

Nancy Armstrong: 'The Disruptors' & tackling ADHD stereotype...

Sat, 8/27 10:58AM 59:46

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

adhd, diagnosed, diagnosis, film, kids, medication, feeling, parents, people, child, pandemic, talking, iep, brain, impairment, happening, women, classroom, teachers, podcast

SPEAKERS

Nancy Armstrong, Katy Weber



Nancy Armstrong 00:00

I also needed a film to educate the people around me. The teachers who didn't understand the coaches who didn't understand, you can't really hand them a 500 page book and go just read about that. It's not gonna happen.



Katy Weber 00:17

Hello, and welcome to the women and ADHD podcast. I'm your host, Katy Weber. I was diagnosed with ADHD at the age of 45. And it completely turned my world upside down. I've been looking back at so much of my life, school, jobs, my relationships, all of it with this new lens and it has been nothing short of overwhelming. I quickly discovered I was not the only woman to have this experience. And now I interview other women who liked me discovered in adulthood they have ADHD and are finally feeling like they understand who they are and how to best lean into their strengths, both professionally and personally. Okay, here we are at episode 100. And I couldn't be more thrilled with this episode. So soon after the documentary that disruptors was released earlier this year, I started receiving messages from listeners asking have you seen this incredible documentary about ADHD? Go watch this film. So I did and I can confirm it is amazing and emotional and just spot on and talking about this incredibly complex diagnosis. It features a ton of well known experts in the field as well as interviews with celebrities and entrepreneurs who have ADHD. It also follows various families with ADHD diagnoses, either the kids or parents or both as they navigate school and medication and social pressures. I have to say I cried many times as I watched this film, I even cried during the frickin trailer. I highly recommend you stop what you're doing and go rent the documentary as soon as possible, especially if you are a parent with ADHD kids. So right after I watched the documentary, I reached out to the filmmakers to see if anyone wanted to come on my little podcast to discuss this film and was thrilled when I heard back from the producer herself. So here we are Episode 100, in which I interview Nancy Armstrong. Nancy is an Emmy nominated producer and executive producer at happy warrior media. Previous to the disruptors. She also co founded the award winning women's leadership and media platform makers, which was

named one of the 100 best websites for women by Forbes and received the Women's Media Center award for its groundbreaking contribution to women history and America. Nancy's husband, their son and their two daughters have all been diagnosed with ADHD and the documentary was inspired by her own family's experiences navigating life with ADHD and the frustrating stereotypes and stigmas they experienced along the way. Nancy and I talk all about the making of the documentary The difficult journeys and choices the families faced in the film, and the heartwarming advice from celebrities like Will i am Paris Hilton, astronaut Scott Kelly and tons more. Again, the documentary is called the disruptors. And you can find it to rent on iTunes, Apple TV, YouTube, Google Play Amazon Vudu. Go watch it. It's fantastic. Okay, here is my interview with Nancy. Well, Nancy, thank you so much for joining me. I am so excited. I have to say, you know, many people reached out to me when the documentary came out and said, Have you seen it? Have you seen the disruptors? Oh my god, you gotta see the disruptors. And I went and watched the trailer. And immediately I had such this visceral, visceral, emotional reaction just to the trailer alone, especially the part I'll never forget the part where the dad Bart is talking about being frustrated with his son, Reese. And he's like, what's wrong with you? And the answer from Rhys was everything, dad, and I just like wanted to cry in that moment. It was so just so intense. And I'm so grateful that you put this film together. So before we talk about that, I want to kind of ask you a little bit about some of your family background because you have three kids, all of whom are diagnosed with ADHD and you have a husband with ADHD. So normally, I asked my guests kind of what was happening to lead up to your diagnosis. But I'm curious kind of You talk a lot about getting kicked out of Mommy and Me with your youngest with your oldest child when he was a toddler, but kind of what what was going on with him that actually led to an official diagnosis.

N

Nancy Armstrong 04:22

Well, thank you so much, Katy, for having me on. And thank you so much about with your kind words on the film. I really appreciate it. And I'm glad that the trailer is resonating and that the film is resonating with so many people. So our personal journey was that my firstborn son was an absolute angel baby until about the age of 12 months and then it's like he changed to a very frustrated, crankier type of toddler and you know, yeah, we got caught. We got kicked out of Mommy and Me class because all the 16 month year old kids were sitting quiet It'll be in their mother's lap. And my son was running around the circle of people and hitting turning the music off. I mean, it was completely like out of control in this context where everyone was supposed to sit now in the circle. And so we were asked to leave and I was completely devastated. So we both just drove home crying, and Jack didn't know why he was crying, but he's a very empathetic child even then. So he felt my pain, didn't understand it. But that was followed by many years of sort of going, what's going on? What is going on with him, he was super high energy, which is, you know, kind of normal and boys, particularly that age. But then it's just started to disrupt his experience in you know, preschool, and he had a hard time with those group playdates. So we were just experiencing impairment in every setting at home, certainly, after my second child was born, you know, had a hard time dealing with that. And he had these sensory issues that were then diagnosed at age four. And so that was then the issue with just sensory integration disorder. So then we did occupational therapy, and spent hours doing that. And I noticed the waiting room of the sense sensory kids was full of people. And I'm like, Well, I guess a lot of kids have sensory issues. And then it wasn't until he was eight years old, and things were really miserable at home and miserable at school, that I just said, this is unsustainable, like, he asked him, yeah, he has to see a child psychologist. So we took him to someone who then said, I want you to have him tested. And I said, What, for what he's got sensory integration disorder, and he said, yeah, just haven't tested. And so I went to this

