

Part 2: Attention-Deficit Neuropsychology with How to ADHD, Black Girl Lost Keys, Jahla Osborne + more Ologies Podcast March 2, 2022

Oh heeey, it's one of those cows that they blow-dried and you're like, "Wow, that cow looks fantastic," Alie Ward. Hunker the hell down, boy howdy hot damn. It's ADHD Part 2. I hope you're wearing a waterproof poncho for your feelings and also that you have a bag of confetti nearby to punctuate some epiphanies. You're gonna love this.

First, really quickly, thank you to everyone at Patreon.com/Ologies for supporting this show. Thank you to every single person who has recommended this episode or the podcast to others. Thanks for rating and reviewing, that really keeps it up in the charts. I read every single review, like this steamy hot one from Alisondear, who wrote:

I gasped when I saw the ADHD title and had an actual good cry through my first listen. My third child is in the process of diagnosis and we are in it right now, entrenched. This episode could be a significant help to our family in crisis. "Thank you," isn't enough.

Alisondear, thank you for that review. The reviews really, really keep me going. Megatron0259, yes, we can be best friends. No, I cannot give you a ride to the airport. Y'all's reviews, I read 'em. Okay, Part 2, let's do it.

So, last week Part 1, you heard from Dr. Russell Barkley, who is a figurehead of the current scientific understanding of ADHD. And believe me, I understand the delicious irony of a nearly two-hour episode made for people with a focus disorder. That was not lost on us here at *Ologies* HQ, but there were a lot of questions to address, it's an important topic, and you can always pause and come back as many times as you need.

So, why the Part 2 then? Well, feelings. It's incredibly validating to learn about all the hard science and the gravity of ADHD but I wanted also to chat with folks out there documenting their lived experience of ADHD; trying to bridge the gaps between ADHD brains and a world that's built for neurotypicals. So, tips, workarounds, hacks, there's self-acceptance, and very much why this isn't just a disorder for your nephew who practices karate during a social studies test. So today, we have three ADHD experts.

Number one, we've got Jessica McCabe. [*clip of Jessica: "Everyone who has ADHD learned all the strategies and all the tricks to overcome their ADHD and be able to function fine in a neurotypical world. What's the problem with that? A lot."*] She/her of *How to ADHD*, which is a fantastic YouTube channel that just crossed a million subscribers. Hell yes. All kinds of information there on... how to ADHD.

And we have René Brooks, [*clip of René: "The clinician is an expert you've hired to work for you."*] She/her, who has run the site *Black Girl Lost Keys* since discovering the need for it in 2014.

And then rounding it out, we've got neuroscientist, Jahla Osborne, [*clip of Jahla: "We just want to make sure that we don't draw conclusions from a super small sample if it's not representative."*] She/her, and Jahla is a graduate student with a BS in Psychology from the University of Denver, currently researching ADHD in the Cognitive Neuroimaging Lab at the University of Michigan.

Oh, and then, hmm, a couple of surprise cameos. [*high-pitched, surprised*] What?! Are we off our rockers? Yes, we are. We care so much.

So please join us as we just fire you up with tales about the strengths of an ADHD brain, notable people with ADHD from the past and the present, writing a book, knitting in meetings, the curse of a parking ticket, the iconic struggles of obtaining medication, how to know what medication is right for you, diagnoses, what seems like a sharp spike in pandemic diagnoses, stigmas, accommodations, overlaps with autism, and what it feels like as a beautiful, round peg to jam your face into square holes, every single day, on this episode of *Ologies*, ADHD Part 2.

Aside: Okay, so to kick this off, let's start with some fawning and some crying.

Alie Ward: I had seen your videos because my husband has ADHD and we watched your TED Talk together and ugh, it's going to make me so emotional but he just started bawling during it.

[clip from TED Talk, "This is what it's really like to live with ADHD":]

What can I tell you to help you understand ADHD? First of all, it's real. It's not bad parenting or lack of discipline, ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder. It's currently the most well-researched mental condition and there are actually measurable differences in the brain. These differences are larger in children but for most people, they never go away. In other words, adults have ADHD too.

Have you noticed listeners' and viewers' questions have changed a lot in the last two years too? Do you feel like there's a collective, kind of, eugh... low a lot of us are going through?

Jessica McCabe: Yeah, I realized after a bit that I was still doing the same thing and... [laughs] There was a moment where I was like, "This is really hard for me to focus on and I'm sure it's going to be hard for people to focus on to watch. Maybe we need something else right now." And I'm really glad that I did that because the last couple of years have really shifted my perspective about what's needed in terms of support for people with ADHD too and what the world can be. Because if we learned anything from COVID it's that the world can change, and the world can change fast. The way things are isn't the way that things always have to be.

Alie: What are you doing for yourself? What changes have you made in the past two years to make sure that you're supporting yourself and that you're getting all of your own needs met?

Jessica: [chuckles] Boundaries. Boundaries is something I am learning. How to say, "No." René Brooks of *Black Girl Lost Keys* has a great phrase that I try to remember now which is, "Guard your 'Yes' with your life." So, I'm doing that.

Aside: Perfect handoff to our second guest, who thankfully had a weak access point to her "Yes," which I was able to exploit. So, when René Brooks of *Black Girl Lost Keys* wrote back and said she'd be on, I shrieked; I was so excited. With so many folks being newly diagnosed, she's an incredible resource that she, frankly, didn't have. So, you're welcome everyone.

René Brooks: When I was getting diagnosed with ADHD, what we know of as like, ADHD TikTok, Twitter, all of that stuff, none of that existed. It wasn't that it was a wasteland, there was good information online. There were people like Terry Matlen, Linda Roggli, Rick Green, lots of good information out there. It's just that you had to go digging for it in a way that you don't necessarily have to dig for it now.

My ADHD diagnosis was not something that I learned about from the Internet, I learned about it from an accident. I was being treated for depression by a therapist and I just so happened to mention in passing to her like, "Oh yeah, they tried to diagnose me with this ADHD thing when I was a kid but my mom was like, 'No way,' and we moved on." I went to continue my story and she stopped me mid-sentence, sent me to an ADHD specialist – who just so happened to work in her office – and we moved on from there. But for sure, if it hadn't been for me mentioning that in passing, probably we wouldn't be here.

Alie: Wow. Was it a relief to you to approach it from a different direction at that point?

René: It was. It certainly made a lot more sense than the idea of me just being depressed with no, kind of, way out. Which is funny because I have dysthymia which is, you know, it's just a low-level depression that just kinda never goes away. [*laughs*]

Alie: But there's so much about ADHD, like your self-reflection, who you think you are, and how you fit into the world, constantly feels almost eroded by not realizing, you know?

René: It's like finding out you were not the person that you thought you were. I think the only thing you can really liken it to is like, finding out that, I don't know, that you're secretly a princess or something. [*Alie laughs*] So, then you have to re-spin your entire life in the context of you being this person who you did not know that you were. [*"I'm a princess."*]

So, even now, every once in a while, some experience will occur to me, like, from my past life, and I'll go, "Oh. *Ohhh*, that was ADHD. That wasn't what I thought it was." There's a lot of that, especially at first. So, it's a relief because you find out... There's even, like, a famous book title about it; *You Mean I'm Not Lazy, Stupid Or Crazy?!*

Alie: Uh-huh, I've seen that.

Aside: This book, *You Mean I'm Not Lazy, Stupid, Or Crazy* is by Kate Kelly and Peggy Ramundo and that'll be linked alongside a ton of resources on my webpage. That will be linked in the show notes. But I do love the title and it kinda makes me want to work on a memoir called, *Are You There, ADHD? It's Me, Chaos*. But that's a personal chapter for another day. But back to what seems like a spike in diagnoses. Is ADHD, like, the middle part of neurodiversity? Does everyone have it? What does Jessica of *How to ADHD* think?

Alie: You know, I know that the last couple of years have been pretty bananas. Have you found yourself also dealing with, kind of, a tidal wave of people who, maybe, they do have ADHD and it was undiagnosed or misdiagnosed? Do you feel like there's more talk about it in the last couple years?

Jessica: Oh, there's definitely more talk about it and there's a number of reasons for that. There's a lot more talk about mental health in general in the last couple years because people who were maybe skating by or could maybe cope were doing so. Like, maybe they were barely above water but they were still managing to be above water. And then COVID hit and, you know, maybe there's a parent who suddenly... they're having to homeschool their kids and work from home; everything's changed all at once and it's too much demand on their executive function. They can't ignore it anymore.

And I think for everybody who gets diagnosed, for the most part, there is a point, usually shortly before they get diagnosed, where the demands on their executive function, the demands that society is putting on them are too much for whatever coping mechanisms they've been skating by with so far.

