps such as these becoming more widely used, the public perception of neurodivergence, mood disorders and health standards have drastically changed (Kang, Ha, & Velasco, 2016). Social media has changed the way in which people are able to connect with others that may share similar life (Kang, Ha, & Velasco, 2016).

With the increase of use in social media and the spread of awareness, self-diagnosis started to become more popular (McVay, 2023). People have been able to do their own research and find other communities that aided in finding a diagnosis (Blume, 1997). Some studies cited the increase of ADHD being directly correlated to the use of social media (Boer, Stevens, Finkenauer, & van den Eijnden, 2019). This study found that adolescents who used social media were more accustomed to task-switching between social media apps and the increase of input, which would “impair their ability to filter relevant from irrelevant information, which may, in turn, contribute to the development of attention deficits” (Boer, Stevens, Finkenauer, & van den Eijnden, 2019, p. 854). This switch between different formats of media has been linked to an increase in hyperactivity and decrease in attention span for people all over the world. Through analyzing these themes through various studies relating to ADHD, neurodiversity and women, this study furthers research news articles to show how media has framed women with ADHD.

Research questions

As this study is concerned with how news impacts how women are framed, the research questions are as follows:

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RQ1: What themes emerged in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* coverage of neurodivergent women?

RQ2: How did *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* frame neurodivergent women?

Methodology

This study examines how U.S. news media, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have framed neurodiverse women with ADHD. Both of the two news publications selected for this study, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were chosen due to their credibility, national readership and long-term publication (Barkin & Levy, 1983). The time frame for the articles included in this study is January 1, 1998, and October 1, 2024. The year 1998 is significant because it was the year the word neurodivergent was first used by Judy Singer (Singer, 2017). For this study, ADHD was the main topical focus. ADD (Attention-Deficit Disorder) has been labeled as an outdated term used primarily from 1980 to 1987 (Mahone & Denckla, 2017). While adding “hyperactivity” to the name, ADHD does not also mean a child will display hyperactive or impulsive behaviors. While some people still used the old terminology out of habit or familiarity, ADD is no longer used in medical diagnoses (Anderson, 2024).

Textual analysis is a research method that helps interpret and examine underlying meanings used in media coverage (McKee, 2003). The purpose of this research method is to reveal the meaning behind language and uncover the deeper biases and cultural ideologies (Belsey, 2013). As a textual analysis, the focus for this specific analysis is on neurodivergence, women and media portrayals. The articles were located through EBSCO by searching the

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publications and each key phrase individually. All articles selected within the time period had the key words “neurodivergence”, “women”, and “ADHD”. Anything that is not a news article was excluded, including op-eds and letters to the editor. Due to the lack of women focused coverage, the articles did not have to be only focused on women in order to be included in this study. By narrowing the focus to these key terms, the articles remaining show how often women with ADHD were represented or misrepresented as ADHD is typically framed through young boy’s perspectives (Williamson & Johnston, 2015). Through this process, the search yielded 51 articles from *The Washington Post* and 48 articles from *The New York Times* during the given time that fit the particular criteria.

These articles selected were analyzed using textual analysis, which can help identify key themes, frames, and interpretation of the media (McKee, 2003). The researcher read each article multiple times and analyzed it carefully, looking for key themes and frames in the articles from *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. Studying these articles helps examine how neurodivergent women were framed and discussed in print media (Lindgren et al, 2022). By identifying various themes, ideologies, and language used for women with ADHD in media coverage, this study was able to analyze and further research on neurodiversity. With women’s issues being a highly important and topical conversation, studying how neurodivergence is viewed will help future generations have a better overall understanding.

Results and Discussion

This study examined how neurodivergent women with ADHD were framed in two major U.S. newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, through a textual analysis. Several key themes and frames emerged through examining 99 articles from *The New York Times*

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and *The Washington Post*. These findings revealed key themes and frames in how ADHD and neurodiversity have been portrayed since 1998.