person to have him tested. And he was evaluated by this diagnostician who said, He's ADHD, and he's, you know, 96th percentile and hyperactivity, which was a revelation, I, my jaw just hit the floor. And then I was sitting next to my husband, whose hand goes up very slowly. And he said, I have all those symptoms. And the diagnostician said, Yes, well, it's hereditary. So that was kind of mind blowing moment. But at least we knew what was going on. And we could do something to help him. And so then that's, that was kind of the beginning of our journey of investigating all the tools that we could use to help him manage ADHD both at home and in every environment in school and sports and things like that. And then we missed the, to the diagnosis of my two girls, because they were presenting very differently than my son, they were much less hyperactive, they were more emotionally impulsive, but they were fine in school, there was no difficulty for them in, they were not having impairment in school. And it wasn't until they reached Middle School, when everything changes, you know, the big things that change are, first, they are going through hormonal changes. So that tends to exacerbate symptoms of ADHD. And the second thing that happens is they go from one classroom, one teacher to six classrooms, six teachers, the demand goes up, they have to be organized. So things just really quickly fell apart for both of them. And that's when we, you know, went and had them evaluated, and of course, they both had ADHD as well. So we have it on both sides of the family. It's kind of no surprise that all three kids have it.



Katy Weber 08:35

So just to backtrack, Tim, your husband was not diagnosed in childhood, he sort of came to a diagnosis through your Son, correct?



Nancy Armstrong 08:42

Yes. It's like his childhood now suddenly makes sense. Why was he getting in so much trouble in school? Why did that third grade teacher put a cardboard box around his desk on all three sides, so only he could see the front of the classroom, you know, he got in trouble for disorganization, he was kicked out of eighth grade. I mean, he's an incredibly successful person. But he really struggled in those K through 12 years that they were really difficult for him. And he had to study so much harder than everyone else to get decent grades. And he's, you know, incredibly smart. So it was just that environment was so difficult for him. And he never knew why. But he got through it, you know, sort of white knuckled his way through it. And then found the thing that he loves to do, and then started really leveraging the power of his brain. And once the opportunity and the thing he loved met the power of his brain. His career just took off in a sort of a very vertical trajectory.



Katy Weber 09:41

Yeah, we see that theme with a lot of the celebrities that you interview in the movie and it was very emotional to sort of see how much they struggled as kids and that common theme of school and just how damaging some of those negative messages are to these incredibly bright Kids and that, that sort of divide between desire to do well versus the inability. Anyway, I want to kind of backtrack to your daughters because, you know, obviously, in this podcast, a lot of the conversations I have with women who are diagnosed in adulthood because of their kids where you know, their kids are diagnosed, and they're like, hey, this sounds a lot like me and

my childhood. But as girls often did very well in school, it's very rare that, you know, the majority of the women I interviewed did quite well in school, but like you said, white knuckled it, and ended up with a with either diagnosis of depression or anxiety in adulthood. And so I see that pattern over and over and over again, of women who are just like really, really hot, such high expectations of themselves such perfectionism, but at the same time, feeling like highly disorganized having some real executive dysfunction issues, and sort of sort of feeling like, I'm just barely holding it together, right. And then so many of us have this breaking point in adulthood. For me, it was the pandemic and having everybody at home. And you know, like, that was my breaking point where I finally got my diagnosis. But then they go to a doctor often and the doctor will say, Well, you didn't have the obvious signs in childhood, you didn't struggle because you did well in school. And then it's like, they're trapped in this, this logical logic vortex of like, well, no, did I have I had it, it's just like, I was pulling it together. So it's almost like, with girls, there's often that feeling of like, well, we're, we're doing well, but at what cost, like what's happening behind the scenes a lot of the time,

N

Nancy Armstrong 11:39

right, it's incredible stress, like I've seen it, and both of my daughters, they, they both do well, although it's really difficult for them, they're diagnosed and we, you know, we're treating their ADHD, but it's still a struggle, you know, there's no one perfect fix. So they're still always managing it. And they both want to do well. And when they don't do well, they experience extreme anxiety and upset. So I always say you just have to get through the K through 12 years, I think it does get easier as you move into adulthood, which is I've seen with all three of my I've seen with two mice don't have one who's 16. So she's still kind of in the thick of it. But it definitely gets easier. And you learn how to compensate for the challenges and manage the challenges and, and start to leverage some of the upsides, which are the things that buoy you and keep you excited about life is that, you know, you can do these other things that are sort of above and beyond your peers. And those are kind of the things that keep you feeling good. And so it's important to keep focusing on those things. Because those motivate you to manage the challenges and not get too down about them.



Katy Weber 12:53

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think that for this diagnosis, a lot of it is just the realization of the why behind so many behaviors. I say this a lot where I'm like, I feel like the treatment plan for ADHD is really just knowing what's happening and why, as opposed to just immediately feeling like, Oh, God, what's wrong with me? And you know, I'm lazy or I, you know, I could do this, but I, but for some reason I'm not. And then you know that that inner turmoil. Now, you had mentioned that this was the film you wish you had had as a parent, because parenting kids with ADHD is very lonely. Can you talk a little bit more about the impetus for the film and kind of what that meant? In terms of the loneliness?

N

Nancy Armstrong 13:36

Sure, I mean, I couldn't believe there wasn't a comprehensive film on ADHD just writ large, just because it's a pretty big issue and affects 10% of the population. And there's a documentary on absolutely everything else. So I thought that was really surprising. I also needed a film to

educate the people around me, the teachers who didn't understand the coaches who didn't understand, you can't really hand them a 500 page book and go, just read about that. It's not gonna happen. But there's something great about film, which is to be able to synthesize a topic to curate a topic into 90 minutes of understandable context, that's also emotional and relatable. That really helps not only parents and children with ADHD, but also the people that work with children or parents with ADHD. So I wanted a tool that I could give to teachers so that they would better understand my children. So they would stop looking at me like there's something wrong with my parenting. I mean, there's a lot of sort of finger pointing at children and parents that this is your fault. And if you were trying harder, you could overcome this, but you clearly are not trying, and there's something wrong with your family and there's something wrong with your children. So that was very frustrating to me. It was also very frustrating to me to live in a town where everyone's kids are perfect. Everyone's children are getting straight A's and on the bar. So the lacrosse team and you know, we were not having that experience. So I felt like there was no conversation, there was no community it was, there were plenty of kids with ADHD. But it was very much in the dark of night, it was undercover and no one was talking about it. And people were shamed about it. Because there is still such a stigma around ADHD, there are pervasive myths that only fuel the stigma, and no one was challenging those in a sort of film platform. So that's one of the reasons I wanted to make the film to was to, you know, sort of unpack what is ADHD, and particularly from a neurological standpoint, and then to kind of one by one, pick off those myths that have really been so pervasive around ADHD as a as a diagnosis as a condition and to reframe it, finally,