For me, that was in middle school. My mom got in a car accident, we had to change schools, my mom was in a hospital bed, and I didn't have the same accommodations of my mom saying, "Hey, don't forget your jacket, here's your homework," or whatever. And I was going to middle school, and a new school, so I had to learn a completely different set of rules, and expectations, and different friends. It was so much change, so much at once without the, essentially, executive function support that my mom had been providing. And I was responsible for getting myself to school on time, for remembering to bring my own books to class.

It was too much for my executive function to handle. So, I suddenly went from being a straight-A student to my GPA dropping to 2.4, like, immediately. For me, it was hard because the first doctor that my mom took me to said, "Well, how did she do in elementary school?" And my mom said, "Well, she was gifted, she's a straight-A student." And he said, "Then she can't have ADHD."

Alie: [exclaims] That makes me want to cryyy!

Jessica: Right. And so I feel like a lot of people might be going through that right now where suddenly things are so, so hard and their coping strategies aren't enough for them anymore. They're going to get checked out and these doctors, who maybe don't know better, are saying well, "How did you do as a kid? Let me look at your elementary school report cards." First of all, what adult with ADHD still has their elementary school report cards? [*robot voice: "Location, unknown."*] [Alie laughs] But that's beside the point.

This whole idea that, because you're an adult and ADHD is something that you're usually "diagnosed with" in childhood, you don't have it. So, I see a lot of people being diagnosed now, but I also see a lot of people being afraid to go and seek a diagnosis because they're afraid of being dismissed.

Alie: What about advice for people who suspect that they might have ADHD but haven't gotten a diagnosis because, maybe, they present as female, or they're not white and they get... For example, so many people that I talk to for this podcast, especially who are people of color, were just dismissed as having behavioral problems just because of structural racism. So, what kind of advice do you have for people who may have been overlooked in terms of getting a diagnosis?

Jessica: Yeah, I mean that, unfortunately, happens a lot. There's solid research on this, that a little Black boy is more likely to be diagnosed with oppositional defiance or conduct disorder versus a little white boy who is more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD, and that's really unfortunate. So, looking for a doctor that's culturally competent is really important and somebody who understands ADHD, arguably maybe even more so. Because somebody who is really well-versed in ADHD, who specializes in ADHD, is going to be much more likely to be able to recognize it regardless of what other intersectionalities are present. Because yeah, some people mask it.

Aside: So yes, as we covered in Part 1, folks who are assigned female at birth or who present as girls or women can get overlooked. And that is mirrored in racial biases as well, about which probably very few of us are surprised, but all of us should be outraged. And actually, before I interviewed Dr. Moore, AKA @Curly_Scientist for the Forensic Ecology episode, I had seen her pinned Tweet which I thought was so helpful and it read:

Hi, I have ADHD, if you need to send me a long email (try not to) it would help if you put a “response needed by” date in the subject. Bold important dates and times. Highlight compensation amount. Ty #ADHDAndSTEM.

And I was like, that's great to know, and also all emails should just be this way. I mean, let's be honest. Now, this clip you're about to hear wasn't in the published episode because I was saving it for this one. So, here is me and Dr. Tiara Moore.

Alie: And you know, I saw a Tweet of yours too about ADHD and I think it's so interesting how many scientists I talk to who have ADHD, and part of what makes them so great at science is that you're constantly asking questions, and learning, and things are changing, and you're able to cope well with it.

Tiara Moore: It's so interesting that you brought that up because it was something that was a struggle for a while. First of all, not understanding that I had it or what was going on. And then, getting medicine and being like, "Woah." [laughs] ["*This is different.*"] And then, you know, having to become an advocate and say like, "Wow, I was so embarrassed and ashamed but like, no, this could help people."

A lot of people, by me talking about it, went and got assessed and have been diagnosed. Especially in Black communities, we're not taken that seriously when it comes to that type of diagnosis. I remember when I was in school it was, "Oh you're just bad, you're just running around." When the whole time, I had ADHD.

Aside: That fucking kills me; think about that. In Part 1 with Dr. Barkley, we really covered how dangerous undiagnosed and untreated ADHD is and how symptoms being attributed to a moral failing cause lasting consequences in self-image. So, if it seems like there's a rise in diagnoses, it's partly because so many people via social media have access to information that wasn't given to them at an appropriate time.

Alie: You look back and you're like, "How did teachers, guidance counselors, parents, psychologists, how did everyone miss this??" You know?

Tiara: But see, that's what I'm saying. They did miss it. They were calling me bad. They were saying, "Hey, Tiara's acting out." They were calling my grandma to the school to come get me instead of saying, "Oh, maybe we should take her somewhere and get checked out." It's just, "Oh, you're wrong. Oh, you're not good." You know? I think that is the disconnect of maybe not having folks who understand it in the school system that know really what's going on. So yeah, there's a lot more work that could be done for sure.

Aside: Thankfully, as Dr. Barkley mentioned in Part 1, more and more studies come out every year. And who is doing them? University of Michigan PhD student Jahla Osborne in the Cognition and Cognitive Neuroscience Department. And she's researching distractibility within ADHD as well as race biases in perceptions of ADHD symptoms. And also, big thanks to BlackInNeuro.com for having an incredible member directory just casually full of amazing, brainy specialists in neuroscience.

Now, Jahla couldn't divulge some facts and figures because the findings aren't yet published so, stay tuned, Dr. Russel Barkley. But we hopped on the horn last week to gab about her active research in two different labs.

Jahla Osborne: So, right now I'm particularly studying distractibility in ADHD. So, distractions can stem from, you know, either the external environments like noises or visual stimuli, or the internal environments like mind-wandering, daydreaming, or even negative thinking. My

current work is trying to assess if individuals with ADHD are equally susceptible to both types of distractions, external or internal, or if they're specifically susceptible to a certain type of distraction. I'm particularly studying adults with ADHD for this.

Alie: Oh, that's great. When you're doing this research, do you have to set up, like, pop-up windows on the computer? Or have someone come in with a bunch of clattering dishes [*clip of man grunting and struggling in a kitchen*] in the room? How do you set that up?

Jahla: Yeah, so right now we've done a lot of, like, survey stuff. The first studies have been more survey-based, people just fill them out. We're looking at the data just based on self-report.

Aside: So, phase one, surveys asking about how distracted people get. Phase two, bring in the machines.

Jahla: But right now we are gearing up for a second follow-up study where we are using computer tasks. So, we have external distractions embedded into the task itself. So, usually it's like a visual stimulus that we're using as our external distraction. But other studies in the past have used more ecologically valid distractors. So maybe, like, noises in a cafe, or something like that, pencils dropping; things that would actually be in the environment for somebody. But for our studies, no, we're not bringing in dishes and things like that right now.

Alie: [laughs] I always picture labs just having like a prop room. When it comes to neuroscience labs, I always like to picture them that they're like, "Okay we've got a clown walking by, we're gonna see if people get scared, if their heart rate goes up." I have a feeling that's probably mostly in my imagination, but still, sounds fun. [laughs]

Jahla: Yeah, maybe once the pandemic subsides and things like that. But a lot of the stuff we're doing right now is just on the computer so people can do it remotely.

Alie: Mhm, that's so cool.

Jahla: And plus, there are a lot of tasks, you know, like classic kind of psychological tasks that have been established. So, we'll use like a flanker task or a Simon task or things like that, that have kind of been established in the literature.

Aside: Okay, so the flanker sounded like a Swedish disco move, so I looked it up. It's actually a test where a screen has a bunch of arrows, either in all kinds of directions, or all going one direction. And your anterior cingulate cortex, which is in the front of your brain Jell-O, has to cut the crap, through all those messy arrows and figure out which way just the arrow in the center of the screen is going.

So, if you're at a basketball game and you're shaking pool noodles at someone trying to make a three-pointer, their anterior cingulate cortex is like, "Do you mind?? Please don't." Likewise in ADHD, studies have shown that folks with ADHD can have significant cortical thinning in the right rostral anterior cingulate cortex. So, the flanker task might rat you out.

Now, the Simon effect is like when you see the word green written in yellow font, or you're asked to press a button on the right side of the keyboard, even though the type appears on the left side of the screen. What I love about learning about all of this is that neuroscientists are doing so much to help us understand our brains, all while being absolute pranksters. They're like, "Processing speed in regard to incongruity of manual extension of index finger and auditory perception of lattice." ["Pull my finger."] Lol. That could be a legit study.

But scientists are working to make this field more accessible. And the lack of accessibility during her diagnosis journey inspired René to make *Black Girl Lost Keys*. As mentioned in Part 1, she formed the Unicorn Squad, which is a support group and a safe space for Black people of marginalized genders to discuss ADHD. It's also open to parents of those people. And René's own ADHD backstory is interesting because she was diagnosed as a child and then two more times.

