Neurodiversity

The essay influenced the neurodiversity movement, which emerged in the late 1990s. This movement advocates for accepting neurological conditions like autism and ADHD as natural variations.

In 1998, **Judy Singer's** thesis "Why Can't You Be Normal for Once in Your Life?" introduced the term "neurodiversity" to academia, further shaping the movement.

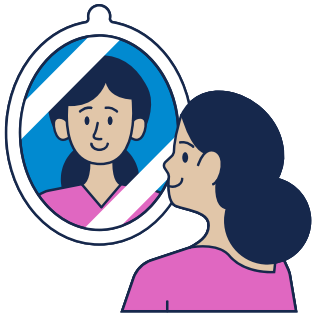
The movement calls for societal changes to better accommodate and embrace neurological differences, viewing neurodivergent individuals as often oppressed in neurotypical societies



Neurodiversity Quote

"Instead of pretending there is hidden away in a vault somewhere a normal brain to which all other brains must be compared we need to admit there is no standard brain just as there is no standard flower. or standard cultural or racial group, and that in fact diversity among brains is just as wonderfully enriching as biodiversity and the diversity among cultures and races"

Thomas Armstrong



Reflection Questions

What is it like to think of your brain in this way?

Is it possible for you to think of your differences as enriching ?

The Movement and Stregnths



The neurodiversity movement also focuses on the strengths of the neurodiverse mind and how society focusing on labeling them as defective is what effectively disables them. Instead, we should celebrate their unique minds and accommodate them.

Kinds of neurodivergence

Examples of neurodivergent neurology include Autism, ADHD, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia, Tourette's, and Dyslexia.

People who are "Neurodivergent" have brains that process, learn and behave differently from what is considered typical. The concept of neurodiversity frames differences as acceptable rather than people as broken or wrong just because other people do things differently.

ADHD is a neurodiversity

One of if not the main ways that people with ADHD are different from those who are neurotypical is that they have different executive functioning. There are aspects of ADHD that **are undoubtedly disabling (because of our world)** , but our focus is on supporting and accommodating these aspects.

Stigma and Self Stigma

STIGMA



The word stigma comes from the Greco-Roman period. Members of society at this time who were slaves, criminals, or traitors were branded with a mark into their skin that was known as a stigma which signaled their low status.

Stigma refers to the devaluation of specific individuals based on some characteristic they possess related to membership in a group that society doesn't value.

People who are neurodivergent or belong to most different groups face some stigma.

ADHD women face a unique and particular stigma because they don't meet the idea of the " GOLD STANDARD WOMEN."



Stigma and Self Stigma

Stigmatized individuals are likely to have experienced harsh judgments from society about how they don't measure up.

How stigma can lead to shame

Many women with ADHD often feel shame, which frequently stems from self-stigma. This self-stigma is caused by negative experiences from their childhood and interactions with the world.

When these women internalize these harmful messages, self-stigma develops. In this module, we will explore how stigma specifically affects women with ADHD and how it leads to self-stigma. It is helpful to remember that this is a big contributor to shame, which we will learn about later.



From Stigma to Discrimination

Addressing Misinformation About ADHD

Stigma often leads to misinformation based on stereotypes and prejudice. Here are some common examples of misinformation about ADHD:

- ADHD isn't a real disorder.
- ADHD only affects children and not adults.
- ADHD only affects boys and isn't as severe in girls and women.
- ADHD is diagnosed too often.
- People with ADHD are over-medicated.
- ADHD is caused by trauma.
- Bad parenting leads to ADHD.

What other misconceptions can you think of?

Misinformation can lead to discrimination, highlighting the importance of combating these myths and spreading accurate information.

What are Executive Functions?

In module one, we discussed how executive functions are cognitive processes that help you manage your life more efficiently in a neurotypical-dominated world. These processes include decision-making, strategizing, organizing, paying attention to details, starting tasks, and completing them. Emotional regulation and self-awareness are also part of executive functioning.

Struggling with executive functions in a neurotypical world can lead to specific challenges.

For example, You might feel overwhelmed by too much information or become paralyzed. While you may excel at generating big ideas, you might need assistance planning and executing the smaller steps to achieve them. When bored or interested, attention is an issue. Emotions can quickly flood or perhaps confuse you.

Neurodiversity Affirming

Our approach focuses on understanding and embracing who you are and reprogramming any negative beliefs that suggest you are faulty or need to be changed or fixed. This is about learning your unique qualities and strengths, using your environment to support you, and reconnecting with your authentic self.

Neurodiverse-affirming approaches reject any notion of shame or inadequacy. They are the opposite of many of the therapeutic approaches that deal with adhd today in mental health practices. Different, not defective, sums it up.

Note: You are still considered disabled by the neurotypical world! It's impossible in many settings to function as an adhd woman, and you need all the help you can get.

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You are as worthy and valuable as someone who is neurotypical. You shouldn't be treated as less than.



Masking

What is Masking?

Masking is a survival tool to fit in within a neurotypical world. Many ADHD or autistic children are taught to mask, forced to do so, or rewarded for it, and it often becomes unconscious.

Masking is a common strategy that many neurodivergent people (and other oppressed groups) use to survive, fit in, become more successful, make friends, try to belong, or prevent being judged or bullied. It often involves hiding who you truly are to fit in.



Masking

Masking isn't unique to neurodivergent people.