Katy Weber 15:54

yeah, I know. Right? And I, that's something we have I have a lot of conversations about, which is like, what are we even talking about when we talk about ADHD? Because so much of the time it feels like, why is this called a disorder? Like, why are we pathologizing an atypical brain? Because really, what it comes down to is that there's environments that are hostile towards this type of brain, like sitting in his classroom or sitting at a desk for eight hours, you know, until all of these ways where it's like, why are we calling this a disorder? Is this a disorder like, but at the same time, I really liked what Russell Barkley who was just wonderful, I love him. So everything that he said, he's just incredible. So I was really excited to see him in. So I mean, so many experts in the film, were wonderful, but I really liked what he said when he talked about the superpower language, because that's another thing we talk about a lot on the on the podcast, which is like, is this a disorder is what are the benefits of calling it a disorder? In terms of taking it serious, right? And not, you know, there are some benefits to actually kind of the medical side of this and taking it serious and getting accommodations and not just being like, Oh, you're forgetful. But what he said was, I thought interesting was that he said, you know, if you, if you talk about it only in terms of it being a superpower and an advantage, then it reduces the pressure on society to help you which I found really interesting, in terms of just like, I like had the dialogue around the ADHD often is so confusing. Like you said,



Nancy Armstrong 17:29

it is confusing. And I think, you know, the dialogue around neurodiversity in general has a lot of people confused. There are oftentimes people with differently wired brains, you know, they may have depression, but they are extremely, you know, talented. So that it's like, whenever you have a differently wired brain, you many times have a gift associated with that. But there is

also this downside. And I think ADHD is very much like that there are challenges and particularly getting through a K through 12 environment where no one cares about your ideas. No one, you know that creativity is not really celebrated in that environment. So it's very hard to get through that environment. But I think once you get out into the real world, those are the people you want in a brainstorm, those are the people you want developing products and creating products at a startup. It's not the linear brained people, they don't have the that wealth of ideas, they don't have the same type of hyper focus on that, that is required to start a company and it's incredibly difficult, like, so there, they tend not to be the founders, I find so many founders of companies are people with ADHD, they can so sort of hyper focus on the one thing that they're interested in to the exclusion of everything else. And in a startup, that's great, you know, that is very hard for a normal brained person to do, to sort of have that imbalance, where, which is what you kind of need to be successful in a startup is to devote all of your brain energy to that pursuit. But it is really difficult in school, were sitting still listening to a lecture for 15 minutes without moving without participating without engaging, it's almost impossible for someone with ADHD. So in the film, we tried to really focus on both the challenges but also, that there's there's basically two sides to the coin of ADHD. On the one side are the challenges and those are real, and if you don't manage them, your life can go in a very unpleasant direction. I think that's really like what needs to be said. But if you can manage the challenges and find a way to activate your strengths, that's an incredibly positive trajectory.



Katy Weber 19:47

I'd like to take a moment to thank better help for sponsoring this podcast. If you're a regular listener of this podcast, you know, I am a big proponent of therapy therapy provides me the best opportunity for verbal processing something that is so Whoa, important for my kind of brain and my sense of self. What I love about BetterHelp is that it's not a crisis line. It's not self help. It is professional therapy that's done securely online from the comfort of your home. They assess your needs and match you with your own licensed professional therapist, and it's available for clients worldwide. So you get access to a broad range of expertise that might not be available to you locally. It also tends to be more affordable than traditional offline therapy and financial aid is available. If you visit their website and read their testimonials. There are actually quite a few reviews that specifically reference help with ADHD as a special offer for listeners of the women and ADHD podcast, you'll get 10% off your first month, simply sign up at [betterhelp.com/women ADHD](https://betterhelp.com/women-ADHD), that's BetterHelp h e l p . c o m / w o m e n . A D H D , and there's a link in the show notes. This podcast is sponsored by BetterHelp. I really liked how the theme of medication kind of worked into that conversation as well in the movie, you know, especially through bear and his incredible mother. Um, I think it bears mom was my favorite character in the movie, she was so driven, and just so positive in the face of like, some serious adversity for this tiny little innocent boy. I know, right? And but you know, she had some really interesting insights into medication with her kid too, because, you know, she was like, like, all parents kind of worried they're so tiny, do I want to give them this medication, but also realizing that like, assimilation is important at certain ages, like, we can't just be like, my kid has a superpower. And he can't sit still, like realizing how much social acceptance and assimilation is important developmentally for children. And so also realizing that like medication can help in terms of you know, even though they are these, you know, we're these Growing Minds, and, and we don't necessarily want to medicate, at the same time, the flip side of that argument is, medication will often help with self esteem, and social skills that will last a lifetime too. And I think that's

such an important part of the conversation around medication that we don't often talk about, right, you know, especially the ambivalence around it, and kind of how there's much more going on in terms of just like, oh, I want to give my kid a pill. So they behave.

