From misunderstanding towards recognition: narratives of autistic women and girls in news articles

Saara Perälä, Henri Pesonen and Tanja Äärelä

Saara Perälä is based at Faculty of Education, University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland.
Henri Pesonen is based at Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway.
Tanja Äärelä is based at Faculty of Education, University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland.

Abstract

Purpose – *This study aims to examine news article stories portraying autistic women's and girls' life experiences of being neurodivergent to gain a deeper understanding of their recognition in societal discussions.*

Design/methodology/approach – *The authors used narrative and inductive and theory-driven thematic approaches to analyse news articles. This study's theory-driven data analysis phase was guided by Honneth's recognition framework.*

Findings – *The analysis revealed dimensions of misrecognition in multiple spheres of life. These dimensions became visible, for example, as physical and social struggles, delayed or denied access to services and the desire to be openly autistic. The authors conclude that autistic women and girls are lacking recognition in society.*

Practical implications – *In spite of the increasing representations in the media, a larger understanding of the unique ways of being an autistic woman or a girl is needed. Practical implications for using the recognition framework as a tool for developing recognition will also be discussed.*

Originality/value – *Research on women's and girls' experiences of being autistic in news stories from the recognition perspective is scarce, particularly in the Finnish context. The media has a powerful role in society as an information producer. Combining the knowledge gap with the available data in the media, the authors provide windows on the narratives of autistic women and girls.*

Keywords *Women, Autism, Media, Recognition, Thematic analysis, Neurodiversity*

Paper type *Research paper*

Received 28 May 2025
Revised 17 September 2025
Accepted 17 September 2025

Disclosure statement: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Introduction

We frame autism as a cognitive diversity and autistic women and girls as representatives of a neurominority (Bertilsdotter Rosqvist *et al.*, 2020). Our approach is associated with the neurodiversity paradigm (Walker, 2021; Pearson and Rose, 2023). Although a formal autism diagnosis holds power, especially for receiving services in society, our study emphasises the holistic view where biological and psychological aspects, together with the environmental (e.g. social, cultural) ones, can have an impact on autistic people's experiences of recognition. We use the concept of *autistic women and girls* instead of the more biologically oriented term *females* in this study, because of our multidisciplinary focus on life stories and identities. We view gender as a diverse phenomenon and a part of identity, experienced and determined by the person themselves (e.g. Juvonen, 2019; Lindqvist *et al.*, 2020).

The essential need for recognition and validation by others influences our self-perception and potential to act in society (Ikäheimo, 2009). This sense of recognition is shaped by our experiences across various levels of relationships, which range from personal connections to legal rights and acts of solidarity within the community (Honneth, 1995). For example,

DOI 10.1108/AIA-05-2025-0050

alongside relationships (e.g. family, friends), people usually have memberships of institutions and thus potentially experience belonging to various communities. Historically, autistic women and girls have struggled to gain recognition in society because of lack of knowledge and the attitudinal environment (e.g. Gould, 2017; Lockwood-Estrin *et al.*, 2020). In spite of the increasing understanding of neurodiversity, which has improved the status of autistic women, their recognition remains challenging (Craddock, 2024). Poor recognition might lead to autistic women's and girls' further marginalisation and exclusion and mental health issues (e.g. Pesonen *et al.*, 2021) and also prevent them from satisfying their *vital human needs* from a psychological and sociocultural perspective (Ikäheimo, 2009). Lack of understanding of and words to describe the experiences of this group has left autistic women and girls without support and, together with delayed diagnostic processes, has increased risks for marginalisation and mental health challenges (Zener, 2019).

The struggles that autistic women and girls are facing in different environments (e.g. education, health care and work) are lacking attention, as are the social and cultural norms associated with the female gender in general (e.g. Muñoz Boudet *et al.*, 2013). However, increasing media attention and representations have begun to shed light on the lived experiences of autistic women and girls. Media has the potential to increase audiences' knowledge of autism and support the recognition of autistic individuals by sharing their diverse stories.

Nowadays, digital media has a central role in the formation of knowledge and educating the public as the main source for news (Reuters Digital News Report, 2024). However, research focusing on media representations of autistic women and girls in Finland appears to be scarce, although some work on the subject exists; for example, the study by Pesonen *et al.* (2020), which addressed stories about autism in the largest Finnish newspaper by circulation. Even outside the media context, there is very limited research on the viewpoint of autistic women and girls in Finland (Saure, 2024; Linnainmaa, 2021; Mikkola, 2020; Pesonen *et al.*, 2015), particularly from the recognition perspective.