The major themes found in this textual analysis focused on social media's impact, women and ADHD, children's diagnoses, and medication. One of the key themes that this study further develops on is how gender and neurodiversity are associated with the underdiagnosis of women and girls. The key frames found discussed gendered differences and social capital, educational challenges, and parental advocacy through the societal understanding of neurodivergence. Not only did this textual analysis highlight areas that the public's perception is shifted or shaped by the media, but it also showed some of these shifts as they happened from 1998 to 2024. Recent articles from both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* demonstrated shifts in how media outlets have framed neurodivergence toward a more inclusive and broader lens.

Themes

The first research question for this study was: what themes emerged in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* coverage of neurodivergent women? Within the articles analyzed, four major themes emerged that demonstrates how ADHD is represented and portrayed in national news publications. Within the 99 articles that were collected from 1998 to 2024, themes such as the impact of social media, women and ADHD, children's diagnoses, and conversations on medication and treatments emerged. This reflects how ADHD and neurodiversity have been contextualized and discussed in the public from both publications selected for this study. These themes also offer a different perspective and analysis of some of the challenges people with ADHD (particularly women) face, showcasing several avenues for improved discussion, further research, and continued support for women with ADHD.

Social Media's Impact

As social media has changed and revolutionized the discussion around health communication, it has also shown how disseminating information around neurodivergence, and ADHD can change a social landscape. Through the collected articles, this study also highlighted that social media's prevalence has also related to a direct increase of awareness, diagnosis, and conversation surrounding neurodivergence. It is now easier than ever to find others that have related experiences or share information. The importance of the impact of social media and platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and X (Twitter) have democratized the way in which information is shared, especially in neurodivergent communities (Eagle, 2022). Four articles analyzed for this study examined how social media has led to created spaces that offer support, advocacy, and information gathering on ADHD. Six articles on scientific studies highlighted how through online communities, people can now share their personal experiences and challenge traditional narratives of neurodivergence and ADHD. These findings demonstrate how rapid awareness, varying personal narratives, and circulation of information can also lead to confusion or misinformed portrayals of people with ADHD.

While several articles from both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* mentioned self-diagnosis through social media, one article highlighted that social media and especially the popularity of TikTok, has shifted how everyday people view ADHD and share both information and misinformation.

Some researchers have expressed concern about how profit motives may feed into these trends, since platforms often feature advertising from app-based mental health services, and influencers have sponsorship deals with such companies... Researchers also warn that TikTok videos can deliver misinformation. A review of literature published last year

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found that around one-fifth of videos mentioning cognitive behavioral therapy were inaccurate, describing it as ineffective or harmful (Barry, 2024).

As social media continues to be a space of shared experiences and commonalities, the spread of misinformation around neurodivergence also has limited how people view others with ADHD. This can also lead to a rise in misdiagnosis around ADHD. Another article from *The New York Times* highlighted how TikTok has been a space for conversation and community where people are able to ask questions and see others who also have the neurological condition.

Do you: Cut the tags out of your clothes? Relive (and regret) past conversations? Have episodes of burnout and fatigue? Zone out while someone is talking? Become hyper-focused while working on a project? Take on dozens of habits? Daydream? Forget things? According to TikTok, you might have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Smith, 2022).

The over 17 billion views to date with the hashtag #adhd shows the immense community and impact that social media can spread awareness and further education around ADHD (Smith, 2022). These findings demonstrate a major change from Zenone, Ow, and Barbic (2021), which found there were 7.1 billion ADHD tagged videos on TikTok. This significant growth from 7.1 to 12 billion views could be due to a dramatic increase in conversation around ADHD and neurodiversity along with the increased popularity of the app from 2021 to 2022. This growth of 7.1 to 12 billion tagged videos was over the period of a year and did not have much significance on what was found, rather showing a dramatic increase in popularity.

Another article from *The New York Times* highlighted that misdiagnosis through social media can prohibit people from the treatment that is best suited to them (Caron, 2024). Other articles highlighted on some of the social aspects of neurodivergence, stating that while there has

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been an uptick of diagnosis, it does not negate the fact that ADHD has been a real issue that people deal with in society

But A.D.H.D. is not a metaphor. It is not the restlessness and rambunctiousness that happen when grade-schoolers are deprived of recess, or the distraction of socially minded teenagers in the smartphone era. Nor is it the reason your colleagues check their e-mail in meetings and even (spare me!) conversations (Klass, 2010).