N

Nancy Armstrong 22:14

Well, of course, that and I mean, I think we tried to be agnostic about the medication, but just really explain what the research shows. I mean, from my own experience, when we were considering medication for my son, it was not an easy decision, it was, you know, 12 or 13 years ago. So even more controversial then. But I was choosing between someone who was demoralized, basically demoralized at school, having problems getting along with everyone at home, and getting so much negative feedback from his world. Just constant negative feedback. And what the, you know, the diagnostician, the psychologist and my pediatrician said is, he can't keep on this path, like this is too much for anyone, these are his formative years, and he gets nothing but negative feedback. Everything he does is wrong. He's getting just a swath of negative feedback. And it's detrimental emotionally for his development. So I tried medication. For that reason, I wanted to see what the other side would be, if it would help them and I didn't know if it would, and sometimes, for some kids, it doesn't help. And it's a whole process where you have to try one medication and see if that works. And then if that doesn't work, you have to try another one. And you have to tweak the dosage. So it's a really uncomfortable process to try to find the right medication. But if you can find it, it is a relief for them to be able to sit in a classroom, and not get in trouble and absorb the lesson and not fall behind and not have all these problems, which I mean, they do have to get through K through 12. They just do. So I was comfortable enough with the research on the medication that we've done more research on stimulant medication for ADHD than any other medication anyone will take. And it's more effective to treat ADHD than any other drug is to treat anything else, any other neurological or for mental condition. So stimulant medication for ADHD is the most effective combination than for any other mental condition. Again, it's a frustrating process to try to find the right one. But when it's helpful, it's a huge relief and my son at you know, eight years old said, I think I should take this every day. That was what his determination was because he suddenly did not have to get a warning. He suddenly wasn't getting yelled at he suddenly could be in a dodgeball game without running off the field with the ball. It produced the requisite amount of dopamine for him to have kind of a normal school day. And that felt incredible to him. And so that was kind of our experience. But I think it's a very personal choice and we're not pushing it. And certainly medication is not the only answer. You sort of use that in conjunction with other treatments.



Katy Weber 25:11

Oh, yeah. I mean, even as an adult, I'm still just like, I've tried two different types of stimulant medication. And I'm like, hard, it's so exhausting to try to figure out, which is the best one, neither was the right fit every time I have to, like make an appointment to go back to my doctor and have to think about how much it's gonna cost me every month. And like, it is so exhausting. And then also the questions of like, How much am I struggling? What am I even looking for? I don't know. Like, there's just so many questions around medication, even as an adult. And then to add in that sort of worry about, like, what are the, you know, even with, like, with bears mom when she was talking about, like, I don't even know if he's gonna know what side effects are or how to be able to sort of articulate those as a kid, right. And that's a whole other side of the conversation.

N

Nancy Armstrong 25:54

Well, another thing that happened just to point this out in the film, where bear tries that first medication that was Concerta, which is a time release medication, and at that point, she was working with her pediatrician who told her to cut it in half, you can't cut a time release medication and half, right? That's like getting a whole day of medication in one dose in one moment. So it's, it's sort of no wonder why that was very negative for him. So we didn't really get into that in the film. But that's kind of what that, you know, once they got to a clinical specialist, then they started having a much more positive experience in terms of finding the correct medication and the correct dosage. But that was kind of that's what happened in that first experience. And that that speaks to the fact that, you know, we do need pediatricians and primary care physicians to be a more accredited first line of defense, because many times that's all there is.

**Katy Weber 26:53**

I know, well, even Yeah, she was even mentioning and something that is very common, which is I found a specialist, but they're booked that you know, and, and that's what's happening. Like, especially in the UK, right now, the waiting list is like three to seven years to get a diagnosis. So I mean, that word, I feel like we're going through this revolution in diagnoses right now, especially with around ADHD and need of urgency, or divergent diagnoses, where it's just like, the knowledge, the awareness, the need for the diagnosis is huge right now. And there's just no no infrastructure to support that.

N

Nancy Armstrong 27:27

Yeah, that's absolutely true. There is a dearth of clinical specialists in ADHD. So assuming that's not going to change anytime soon, or in an appropriate amount of time, there needs to be a push to have primary care physicians and pediatricians really get better ongoing training on ADHD so that they can better identify it. I know, some doctors offices, some pediatricians offices are now doing like a mental health survey. I noticed when when I take my kids to get their annual, physical, they'll will they will fill out and I will fill out a survey, the sort of a rating scale survey or how are you feeling, you know, different things to do with how you're feeling and things you're experiencing that I couldn't identify as sort of markers of ADHD or, or anxiety or depression. So I think they're starting to at least ask about it by doing those surveys, but I don't think that's totally common. And it needs to be.

**Katy Weber 28:24**

And I hear stories about like, oh, well, you have what looks like ADHD, but it's probably more likely, you're just depressed or you have trauma from childhood. You know, I think there's just a lot of confusion around, you know, what are we even talking about? When it comes to the traits?

N

Nancy Armstrong 28:40

 Nancy Armstrong 28:18

It's guesswork? This is a neurological condition that people are guessing about, that's not good for anyone.



Katy Weber 28:47

Right? Yeah, I know, I, you know, unlike most of my guests, I was diagnosed first and then took a look at my two kids through, you know, and looking at everything they do, and their schooling and sort of realizing, Oh, I see bits. And you know, I see traits in both of them. But I have one boy and one girl, and it presents very differently in both of them. And so I, you know, I had that same issue where I was like, I want to get them tested. But I don't want to mess this up. I want to I don't want to just go to a pediatrician, like I, I really wanted to do the comprehensive psych evaluation with both of them. And it's not cheap. You know, it was it was a lot and a lot involved. And I'm, you know, very fortunate that we were able to do that. But I also feel like, still even with a comprehensive evaluation, I'm still questioning, is this valid at diagnosis, I guess, you know, where I'm like, is this something else? I'm always wondering, like, Is this is this just executive dysfunction? Or is there something else happening? I don't know.