To address this gap in research, we analysed news articles published by the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle in Finnish) that portray the life experiences of autistic women and girls. We analysed the articles by asking the following research questions:

RQ1. How frequently do autistic women and girls appear in news stories in 2014–2024?

RQ2. What narratives are represented in the articles of autistic women and girls?

RQ3. What do the narratives reveal about the dimensions of recognition?

By answering these questions, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of the recognition of autistic women and girls in societal discussions.

Recognition as a framework for autistic women and girls

This article draws on Axel Honneth's theory of recognition (Honneth, 1995, 2012). The individual's need for recognition, as well as mutual recognition of others, is central to the development of a healthy identity and a meaningful life (Honneth, 1995). Recognition becomes visible at three spheres of social interaction where people experience positive or negative encounters throughout their lives. These spheres form the basis of how a person recognises and values oneself.

The first sphere includes private, close relationships as arenas of love or abuse. Both aspects are affecting the development of our self-confidence. The relationship with oneself in the private sphere is closely affiliated with identity. Personal autistic identity refers to recognising autistic characteristics as a solid part of one's own personality, with or without a formal diagnosis (Pearson and Rose, 2023). Some autistic women have reported being labelled through autistic characteristics (e.g. being picky or against changes) a long time before identifying as autistic. In this sense, autistic traits can be understood as relatable. However, no matter how humane the traits might appear, autistic people face discrimination and othering before and after their identification process (Pearson *et al.*, 2023). Autistic social identity, again, is linked to the experienced meanings of possible diagnosis and relationship with the autistic community (Pearson and Rose, 2023). Because of discrimination and the stigma associated with autism, identifying with the community is not self-evident (Perry *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, identities are not solid but change across the lifespan, *like a dance*, in women's dynamic relationship between social expectations linked with age, societal structures and one's own agency (Norvaišaite and Tateo, 2024).

The second sphere is formed by the rights or denied rights of autonomy and dignity as building blocks of self-respect. The denied rights are present in the lives of autistic women and girls through the lack of services and support. One possible dimension explaining these situations can be masking, or camouflaging, which refers to hiding one's autistic appearance and aiming to act as "expected by the majority" in social settings to avoid exclusion (e.g. Alaghband-rad *et al.*, 2023; Seers and Hogg, 2023). Masking presents a risk for the mental health of autistic women, and the realisation of masking, questioning who they really are without the mask, can cause an identity crisis (Lilley *et al.*, 2021). Masking thus makes it more difficult for autistic women and girls to be recognised, and together with the history of perceiving autism as a predominantly male condition, the challenge will remain until knowledge of different autistic appearances significantly increases (Pearson and Rose, 2023).

The third sphere concerns the community, where being valued as a member of a community is defined by actions of solidarity or insults. Experiencing these actions in relationships is central to our level of self-esteem. The need for recognition is not only a matter of the developmental psychology of an individual but also a matter of social justice and, in the case of misrecognition, a motivation for collective social struggles (Amer and Obradovic, 2022). For example, autistic women and girls have emphasised the importance of social media communities as arenas of knowledge and support (Zener, 2019).

Methods

Sample

The data consisted of 26 free, publicly available news articles published online by the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yleisradio, or Yle). Annual surveys have ranked Yle as the most trusted Finnish media by the citizens for several years (Müller, 2024). This makes it a valid source when studying the recognition of autistic women and girls in the Finnish context.

The selection of the news articles was carried out in Yle's online article database by searching for autism-related news articles within the last 10 years (2014–2024) using the search word *autismi* (the Finnish word for autism that covers the entire autism spectrum). Because the online database had no advanced search features, we could not use two search words simultaneously (e.g. autism, women) and thus had to carefully read the titles of each article in the initial screening. The ten-year timespan was based on the visibility of the neurodiversity movement in the research literature (e.g. Pellicano and den Houting, 2021; Renzulli and Gelbar, 2023).

The search yielded 403 autism-related articles. These articles were read, selecting the ones bringing forward the voices of autistic women or girls. The final data included 26 articles. Most articles included interviews with autistic women and girls, and nine articles also included parental views. The women and girls in the articles were between ages 11 and 40.

They either had a formal autism diagnosis, were in the process of getting a diagnosis, or were waiting to enter the process. The articles are referred to by date of publication, as they all derive from the same source. Although the articles are publicly available, we have chosen to anonymise the participants in the citations. The English translations of the citations have been checked for accuracy by the authors.

