

JoJo Abdi: Poetry, trauma & our sensitive wiring

Fri, Dec 16, 2022 11:51AM 54:52

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

adhd, feel, diagnosed, women, read, life, struggling, sensitive, podcast, people, teacher, add, energy, kids, deal, poems, students, talk, person, trauma

SPEAKERS

JoJo Abdi, Katy Weber



JoJo Abdi 00:00


As an adult, I find out like, I don't really know who I am. So I had to, through this diagnosis get to really know what I like, what I don't like, what bothers me all the stakes




Katy Weber 00:15

Hello, and welcome to the women and ADHD podcast. I'm your host, Katy Weber. I was diagnosed with ADHD at the age of 45. And it completely turned my world upside down. I've been looking back at so much of my life, school, jobs, my relationships, all of it with this new lens. And it has been nothing short of overwhelming. I quickly discovered I was not the only woman to have this experience. And now I interview other women who like me discovered in adulthood, they have ADHD, and are finally feeling like they understand who they are and how to best lean into their strengths, both professionally and personally. Okay, I would like to share with you this review from a listener named M Ruta on the Apple podcast platform in Australia. It's entitled, love it. Thank you, Katie, listening to your experiences, and those of your guests have had a profound impact on my understanding of my own ADHD and life. Thank you, Amruta. I'm so glad to hear this. And it still blows me away to know that this little podcast has been so helpful to so many of you. I really, really appreciate the feedback and the reviews. So if you are a listener of this podcast, and you have been helped by these conversations, a lovely way to say thank you is to take a moment to leave a review. And if that feels like too much right now, and I totally get it. You could also just stop and quickly hit those five stars. In fact, why don't we just pause right now and you can just go do it. I promise I will wait for you. Okay, here we are in Episode 116, in which I interviewed Joe Joe Abdi. Khadija is a Somali born writer, poet and educator living in Minneapolis. Her poetry and essays have been published in lyric reality Minnesota Women's press, and in the anthology by Freedom voices Muslim American writers at home stories, essays and poems of diversity and belonging, Jojo was diagnosed with ADHD in the fall of 2021. And like many of us, she's been coming to terms with what she calls quote, this brain that's so good at complex, exciting things that are hard for most people and so terrible at small routines of everyday life. Very well said Jojo, and I talk all about her poetry sensitive wiring, and how many of us tend to get swept up in the to muchness of life we also talk about some of the childhood trauma she experienced when her family fled Somalia, her


survivor's guilt and how her ADHD has affected her self esteem and her self worth growing up. We also talk about how certain cultures are more ADHD friendly than others, and what JoJo was doing to foster an inclusive classroom environment for her students. Now, after you listen to this wonderful episode, please make sure to go check out some of Joe Joe's beautiful poetry. There is a link in the show notes. Okay, without further ado, here is my interview with Joe Joe Abdi. All right, Hi, Joe. Joe, thank you so much for joining me.

 JoJo Abdi 03:19


Thank you for having me. I'm so happy to be here after listening for a little bit.

 Katy Weber 03:24


Yeah. So you said a friend introduced you to the podcast?

 JoJo Abdi 03:27

Yes, a friend of mine sent me one of the episodes on one of the days I was really frazzled. And I was like, wow. And then I kept listening to it until like one in the morning. Like, I listen to so many episodes, and everyone kept reaffirming a part of me or something that happened to me. And it was so affirming to hear those stories. So I got in touch with you. And I wanted to tell my story too. Oh, well

 Katy Weber 03:54

I'm so glad he did. I feel like I have a lot of questions about your your unique perspective but also wanted to hear about first year diagnosis journey. So you self diagnosed first in in 2021. What was going on in your life? Specifically? You said you had seen a YouTube video? Was there something specifically happening that kind of made you really think okay, I need to look into this?

 JoJo Abdi 04:22

Well, you know how it is we always go into a tangent. So it was actually the year before that while I was finished closing up my grad school thesis and submitting it, I really realized how much more difficult it is for me to to write or to edit my work. And so I told my graduate advisor how many systems I have, just to produce a clean copy. Like I would have Grammarly check my spelling, and then I will print it out and track it with a pencil and then I will have a speech to text read it back to me. And so I had like this Five different systems just to provide a clean copy. And she was like my God that you work so hard. And, and that kind of took me on a journey of discovering that I have dyslexia. And I tried to get diagnosed the traditional way through like local, but they had like 10 months to be seen. And 1000s of dollars. And, and I'm like, I've been living with this so long. So I looked online, and found a program that it's similar. And then not only was I confirmed to have dyslexia, but it was also dyscalculia dyscalculia, they call it I can barely count, and dysgraphia, which was affecting my writing, which is why I had so

