

Ms. Amy

English 1101

Navigating ADHD: Jaida's Journey Through a Shared Lens

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The muffled hum of Jaida's voice filled the room as she spoke. Her phrases, as jumbled as her thoughts, are accompanied by constant movement of her hands and restless tapping of her foot. I look at her and I see me, yet still leave with no clarity of what it's like in her mind.

Understanding ADHD often involves delving into personal experiences, revealing the nuances of living with this condition. During my interview with Jaida, her mannerisms provided glimpses into her world—picking at her fingertips while talking, her foot bouncing with restless energy, and her tendency to talk fast when excited—all reflective of the internal restlessness associated with ADHD. As someone who also lives with ADHD, I found our conversation to be an enlightening journey into how gender and societal expectations shape our shared experiences.

Jaida's journey has been marked by challenges that began early on. Growing up, she recalls her parents often telling her that certain behaviors were "unladylike," reinforcing societal expectations that clashed with her naturally energetic disposition. This conflict led to bouts of anxiety and depression, internalized struggles that manifested in racing thoughts, particularly evident during moments of sleep. "I would lie awake at night, my mind just wouldn't shut off," Jaida said. This restless mind, a familiar foe, resonated deeply with me.

The conversation with Jaida meandered, much like her thoughts, occasionally veering off course into multiple points and anecdotes. This tendency to get off track reflects her mind's ability to make myriad connections rapidly—a trait that, while stimulating, can also be overwhelming. Misplacing items and feeling easily distracted are common occurrences, symptomatic of her internal and external disorganization. "I can never find my keys," she laughed, "or my phone, or my wallet. It's like they have legs and just walk away."

Delving deeper into her personal experience with the societal standards for women, Jaida relays her struggles. "I've always been told to be like other girls," Jaida reflected. "It's frustrating when you feel one way inside your mind and on the outside, you have people trying to explain your thoughts with a hundred different explanations." This disconnect between internal reality and external expectations underscores the complexity of living with ADHD. For Jaida, it has meant a constant struggle to align her vibrant, multifaceted mind with the more linear paths others expect her to follow.

Jaida's academic journey from high school to college illustrates the challenges she faces daily. Despite overpreparing and planning meticulously, she often struggles with procrastination and maintaining focus. "I can make the most detailed study plan," she said, "and then end up cramming the night before anyway." Relationships with teachers and friends are marked by her intensity and passion, although her motivations can fluctuate. "Some days, I'm all in," she explained, "other days, I just can't bring myself to care."

Finding a singular passion amidst the constant allure of new interests poses a continual challenge. "The pressure to excel as a woman of color exacerbates these expectations," she admitted. Societal and internalized pressures add layers of complexity to her already turbulent

mental landscape. "There's this feeling that I have to work twice as hard to be taken seriously," Jaida said. "And with ADHD, it feels like I'm always falling short."

During our conversation, I recognized how much Jaida's experiences and my own are similar. However, while we both grapple with stress and anxiety, our responses differ—Jaida plans meticulously, while I tend to procrastinate. Yet, the underlying chaos of excessive thoughts and the feeling of being mentally "stuck" resonated deeply. "It's like my mind is a browser with a hundred tabs open," Jaida said, "and I can't find the one that's playing music."

It's always been interesting to see how ADHD shows up differently for people. Neurodivergence isn't uncommon in society, yet there are very few, if any, concretes about. Beyond the two of us, there are so many struggles that come with ADHD because they affect everyone differently. The symptoms, the environmental factors, the biological factors, the societal factors – whether that be gender or cultural. There is no consistency there which can be incredibly frustrating but also incredibly rewarding when individuals start to see the progress in their own lives.

Jaida compares navigating her ADHD as a daily balancing act. "It's a process where I want to be resilient and introspective, while juggling with societal expectations as a whole, adding on to the fact that my mind is everywhere at once." I believe her story is not just a testament to her strength but also a mirror reflecting my own struggles and strengths, highlighting the shared complexities of living with ADHD. Through her eyes, I saw the gendered layers of our condition, the unique pressures that women with ADHD face, and the common threads that bind our experiences together.

Our conversation also brought to light the coping mechanisms we both developed. Jaida shared how she uses creative outlets to channel her restless energy. "Art has always been my escape," she said. "When I paint, I can let go of the chaos in my mind." Similarly, I find solace in writing, using words to organize my thoughts and emotions. These creative pursuits serve as anchors in the stormy seas of our minds.

The support system Jaida has built around her also plays a vital role in her journey. "My friends and family have been incredibly understanding," she said. "They know when to give me space and when to push me a bit." This support mirrors my own experience, where understanding and patience from loved ones make a significant difference. The empathy and encouragement we receive help mitigate the isolation that often accompanies ADHD.

As our conversation ended, Jaida shared her hopes for the future. "I want to use my experiences to help others," she said. "Whether it's through advocacy or just being there for someone who's struggling, I want to make a difference." Her words resonated with me, echoing my own desire to raise awareness and foster understanding about ADHD.

At the end of the day, none of my questions were truly answered. Not because of her, not because of me, but because we can't speak for the world. I cannot speak for all the women that are misdiagnosed or underdiagnosed and told to be "ladylike." She cannot speak for the cultural norms of mental health as someone who grew up in western culture. I see similarities and yet, I only have more questions. It's that horribly wonderful?