Data analysis

We used narrative approaches and both data- and theory-driven approaches in our analysis. First, we used inductive thematic analysis, including six phases (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019). We familiarised ourselves with the data, followed by a systematic reading while taking notes. Then we coded the data, focusing on informative segments and similarities, acknowledging the subjective role of the researcher. The codes were merged into preliminary themes which were then reviewed, leading to an agreement not to code contents related to general information or professionals' opinions (e.g. physicians and researchers), as we were particularly interested in the narrative elements in the articles (Riessman, 2008). After this, we continued the coding and identified three main themes with six sub-themes:

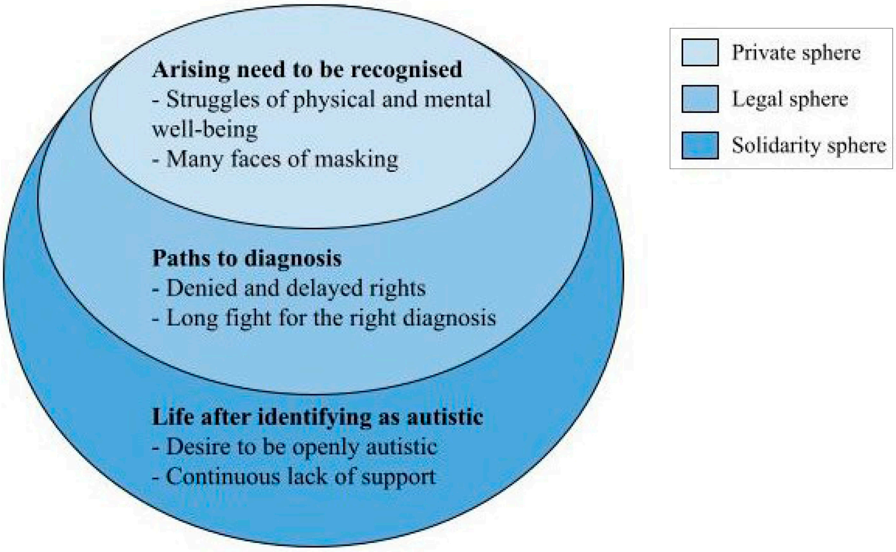
1. the arising need to be recognised with "struggles for physical and mental well-being" and "many faces of masking";
2. paths to a possible diagnosis with "denied and delayed rights" and "long fight for the right diagnosis"; and
3. life after identifying as autistic with "desire to be openly autistic" and "continuous lack of support".

In the final phase of the analysis, we used Honneth's three spheres of recognition (1995, 2012) as a theoretical lens to categorise the main themes and subthemes. While the narratives of the private sphere were relatively clear, categorisation between the legal and the solidarity spheres had partial overlap. Both included narratives operating in similar institutional environments, such as education and health care. However, it was possible to categorise these narratives by scope: the narratives within the legal sphere were more situation-specific, while those in the solidarity sphere described the phenomenon and attitudes in a broader context. To ensure trustworthiness, the authors had several meetings where the analysis process was discussed, resulting in a consensus about the themes. The first author also discussed the emerging themes with a peer outside the research team to receive feedback about the data interpretations.

Findings

The analysis revealed that the number of news articles on autism had been rising rapidly in recent years. From 2014 to 2021, Yle had published only nine articles with the viewpoint of autistic women and girls, while the period from 2022 to April 2024 had seen as many as 17 articles. The analysis further revealed that in spite of the increasing number of articles, the nature of the narratives has not changed. Throughout this ten-year period, the news articles have shed light on the experiences of autistic women and girls, focusing mostly on their hidden struggles in different spheres of life. To answer research questions 2 and 3, the analysis resulted in three main themes representing the recognition of autistic women and girls. Figure 1 depicts the results with their relation to Honneth's (1995) spheres of recognition. We use the publication dates of the news articles to indicate the different data from the Yle archive. Instead of names, we use the pronouns *she/her* to refer to the women and girls of the news articles.

Figure 1 Spheres of recognition of autistic women and girls in news articles



Source: Authors' own work

Private sphere: arising need to be recognised

Under this sphere, the narratives focused on describing the personal experiences and feelings of autistic women and girls. These experiences were also closely related to identity-building processes.