René: I had no idea that I had it. I know now, as an adult, that I had ADHD as a child, but I had never been told what I had or what it meant, and it was mainly because no one told my mom what it meant. All they said was that her gifted child, her straight-A student, had ADHD and without any real information about what that needed, what that meant rather, she was just like, "There's nothing wrong with my kid, bye." And that was the end of it.

There's so many resources now that were not available in 2009, which it doesn't seem like it was that long ago, but it was. There were no Black people doing anything... That's the whole reason I created *Black Girl Lost Keys*, because there wasn't anything. I was writing a post about what it's like to be Black with ADHD which, funny enough, never existed on the blog before. And I was going through a list of, like, here's all the people who talk about it, it shocked me and I started to cry because there was nothing. There was nothing when I got diagnosed, and I looked, and I really wanted there to be something. So, this is good.

But the point that I was making, sorry, is that when a lot of us came into the world of ADHD, we usually ran into either Hallowell or Barkley first, when you really wanted to get into the brass tacks of what it meant. So, Barkley was my initiate. [laughs] I like Hallowell too, but that was my initiation into that world. But I'm really encouraged by what's available now versus what was available, even... Like I said, if there was so little for me, imagine how little there was 10 years before I was diagnosed, and 10 years before that.

Aside: One of these studying misdiagnoses, of course, is Jahla Osborne. So, what are some of the whys there? Both systemically and also personally for her?

Jahla: There are probably people who, you know, didn't have access to a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist or, you know, the ability to undergo some sort of evaluation to be able to diagnose. So, I'm sure that it definitely happens. To get some of these services, typically, you need to be aware of what even this disorder is, who to go to to get evaluated. Sometimes it can cost money to, like, get some of these evaluations. So, if you don't have those things then it can make it difficult, so yeah.

Alie: Do you have a mission in terms of the work that you do in changing the way that ADHD is diagnosed or missed in any certain populations? Or just in general, awareness about it, is there any kind of motivation behind a lot of your work?

Jahla: Yeah, I would say that the motivation behind my work comes from my brother. So, my brother has ADHD and, you know, just kinda seeing, like, growing up, the struggles that he had academically, the struggles that he had with self-esteem because of the learning difference that he had and how it wasn't really accepted in traditional school settings, and how that impacted him.

And then also, ADHD can have functional consequences. So, not everybody with ADHD will necessarily have these consequences, but people with ADHD are less likely to go to college, or even graduate from college, more likely to change jobs or get fired, and then they're also more likely to experience criminal incarceration. Basically, my motivation

just comes from wanting to lessen the functional consequences that can happen for individuals with ADHD.

Aside: Anyone out there with siblings whose brains work a little differently from yours? Show of hands? Okay, almost everyone. Got it.

So, remember from Russell's episode, siblings can make a really huge impact just on how we see the world and how we see others. So, my own sisters, Celeste and Janelle, I'm sorry for singing along to Klondike bar commercials, like an opera singer at 7am and stealing your barrettes. But as we learned in Part 1, ADHD is starting to be looked at as a spectrum disorder, like autism. But the two can overlap, kind of like a technicolor Venn diagram. So, some research suggests this combo is 37– 85% of people who have one, have the other. So, what does Jessica see in her *How to ADHD* audience? And also, do we need a new name? Like ASDHD? No? Okay.

Alie: So many listeners were curious about the autism and ADHD overlap and how often that does get misdiagnosed. Have you had to do a lot of research for that given that you have so many members of your community that are both?

Jessica: So, my brother actually is autistic.

Alie: Oh!

Jessica: And I adored my brother and growing up I've noticed... A lot of my friends, a lot of people I am just naturally drawn to are neurodivergent, somehow [*I like you.*] and ended up turning out to have either ADHD, autism, or both. It's almost like a special interest for me. I'm kind of obsessed with autism. ADHD is the thing that I do, that I definitely specialize in, that I talk about on my channel. And I don't speak about autism as much because it's not my personal experience but I do find it fascinating. So, there are a lot of times where I'm reading journal articles about it or talking to the autistic brains in my community and really trying to understand their experience.

In a lot of ways, ADHD can be in the middle between neurotypicals and the autistic community. It felt like, at least growing up for me, I had to translate a lot. My brother and my mom were so different, their brains were so different, that they were completely incompatible. My mom had no idea what my brother was trying to say; my brother had no idea what my mom was trying to say. And so I ended up kind of being the translator. I'm like, "I don't completely get you but I understand enough of this that I can explain it to mom," and my mom would explain something neurotypical and I'm like, "I don't completely understand it but I get enough of it to explain it to my brother." [Alie laughs]

Aside: Which explains why Jessica is so good at relaying and being an ambassador between neurodivergent and neurotypical folks and why she might have a passion for that. She's also so good with analogies. She's like someone who's really good at something, if the thing were an analogy... To use an analogy.

Jessica: It's really like we're on different operating systems. There are neurotypical brains and there are... I'm not even saying everyone who is neurotypical has the same brain. Nobody with ADHD has the same brain as another person with ADHD either. But think of neurotypical brains, because they're the majority, most people are neurotypical, they're like Windows, PCs. That's what most people use, that's what most people know how to use. And ADHD brains are kinda like Macs, where a lot of people use them but those who don't, don't really know how to use them, and if you try and use a Mac like it's a PC, it's not gonna go well, right? [Alie laughs] Different shortcuts. And then you hit a magic

button or you, like, do something on the screen and something happens and you're like, "What the— What did I do? I just pushed a button and now this whole other program's running. I don't get it. Stop, come back, slow down."

And then autistic brains, Dr. Raffael Boccamazzo, who is very public about his autism who I also work with, will explain that like Linux. Nobody knows what the heck Linux is [*Alie laughs*] unless you're one of the very few people who likes Linux. Everybody else looks at it like, "What the he- I don't even recognize this. I don't know what to do with this." And on any of these operating systems, if you try to use this operating system like it's a different operating system, you would think it was broken. You would think there was something wrong with it because the shortcuts you're used to using, aren't working. The commands you're used to using aren't working.

So, the temptation is, "Let's fix that. Let's reprogram this thing to make it work the way that Windows does." But the truth is, diversity is really valuable. It's great. And I'm not saying it's always great to have ADHD; there are times when it's not great to have ADHD. But overall, neurodiversity in the world is a valuable thing because it allows people to come at things from different perspectives. If everybody's brain worked the same way then everybody's brain would work the same way and we wouldn't have all the innovative ideas that we do.

Aside: And I love that. So, different brains have different strengths and we're stronger with diversity. I found an article in *Healthline* about what type of work environments ADHDers thrive in and it said, "Passion-fueled, high intensity, ultra-structured, lightning pace, and hands-on creative." And psychotherapist Dr. Stephanie Sarkis is quoted saying, "People with ADHD tend to work well in a fast-paced, high-intensity environment like that of an emergency room or an ambulance." So, when you think of ADHD folks chasing adrenaline or whatever, remember that your trauma surgeon, or your firefighter, a lot of athletes, and teachers, and social workers, and performers, are like, "Oh, is this job too much for you? That's okay, we got it."

Which reminds me of the hunter-farmer hypothesis that was made by a radio personality whose son had ADHD. Some people hate this notion, it's not scientifically backed by evolutionary biology or theory but it resonates as validating for some others like Jarrett, who is the kind of good Samaritan who runs toward peril to help strangers.

Alie: I was talking to my wonderful mother-in-law about just that theory of people with ADHD in particular being hunters in a world of farmers, or in a farming world. Have you heard that one? Does that come up a lot?

Jessica: I have, yeah. There is truth to it. The way that society functions right now is really not built for an ADHD brain. It's really not. There is far too much paperwork, [*laughs*] mail, and there's so much admin stuff. Trying to stay on top of things is really, really difficult. [*laughs*] Yeah. And the truth is, whether hunter-gatherer, whatever, there are environments that are definitely more accessible to the ADHD brain.

If you put me in an environment that requires me to have really good time management skills and organizational skills, I'm going to be really disabled, quite frankly. Because those are things that I really, really struggle with. But if you put me in an environment, like put me in a think tank, like, "Hey, we have this new idea, what do you think?" Great, now I'm going to thrive. Put me in an environment where I can move around and, like,

come up with new ideas, and take a break when I need to take a break, and there's some flexibility, I'm going to do great.

So, I don't mind using strategies and stuff to help me get to dinner on time with a friend. But if I have to get to everything on time and I don't give my brain any time to wander, I notice I start getting depressed. I need to be a Mac. I'm a Mac, right? And I can interface with a PC and I can learn to do that, but asking me to *be* a PC... which honestly, I did to myself for a long time.