This highlights that people with neurodivergence are not just hyperactive, but that social media has spread awareness and sociability of those with ADHD. Social media was also referenced in approximately half of the articles as a notable difference maker in how neurodivergence is viewed in society.

In the past two decades, the world has become much kinder to the estimated 6.1 million children and approximately 10 million adults with ADHD, whose hallmark symptoms are distraction, forgetfulness and impulsivity... people with ADHD have had all sorts of new ways to own and tell their stories, encouraged by viral transmission of confessions from brave celebrities - such as Olympic athletes Michael Phelps and Simon Biles - and enterprising artists like McCabe and the TikTok cartoonist Dani Donovan. Reddit's ADHD page has more than a million members (Ellison, 2021).

By highlighting that popular figures and celebrities also have ADHD, it destigmatizes that it is an issue that only men or young boys deal with. Six articles from *The New York Times* and six articles from *The Washington Post* noted that social media and the increase of internet access have created a landscape that is full of distractions, which is a common symptom of ADHD. One article from *The Washington Post* stated that an increase of media intake has had a significant impact on attention difficulties.

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Common complaints revolve around an inability to focus on anything because of constant interruptions and feeling like one is constantly pulled to check their email, text messages, social media or dating apps - even when the notifications are turned off. As a result, we often try to do two or more things at the same time and end up depleting our attentional resources. A study of young teens in the Netherlands showed that those who engaged in more media multitasking showed more attention problems with time (Kecmanovic, 2024).

This destigmatization of ADHD and the increase of media intake in these findings were similar to a study done in 2012 where the results showed children had a similar experience and significant difficulty concentrating when routinely multitasking at school or during their daily tasks (Ewen, J. et al, 2012). Ewen, J. et al (2012) found that children with ADHD may exhibit issues multitasking because they are less able to perform basic tasks efficiently. It stated that children with ADHD have a harder time multitasking due to a lack of being able to process dual tasks that require focus. These findings support the four articles included in this study that mentioned social media, children, and issues related to multitasking.

Another article discussed the impact that social media, internet usage, and video games can have on people. Over the past 10 years, ADHD rates and internet usage have increased drastically (Dewey, 2015). While social media and the internet may cause some ADHD-like symptoms and change how those who have the disorder function when they have prolonged use, there is no factual evidence that internet usage could cause an otherwise healthy person without ADHD to develop the disorder (Dewey, 2015). Literature on social media and ADHD corroborates these findings, while studies indicating that social media can be a catalyst for diagnosis and awareness, it can also lead to the development and support of stereotypes that

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contributes to a culture built on “quick fixes” to manage ADHD and neurodivergence that commonly overlook comprehensive care.

Women and ADHD

Out of the 99 articles collected, 34 of them highlighted issues that women and girls dealt with through their ADHD or diagnosis. Many of these articles discussed that the increase in awareness also led to a higher number of women and girls being diagnosed. Through this emergence and discussion around how to diagnosis women that display different symptoms, several articles from both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* highlighted that neurodivergence was not only an issue men and young boys experienced (Ellison, 2020; Onwuamaegbu, 2022; Perhach, 2023; Searing, 2024; Schwarz & Cohen, 2013). These shared experiences surrounding women with ADHD often show that women are dismissed or mischaracterized in both news and social media.

This internalized stigma and gap in support shows that proper diagnosis and representation are important factors to pay attention to in future research. 15 articles stated that women were more likely to try to cope with their symptoms in a variety of ways that makes their diagnosis process more difficult. “Boys are roughly twice as likely to be diagnosed with ADHD in childhood as girls are because, even at young ages, girls’ symptoms tend to be more inattentive than hyperactive in nature. As a result, girls with ADHD might struggle a bit in school or be seen as quiet daydreamers but evade diagnosis because they aren’t noticeable disruptive in class or at home” (Smith, 2022). This shows a gap in how young girls and women are portrayed in the media due to a lack of research on how their symptoms typically present themselves. It also highlights how personal narratives and lived experiences help provide insight into how to provide the right type of treatment for those who have ADHD.