Struggles of physical and mental well-being

Most of the narratives of autistic women and girls began with a struggle. At this point, the majority were not officially diagnosed yet. The narratives indicated negative feelings, for example, not being understood, unbelonging, loneliness and shame, in addition to mental health challenges, such as anxiety and depression. Also, exhaustion, eating disorders and sensory overload were mentioned. For example:

> Already as a child she, 26, felt she was different from others. A little strange. The feeling of not belonging was particularly pronounced when she was with other people. Occasionally she ended up in awkward situations, when she said or did something that offended others. The reasons for this were often unclear (14.8.2021).
>
> I did not always understand what was expected from me. Also, social interaction took awfully lot of energy (13.11.2021).

The narratives illustrated that difficulties were mostly present in situations that demanded high social activity. Schools were the most challenging environments for autistic girls, possibly because of the rapidly changing social norms related to the interaction of girls in their teenage years. Additionally, bullying was complicating their school path. Previous research clearly states that bullying can cause serious mental health challenges, and the risk of getting bullied is multiple times higher for a student with autistic traits compared to the total population (e.g. Wang and Susumu, 2024).

In the narratives, overwhelming social situations without any support led to autistic women and girls blaming themselves for the difficulties (e.g. own behaviour). Most of the data suggested that they did not have exact words to describe their experiences and did not relate them to autism right away.

Many faces of masking

The narratives revealed that, before their formal diagnosis, some of the autistic women and girls had concluded that to fit into the neurotypical world, they needed to change. They started to mask their autistic behaviour and were conscious of those acts to a varying degree. When the women and girls were not masking, they were prepared to face prejudice and stigma:

> All autistic people are not capable of, or have not learned to mask, so living in this society is more difficult for them. They will be discriminated against more easily (14.8.2021).

Masking autistic characteristics and mimicking neurotypical behaviour were considered mandatory skills to cope with the social world requirements. However, most of the narratives emphasised the negative effects of masking (e.g. Pearson and Rose, 2023). Masking demands a lot of energy and can cause serious mental health issues. When prolonged, it can negatively affect the entire identity:

> It is sometimes difficult for me to know which part is the real me and which is made up. Or how I really feel in certain situations (14.8.2021).

Some of the narratives indicated that the women and girls mask because of the stigma (Price, 2022) related to autism. According to an autistic woman studying in the medical sector, the stigma was also present there in spite of the knowledge affiliated with the discipline.

In spite of the predominance of struggles, the narratives revealed that autistic women and girls also had relationships in which they felt loved and recognised as their true selves. Usually these were relationships with their closest family members and friends:

> The ones who accept me as I am, are my friends. The ones, to whom I don't need to explain anything (10.12.2018).

Legal sphere: paths to diagnosis

The narratives here focused mainly on the services organised by society, such as the health care and education sectors. They revealed how difficult and slow accessing certain services can be and how much effort it demanded from the autistic women and girls themselves.

Denied and delayed rights

> If our environment considered sensory defensiveness and accepted different neuropsychiatric challenges, we wouldn't really even need these diagnoses (17.5.2023).

The citation above illustrates an idea that still today is closer to utopia than reality in society. This can explain why the narratives of the autistic women and girls emphasised the benefits of a diagnosis. Seeking a diagnosis through the autism assessment was not easy. According to the narratives, the chances of success in getting a diagnosis were higher for those who could afford private health-care services, had access to occupational health services, or attended a specialised institution such as a hospital school.

Awareness of one's personal experiences and autistic characteristics did not automatically grant access to the public health-care services, but self-recognition and active agency appeared to be considered important for the process to begin in the first place. The women and girls, or their parents, were collecting information, reaching out for professionals and autism communities and making major adjustments to their lives during their processes. They also needed patience to wait, in some cases up to ten years. While the knowledge of autism and its history has taken steps forward (e.g. Pearson and Rose, 2023), gendered perceptions of autism still place women and girls into more challenging positions concerning recognition (McLinden and Sedgewick, 2022):

> Especially as a young woman in public healthcare it is very likely that you will be turned away. Either you don't look autistic enough or then ADHD traits of women are not recognized (25.10.2023).

In addition to gender, experiences shared in a peer support group suggested that the recognition of a neurodivergent person who manages to succeed at school or in working life seems difficult. Also, the mechanisms in autism assessment gained critique:

> The difficulties are not necessarily very well reflected in the test situations, where you have to copy some pictures. The neurological tests are often quite far from everyday situations (15.6.2022).

The narratives highlighted the overall need for professionals, especially in the health-care sector, to gain more understanding of different ways of being autistic. The women and girls provided practical examples they wished to be considered when meeting autistic patients: providing more practical information about the visit, having peaceful waiting areas, understanding that autistic people may face difficulties with sudden changes and tasks, such as filling applications, and that their body language might not match with the pain they are describing.