There's this, kind of, internalized ableism that I realized when I started my channel, I started it so that I could learn what was wrong with my brain and how to fix it so that then I could essentially be neurotypical. I was so frustrated with the way that my brain was getting in my way that I was just like, "Let me go learn what I'm dealing with, learn how to fix it so that I can go back to my life, only now neurotypical." Essentially. I didn't know that that's what I was doing, but it's essentially what I was doing. I wanted to be on time, and organized, and disciplined, and consistent, and all of these things that I thought you had to be, to be successful.

The funny thing is, I learned so many strategies for doing this and I read so much research, and learned all the things, and tried all the things, and couldn't stick to most of the things, [*both laugh*] but I got to the point where I realized, I'm still not there yet.

Maybe this strategy, maybe *this* strategy, there's eventually going to be this one magical thing I'm going to find, everything's going to click into place and I'm going to be able to do the things that I thought that I "should do" as a good employee, boss, YouTuber, I don't know. At some point, I'm going to get my shit together.

And the thing is, it never quite happened for me. But I also looked around and saw, "Oh crap, I'm successful. Like, what? Wait, hang on." [*laughs*] There's this break in the spacetime continuum or something. Like, why was I able to be successful but I still have ADHD? I still have these challenges, my car is still a mess, and I'm still late to things, and I'm still struggling, but also I'm successful. And I realized, it's not only not possible to completely overcome your ADHD, it's not even necessary. And this idea that we have to, that this is who we have to be or what we have to do to be acceptable in the world or to be worthy of our success, is really harmful and toxic and something that I'm kind of rebelling against right now.

Aside: So, rather than self-reproach or conformity, you can see your strengths and celebrate the Ws because, she outlines, the alternative to self-acceptance.

Jessica: Like imagine, okay, "perfect world" in which everyone who has ADHD learned all the strategies and all the tricks to overcome their ADHD and be able to function fine in a neurotypical world. Well, what's the problem with that? A lot. One, every single person with ADHD is now paying an enormous ADHD tax of all of the money they're having to spend and time they're having to spend on learning these strategies and paying for these strategies so that they can function in this neurotypical world, right? So, it takes an incredible toll on us personally.

It also takes a toll on our self-esteem because, like, this whole time we're telling ourselves how we are is not okay and we have to be different, we have to be more like how somebody else naturally is. It takes a hit to our self-esteem; to our finances because we're probably spending a lot of money on these strategies; to our time because we're having to spend a lot of time learning about these strategies. But worse, we're now ensuring that

the next generation has to do the exact same thing because the world has not had to change.

Aside: So, if you're neurodivergent and you help make the world a friendlier place to others and yourself, and you work with your strengths instead of trying to twist yourself into someone else's pretzel, you make a better future for other people.

Now, if you're here because you suspect you have ADHD, is it possible to just resonate so hard with a piece of content or a podcast that you're pretty much diagnosed? Neeehh... not so fast. I'm not a doctor. But René has advice.

René: Well, I would recommend, like... This is no diss to any creator, but I think it's important that if you've consistently seen yourself in the content, it's important to start moving towards talking to professionals because there are some things that can mimic ADHD that you can also be dealing with. A lot of these things can play together, like bipolar can look like ADHD, trauma can look like ADHD, the same three can exist all in one person.

So, I think it's important to, when possible – obviously, there are limitations because of finances, accessibility, a million different other reasons – but I think it's important, to the best of your ability, to get in front of a pro when you've seen, like, 40 of these videos and you're pretty convinced that that's what's happening. Because you could be absolutely right or you could be partially right. And I think the partially right is probably more dangerous than being completely wrong.

Aside: So of course, yes, seek a professional opinion. And if you're looking for a good professional, there's a wealth of resources available at CHADD, Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, and ADDA, Attention Deficit Disorder Association. Those are causes close to Jessica and René so we made donations respectively and those URLs will be linked in the show notes.

We also donated to Jahla's charity of choice, FailSafe, which fosters positive change in those affected by incarceration. And FailSafe's blueprint for re-entry is to empower and restore hope to inmates, the formerly incarcerated that they refer to as returning citizens, and family members affected by incarceration. So, there's more info about them at FailSafe.era.org and those donations were made possible by sponsors of the show.

[Ad break]

Okay, let's address some listener questions we didn't get to answer in Part 1. Annika wants to know if people are ever shocked to find these creators have ADHD and if that makes them annoyed. And Annika writes: I'm so tired of hearing from people that it's a superpower when I'm weeks away from complete burnout.

René: Remember I was diagnosed almost 13 years ago so, I mean, by virtue of what I do for a living, no one is ever shocked, now, that I have ADHD. But back when I was originally diagnosed, yeah, I got a lot of, "What do you mean you have ADHD? But you're so smart." And it took a lot of, like, "Well actually, ADHD doesn't actually have an effect on your intelligence in one direction or the other." But as much as people say, "Only people who are geniuses have it." That is not true. I've never seen anything, research-wise, that would indicate that. It doesn't seem to have any effect on intelligence in one direction or another.

Alie: Russell Barkley said the same thing.

René: I love Russell, I do. I know everyone has their favorites but I like Russell.

Aside: So do we, obviously. And Dr. Barkley reads all the research and his mission is to legitimize the struggle. So, if you haven't listened to Part 1, go back and listen to it. It is thorough, it's serious, and it's not *not* a bummer, but it's also incredibly validating and so many of you wrote to me saying you wept at feeling so thoroughly understood. So, there's also hope and therapies in that one, including information on medication, which works extremely well for the vast majority of people with ADHD, if you can get it filled.

Patrons Natalie, Em Kase, Jennifer Green, Lani Bouwer, and first-time question-askers Alexis Salazar, Bobbi Minard asked about medication strategies. And Rebekah Weinzel wrote on Patreon: Is there a way I can get diagnosed and prescribed Adderall without having to keep track of several forms, remember to get them filled out, and then actually mail them back to a doctor? I simply have too much ADHD for all that.

Alie: Have you found any workarounds with the responsibility of having to see a clinician and go get your refill in person and jump through so many flaming hoops...

René: No, there isn't one.

Alie: ... just to get medication? [*laughs*] There's not...

René: No, there is not one. I appreciate the fact that you thought I might have a solution for that.

Alie: [*laughs*] It is the least ADHD-friendly situation. [*laughs*]

René: It's so bad that it almost seems like it would have to be intentional. [*Alie laughs*] You could not have created a worse process, you had to have been trying to. And it's different in every state, by the way. In case your listeners didn't know, some places you have to do a urinalysis, some places you don't. Some places you have to carry a paper script, some places you don't. Some places they can call it in, some places they can't. Sometimes they can call it in 90 days, sometimes they can only do 30.

I got my meds the other day and it was a 14-day supply and I still haven't had the patience to call my doctor and find out why they wrote it that way. And my doctor and I have a great relationship but I'm just like... I looked and rolled my eyes and was like, "I can't deal with this today. I just can't."

Alie: [*laughs*] My doctor called in Vyvanse for me that was available last Monday and I still haven't picked it up and CVS is two miles away.

Aside: [*sighs*] That's right, story time. So, my doctors suspect that some of my decades-long troubles with anxiety, perfectionism, overwork, and overwhelm – you can see the entire Procrastination episode – are just well-masked ADHD as well.

So, this cropped up for me during the pandemic when I realized, despite being home and not on airplanes for a month or two, for the first time in years, I was still really struggling with deadlines and assignments.

I was lucky to be selected by Patreon to be mentored alongside a handful of creators, including the music producer, Lazerbeak of Doomtree Records; and *Flash Forward* creator, Rose Eveleth; *Comics Explained*, Robert Jefferson was in it; Justine of *2 Black Girls 1 Rose*; and Jessica McCabe was in this Patreon group. I already loved her work and we both were really struggling with getting our assignments on time for it. Jessica talked to me on the side about getting evaluated, which I did, just a few months ago.

So, between that and the concussion, I'm just now seeing if medication or just new strategies are right for me. But it's a bit of adjustment after knowing so much about

Jarrett's ADHD and thinking I was the neurotypical one. Oops, ahhh. [*laughs softly*] I think everybody else thought and I didn't. But does Jessica have advice about medication?

Alie: Xenia Holm and Rainbow Warrior both asked, essentially... they have ADHD but, "Stimulants, despite other virtues," as Rainbow Warrior said: Only seem to make me able to switch between tasks faster. Or Xenia asked, they have anxiety and they're worried that stimulants would push them over the edge. Do you have any tips for people who are diagnosed or are thinking that they might be but stimulants haven't been a good fit for them?

Jessica: Yeah, I mean, that's really it, it's a matter of trial and error. And the truth is, it's still a bit of a crapshoot. We don't know yet which meds are going to work for which brains; there's some genetic testing but it's not really great yet. So really it's that you've got to try something and if it doesn't work, be honest that it's not working, or be really, really open with your doctor about how you feel on it because odds are, there's a different one that would work for you, or a different dose that would work for you.