The renowned scholar and civil rights activist W.E.B Dubois discussed the idea of code-switching more than a hundred years ago in his famous book The Souls of Black Folk. In it, he discussed how African Americans had to juggle their African American and American identities while facing the reality of a white-dominated society.

“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

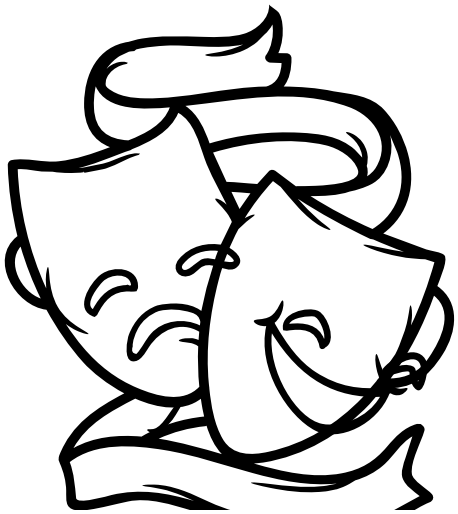
W.E.B Dubois

Examples of masking

- Engaging in small talk when it's exhausting
- Forcing eye contact
- Hiding emotions
- Pretending to understand even though you don't
- Imitating others when you are confused
- Forcing yourself through uncomfortable sensory discomfort
- Hiding stimming or things you do to comfort yourself
- Keeping quiet when you want to talk

Masking can be exhausting; it can cause stress, anxiety, and physical illness and can cause burnout.

It's okay that you do these things. It's perfectly normal, but as an adult, you may be able to choose to be around people, and in certain situations, where you don't need to do this.



Exploring the Messages that lead to Self Stigma

According to Sari Solden, there are four main ways that women with ADHD internalize stigma that leads to shame and masking behaviors.

"You messages", "She messages", "Duh messages," and "Societal messages."

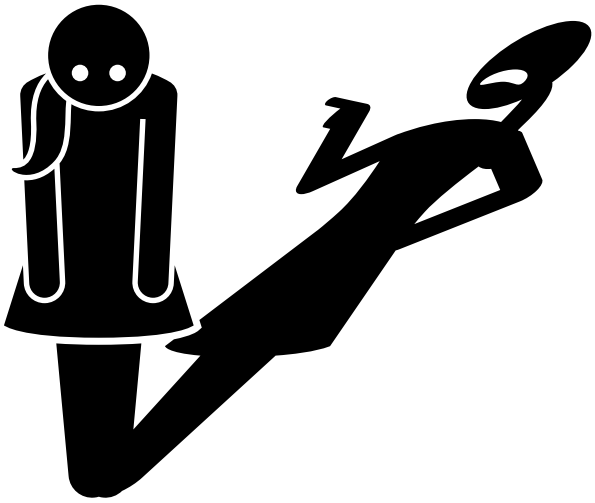
Knowing and exploring these messages is our first step in this group. These messages are a part of your critical self-talk. These messages are based on a lie.





Exploring the Messages that lead to Self Stigma

Let's define these messages.



You Messages:

Direct attacks about the difficulties and differences you heard from people in your life.

These messages "result from misunderstanding, misinterpreting or conflicting your character with the behavior resulting from your unique brain wiring.

She Messages:

Comments that people make about women who have similar challenges and differences as you have.



Exploring the Messages that lead to Self Stigma

Duh! Messages:



Advice that undermines your experience or differences does more harm than good. It can make you feel belittled, invalidated, or like someone lacks an understanding of the complexities of ADHD. It implies you are lazy or stupid for not figuring out the "simple" solution yourself. “ You should write it down! “
“Try a planner”

Absorbed Messages:

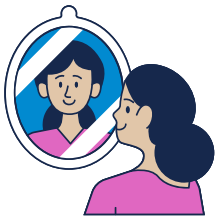


Messages from school, work, media, and society say what a girl or woman "should" do, and you compare yourself unfavorably to others, making your ADHD worse.

We will take some time to consider the messages that've shaped your self-talk and beliefs about yourself and what you can and cannot do in our group.



Reflection



Duh!

As ADHD women, we often receive well-meaning but oversimplified advice that doesn't capture the complexity of our experiences. These "duh messages" can feel dismissive and add to our emotional stress. Even professionals might give this advice, making it even more challenging.



- Have you tried a routine?"
- "You should set reminders on your phone."
- "Have you tried meditation or yoga?"



Reflection Question

What are some "duh messages" you have received over the years, and how did they make you feel? You may even want to think about who gave you those messages.

You aren't stupid. Those strategies aren't usually easy to implement for your different brain, or you may need help or ideas for implementing them differently.

Emotional Distress Syndrome

These messages contribute to what’s been called "emotional distress syndrome" in ADHD women, a chronic state of emotional stress caused by constant feelings of inadequacy and misunderstanding. Reflecting on these questions can help you recognize the impact of these messages and find ways to honor your unique experiences.

Group Exercise You Messages



These are direct messages that conflate your character with your brain wiring.

Often these result from people not understanding adhd, and even when you get a diagnosis, you can have a hard time getting rid of these entrenched ideas.

- "You're just being lazy."
- "You're not trying hard enough."
- "You're such a mess."
- "You could be successful if you would try hard enough."
- "You're irresponsible."
- "You're too emotional."
- "You're inconsiderate."
- "Your friends won't want to hang out with you unless you do X."
- "You have so much potential if you would only do X."

- Are any of these familiar to you?
- Can you think of any of your own?
- How do they impact you?