Long fight for the right diagnosis

The narratives revealed situations where the autistic women and girls had been denied entry into the autism assessment because of a previous mental health diagnosis. This was mostly reflected in the experiences of teenage girls. For example, a doctor told the parent of one girl that the girl has autistic characteristics, but they cannot be assessed further because she is anxious and depressed. The parent described:

> I told the doctor that she is anxious and depressed because she is not getting help. If we would get help, she probably would not have anxiety anymore (15.5.2022).

In connection with the same phenomenon, women described having multiple other diagnoses, such as depression, anxiety or eating disorders, before autism was considered. The interventions to tackle these difficulties were often poor, as a significant diagnosis was missing, which, in turn, affected the overall well-being of the person. Once again, the agency of the autistic women and girls themselves appears to be crucial. For example:

> I was treated as a mental health patient. I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety, and got medication. But something was not matching, because life felt difficult even when my mood was good. I thought that this has to be figured out and I read online everything I found about Asperger's [autism] (13.11.2021).

The narratives showed how the persistent women and girls, together with their family members, were fighting for the right to access the assessments. Most of them eventually succeeded, but the delayed diagnosis did not come without consequences:

> At least I would have gotten the words to understand my experience. I would not have felt like I was [a person] of the wrong kind, or a person who just does not get this life like others do. "Autism spectrum" would have been a lot better word for that experience than "a bad person" (2.4.2022).

Solidarity sphere: life after identifying as autistic

Here, the narratives portrayed positive experiences after finally accessing services and support to some extent. However, the narratives still underlined the need for improvements on the overall situation.

Desire to be openly autistic

When proceeding to time after the diagnosis, the narratives of autistic women and girls revealed predominantly positive emotions:

> The diagnosis was a relief for her. It was relieving to understand that there was nothing wrong with her. She just had a different neurotype.
> It explained why I had always felt like I am the wrong kind of [person]. From the outside one cannot see that I'm autistic. I feel that people still sense that there is something different in me (14.8.2021).

Previous studies have articulated that a diagnosis holds remarkable power as a tool for enabling and increasing self-understanding and self-appreciation (e.g. Milton and Sims, 2016; Lilley *et al.*, 2021). After receiving the diagnoses, the women and girls appeared to recognise and describe more openly their strengths, such as a high sense of empathy, analytical thinking and a strong emotional life, for example:

> I also feel that I understand others, such as the elderly and children, better than people in my own reference group do on average. The mind of people with Asperger's [autism] is maybe more similar with [that of] children than the mind of neurotypicals is. Both get excited about things that can be considered weird. Routines are important for both and both get tired easily (13.11.2021).

Overall, the above extracts suggest that the growth towards a stronger autistic identity, both personal and social, was enabled with the help of the formal diagnosis. However, the autistic community also values self-identification not only because of the acknowledged problems linked to the diagnostic path but also to highlight the role of the active autistic community and peer support. In most of the narratives, social media (Instagram, TikTok) was the first source of information and channel to reach people with whom the autistic women and girls were able to relate.

The narratives of autistic women and girls also presented their dreams and expectations for the future. They wished to study and get a profession, find work and go for a holiday trip with family or friends. None of these events in the lives of autistic women and girls were taken as self-evident. Previous research on working careers of autistic women has underlined the challenges of finding and maintaining meaningful work, indicating that autistic women are not in an equal position with autistic men or the non-autistic population concerning work opportunities (Turner, 2024; Hayward *et al.*, 2019).

Continuous lack of support

Finally, the narratives challenged the idea of what should be considered "normal". As in the neurodiversity approach (Walker, 2021; Pearson and Rose, 2023), the autistic women and girls underlined that belonging to a neurominority is not considered a disorder but part of the needed diversity in nature. This should not be understood as underestimating individual challenges autistic people are facing or the need to label autism as a disability.

Even the diagnosis was not a guarantee for the autistic women or girls to gain more understanding or support in society. While a couple of examples from schools that had taken serious action to support their autistic students and workplaces that were interested in creating sensory-friendly environments appeared positive, the women and girls still felt they had to keep on hiding their autism or be strong enough to face discrimination.

According to the narratives, misrecognition was mostly visible concerning the denied or delayed rights to access the services autistic women and girls would have needed in their lives. These services included accessing the autism assessment in reasonable time, getting appropriate support in education, getting right kind of treatment in health care and getting help with daily tasks. To receive any support or services, autistic women or girls themselves, or their close ones, needed to be very active. A parent of an autistic girl summarised their situation:

> We will survive, but the price tag for that has been incomprehensibly high (26.10.2023).