My doctor at one point switched me to a different medication and I was like, "Nope, I don't like this, put me back on the other one. This one doesn't work as well." And he said, "Well, I put you on a lower dose at first to make sure you didn't have any problematic side effects. You don't. If it's just that it doesn't seem to be working as well, before you switch back to that other one, let me raise the dose a little bit and then see how you feel."

And then he did a little bit and I was like, "Oh my God, everything just clicked into place," I was like, this feels like me. [*heavenly angels singing*] I feel like me, I feel functional, I feel like I can do things but it doesn't feel like my medication is what's making me do things, it just feels like what I imagine most people feel like when they have a cup of coffee in the morning and they're like, "Cool, let's do this. Ready to work." And it was just magical when I found the right one. So, really it's just a process of trial and error.

But medication should not have more side effects than they're worth, right? I think the statistic is, for 80% of people with ADHD, medication works really, really well, and it's just a matter of finding the right one. And then there are people that medication doesn't work for and other strategies are going to be better for that. And, you know, there's also non-stimulant medication as an option. It didn't work for me but there are some people that really like their non-stimulant medication. So, there's just a lot of options.

Dr. Hallowell, Dr. Ned Hallowell – who's like the superman of ADHD and wrote *Driven to Distraction, Delivered from Distraction* and just a ton of books on ADHD, is just a phenomenal psychiatrist, has his own podcast – meds don't work for it. ["*Dang it.*"] He drinks a lot of coffee. [*both laugh*] Meds don't work for him. It's so interesting to me that as a psychiatrist, he would be diagnosed with something that he talks about all the time and medication doesn't work for him.

It's really something to talk to your doctor about. And this is also why I think it's really important to understand there are other tools available. Not only because sometimes meds don't work, but also because sometimes the meds aren't worth it, right? Like, if you really hate how you feel on meds, like, it might not be worth it to you. Or maybe you do have side effects from meds or whatever. They're typically really mild but, you know, everybody's different. But also sometimes, maybe you don't have access, economic access, or you can't get into a doctor who will prescribe you meds, or whatever. So, then what? They can't be the only solution.

Also, pills can't teach skills. There's a lot that I still struggle with even taking meds. And yeah, I personally do get that moment of feeling my meds kick in, it feels like my brain comes online and I can focus better and stuff. But I still notice, whatever I'm doing [chuckles] when my meds first kick in, better be what I want to be doing for the next couple hours. [Alie laughs] That's how they work for me.

Alie: [laughs] That's so good to know. I know. [laughs] That's really funny that you're like, "Are you in a place for this? Okay, great. Go."

Jessica: Yeah, I took my meds once and like... Okay, I usually take my meds, go back to sleep for half an hour, wake up, I'm still a little groggy, so I'll meditate for half an hour, and then I'll do my workout, and then I'll go about my day. But one day I was like, "Oh, having a lazy morning, I'll sleep a little bit longer, and then I'll meditate, and then I'll work out, and then I'll take a bubble bath." Well, my meds kicked in while I was in that bubble bath [Alie laughs] and I also put something out on Twitter so, for the next four hours I was working in my bubble bath because I couldn't stop focusing long enough to get out of the tub. It was hilarious. So, yes. [laughs]

Alie: [still laughing] Oh my god, that's amazing, I completely get that. That's so funny to be like, "This is where I am now, this is where you can find me." [Jessica laughs] But you're on task.

Jessica: Sometimes your brain is just like, "And now I wanna work," and you're like, "All right, we're gonna roll with this." Ride that wave.

Alie: Mm-hm, oh my god.

Aside: So, if you do take medication, don't expect the first dose to be the most revelatory moment of your life. It might be, it might not. Also, if you're washing down a stimulant with your juice in the morning, maybe don't. Apparently, acidic foods and Vitamin C can break down your meds quickly and make them less effective. Also, if you're having side effects like anxiety or jitters, you can try taking your stimulant with plenty of protein, instead of a breakfast of two and a half Girl Scout cookies. ["How did you know?"] So, before you dismiss a drug's efficacy, just look at how you're taking it and then, of course, ask your doctor.

And if you can't afford your incredibly expensive name-brand-only Vyvanse, well I did find that its maker, Takeda, has the Help At Hand program and that can offer financial assistance if you're broke or, if you have shitty insurance. So, I will link that on my website or you can search "Help At Hand." Takeda is the pharmaceutical company. They are not sponsoring any of this, trust me.

Reddit ADHDers also have tips aplenty so you know what to ask your doctor. But what if your doctor is less helpful than a stranger with the username Cupcakes42069? Well, René, professional ADHD coach, weighs in.

Alie: Do you ever have to coach people on how to find the right clinician for them?

René: Back before I started working in this sector, I worked in major health insurance, public and private. And I think one of the most important things for patients to know – and they so very rarely seem to know it – is that a clinician is an expert you've hired to work for you, to partner with you in your healthcare. They are not your boss, they are an expert and you should certainly respect their expertise, but if you feel like that person is trying to take a position of authority over you or that they don't listen to you or respect your

ideas... Like, they know the human body, you know your own body. So, you know what's normal for you and what's not. And you need clinicians who, to the best of their ability, are able to hear you, and respect you, and take that into consideration. And if you feel like you're not a respected member of your own health team, you're with the wrong clinician and it's time to start looking for a new one. ["*Bye now.*"]

Alie: That's excellent advice.

Aside: So, I hope you are feeling accepting of the folks in your life with ADHD, or yourself, or maybe your kids.

Jessica: I don't want my kids, if I have them, to feel like they have to, that they have to fit that mold. Again, that doesn't mean... There is, like, a way other side of the fence which is like, "People should just accept us as we are and we should just be able to do whatever we want." Like, nobody gets to just do whatever they want. We still, again, live in a society. [*"We live in a society."*] We still have to interact with other people, and if our behavior is hurting somebody we do have to be accountable for that and we have to try to figure out ways to not do that.

It should be a collaborative effort, it shouldn't be just, "Overcome your ADHD and then you'll be okay." It should be... As Brené Brown would put it, "You are already worthy of love and belonging," and now let's help you function in society. And also, let's help society function better to accommodate people who are neurodivergent.

Alie: Right, which is, like, so many creative people. You're welcome, *everyone*. [laughs]

Jessica: [laughs] Yeah, for real.

Alie: There's so many people I know who are creators who, the whole reason why they went into creative fields is because the idea of, like, going to the same place every day and having to be on top of organizational tasks is overwhelming, but being in the run of a play for three months that they have to do really intensely is, like, something they can do and interests them. So, there is so much that the ADHD brain, even undiagnosed, is such a huge part of what society is, that to discourage that in people would be such a loss.

Aside: Some famoose people you know with ADHD? Oh, just: Emma Watson and Simone Biles. Astronaut Scott Kelly, Michael Phelps, Solange Knowles. Paris Hilton has it, Dave Grohl, Lisa Ling, will.i.am, and Channing Tatum, who I like to call Stalker Channing Tatum O'Neal Patrick Harrisson Ford. People have also speculated that Albert Einstein had ADHD and according to an article in *Smithsonian Magazine*, one historical hyphenate had a pension to procrastinate and abandon artwork. Who was it? Leonardo Da frickin' Vinci. Experts think he had ADHD. Also, according to one headline, those with ADHD might make better entrepreneurs, and that is from the magazine, *Entrepreneur*.

Jessica: ADHDers are three times as likely to start their own business. It sounds more impressive to say 300% more likely to start their own business. We're divergent thinkers.

Alie: Oh! Really? How do you organize it though? The problem is, if your business is a success and you hire people, and then you're like, "Fuck! I've got to manage people?? I've got to do my taxes??"

Jessica: [laughs] Look, I said *start* their own business. I didn't say "actually remember to pay their taxes." [laughs] That's where we need to make the world a little more accessible for ADHD.

Alie: Right. That's where you hire people who are really good at that stuff.

Aside: Shout out to Susan Hale, who's been my friend for 20 years and my bookkeeper for two, and it's the best money I've ever spent. I love you, Susan. What would I do without you? Also, giant lesson from me, your dad. Don't beat yourself up if you need help, because without the team who makes *Ologies*, there would be no *Ologies*. So, if you have a venture, maybe you're afraid to start, ask yourself, are you afraid of failure or are you maybe afraid of success? Because if something succeeds, that's just more work. And what if you can't handle it? Just trust that with success comes more resources, like perhaps a bookkeeper, or outsourcing your laundry if you have to, as René highly recommends.

René: It becomes very, like, result-driven, right? And that's why I was saying, that's how you know nobody cares what you have; they care what you're doing. Because you produced the result they wanted and a good grade, they didn't care what you had to do to make that result happen.