Nancy Armstrong 29:44

Well, I think Russell Barkley says that these testing this battery of testing that people are asked to do, which is very cost prohibitive is not really the way to diagnose it and he really discourages people from doing six hours of testing might kids, all three did, you know the six hours of testing and then a 25 page report from that testing. And that's really cost prohibitive. So he doesn't even think that that's the way it should be diagnosed. He just thinks that it should be a thorough history by someone with clinical acumen, to diagnose ADHD and then that's the way you diagnose it. And that's kind of where Halliwell stands to, that it's the conversation. It's the interview with the parents, the children, you know, feedback from teachers to kind of see where it's presenting an impairment, and you sort of take a history of very, very, very detailed and thorough history, and that's kind of how they diagnose it. And that's less cost prohibitive. And those tests and those tests are 1000s of dollars. But sometimes, that's what some schools require, in order to get extra time, which everyone with ADHD should get extra time. If you have ADHD, then you should get extra time. Some schools are saying, well, it's the degree to which you have ADHD that you should be getting extra time. I mean, I think if your brain is, is wired differently, if you have a neurological difference, then probably extra time is what you should get if that's what you need. Most kids with ADHD do need extra time.



Katy Weber 31:13

Yeah, yeah. And that's the other thing too, as I look into both my kids have just recently been diagnosed. So now we're looking into like, Okay, do we want to get them an IEP, my daughter's in high school, and I feel like a lot of the things that an IEP will be really beneficial, because it'll give her those things, you know, it'll, it'll force the teacher to allow her to sit in the front row and help her advocate for herself in a way that if she had asked her teacher, you know, I'd like to sit in the front row, you know, last year, her teachers were like, No, you have to sit alphabetically, and your last name is w, so you end up in the back row. And she was like, Oh, okay. You know, like, kids don't know how to advocate for themselves in those situations. So

like, I'm really, and same with extra time. And like a lot of those things with an IEP that were like, Yeah, this feels like this would be really beneficial for her in high school. My son, on the other hand, is going into sixth grade, which, like you said, is a pivotal grade for him. And I'm also really working very concerned about getting the IEP at that point, because we're worried he's going to be tracked into you know, that he's going to be kind of stereotyped as being a you know, a not intelligent kid, honestly, to be that's what our fear is right, that he's going to start being subjected to a lot of the stereotypes and stigma around ADHD, and that's going to track him into certain classrooms that he might not otherwise be tricked into, because he is really gets really, really high grades and is very bright. And so we're much more worried about like, how the IEP is going to sort of change how teachers view him, if that makes sense. And that's like an ongoing conversation we're having. And so my husband is sort of like, well, let's just see how much he's struggling. And then we'll get him the IEP. And I'm like, Yeah, but do we don't want to get to the point where our kids are struggling? Because then you get back to that whole conversation about white knuckling it and like, what's the cost? Right? Like, like you said, like, these things should be available so much easier, they should be able to be in an environment where they can advocate for themselves, and they just aren't.

N

Nancy Armstrong 33:03

Absolutely, and it was, you know, it's the law as of 1991, by the Department of Education, and their regulations prior to that ADHD was not an eligible condition for special education services in school, like an IEP. But now, it is, you know, it is law. So, first of all, that shouldn't be the case. And also, if teachers are having a particular perspective on it, that's incorrect. They need to watch the film. And that's sort of step one of their training. Really, they don't have any training on ADHD. They don't they, they may have read a boilerplate about what is ADHD, but that's not enough to understand it. I mean, it's hard to understand it, even if you really do know so much about ADHD. You know, sometimes as parents, we say to kids, can you just stop? And that's right, that comment right there is indicative of a lack of understanding, you know, you sort of have to just deal with them where they are, and find ways to you know, be the calm, rational one in the room and it's taken me over a decade to figure those things out. But I still make mistakes every once in a while just because it is so frustrating sometimes. So I understand the the plight of teachers and having their classroom disrupted and having to spend more time with a particular child because they aren't going as fast as the other kids are or they have to sit up front or they're tapping their pencil or things like that. But if you understand, you know, that these kids are, are really trying they are doing the best they can and that they are the future Will i am's and Steve men's and David Neeleman and those kids were very, very mistreated in their classrooms, but they were mad at they managed to overcome. So you know, you teachers can think about it like this is just this the way this brain type works. And the setting is very difficult for them and it's my job as a teacher to give them a little extra support and a little extra help and a little extra Patience so that they can do their best work.



Katy Weber 35:03

Yeah, you know, I, I really appreciated that perspective in the film to the just the the frustration and the candor from the parents, right, realizing that Yes, life would be much easier if we didn't have to do all of this and have to deal with this. And watching the parents beating themselves up when they do get frustrated. And when they ask the questions like, oh, what's wrong with

you? Why can't you do this, and the eye rolling and the scolding, and all of this and how detrimental, that negative feedback is to a child, any child really, but a neurodivergent child, especially like realizing how easy it is, for them to receive more negative feedback than positive feedback in the you know, over and over and over again, and, and I loved how you really kind of explore that theme of how important positive feedback and strength focused parenting and teaching is for a child, especially a child with ADHD and how that they're just not getting that anywhere. And you know, and it really brought back the memories of me looking back at my report cards after my diagnosis, and just seeing so many of those comments over and over and over again, which is like Katie is bright, but and then a whole long list. And I was also that kid who was separated from the pods, and I had to go sit by the teacher, or there was another parent who was talking about, I don't know, I think maybe it was Kelly, who was one of them was one of the adults was talking about, like getting kicked. No, it was Ty Bennington, I think was talking about going getting kicked out of the classroom all the time and having to sit in the hallway. And then not knowing what was happening in the classroom because you spent so much time outside the classroom, and then like, you're already at this disadvantage, because you don't know what's happening. Yes. And I was like, Oh, my God, that happened to me so many times where I was, I spent a lot of time in the hallway, in middle school. But you know, realizing how important like you said patients and and always thinking, always framing in the positive and how that takes a lot for a parent, especially when you're tired, and you're overworked. But how important that that is, you know, and I've seen that shift in my own parenting as well realizing, with my children, like, it's always about, like, what do you need to succeed right now. And you know, and that, I guess what I'm trying to say is like how important it is to stop with negativity, and stop with negative comments and how damaging just that alone can be to a child's sense of self as they're in this formative age.