Discussion

We examined the news articles portraying autistic women's and girls' life experiences of being neurodivergent to gain a deeper understanding of their recognition in societal discussions. Our findings suggest that the media represents how the recognition of autistic women and girls as individuals can be hindered in everyday situations. Autistic women and girls seem to be lacking acknowledgement, understanding and support. Dimensions of misrecognition in their narratives were often linked to identity-building processes. We may therefore ask: can one's identity – including self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem – develop if the person is not recognised as a valuable member of the surrounding society? According to Honneth (1995), it cannot, at least not in a sustainable way. The narratives in our study were supporting this view. The narratives of autistic women and girls revealed feelings of not being good enough, not belonging and hiding their true selves. Being recognised in the first place depended heavily on the level of their self-awareness. Luckily, the narratives also showed that home and close relationships were a significant source of support and particularly recognition for them.

As society is responsible for services such as education and health care and legal rights for all citizens, the effort to interact with human diversity in a respectful way should not just be a matter of voluntariness. Together with the media, these institutions are responsible for producing and sharing valid information for society. The right to support within the Finnish educational system is not dependent on diagnoses but on the individual experienced need of the student (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025). This should have positive outcomes for the support of autistic students, considering that this study and previous research have stated that autistic women and girls are still getting their diagnosis late, if at all (e.g. Lai *et al.*, 2015). However, the precondition for the support in educational settings is that the needs of autistic students, or students with some autistic traits, are first recognised.

To support the recognition of autistic women and girls in society, based on the lessons learned from their narratives in news articles, we suggest that especially persons working in the legal sphere – in educational or administrative institutions and public services (e.g. health care) – should consider the multidimensional nature of the lived experiences of autistic women and girls and thus understand that their recognition depends on the interaction between people. To accomplish meaningful encounters between autistic and non-autistic people, exceeding the interactional gap between them, also referred to as the *double empathy problem* (see e.g. Milton, 2012), is needed. Additionally, the three spheres of recognition introduced in this study can be used as a practical tool when discussing and gaining knowledge about different dimensions affecting the well-being of autistic women and girls. For example, in educational settings, teachers and other school personnel could benefit from training about neurodiversity (particularly related to women and girls) and evaluating how the principles of the recognition framework have been applied in the school environment, support practices and their own interaction with students and staff as professionals.

Limitations and future research

The most notable limitation is related to the data. While we focused on information provided by autistic women and girls, including direct citations from the articles, the narratives in the articles may not fully represent the nuanced experiences of autistic women and girls. This limitation arises because the data selection was determined by what the journalists deemed worthy of sharing. To overcome this limitation, future studies could focus on involving autistic women and girls in the analysis process of the news stories.

Our study examining the news articles highlighted the life experiences of autistic women and girls from the recognition point of view. The different roles that autistic women and girls have in their lives (being a student, partner, parent, employee, etc.) and what kind of experiences and support needs are present in changing environments require further investigation. It would also be interesting to study media representations of autistic women and girls in other Nordic countries and compare the media framing. Such future research should consider participatory research approaches from the planning stages to conducting the research.

Also, the gender assumptions in this study are formed based on the language (names/nouns) used in the news articles. It is worth pointing out, however, that we recognise the limitations of this kind of categorisation considering gender diversity and research stating that representations of gender diversity can even be higher among autistic people compared to non-autistic (Corbett *et al.*, 2023). The autism research field would have room for more diverse voices from the perspectives of all genders (Walker, 2021).

Author contributions

Saara Perälä had the main responsibility of planning and executing the study and writing the manuscript. *Henri Pesonen* participated in planning the study, discussing the data analysis and interpretating results and discussion. *Tanja Äärelä* participated in planning the study and discussing the data analysis and results. All authors reviewed and approved the manuscript.

References

Alaghband-Rad, J., Hajikarim-Hamedani, A. and Motamed, M. (2023), “Camouflage and masking behavior in adult autism”, *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, Vol. 14, doi: 10.3389/fpsyt.2023.1108110.

Amer, A. and Obradovic, S. (2022), “Recognising recognition: self-other dynamics in everyday encounters and experiences”, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, Vol. 52 No. 4, pp. 550-562, doi: 10.1111/jtsb.12356.

Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, H., Chown, N. and Stenning, A. (Eds) (2020), *Neurodiversity Studies: A New Critical Paradigm*, Routledge.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006), “Using cthematic analysis in psychology”, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 77-101, doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2019), “Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis”, *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 589-597, doi: 10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806.

Corbett, B.A., Muscatello, R.A., Klemencic, M.E., West, M., Kim, A. and Strang, J.F. (2023), “Greater gender diversity among autistic children by self-report and parent-report”, *Autism*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 158-172, doi: 10.1177/13623613221085337.

Craddock, E. (2024), “Being a woman is 100% significant to my experiences of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism: exploring the gendered implications of an adulthood combined autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder diagnosis”, *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol. 34 No. 14, pp. 1442-1455, doi: 10.1177/10497323241253412.

Gould, J. (2017), “Towards understanding the under-recognition of girls and women on the autism spectrum”, *Autism*, Vol. 21 No. 6, pp. 703-705, doi: 10.1177/1362361317706174.

Hayward, S., McVilly, K. and Stokes, M. (2019), “‘I would love to just Be myself’: what autistic women want at work”, *Autism in Adulthood*, Vol. 1 No. 4, pp. 297-305, doi: 10.1089/aut.2019.0020.

Honneth, A. (1995), *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.

Honneth, A. (2012), *The I in We. Studies in the Theory of Recognition*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.

Ikäheimo, H. (2009), “A vital human need: recognition as inclusion in personhood”, *European Journal of Political Theory*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 31-45, doi: 10.1177/1474885108096958.

Juvonen, T. (2019), “Nimeämisen mahti: sukupuolta ja seksuaalisuutta kuvaavien termien suhteisuudesta”, *SQS – Suomen Queer-Tutkimuksen Seuran Lehti*, Vol. 13 Nos 1-2, pp. 1-22, doi: 10.23980/sqs.89126.

Lai, M.-C., Lombardo, M.V., Auyeung, B., Chakrabarti, B. and Baron-Cohen, S. (2015), “Sex/gender differences and autism: setting the scene for future research”, *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 11-24, doi: 10.1016/j.jaac.2014.10.003.

Lilley, R., Lawson, W., Hall, G., Mahony, J., Clapham, H., Heyworth, M., Arnold, S.R., Trollor, J.N., Yudell, M. and Pellicano, E. (2021), “A way to be me’: autobiographical reflections of autistic adults diagnosed in mid-to-late adulthood”, *Autism*, Vol. 26 No. 6, pp. 1395-1408, doi: 10.1177/13623613211050694.

Lindqvist, A., Sendén, M.G. and Renström, E.A. (2020), “What is gender, anyway: a review of the options for operationalising gender”, *Psychology & Sexuality*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 332-344, doi: 10.1080/19419899.2020.1729844.

Linnainmaa, M. (2021), “Tyttöjen autismikirjon naamiointi diagnosoinnin haasteena koulussa: systemaattinen kirjallisuuskatsaus”, *Neuropsy Open: kliinisen Neuropsykologian Verkkojulkaisu*, Vol. 2 No. 3, pp. 2-17, available at: https://journals.helsinki.fi/neuropsyopen/article/view/1721/1568

Lockwood-Estrin, G., Milner, V., Spain, D., Happé, F. and Colvert, E. (2020), “Barriers to autism spectrum disorder diagnosis for young women and girls: a systematic review”, *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, Vol. 8 No. 4, pp. 454-470, doi: 10.1007/s40489-020-00225-8.

McLinden, H. and Sedgewick, F. (2022), “The girls are out there’: professional perspectives on potential changes in the diagnostic process for, and recognition of, autistic females in the UK”, *British Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 50 No. 1, pp. 63-82, doi: 10.1111/1467-8578.12442.

Mikkola, M. (2020), “Autismikirjon häiriöt tytöillä: oirekuvan erityispiirteitä, kirjallisuuskatsaus”, Faculty of Medicine and Health Technology, University of Tampere, Finland, available at: https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:tuni-202002031789

Milton, D.E.M. (2012), “On the ontological status of autism: the ‘double empathy problem”, “, *Disability & Society*, Vol. 27 No. 6, pp. 883-887, doi: 10.1080/09687599.2012.710008.

Milton, D. and Sims, T. (2016), “How is a sense of well-being and belonging constructed in the accounts of autistic adults?”, *Disability & Society*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 520-534, doi: 10.1080/09687599.2016.1186529.