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One *New York Times* article from 2018 quoted a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that stated, using strict criteria, around five percent of adult women have been diagnosed with ADHD (Carey, 2018). This article also noted that half of the pregnancies in the United States are unplanned and related that back to the use of prescription medications used to treat ADHD. “Early pregnancy is a critical time for the developing baby. We need to better understand the safest ways to treat ADHD before and during pregnancy” (Carey, 2018). While it is not recommended for the mother to continue taking stimulants when she is pregnant, this and other articles focused on women’s issues that are impacted by their diagnosis and treatment strategies.

The articles analyzed support research that shows gender impacts how ADHD is diagnosed and treated (Nussbaum, 2019). Research shows that women may present their symptoms in a way that does not comply with the “hyperactive” traits commonly associated with ADHD and neurodivergence (Carey, 2018). Over half of the articles mentioning women and their diagnosis shared that their personal experiences and symptoms are often overlooked, leading to further misdiagnosis and a lack of research. Without proper recognition of research, many women do not receive the necessary interventions or accommodations in their everyday life, educational settings, or professional endeavors. The stigma attached to the traditional gender norms of women with ADHD also leads to greater discourse in online communities and research settings.

The 34 articles that mentioned women with ADHD displayed themes that highlighted how news lacking significant coverage of how women are impacted shows a greater problem of gender-specific diagnostic criteria and treatment protocols. Throughout this textual analysis, health and wellness emerged as another significant theme from both *The New York Times* and

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The Washington Post's portrayals of women with ADHD. Some of the articles that dated back to the late 1990s and early 2000s framed ADHD only as a medical disorder. This strict analysis of ADHD emphasized pharmaceutical treatments, medications, criteria for diagnoses, and other forms of treatments.

Articles that focused on those portrayals limited the amount of people that were diagnosed and further spread the narrative that ADHD was not a common condition.

Approximately 4 percent of adults in the United States have enough symptoms to qualify for ADHD, but only an estimated one in 10 of them is diagnosed and treated. For comparison, roughly 9 percent of children in the United States have been diagnosed with the condition, and three-quarters have received medication or behavioral therapy for it (Smith, 2022).

Wellness in the neurodivergent space was not often defined, but when it was discussed, it was through the lens of symptom self-management. While more recent coverage from the last five years broadened those criteria to include mental health, lifestyle choices, and other alternative approaches to enhancing someone's well-being. Articles that took a more holistic approach explored themes such as mindfulness, exercise, diet, therapy, and other tools to help manage neurodivergent traits and characteristics.

The New York Times and *The Washington Post* had 57 articles that mentioned wellness outside of just the clinical nature, referencing the emotional, psychological, and social aspects of being diagnosed and living with ADHD. These traits were also prominently mentioned regarding women and marginalized communities who often face barriers to diagnosis and care for their symptoms. This study shows that lack of research highlights the implications of a gap in

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representation and exemplifies the need for a cultural shift in how neurodivergence is perceived, written about, and how society understands its representation across genders.

Children

Another key theme that demonstrated a cultural shift in how ADHD is perceived in the news was how children with ADHD were discussed. Children with ADHD and their experiences have formed a significant foundation surrounding neurodivergence and the lifelong symptoms of how ADHD is represented. This theme emerged prominently in discussions on early diagnosis, educational challenges, behavioral symptoms, and developmental stages influenced by ADHD. These articles and the research behind children with ADHD showcased a spectrum of experiences, ranging from the positive effects of creativity, early treatment, and the negative consequences specifically in school environments (Ewen, J. et al, 2012).

Children with ADHD were often referred to as “troublemakers” or “easily distractable,” labels that can have a profound impact and implications on self-esteems and overall life outcomes (Strauss, 2016). Scientific imaging studies have shown that ADHD structural changes in the brain can be recognized at the age of four (Nutt, 2018).

More than 6 million children aged 2-17 living in the United States have been diagnosed with ADHD, according to the most recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Thirty years ago, however, the number was half that, suggesting to some critics that the disorder is over-diagnosed today (Nutt, 2018).