N

Nancy Armstrong 37:34

Right. And they are having reactions to situations that are really outside the norm. So as a parent, then your reactions are really outside the norm. And it's this thing that snowballs, which is really negative. And I think, you know, I always say to parents, you're only human, just stay with it. And when you make a mistake, apologize, you know, tell your kids, I'm only human, when you acted like this, I had a really bad reaction, which I know I shouldn't have, we'll both try to do better next time. And I think just that communication of your child, knowing you're with them, and you're in this together, and you're on the same team, that is really helpful. I mean, just having been through with my son, he's turning 21 in November, and when he graduated from high school, which, you know, no one was sure for a while, how that was gonna happen. It was like, it's not gonna happen. I don't know how he's gonna graduate. But he did graduate. And he got into college. And it's that moment, he said, I would never be here without you. And that was amazing. It took you know, that was 18 years that was 18 years, that one sentence, which is a lot of time to work for one sentence. But you know, it's very, very rewarding to help someone who struggles like that through their childhood, and to get them to adulthood intact. So I would say to a parent, it's like parenting on steroids. But if you can just hang in there, your child will know that it was your effort and your advocacy and you're never give up attitude that got them to where they are, to a good place, just get them to adulthood intact. That's the whole game. If you're a parent with children with ADHD, and you have to be their advocate, and when you know, they get bullied which over 50% of kids with ADHD get bullied, you can't be afraid to be confrontational with the parents of the bullies and the bullies. Like you're constantly putting yourself out there and it's exhausting on every level, but that's the jump.



Katy Weber 39:33

Yeah, I like what you said about being on the same team. Right? I think that's a reminder I often need for myself as well as for my kids just remembering that like, why are we doing this? Why are we in this moment right now? What is our goal? Together? Yeah.



Nancy Armstrong 39:49

Now it's really hard to keep that in mind in the in the fit of the moment.



Katy Weber 39:55

When I was diagnosed with ADHD, it completely turned my world upside down. I looked back at so much of my life, my grades in school, my multiple careers and hobbies, my friendships, my marriage, motherhood, my relationship with food and my body like all of this with a new lens. And it was overwhelming to say the least, if you've been diagnosed with ADHD, and you're feeling blown away by this new insight into your brain and how it operates, I totally understand I can help you begin to sort through this chaos, explore who you are and how your brain operates. So you can finally start to lean into your strengths and begin to use them to your advantage moving forward. Together, we can work to identify what obstacles you've been facing, and create strategies to help you start living a more fulfilling, gratifying life, head over to [women in adhd.com/coaching](https://www.adhd.com/coaching), to book a 30 minute initial consult with me. So we can figure out if my brand of one on one coaching is right for you. Again, that's [women and adhd.com/coaching](https://www.adhd.com/coaching). And you can find that link in the episode show notes. Now, before we had started recording, you had mentioned that you kind of had you feel like you probably had some of the ADHD symptoms as a child, but it doesn't feel like an impairment. Now, is that is that through your daughter's diagnosis? Or what? Can you expand on that?



Nancy Armstrong 41:16

Yeah, I think I recognize Well, you know, you sort of put all the pieces together. You know, after studying ADHD for so long, and certainly making the film, I recognize that my mother, who's not with us anymore, had a raging case of ADHD. And we always wonder like, what's going on? With her? Like, you know, we asked that same question that we asked, we were asking about my son when he was a toddler, what is going on? It's not nothing, it's something we just didn't know what it was. And so she would tick all the boxes of adult ADHD, every single one of them. And then you know, my own experience growing up was the same thing with the report cards. It was like Nancy is very charming, but she needs to stop talking during instruction. And she seems to be drifting off when she's supposed to be paying attention. And you know, all these little things. And so I definitely experienced that daydreaming and attentiveness, even in high school, I think through high school and college, but you just keep pulling yourself back. And I had to study, I always felt like I had to study harder to get the same grades. So I didn't do well, grade wise, but it seemed like everyone was having a much easier time of it. And so I always just made me think I wasn't all that smart. So that was kind of my self diagnosis. I'm just not the smartest person. But then, you know, when I went to graduate school and had kind of learned how to hyper focus, I, you know, I graduated first in my class with a four point out. So

that was a huge swing from, you know, from high school and even on my undergraduate experience, by the time I turned 30, I either had overcompensated so much for the things that were the challenges like super disorganization, emotional impulsivity, I mean, just like my late teens and early 20s, were just a series of humiliations and bad choices. And I just kind of chalked it up to well, that's just me, you know, I'm just not like everyone else. But I think probably there was, you know, sort of some degree of ADHD in that equation, because I would have checked a lot of those boxes. And then, by the time I turned 30, which was sort of developmentally late to reach full maturity, which is very true, and people with ADHD, they're behind, about 30% or so, you know, for me, I went to college at 17, I was probably emotionally 14, which is why it felt like such too much for me. And so by the time I was 30, I felt like I sort of had reached full maturity and I calmed down, and things got a lot easier. And I don't think that I have that impairment in my life. So I wouldn't say that I'm a person. Now who has any kind of real case of ADHD, but there is this percentage of people like 25 to 30% of people that reach full maturity no longer have impairments, so they no longer have that diagnosis.