Aside: And if you're looking for some great resources for coping with ADHD in school, you can check out Dr. Barkley's excellent book, *Taking Charge of ADHD*, the fourth edition, *The Complete Authoritative Guide for Parents*. I've kept these episodes geared more toward adults because there are a lot of resources through school systems that free-range adults just don't have. And patron Sage Alyxander wrote in, semi-rhetorical: Why is it that 99% of articles about how to cope with ADHD are for parents about their children?

René: So much of the discourse around ADHD is about kids. Like, I just want to not get fired. I need to not have to file bankruptcy. I need to be able... Oh my god, when I was a young adult with ADHD, I was a mess! I had, like, \$1,500 in parking tickets. My car was always getting towed. I was always five minutes off of being fired. Like, it is no way for a person to live!

Aside: Having ADHD is a mix of strategies, possibly medication, workarounds, and not throwing your whole soul under the bus because you've got some overdue library fees. I personally suspect that library fees are what keep the lights on in the library, so, well done. Also, hello librarians. I'm sorry about the late fees. I love you.

Jessica: I just am at the point where, like, there are so many practical strategies out there now, and there's a ton on my channel, and I think they're so important because we do still live in a world that's very neurotypical. And at the same time, while we're learning these strategies, we have to remember the goal is not to get perfect at all these strategies and then not have ADHD anymore. [laughs] Like, maybe the ultimate goal... It's the same ultimate goal that should be for anybody, which is to live a life in line with your values, in which you are valued for who you are and what you contribute, and you can contribute it, and you are empowered to do so.

I still had it in my head that, like, there was a perfect, that there was an end goal, that eventually I just won't struggle with ADHD at all. I'll be so empowered, I'll know all the things, I'll have all the strategies, I'll find the magic tools. I just won't struggle with this at all anymore. And... [laughs] it was humbling to realize, no, I will. And there was a period of imposter syndrome in between where it was just like, "Oh god, everybody's looking at me like I have the answers and I'm not even using these answers. What if I don't have the answers?" And I'm just like, "Okay, this isn't just me..." There isn't *the* answer. Nobody has the answer because there isn't the answer.

Like anything in life, it's complicated. It's going to be a complex collaboration of, "I need to learn strategies to support my brain, and I need to advocate for myself, and the world needs to do a better job of accommodating neurodiversity." To use a weird example, if you think of somebody who's in a wheelchair, you're not going to be like, "I can't walk, so therefore somebody should carry me everywhere." That's not okay. But also, "If I get a wheelchair, I shouldn't also have to build all of my own ramps," right? So, that's kind of where I'm falling right now, and I know this is really meta instead of practical strategies, but I think it's important.

I think we should have our, you know, strategies and tools that we can use. But we also need to live in a world where we're allowed to use them, and that we're supported in using them, and that it's not completely falling to us, or even looked at like we're weird, right? There's this weird thing where it's like... Like, it's not okay that you get distracted in meetings. Okay, cool. Let me bring a fidget so that I can not get distracted in meetings. Let me bring my knitting so that I can stay focused. Well, that's not okay either. Okay, what do you want from me? [laughs] You know?

Alie: You're like, "You get a sweater out of it at the end of it! Come on! I'll make you a sock."

Jessica: Right! Also, I'm paying attention now, so you're welcome.

Aside: So, if you have executive function issues, you may find that something soothing or exciting while you work is helpful. Even chewing gum at the computer really helps some folks, to the point that schools make exceptions for kids who focus better chewing gum. I work better with music. My Pandora use, still going strong. Jarrett watches action movies on one monitor while he works on the other. And I find that astounding. He says it's like having a white noise machine to sleep. I'm like, "Okay, sure."

What about fidget toys? One way you can support a creator with ADHD is to go to René's shop at BlackGirlLostKeys.com. She has them for sale there. She also sells water bottles or protein shake bottles with a built-in pill organizer, and shirts that say, "Guard Your Yes With Your Life." She has worksheets too, and workbooks on topics like 100 no-cook meal ideas and learning how to dress well with ADHD; she's got another on cleaning. And of course, she's a professional ADHD coach. And via her Patreon, you can hear her podcast at any subscription level for more tips.

Now Jahla, a neuroscientist studying distractibility offers some wisdom as well.

Jahla: Having breaks really helps. Same thing on the weekend. I try not to work too much, if possible. I think by having those breaks in there when I am working, I feel like I'm a lot more productive. One thing I have to remind myself is that the work, honestly, will never stop. So if I don't get to this email today or if I don't get this part of the data analyzed today, then I'll have something to do tomorrow. I just try to take it one day at a time.

Aside: I love this little device called the time timer. You can use it for the Pomodoro Technique, which is how, turns out, the Quantum Ontology guest Dr. Adam Becker wrote his frickin' book, *What is Real? The Unfinished Quest for the Meaning of Quantum Physics*. And yes, this acclaimed astrophysicist has ADHD. So I went back to his 2018 episode, which is fantastic, and I pulled that part for us.

[clip from *Ologies Quantum Ontology* episode:]

Alie: What was the process of writing the book like?

Adam: So, first it was abject terror after I got the contract, because after I finished partying, I realized I was on the hook for 90,000 words, and I'd never published anything longer than about 3,000. So that was completely fucking terrifying. I had a history earlier on in my career of having difficulty getting work done and getting it done on time or getting it finished. And I had by that point moved past that. I finished my degree and whatnot. But I still had this mental image of myself as someone who had difficulty getting work done on time, and so I was really extra scared.

But I decided, okay, the only way that I'm going to get through this is if I plan it and then just only pay attention to whatever's in front of me, because I can't write 90,000 words, but I can write 600 words a day. And if I do that for a while, eventually I'll have 90,000 words. So I outlined it, and I went over the outline with my publisher, and they liked the outline. Of course it changed, right? No plan survives contact with the editor.

So, for each chapter I'd outline the chapter and then I just sort of worked through that outline and wrote a really shitty first draft and tried to do 600 words a day. And what I'd do is I would do 50 minutes on and 10 minutes off, and in the 10 minutes off I wouldn't look at anything with a screen and I wouldn't read any nonfiction. I read exclusively novels, and that really helped my brain work because I found that if I didn't read it all, I couldn't write because if there's nothing going in, nothing's going to come out.

Other *Ologies* episodes in which we discuss succeeding with ADHD include the Corvid Thanatology episode with Dr. Kaeli Swift, Maritime Archaeology with Chanelle Zap, Thermophysiology with Dr. Shane Campbell-Staton, Neuroendocrinologist Dr. Daniel Pfau talks about that, and Molecular Biology with Dr. Raven Baxter.

And using a timer for tasks, Jahla had a great tip, which I have used every day since our interview.

Jahla: One thing that we're discussing is, you know, just telling yourself, "Okay, I'm just going to write for 10 minutes today or 15 minutes, setting a timer, and then you'll be surprised how much you can get done in that time period. And then once you've started... Sometimes I'll do the 15 minutes and then I'm, like, in the groove so I can continue to write for longer.

Aside: Part of success is knowing yourself, knowing how you thrive, and what works for you. And what doesn't work for you. René zeroed in on that and I love her.

René: You have to develop self-awareness, you have to develop the ability to know what you need, and how to say no to what you don't need, and to not be open to suggestions that you already know are not going to be what you need. And I know you know what I'm talking about because don't you love it when someone says, "Try a notebook." And you tell them, "I've got a million damn notebooks; that's not going to work," and how offended they are by that?

At this point I'm just like, "What kind of fool do you think I am?" I have gone to college, I went to Penn State, I built my own business, I went to a doctor, I take a stimulant medication that is a pain in the ass to fill, as we've established. And *you* think I could've resolved all of this by walking down to the fucking dollar store and buying and *notebook*? You think 75 cents was going to solve a problem that I've spent thousands of dollars and

countless hours to resolve? You think that was the solution? You think I couldn't have thought of that on my own?

Alie: [laughs] You're like, "Wait a second! Should I try a pen too???"

René: Do you think that would work? Or should I do a pencil? I don't want to miss out on the opportunity to erase. Do you have any other wonderful ideas?? Can you write the pharmaceutical companies? I don't want to forget!

Oh wait, now my good friend happened along and you know what they told me? To just do it! I'm going to try that! *Really?*

Alie: You should just do the thing that you can't do!

René: It's probably not the way of peace. If you like peace, that's not the route to go.

Alie: [laughs] The way of peace.

René: I'm just like, "No, no..." Not at this point. It used to really hurt my feelings when people would do that because it was like, "Oh, you think that I lack the intelligence and the wherewithal to come up with basic solutions to my own problems? How could you think that of me?" At this point I'm just like, "You don't know anything about what you're talking about. Go Away! Booooo!!!" [laughs] ["Yeah, well, you know... That's just, like, your opinion, man."]