These more scientific based studies showed themes of treatment variations, personal narratives from people with ADHD, behavioral challenges, and the impacts that symptoms can have on the patient’s everyday life (Ellison, 2021).

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The articles reviewed from both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* underscored the importance of early and individualized support for children that are diagnosed with ADHD. The benefits of early diagnosis were mentioned in 10 articles and highlighted the impacts that social standing can have on medication and treatment. Of the articles that mentioned children with ADHD, 14 of them highlighted only focused on boys that dealt with symptoms. When discussing childhood ADHD, girls were discussed through retrospective accounts. These portrayals highlighted women reflecting on their childhood symptoms and what was missed through a lack of early diagnosis.

Educational policies and classroom etiquette were mentioned as areas where adaptivity and accommodations were necessary for different learning styles. Some articles noted that through behavioral interventions or medications children were able to focus better. Hands-on learning was mentioned in seven articles as a positive way to help children focus better in classroom environments. Others mentioned medication as being a common issue as some authors and resources noted that children are being overmedicated for ADHD. These articles support the findings of studies done on how children are impacted by neurodivergence and suggests other ways to properly treat symptoms in classrooms (Ellison, 2020).

These narratives and discussion around childhood ADHD, demonstrates the understanding of neurodivergence from a young age. This shows gaps in research and media portrayals to properly represent ADHD across all genders and backgrounds. This broadening of discussion and perspectives shows areas where reducing stigma and proper access to care and support can heavily impact children.

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Medication

As one of the most intertwined themes of ADHD and neurodivergence, articles from both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* cited that medication and diagnosis have significantly rose in recent years. This contested aspect of ADHD and how it is treated was explained from both a public discourse and clinical practice issue. Societally, medication for children with ADHD has become more prominent in recent years. 47 articles from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* discussed medication and ADHD. Many societal issues and articles debate the use of stimulant medications through the lack of trust in pharmaceutical companies, overly common practice for diagnosis, and the therapeutical benefits of diagnosis (Ellison, 2015; Gilbert, 2023; Onwuamargbu, 2022; Schwarz, 2013; Strauss, 2016). While medicating ADHD has proven to be a good way to mitigate symptoms, many were concerned about the over-reliance, side effects, and social issues surrounding medicalizing symptoms and how they are treated.

Through these findings, 31 of the articles that mentioned medication also discussed how it impacted children. These articles discussed the effects of drugs and how symptoms were treated in children.

Some articles discussed the harmful nature of medications while others stated that due to the influx of diagnoses, it soon became hard to get their medication. As shortages of ADHD medications began to rise, more people with ADHD go untreated for several months due to money or time constraints (Caron, 2023).

Several children from this article stated that the medications were a way to feel like they could catch up. Without being treated, some students mentioned that they fell behind in school, lost track of time, or felt less like their selves. Other approaches to ADHD treatment were largely

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based on behavioral traits. Having a job or hobby that provides substantial dopamine to the reward pathways in people with ADHD can mitigate some of the symptoms (Friedman, 2014). One woman in her early 20s who has taken Adderall for years to treat her ADHD stated that she struggled significantly with paying attention in lectures or school but had no issues focusing on art or painting (Friedman, 2014). This article also mentioned that other patients began treating their ADHD by multitasking, changing their everyday environments, or having a routine that was varied and unpredictable. Out of the 31 articles that mentioned a patient's direct response to medication, all of the patients quoted had positive things to say about the impacts of the medication.

The topic of medication is important when also understanding how ADHD is diagnosed. It is not a medical test or one that requires blood samples, rather it is an interview, medical history, and symptom questionnaire that the patient fills out. This is significant because without a standard way or practice to diagnose ADHD, results may vary greatly. During the COVID-19 pandemic, ADHD drug usage spiked in young adults, and specifically women (Caron, 2024). The CDC stated that the mental health impacts of the pandemic had a direct result in exacerbating ADHD symptoms. Stimulant prescriptions have significantly risen between 2016 to 2021 but rose more than 10 percent in young adults and teenage girls between 2021 to 2022 (Gilbert, 2023). The CDC stated concerns around clinical guidelines on how to treat and diagnose adults with ADHD.

