

# Hyperactive Education: Negotiating ADHD as an Undiagnosed Middle Eastern Female Student

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## **Abstract**

This autoethnographic study explores the lived experience of growing up and studying with undiagnosed ADHD as a Middle Eastern woman within cultural, familial, and academic systems that rendered neurodivergence invisible. Drawing on reflective journals, memory work, and narrative analysis, the research situates personal experience within broader structures of gendered expectations, cultural norms, and ableist educational environments. While ADHD is commonly framed through Western, male-centred diagnostic criteria, this study highlights how women, particularly those from ethnic minority and collectivist backgrounds, mask symptoms through perfectionism, compliance, and emotional labour. This masking, sustained over years, leads to burnout, identity fragmentation, and internalised shame. The narrative reveals how cultural expectations of daughterhood, obedience, and academic excellence intensified these pressures, making ADHD appear as moral failure rather than neurological difference. Using feminist theory, habitus (Bourdieu), and intersectionality (Crenshaw) as analytical frames, the study demonstrates how the interplay of gender, culture, and neurodivergence shapes academic performance, mental health, and self-perception. The paper argues that institutions and families often misinterpret ADHD-related behaviours, reinforcing stigma and delaying diagnosis. By bringing the personal into dialogue with the political, this research challenges dominant narratives around ADHD and offers insight into the invisible labour performed by neurodivergent women navigating conflicting cultural and educational demands. Ultimately, the study aims to broaden understandings of ADHD, highlight underrepresented voices, and advocate for culturally responsive support for women whose struggles remain unheard.

**Keywords:** ADHD in women; Autoethnography; Cultural Expectations; Gender and mental health; Intersectionality.