Katy Weber 44:13

I kind of feel like you eat sort of ebbs and flows, right. Like I that oftentimes I think about sort of the ADHD or the the impairment aspect comes and goes, I certainly had it raging case of ADHD when my kids were babies, because of the emotional dysregulation and just feeling just like I was doing everything wrong, you know, and then it kind of tapered off of it as they got older and then again, you know, the pandemic brought up all this stuff and and you know, as a middle school like I see these peaks and valleys in my in the sort of severity of my impairment and so I'm that's why I'm always confused where I'm like, what are we talking about? Are we talking about a neuro divergent brain that if it's in a certain environment, you know, you have these traits of ADHD because you can't handle it but then And when you level off and you compensate, and you accommodate, you know, and you have these accommodations, then is it no longer ADHD? Or is it just ADHD in the happy face?



Nancy Armstrong 45:10

Well, it's you learn you, you, you know, you, that's you managing the challenges learning to manage the challenges. You know, my husband has all kinds of things that he does to manage the challenges. I think he you know, he does meditation, he gets up at five in the morning and exercises right away exercises a lot, which activates the dopamine in your brain. So he has, you know, he eats, right, he does all kinds of things that he can do to mitigate the challenges. But the challenge is really frustrate him when they when they come up there and credibly frustrating to him, because he just doesn't want to have them anymore. But that's just the way he's wired. He's also a visionary and an incredibly creative brain. And he has the ability to hyper focus. So all of those things are, you know, really at the forefront of why he's been so successful. But it's just frustrating. So it, it also depends on the degree to which you've learned to mitigate those challenges. I don't I, for example, was so disorganized, my entire childhood. And in my 20s, I mean, really severely disorganized. I didn't know where anything was, like, there's not one paper that was filed. And then I sort of made this decision that 31 I was changing my life as changing careers, that everything would be, you know, militantly organized. And now I have extreme anxiety with any kind of disorganization. Like, it's almost like, No, I don't want to go back there. You know, it was so debilitating to me to be disorganized like that, that I have organized everything almost to like a crazy OCD extent. I probably have

OCD now. Because anything out of order it I start sweating, you know. So that's just for me, having everything hyper organized was kind of a way to manage that as sort of a tool just to swing the pendulum all the way to the other end.



Katy Weber 46:56

Yeah, yeah, I feel like we have that we talked about that I the need for manageability in our life, and when things become unmanageable, then it's like you sort of like, Oh, it's too big. It's a huge mountain. I can't handle it anymore. But if I can control it, then I get I obsessively control it. And like, what is that tipping point, right? It's like how many? How many dishes in the sink? make it manageable? That you're like, oh, I can clean these? And how many are like, Oh, God, no, not now. I never know, another another thing that you just kind of woven throughout the film is the you know, are we over diagnosing this and kind of how the, you know, the USA especially has so many more, as, you know, a much higher percentage of cases. And is that because of something socially? Or is that just awareness and diagnosis and the tools and, and, you know, we've seen such I know, there's not a lot of like hard fast data out there, because it's all happening in real time. But like, it seems to me that we have had this intense spike in diagnoses since the pandemic, especially in adults and adult women. What do you think is going on? Do you think that this is really just a revolution in awareness about ADHD and the fact that we had it all along? We just didn't know what to look for? Or do you think that something about locked down and the pandemic and the you know, the height of tic toc and all of that is is like giving us ADHD and it's being overdyed? Or is it overdiagnosed? Okay,



Nancy Armstrong 48:25

so I'll take I'll take that, as I'll take that as two questions. And my answer is more than anything based on my conversations with Russell Barkley, Dr. Russell Barkley and Ned Halliwell and all the rest. So this isn't an opinion, I'm just going to tell you what they told me. And that is that there is no evidence that we are over diagnosing it, there is no increase in prevalence from what they can see, there's only an increase in identification. So for the last decade, we've been diagnosing boys don't just say, Let's go pre pandemic for a minute. So, as of 2020, we are diagnosing boys pretty much in the last decade, around 80% of the time, and that has stayed flat, that's remained flat. Where we have increased diagnosis is in those under diagnosed segments of the population, which are girls, teenagers in general, adults, especially women. So for a long time, we were just diagnosing boys. And that was kind of, you know, where we focused. And now because of greater awareness, because, you know, we have a lot of awareness in the United States with you know, organizations like Chad and, you know, I, I get five articles a day on ADHD. So we're very focused on it in this country. So I get a Google alert for articles that Come up on ADHD, there's at least five every single day. So we're very focused on it. And so there's a lot of awareness in this country. And we also have, as I said, as of 1991, it's, it's eligible for an IEP in school. So we're doing a lot of things in this country, whereas other countries are maybe not as focused on it. But it's probably the same degree of prevalence globally. It just looks like it's more in the United States, because we're more focused on it. We have more practitioners, although still not enough, but we don't have an eight month wait or a three year wait, you can see a practitioner, it might not be tomorrow, it might be difficult, but it's not as difficult as it is in some of these other countries. So there's a lot of lack of diagnosis in those countries, because you can't get in to see anyone, so you don't have a diagnosis. So the numbers are low. And then so that's pre pandemic, and then post pandemic. Yes, I think

the shutdown, and school closures were very bad for kids with ADHD, in particular, the stimulation that they got just going to school and being in a classroom was, you know, went to zero. So there was no no engagement at all, where there's a little bit of engagement, at least in going to school, so they were staring in front of a screen all day. And that was bound to exacerbate symptoms of no learning was happening for kids with ADHD for the most part. So that was terrible. And I think it's hard for a lot of kids to learn online. You know, I know, there were a lot of teachers who said it's going great. But there weren't a ton of parents who were saying that. And there weren't a ton of kids who were saying that my all three of my kids said they didn't learn a single thing during the online learning that they did. Thankfully, it wasn't too long, it was just a semester, but it was really not not effective for them at all, in terms of learning. So I think we saw a spike just because parents were home with their children and paying more attention to them and seeing them every day and sort of having this greater exposure to their own children and going with what's going on. So I think that, you know, the pandemic definitely exacerbated symptoms and broadened awareness that something might be going on, or people who had low levels of ADHD, and were kind of flying under the radar, that those those levels were exacerbated during the pandemic, just just by virtue of the fact that they weren't getting exercise. They weren't having any sort of they were in their houses locked in their houses. Yeah, we talked about that a lot. So their brains were just Oh, yeah.