With more people being diagnosed, and women still being diagnosed later in life, these articles highlight how women have issues with having delayed access to medication and treatment. 24 articles conveyed first-hand accounts where people said medication was lifechanging, and 15 of those were from a woman's perspective. These themes of medication and

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the rise in ADHD diagnoses show that this is becoming a greater problem that needs to be significantly addressed, especially for women whose symptoms often go untreated or overlooked.

This shift in perspective and portrayal of ADHD shows a growing cultural awareness that ADHD can be treated in a variety of ways. Through this textual analysis, themes of social media, women and ADHD, children's diagnoses, and conversations on medication and treatments emerged. By analyzing these themes, we have a better understanding of how women with ADHD are perceived. The two newspapers selected for this study exemplified increased amounts of self-advocacy, quicker diagnoses, personal care, and other resources that help people trying to manage their symptoms from 1998 to 2024. While these themes highlight some of the patterns in how women are portrayed in news, understanding how these narratives are framed also gives a greater understanding on the social and media contexts given by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

Frames

The second research question for this study analyzes how *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* framed neurodivergent women. From 1998 to 2024, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* covered ADHD and neurodivergence using three dominant frames that emerged through this textual analysis. The three major frames discovered highlighted women's challenges and social capital, educational challenges, and parental advocacy through the societal understanding of neurodivergence

ADHD was framed as a less serious medical condition in the late 90s but is now widely seen as a clinical disorder requiring diagnosis and treatment (Nutt, 2017). *The New York Times*

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often framed ADHD has a more common neurological condition while 15 of the articles from *The Washington Post* talked about the condition in a negative connotated manner.

Women's Challenges and Social Capital

Among the articles analyzed for this study, challenges related to women emerged as the most common frame that was mentioned across all articles from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Despite the increase in ADHD diagnoses in women and young girls, large news publications still report on some of the nuanced stereotypes of neurodivergent women. This framing of gendered issues can convolute women's lived experience with the neurological condition. While not all the articles discussed how there were disparities in how ADHD has been diagnosed and discussed, many that mentioned gender examined how these symptoms impacted women and usually presented themselves differently (Perhach, 2023). Through both new entities, it was frequently noted that ADHD has been difficult to diagnosis in women and has been historically underdiagnosed. 22 articles framed girls as quietly struggling with their ADHD, often internalizing symptoms such as anxiety, depression, emotional dysregulation, and inattentiveness.

Only seven of the articles that spoke about women with ADHD related back to how race, class, and motherhood are impacted by ADHD. Some of the language used in these articles that focused on the issues of having ADHD as a woman reinforced gender norms. Two of the articles from *The New York Times* referred to ADHD as being a personal barrier to being a good mother or employee. These frames that are reinforced by media suggests that women must fix themselves in order to function in society rather than providing resources or alternatives that accommodate neurodivergence.

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A trait that was commonly referred to when describing women with ADHD, inattentiveness, is less likely to cause a disruption in public or to trigger evaluation in a school setting, often leading them to go unnoticed until later in life (Ellison, 2020). Women were also mentioned in narratives that discussed the impacts of having a late diagnosis, showing that a misdiagnosis or late diagnosis can often relate back to dealing with anxiety or depression. This frame also highlighted that women are often expected to act according to other social norms, such as stereotypes of always being organized, calm, on time, and high functioning. These traits can also mask ADHD or neurodivergent attributes. As ADHD manifests itself differently in women and girls, this gendered frame that was prominent in both newspapers displayed how cultural norms and other biases can both shape the visibility and other lived experience of neurodivergent women.