Aside: So while the bullet journal, or the BuJo, was developed by someone with ADHD, it's not for everyone. I myself use a half-sheet-sized ring binder so I can take things out and re-shuffle them because I just spent years staring at a pile of 20 journals that only had, like, the first seven pages used.

In case you want to see my binder, and my dog, I'm going to be doing a Patreon livestream on Sunday, March 6th, at noon Pacific. But also, binders and dogs, maybe they're not for everyone.

Alie: Are there certain little tips, or tricks, or major systemic things like, just, "I have to sleep nine hours a night," or something that you would advise people to try?

René: I think sleep and eating consistently are some of the areas that we struggle the most in, and I am not a good person when I haven't slept. Like, I don't even want to be around me when I haven't gotten enough sleep. I think looking at those basic tenets of self-care, to begin with, like are you sleeping, are you eating, can you find your stuff, do you have enough clean clothing, are you able to keep foods in the house that you can eat consistently? All of those are areas that you want to take a close look at.

At some point, in trying to learn how to manage my ADHD... Like, at first it was about finding out what the symptoms are and eliminating them. Like, how do I get rid of the impulsivity, and the distractibility, etc.? As I learned more, it became more so, like, never mind getting rid of the symptoms, I can't. But here's what I need to accomplish. I need to eat. I need to manage my finances. I need to be able to get a decent night's sleep. How do I support myself in my impulsivity, in my distractibility? How do I keep myself redirected?

It's a very subtle switch but it's an important one because trying to control the symptoms is you fighting yourself. Trying to accomplish the things you need to accomplish puts the focus back where it belongs because, quite honestly, if you've got your life managed, do you really care if you have ADHD? Does it matter at that point? No one cares how distractible I am if I'm meeting deadlines, and showing up places on time, and being a

halfway decent person. Maybe I can't accomplish good every day, but I've got a pretty decent emotional regulation, right? Nobody cares whether we have ADHD or not. They care about the things that they see as negative qualities.

Irresponsibility... I *hate* the irresponsibility trope that people try to throw at us. We're actually not irresponsible people, by and large. At least the people I've met have not been... Like, when they say, "What do you mean I'm not irresponsible?" Irresponsible people do not care if they're meeting the requirements because they're irresponsible. Think about the truly wild, irresponsible people you know. Like, to not give a shit is their brand. They do not care if they're disappointing. They do not care if they're not able to meet the standards. That is true irresponsibility. How many actual, irresponsible people do you know?

Alie: Yeah, that's such a good point. There's so much effort too, for people who do have ADHD, if it's a matter of thought that counts or effort that counts, the effort it takes to do certain things is, I feel like, multiple times that what maybe some neurotypical people might experience. And that effort is there, there's just... It almost, like, costs more energetically to do things, you know?

René: Yes. Absolutely.

Alie: You know, I was talking to a friend of mine who is a psychologist who was saying that one question that is on intakes about this, and one question that seems to really resonate with a lot of patients is the "Do you feel like you're driven by a motor?" And how much that can feel burnout, that feeling that you always, always, always have to go, go, go to make up for things, you know? Do you feel like that's something that resonates with you too? Or do you have to try to turn your motor to idle at all?

René: Oh, mine doesn't have an idle button. That button's broken. [Alie chuckles] So yes, I definitely can identify with it.

Aside: What does René want to shout from a bullhorn at the top of a mountain?

René: I wish people would learn what executive function is and then understand that what they think of as executive function is not a choice. Like, everyone has it in their mind that you can... if it's important to you, you will remember it. If it means enough to you, you will find a way to be on time. But as a person with ADHD, if you don't have the skills and the tools to put in place to assist you in the places that you need help, it doesn't matter how important something is or how meaningful it is.

There was someone who I was very close with who lost their job, and filed with unemployment, and was turned down, and they needed to go to the appeal hearing. The appeal hearing and getting that money made the difference between whether or not they would be able to keep their apartment. They lost their apartment because they forgot to go to the meeting. That's not a choice. Whether or not you remember something has nothing to do with how important it is or what the consequences are. It just doesn't.

When you remove the intent from it, a lot more of these things become less frustrating for everyone involved, because I think that's where a lot of the conflict comes in relationships and communication. After a while, a person starts to wonder, like, "Are you kidding me?"

Alie: It's interesting too, the way that our culture is so split where we get this messaging about, "If someone doesn't prioritize you, cut them out of your life. If someone doesn't respect you, if he's not that into you, cut them out and move on," you know? And then at the same

time, it doesn't allow for a lot of understanding of motives behind things. I think it's really tough sometimes without awareness to really understand what's behind someone's actions.

René: The people who actually, really love you... A lot of those other things are based in performance. "Did you show up for me? Did you do the thing I asked you to do?" The people who actually love you at your core and at your essence will also present themselves. My best friend has been my best friend since I was 18 years old. I wasn't diagnosed with ADHD until seven years later. Think about it, she had 7-10 years of me never being on time. So she's had to adjust herself because she would always just plan on me being late. Like, "I'm not going to fight with René about being late. I watched her be late a million times. I don't know why she's late, but she's late. I'm going to tell her a different time so that she comes on time."

Alie: Yeah! [laughs]

René: Those are the only kinds of friends I want in my life, who see who I am and go, "How do we have this relationship with this person being the way that they are?" Because that's what I do for my friends and I don't think it's unreasonable to expect reciprocity in that way. It's like... Look, if you genuinely cannot deal with someone's lateness, if it offends you to that degree, no one's holding you hostage. Stop being friends with them. We both have to try. You have to give grace; I have to get to a place where I can do it better. And if that's not good enough, then we can't be friends!

You can't be friends with everybody in the world. That's all right. No hard feelings either. Like, if this isn't working for you, let's not be friends. We can respect each other, we can still have love for each other, but that close friendship might just not be for us.

Aside: Again, I mentioned this book in an aside for Part 1, but *The ADHD Effect on Marriage* by Melissa Orlov, super helpful for me personally, even though Jarrett and I both read it before we were ever married or engaged, and when we were in a phase of our relationship where we broke up every couple of months. Since that book, we haven't broken up once. Isn't that amazing?! Trust me, it is.

So, his diagnosis and learning about it was absolutely life-changing, maybe lifesaving. And we had a little audio issue here, but as René says, Melissa really brought a lot to light, didn't she?

René: Melissa really brought a lot to light, didn't she?

Alie: Yeah, it just reframed so much that you think are either... you know, what we would call character flaws, or personality traits, or choices, and once you can see certain patterns, I saw my husband in a completely different light. And I also... Because he hadn't been diagnosed, he would do things that were really dangerous, or really sketchy, where I'm like, "Where is his judgment???" And knowing now that he was always, like, riding his motorcycle at 100mph and almost killing himself on it...

René: If you're the kind of person who looks for security, you're like, "How the hell did I wind up married to fuckin' Evel Knievel? What's going on here? What are you doing?"

[clip of Evel Knievel on Johnny Carson: "As far as why I do what I do, there are three mysteries to life. That's where we came from, why we do what we do, and where we're going to go. Johnny Carson doesn't know the answer to any of those three things and neither does Evel Knievel. It's a question that can't be answered."]

Aside: A lot of patrons wanted to know about relationships, like ADHD partners Merith Bennett and Marcus Elliott, and Natalie. And Jessica has videos like, "ADHD and Relationships: Let's be Honest," and "How to Help Someone Who Has ADHD." One great tip is: Don't parent your partner. Help support them where they need it but remember you're an equal team who bring different things to the table.

Now, can she fix all of our relationships? No pressure.

Alie: Jenny Lowe Rhodes, Sally O'Meara, Daniel Kim, and Annika all wanted to know how to support people who have ADHD or how to ask for support so that they're not judged.

Jessica: Yeah, I think, remember that really the biggest thing is that it's not a moral defect. It's not that they're lazy, or not trying hard enough, or a bad person, or a bad student, or a bad friend. It's that their brain works differently. They are on a different operating system. Their brain functions differently. The reward pathways are different. Their perception of time is different. Their emotional regulation is different. Their attention regulation is different. It all functions differently. And so it's not that they need to be spoken to like they're a child or treated like they're a child, but for some things we need support, accommodations, just to even be able to access it.

So, I'm really good at my job, and sometimes it wouldn't look like it because I struggle to figure out where a folder is for the thing that... Even things that I do on a regular basis, I'm like, "How do I do this again?" I have really basic, basic struggles. And it's so heartbreakingly because, often, ADHDers are trying harder than their neurotypical peers and they're just facing more obstacles. But because those obstacles are invisible, it doesn't look like that.