Ministry of Education and Culture (2025), “Support for learning and school attendance”, available at: https://okm.fi/en/support-for-learning-and-school-attendance (accessed 13 March 2025).

Muñoz Boudet, A.M., Petesch, P., Turk, C. and Thumala, A. (2013), “On norms and agency: Conversations about gender equality with women and men in 20 countries”, *Directions in Development: human Development*, World Bank, doi: 10.1596/978-0-8213-9862-3.

Müller, J. (2024), “Uutisarvostukset 2023”, available at: https://yle.fi/aihe/a/20-10006166 (accessed 12 October 2024).

Norvaišaite, A. and Tateo, L. (2024), “Development of performative identities in autism writers’ autobiographies”, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, Vol. 40 No. 4, pp. 1-15, doi: 10.1080/08856257.2024.2407660.

Pearson, A. and Rose, K. (2023), *Autistic Masking. Understanding Identity Management and the Role of Stigma*, Pavilion Publishing and Media Ltd, UK.

Pearson, A., Rose, K. and Rees, J. (2023), “‘I felt like I deserved it because I was autistic’: understanding the impact of interpersonal victimisation in the lives of autistic people”, *Autism*, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 500-511, doi: 10.1177/13623613221104546.

Pellicano, E. and den Houting, J. (2021), “Annual research review: shifting from ‘normal science’ to neurodiversity in autism science”, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, Vol. 63 No. 4, pp. 381-396, doi: 10.1111/jcpp.13534.

Perry, E., Mady, W., Hull, L. and Cage, E. (2021), “Understanding camouflaging as a response to autism-related stigma: a social identity theory approach”, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, Vol. 52 No. 2, pp. 800-810, doi: 10.1007/s10803-021-04987-w.

Pesonen, H., Kontu, E., Lahdelma, M. and Fabri, M. (2021), “Autismikirjolla olevien yliopisto-opiskelijoiden käsitykset yhteenkuuluvuuden tunteesta yliopisto-opintojen aikana [conceptions associated with sense of belonging for students with autism whilst at university]”, *Journal of University Pedagogy*, ISSN 2242-8070.

Pesonen, H., Itkonen, T., Saha, M. and Nordahl-Hansen, A. (2020), “Framing autism in newspaper media: an example from Finland”, *Advances in Autism*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 167-177, doi: 10.1108/AIA-01-2020-0003.

Pesonen, H., Kontu, E. and Pirttimaa, R. (2015), “Sense of belonging and life transitions for two females with autism spectrum disorder in Finland”, *Journal of International Special Needs Education*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 73-86, doi: 10.9782/2159-4341-18.2.73.

Price, D. (2022), *Unmasking Autism. The Power of Embracing Our Hidden Neurodiversity*, Monoray/Octopus Publishing Group Ltd, UK.

Renzulli, S.J. and Gelbar, N.W. (2023), “Chapter 15: the neurodiversity paradigm and the future of higher education”, J.W. Madaus and L. L. Dukes (Eds), *Handbook of Higher Education and Disability*, Edward Elgar Publishing, UK, doi: 10.4337/9781802204056.00024.

Reuters Digital News Report (2024), “Uutismedia verkossa 2024”, available at: www.mediaalantutkimussaatio.fi/wp-content/uploads/Reuters_Uutismedia-verkossa-raportti_2024.pdf (accessed 29 November 2024)

Riessman, C.K. (2008), *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, SAGE Publications, Inc.

Saure, E. (2024), “Autism spectrum traits in anorexia nervosa”, *Dissertationes Universitatis Helsingiensis*, *291* University of Helsinki, Finland, available at: http://hdl.handle.net/10138/587914

Seers, K. and Hogg, R. (2023), “Fake it ‘till you make it’: authenticity and wellbeing in late diagnosed autistic women”, *Feminism & Psychology*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 23-41, doi: 10.1177/09593535221101455.

Turner, T.K.M. (2024), “An exploration of the worklife experiences of autistic women in the UK”, *PhD Theses Collection of the University of Hertfordshire*, UK, doi: 10.18745/th.27768.

Walker, N. (2021), *Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities*, Autonomous Press.

Wang, R. and Susumu, Y. (2024), “Factors of bullying victimization among students on the autism spectrum: a systematic review”, *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, doi: 10.1007/s40489-024-00478-7.

Zener, D. (2019), “Journey to diagnosis for women with autism”, *Advances in Autism*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 2-13, doi: 10.1108/AIA-10-2018-0041.

Corresponding author

Saara Perälä can be contacted at: saaperal@ulapland.fi