Not only do these challenges impact women at home or at work, but they also have a significant impact on their social life. ADHD was framed as a social barrier in 18 of the articles gathered for this study. Traditional gender roles that describe how woman is generally framed or portrayed in news media include being organized, nurturing, and productive. Seven of the articles from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* examined how these traits are commonly missed in women diagnosed with ADHD. With women being statistically underdiagnosed, Quinn (2005) discussed these lifelong issues being missed and leading to higher rates of anxiety and depression in women. This again related back to mental health issues that women face when they go undiagnosed and without treatment. These findings also supported the 2023 study done Cilia Vincenti, Galea, & Briffa, where women reported higher rates of self-injury and negative self-talk due to their misdiagnosis. Not only is this a gap in how ADHD is

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treated medically, but it becomes a social barrier to educational opportunities, career advancement, and personal growth.

Educational Challenges Frame

In educational and institutional settings, ADHD and neurodivergence were typically portrayed as challenges for schools, teachers, and workplaces to manage (Onwuamaegbu, 2022). Nine of the articles from 1998 to 2024 highlighted how institutions teach students with ADHD, how having ADHD can be a distraction in the classroom, and gave examples of how teachers often respond to this different style of learning. This way of framing students and their ability to learn in traditional classroom settings shows that there is room for improvement on how students with ADHD are taught on a larger scale.

One article from *The New York Times* discussed how the reframing of ADHD has the potential to harm educational settings if children cannot access the help that they need, ““This reframing A.D.H.D. as a gift, personally I don't think it's helpful," said Natalie Knochenhauer, founder of A.D.H.D. Aware, an advocacy group in Doylestown, Pa. "You can't have a disability that needs to be accommodated in the classroom, and also have this special gift. There are a lot of people out there -- not only do their kids not have gifts, but their kids are really struggling”” (Parker-Pope, 2008).

Another *New York Times* article discussed how some children that have ADHD may need more hands-on learning such as games, physical activity, and outdoor exploration rather than traditional books (Steinberg, 2006). This displays how ADHD can impact a child’s life both at home and throughout their learning experience if they do not have the help or tools needed to keep them on track. This supports Ray & Hinnant (2009) where most conversations around ADHD focused on how it impacted children, particularly in learning environments. These

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findings also showed that a majority of studies done on children in learning environments also commented on how medication helped them focus in school (Rios-Davis, Sibley, Delgado, & Zulauf-McCurdy, 2022). The articles analyzed for this study discussed how children are impacted heavily if they do not have support or proper access to care (Smith, 2022).

Three of the articles analyzed highlighted that young girls, especially those from marginalized communities may encounter more biases and stereotypes within a classroom setting. These stereotypes can influence confidence and provide more barriers towards diagnosis. By ultimately limiting or restricting development in educational settings, young girls are often overlooked for their symptoms. Through these educational challenges, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* highlighted how these issues can impact how others view neurodivergent girls in school settings. Despite their academic success, these issues show that there can be long-term complications that limit their educational experience and influence their life-long impact.

Parental Advocacy Frame

Another frame that was prominent throughout this textual analysis was how parents advocate for their children with ADHD. 12 of the articles from both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* discussed how parents are often central figures in a child's diagnosis. Eight of these articles specifically mentioned mothers managing their children's journey with ADHD.

One article from *The Washington Post* illustrated the experience of a mother trying to navigate how to support her 16-year-old daughter with ADHD (Leahy, 2017). This was a demonstration of a parent seeking outside help and advice to better navigate her daughter's symptoms. In this article, the author related back to other issues of undiagnosed cases of ADHD and how that impacts the familial structure. "We also know that children who have endured years of ADHD without proper treatment are far more susceptible to depression, anxiety and poor self-

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esteem, and those issues can lead to substance abuse, cutting and other self-harming behaviors. It is so isolating to be bright and yet not have your brain work the way you want it to” (Leahy, 2017).

This article highlights the parental frame by showing how important it is to pay attention to symptoms, find proper treatment, and how families can help spot the first indicators of having ADHD while they often go unnoticed. “One 2014 nationally representative survey found that nearly 50 percent of mothers of ‘tween’ girls diagnosed with ADHD had at first misidentified the cause of their children’s problems and delayed getting medical help” (Strauss, 2016). The way that news entities frame people with ADHD, particularly neurodivergent young girls, shows the urgent need to shift how ADHD is framed on a larger scale to broaden the inclusive narratives to include different backgrounds, symptom presentations, and lived experience to address disparities in treatment and diagnosis. One of the articles also highlighted that some parents are also realizing that they have ADHD through doing research for their child’s symptoms (Onwuamaegbu, 2022). With the increase of ADHD diagnoses in children, “parents who grew up in a time when such a diagnosis was rare are starting to understand that perhaps they, too, have it” (Onwuamaegbu, 2022).