If somebody's stuck on the freeway and there are a bunch of cars in front of them, you'd be like, "Yes, obviously they're not moving because there are a bunch of cars in front of them." But if somebody's stopped on the freeway and there's nobody else on the road that you can see, you're like, "Why aren't you moving? Do you not care about this thing you're trying to get to? Just step on the gas!" And you don't see all of the cars in front of them. You don't see the obstacles, so you think they're not there, so you make the very natural assumption that they don't care or they're not trying when that's really not the case.

So, understanding what it is that they're dealing with and what's getting in their way... because I promise you, something is. Something is. If they're not doing something, there's a reason for that. If I'm in an accounting job and I cannot stand numbers, spreadsheets, anything... Yeah, I can use a lot of strategies to get my brain to do that job, but really, a better option? Get a different job. It's a terrible job for my brain. It just is. So, recognizing when it makes sense to change the environment and when it makes sense to, you know, "Oh, if I take meds I can be a fantastic writer." If I don't take meds, I can't write. But I'm a fantastic writer! So it makes sense for me to take meds.

Aside: So, people out there who love someone with ADHD, learning more about it – *whew!* – helps so much. And giving some extra grace gives you so much in return.

Neuroscientist and ADHD sibling Jahla agrees.

Jahla: The symptoms sometimes... Like, as a kid growing up, sometimes it would be a lot, I would think, sometimes with my brother. But understanding that this isn't something he chooses to do on purpose, this is a lot deeper than that, and me being more understanding and then actually trying to become aware and more educated on the stuff that he might be struggling with, I think, helped our relationship because I better

understand what it is that he's going through or dealing with on a daily basis. I think that's probably the best advice; just try to be understanding and accommodating to the people in your life that do have to battle with this.

Aside: So, accepting others. Also, big message from Jessica. You ready? This is big. That's why it's at the end. It's big. It's good.

Jessica: I can tell you what I'm obsessed with right now, which is the idea of us being okay as-is.

Alie: Mm-hmm.

Jessica: Because I think that those of us who are neurodivergent grew up our whole lives being constantly corrected on our neurodivergent behaviors and learning that they are not okay. It's not okay to get really excited and talk really loudly about something you're excited about, because a lot of times it's in situations where it's not appropriate. It's not okay to get out of your chair and move around. It's not okay to interrupt while somebody's talking. It's not okay to... A lot of these things are things that we do have to learn, contextually, to be better about in general.

Like, all kids have to learn when it's their turn, and how to share, and things that people with ADHD might have trouble with. But we almost learn to train it out of ourselves entirely. We learn it's not okay to fidget when actually that fidgeting can help us focus. It can bring down our anxiety and it can give our floating intention something to do so it doesn't float all over the room and take us with it.

But there's almost this pressure when you have ADHD to erase your ADHD completely, to be neurotypical, as if that's the goal, right? It's a terrible goal to have, but it's one that we almost all seem to have on some level because it seems to be the message that we've gotten our whole lives. "You'd be so successful if you could just..." "You have so much potential if you would just put your nose to the grindstone. Just sit down and do it," as if it's a choice, as opposed to, "This is just how our brains work."

So, a big thing that I'm really obsessed with right now is accepting people as-is. Accepting that I have ADHD; accepting that the person I work with is autistic. Accepting that, and then instead of going, "How do we make them be less *that*?" going, "Given that, now where do we go from here?" Because we still live in a society, right? We still have goals we want to accomplish. We still want to be empowered; we want to be able to do the things we want to do. We want the people we care about to be able to grow up happy, and healthy, and do the things they want to do.

Alie: For speaking to literally one million brains for your job, what would you say is something that people wouldn't know is either difficult or even just annoying about it?

Jessica: I don't know if people realize how much it breaks my heart to read the comments sometimes. I will sit and read comments or read people's stories and cry. And sometimes I can't even respond because I just don't even have the bandwidth that day, but I will read these stories and I will just sit there and cry because there's so much... There's so much pain out there. People are struggling so hard, and up against a world that thinks they're not trying. That's really hard to read sometimes. It's also what motivates me, but it's really tough because people are asking me for answers that I don't have.

There's 12-year-olds saying, "My parents don't believe ADHD is real. They won't take me to a doctor. What do I do?" And I don't know what to tell them, because there's no good answer, right? Until the world understands ADHD better, until we overcome these

stereotypes and this idea that ADHD is a joke, or not real, or not that big of a deal, until we get past that... Or the moral idea, the idea that ADHD is this moral failing. Until we really understand, as a society, ADHD well enough to move past that, this pain is going to continue of people feeling like it's their fault that they're struggling, and trying so hard not to, and being punished or shamed for it, and it absolutely breaks my heart.

[clip from Jessica's TED Talk: "ADHD brains have a lot to offer the world. We tend to be generous, funny, creative. We not only think outside the box, we're often not even aware there is a box."]

There's a quote that I love. I think it's John Steinbeck. "Now that you don't have to be perfect, you can be good."

Alie: Ah!!

Jessica: And it can be paralyzing for people who are neurodivergent to even want to, like, go out and try things or interact because we've been corrected so often our whole lives that we're, like, so afraid to mess up, you know? We almost get trained into being perfectionists because we keep getting corrected and we keep being told, like, "That's wrong. How you're doing this is wrong. This is wrong. This is wrong." So eventually we're like, "Don't do anything wrong." That's almost a mantra. "Don't fuck up. Don't fuck up. Don't fuck up!" Right? That's almost what we go through.

I was having a conversation with somebody the other day and realized, like, that's a terrible way to live, just constantly being afraid of messing up, because then you don't want to take the shot, right? And what I'm trying so hard to do, and what I'm hoping others can start to join me in doing... If we're thinking about perfectionism, we're thinking about, like... Perfectionism is making all the shots you take, right? But if we shift to think about winning the game. We have to take a lot of shots and we're going to miss some. And that's okay.

So take the shot. Ask brilliant people basic questions. And look at that, you just may understand yourself and others better. Give yourself grace and accept all the really creative and wonderful ways your brain works, because it's great. You can try to tailor a life that fits you if you can. You can surround yourself with people who understand you and who don't expect perfection. You can work in small, defined chunks of time. Take breaks. And don't be afraid of imperfection *or* success.

I hope this 2-parter has helped some of you. If nothing else, just know you're not alone. You're not a fuckup. You're special, you're different. It's cool. Everyone struggles with executive function to some degree, everyone, and our attention is so much more fractured than ever. We can work 24/7, and some employers expect that of us, and we live in a gig economy where one job isn't enough to afford a house. So next week, *Ologies* lifehacks for everyone. I'm thrilled about it.

Find the ologists from this episode at the links on my website at AlieWard.com/Ologies/ADHD2. That'll be linked in the show notes. René Brooks is [@BlackGirlLostKeys](#) everywhere. Find Jessica McCabe at [HowToADHD.com](#) and her handles are [@HowToADHD](#). Jahla Osborne is on [Twitter](#); her handle is in the show notes. And we are @Ologies on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). I'm [@AlieWard](#) on [both](#).

Thank you, Erin Talbert, for adminning the *Ologies* Podcasts [Facebook group](#) with help from Shannon and Boni of the podcast *You Are That*. Thank you to Susan Hale for bookkeeping, and merch, and Noel for scheduling and so much behind the scenes. Thank you Emily White of The

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And giant, huge thanks to the muse and the editor of this, and the one and only Jarrett Sleeper of Mindjam Media for laboring so hard the last few weeks on these giant episodes with, like, five guests, and hours of content, and a lot of work. And of course for working through the hard parts of life to understand each other better. Fuckin' super glad we listened to that audiobook and we were like, "Oh wow. We're not assholes. Holy smokes! Boy howdy! This rules!" Nick Thorburn made the theme music.

And if you stick around to the end of the episode, I tell you a secret. And this week's secret is just straight up that I have been feeling super weird about being, like, "Do I have ADHD after all these years? What if I don't? What if I just am lazy or whatever?" So, it's very, very fresh for me and I'm still understanding it myself. Makes a lot of sense, sure. Also grappling with looking at myself in a whole different way, so, uh... hella fresh is what I'm getting at, for probably a lot of people. But, wow.

One thing I look back on is all of the tricks, and workarounds, and ways that I've tried to make work easier for me, and I thought I was being fussy. I realized, wow, those were actually adaptations I was making to keep myself on track, and I abandoned a lot of them because I thought I seemed uptight using them. And I was like, "Oh! No, those were keeping me alive." So I'm reevaluating a lot of the ways that I... I'm just reevaluating a lot of the ways that I work.

Anyway... [*anxious singsong*] vulnerabilities; self-reflection. Okay, you're great. Look at that, we did two episodes on ADHD y'all. We did it. Okay, berbye.

Transcribed by Aveline Malek and Emily White at TheWordary.com

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