Katy Weber 52:38

You had kind of had this structure this, you know, this house of cards structure that was working for you. And then a gust of wind just blew it off the table.



Nancy Armstrong 52:48

Yes. Yeah, that's exactly. Yeah, that's exactly right. And then you see all the, and then you saw all the anxiety, we think with girls too. And this is what we, I mean, this is true boys also, most particularly with girls is that we see only the depression and anxiety. And so we start treating for them for that. And I know a lot of parents who have treated their kids for anxiety, when what they really have is ADHD. And they sort of said, well, they have ADHD, but we started treating them for anxiety. And I always want to say, no, no, just treat the ADHD. That's where the anxiety is stemming from, it doesn't make any sense to treat anxiety when the underlying diagnosis is ADHD.



Katy Weber 53:31

Yes, I know. I feel like I hear this all the time where women are told let's treat the anxiety and the depression first, and then see how it affects the ADHD and I'm like, That makes no sense. Yeah.



Nancy Armstrong 53:43

The drugs that yeah, the drugs as I said, the drugs to treat anxiety aren't even as effective to treat anxiety as as the ADHD medications are to treat ADHD. So it's bewildering really



Katy Weber 53:55

well, I just so appreciate all of the questions, the nuanced layered questions that were asked and and talked about in the documentary The families, it's just such a rich, rich piece. I really appreciate how you putting it together. And advancing this conversation around something that is the more like I often say, the more I talk about it, think about ADHD, the less I understand. So I really appreciate your perspective on this and just bringing together so many important voices and experts. It's was fantastic. And I want to ask, I know you asked this question in the documentary and it's a question I like to ask my guests really quick. Like if you could rename ADHD to something a little less confounding and confusing. Would you call it something else?



Nancy Armstrong 54:42

I mean, I wish it it could be named after you know, one of the more positive attributes. So, you know, maybe the creative brain or something like that. Creative, creative chaos or something like that. But you know, I think it's it's a very unfortunate name Attention Deficit Disorder hyperactivity disorder is just it's a terrible name and it really trivializes. You know what, what ADHD actually is. Or maybe if it focused on something like the executive functioning Deficit Disorder. I think that would be better.



Katy Weber 55:19

Right? Yeah, I know. Oh, my goodness. Yeah.



Nancy Armstrong 55:23

Ned Halliwell wanted to call it variable, vast variable attention, stimulus trait?



Katy Weber 55:30

That would be Yeah, he talks about that in his book in ADHD 2.0. But my only problem with it is it's really difficult to Google. So you would have to still type in ADHD, which I learned from your documentary is the most Googled term out there, which I thought was very fascinating.



Nancy Armstrong 55:44

Yeah, least at least it was among the top. Well, as I said, I get five, five articles a day on ADHD.



Katy Weber 55:53

But I do too, but I think it's just because I'm so immersed in it. I can't I have no sense of like, what the rest of the world thinks of this because I'm so I just so like, you know, knee deep at this point. I think everyone has



Nancy Armstrong 56:05

it. Very few other things have. It's true.



Katy Weber 56:10

I liked how we Mandela's answer to we would ask every day when he would just say just call it your name. And he was like, I would just call it how he and I would call everybody to just call your name because you're unique and wonderful. And if he was, he was such a joy. And I loved when he also talked about his parents and how you know, really what the most important thing in all of this is just being accepted for who you are, and learning to accept yourself and your wonderful, weird brain.



Nancy Armstrong 56:41

Yeah. And a stable life partner, they will out perform neurotypical person who's also an entrepreneur. But actually, they had to have one of those things, they either had to have a college degree or a stable life partner. And they would outperform a neurotypical person who was an entrepreneur. But if they did not have those two things, they didn't have a stable life partner and they didn't have, you know, the education they needed to pursue that path they would not, they would not over perform or outperform someone who was neurotypical.



Katy Weber 57:17

And not surprising. Well, thank you again for the time to come talk a little bit more about ADHD and your experiences. And again, just thank you so much for putting this wonderful piece of work out into the world. Just to recap, it's called the disruptors. And I rented it on iTunes, I think but I think where where can people find you and find the movie?



Nancy Armstrong 57:41

You can find the movie on iTunes, Apple TV, YouTube, Google Play, Amazon and food.



Katy Weber 57:47

Wonderful. All right. Well, thank you so much, Nancy. It's been a real pleasure.



Nancy Armstrong 57:52

Thank you, Katie. Thank you so much, appreciate it.



Katy Weber 58:37

Am there you have it thank you for listening. And I really hope you enjoy this episode of the women and ADHD podcast. Also, you know, we ADHD ears crave feedback. And I would really appreciate hearing from you the listener. If you're a fan of the podcast, please take a moment to leave me a review on Apple podcasts or audible. And if that feels like too much, and I get it, then just take a few seconds right now to give me a five star rating. Or share this episode on your own social media to help reach more women who maybe have yet to discover and lean into this gift of neuro divergence see, and they may still be struggling and don't even know why. And if you'd like to find out more about me and my one on one coaching for women with ADHD, head over to [women and adhd.com/coaching](https://www.womenandadhd.com/coaching) and you can always find that link in the show notes. I'll see you next week when I interview another amazing woman who discovered that she is not lazy or crazy or broken. But she has ADHD and she is now on the path to understanding her neurodiversity and finally using this gift to her advantage. Take care till then