Parents also advocated for their children in different ways outside of just their diagnosis. One article from *The Washington Post* detailed how a middle school teacher in Georgia gave a student with ADHD a ‘Most Likely to Not Pay Attention’ award. The mother of the student spoke out and reported the teacher, “As a parent, it is my job to protect my child from being humiliated and bullied, especially when the bully is her teacher. Making fun of any disability is not acceptable” (Wang, 2017). This personal narrative being shared shows how parents can advocate for their children and this frame examines how some students lack access to

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understanding environments. Two of the articles analyzed for this study supported how the increase of awareness and conversation on social media impacted parents and their children's diagnosis (McVay, 2023). Being able to see actual depictions of ADHD in children or hearing other first-hand accounts, parents have been able to help identify some traits or symptoms of ADHD quicker.

Social capital is also impacted by this because it shows that parents that are educated and resourced are more likely to navigate the diagnosis and treatment process for their child (Meyer, 2016). The lifelong implications of dealing with a lack of research or opportunities poses a threat to a child's development, both emotionally and socially. This frame intersects how gender roles and the ability to access resources through parenting a child with ADHD. Both newspapers portrayed disproportionate measures of how mothers were typically the drivers of advocacy for their child.

Conclusion

This thesis analyzed 99 articles from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* from January 1, 1998 - October 1, 2024. Through a careful, repeated reading and textual analysis of each article from the two newspapers, several key themes and frames were found that illustrate both evolving perceptions of women with ADHD and other substantial challenges people face relating to neurodiversity. With topics ranging from gender issues, underdiagnoses, social media's impact, and medication treatment, the 99 articles on ADHD and neurodivergence were evaluated and analyzed for these common themes and frames. By examining these themes and frames in detail and relating them back to other key literature and research done on ADHD and neurodivergence, this discussion provides a comprehensive understanding of how gender, social

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media, health, wellness, and overall functionality of ADHD has been represented. This study enhances our current knowledge of the ever-evolving landscape of neurodiversity.

Individuals with ADHD come from a variety of diverse backgrounds, but this study specifically focused on how media portrayed and framed women with ADHD. While these two sources of media and their framing has shifted over time about ADHD, the medicalization and gendered narratives remained dominant frames. Early portrayals of ADHD and women were typically rooted in medical terminology, clinical diagnoses, and prescription treatments while recent discussion and narratives have focused on mental health, women's marginalization, and equity for those with ADHD. Additionally, the emergence of themes and frames centered on gender and social capital demonstrate how access to proper care, representation, research, and diagnosis is shaped by identity and privilege. Women and girls were often framed as misunderstood or overlooked and were usually diagnosed much later in life versus their male counterparts. Neurodivergence and ADHD were expanded upon to demonstrate that they are not only medical conditions, but also social and political issues that are commonly discussed in popular news media.

The themes and frames found in this study indicated that there is a need for further research to be done on how media portrays women with ADHD or neurodivergence on a greater scale. Future research could help the public's understanding of women and marginalized people's perspectives and encompass a larger demographic could be on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) individuals that have ADHD. These groups are often underrepresented in mainstream media, thus limiting current research on how ADHD and neurodivergence has impacted their lives. Additionally, other comparisons across international media outlets or also using digital-narrative publications could

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help further reveal other nuances in how neurodivergence in women is discussed. Examples of this could be a qualitative approach by conducting a survey or looking at other publication's framed perspectives of women with ADHD.

Ultimately, this thesis contributes to a growing body of work on understanding ADHD and neurodivergence to help advocate for a more empathetic and well researched representation of women with ADHD. By continuing this research, we can better understand the frames and themes that commonly dominate the larger media landscape to prevent harmful or neglectful narratives and encourage cognitive diversity in today's digital age.

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