many systems. So I am one of the questioners was asking me, do you have ADHD? And I quickly crossed out? No, because I worked in medicine for 10 years, right, as a medical interpreter, and I will be in the room with parents and the little energetic kids who are like bouncing off the walls, they would be like talking about ADHD, and I'm like, that's really not me. So I never thought I had it. And I just kind of like so when, a year later, in 2021. In April, I was just sitting taking a break. And the algorithm suggests this video, it was titled, this is what happens to women with ADHD left undiagnosed. And I'm like, Okay, let's check it out. And this girl proceeds to tell my whole story in that 10 minute, I think it was 14 minutes. She was like it she talks about emotional dysregulation, which is a word. I never had never heard that word for what I felt like just feeling feeling so thin skinned and being awake in the middle of the night, rethinking a conversation that happened early in the morning, because she had words for experiences I had. And so it was like I was on break. The rest of the day is a blur. I don't remember what else I did what I thought about but I just kept playing in my head, lay in my head. So later, when I went home, I went online. And I looked for this list. I said, So what are the other? What are the true science that somebody has ADD? So I looked typed women with ADD online? And it gave me like this 24 questionnaires, right? Like that your checklist. And so I turned on the highlighter function on Google, Google Doc. And if I have a highlight, or highlight or highlight, do you forget things? Do you always lose things? It was so many every question. By the time I did all of them. I had like 22 of them highlighted and two of them left. I don't know what to do. I could not stop thinking about it. Like it just my whole childhood clicked into place. All the challenges I've ever dealt with kind of like this is a thing that I was actually experiencing. And for me, it's like, I fought really hard with myself to appear normal to appear successful. Like I was going to grad school, I was having jobs. I was keeping calendar. On the outside, I appeared quite neurotypical like someone who was like, but on the inside, I was frazzled. I was always like water firing. I was always like, I was extremely insecure. I felt like an imposter. And so it's just so difficult for those two things to clash. And finally, to have a name for what it was.



Katy Weber 08:33

I know, right? Yeah, I feel like that was that was such a game changer for me when I took the self test specifically for women, when I realized that a lot of the questions were based around shame around, you know, sort of this idea that there's this public version of you, and then this private version of you that nobody knows about, right? And that you're gonna get found out and I found, you know, talking about impostor syndrome, I found your poem online impostor, which was so moving it just really like spoke to that sense, right? I'm just gonna read it because I'm otherwise I'll butcher it. But where you just said, what you don't know is the fight that goes on in someone's head, when they don't feel they deserve good things, when their every thought is wait till they find out who you really are, or surely they'll know soon enough that you are messy, disorganized, weird, unskilled, lazy, not worthy insert any other crushing, self critical thought that pops up and it just, you know, speaks to that feeling of just you know, that you're fooling everybody or somehow and where does that core shame come from? I think that's what we try to figure out. At least, you know, I've tried to figure that out with my guests too, right? That the core shame that kind of comes alongside with perfectionism and the, you know, need to really work, work so hard to show up and be a good person and all of that so that really hippie, that poll. I was like, Oh, that just like, absolutely captures that idea. And then also realizing that, that not everybody feels this way. I think that was the thing that was so profound for me with the diagnosis when when it started really speaking to like, my soul, what I was learning more about ADHD and then also realizing, Oh, this isn't a universal experience.



JoJo Abdi 10:21

Yeah, the shame, I always try to figure out where the shame come from. I feel like it's just the constant comparison. You get as a as a kid in schools, like, why can't you be like so and so. And all the complaints teachers write about you like, like, I think one of my teachers, when I was in the first grade, wrote to my mom that he has this many students. And if you compare them for Georgia on a scale, she's more trouble than all of them combined. You're kidding. In my mom was mortified, she still tells the story to me. It's because I couldn't sit still, I was so energetic, I was always raising the hand and, and then not waiting to be picked, like hand would go up. And I would speak. So I had this, like, I was really going as a kid, like, I could not sit still. And I was always distracted by other kids. So I would insist that I be sat on the front, so I don't have to see all the movement of guests. And so all these self advocating I was doing for myself, like, refusing, like, if some kids are in my spot, I would be like, it'd be a fight before class started. I'm like, teacher, I have to sit right here. And so it was all of that combined. And so when I hit alone, around 1213, I started to self monitor, and manage myself and be like, no, no, no. And then I started to watch other kids who appear neurotypical kids who like get their homework done on time, and kids who were doing things the correct way, and then copying them and then suppressing my urge to speak up my urge to move and wiggle around. So a lot of my energy would go to focus in in classrooms, which really impacted my schooling. And so it just it all that shame is just like trying to pass for normal takes a lot of energy. And by normal, I don't mean like we are abnormal. I'm talking about what society deems as this is the normal kid and vicious you who's like out there daydreaming when half the class, you know, less than goes by. So it was that struggle. I feel like to me that made me feel like like, there's something not right about me that always have to edit and correct. And perfect. I got really good at it. But then, as an adult, I find out like, I don't really know who I am. So I had to, through this diagnosis, get to really know what I like, what I don't like, what bothers me, all these things. So that's the beautiful thing about knowing is like, now I get to be me, like my mask came out. And my siblings are shocked how different I am, you know?



Katy Weber 12:57

Well, even just this idea that a teacher would would call you a troublemaker, because you have your hand raised and you're curious, and you're excitable and you want to participate like that those qualities in a child are considered or labeled as a troublemaker is just insane to me. Right, it's just so profoundly wrong. One of my pet peeves is when people say, Oh, they roll their eyes and think, Oh, everybody thinks they have ADHD because they saw one tick tock video or one YouTube video. I'm like, No, you don't understand. That was the catalyst that led me to look over my whole life through this new lens, right? It's such a profound experience. And it drives me crazy that people just roll their eyes and and shrug it off like you'd like you just sort of you know, lost your keys once and decided that you had ADHD. So I wanted to hear was your diagnosis when you were professionally diagnosed? Was it a relatively easy experience? Or did you feel like you had pushed back?



JoJo Abdi 13:49

Yeah, a lot of people say that they have add that and there's a lot of things that can impact the person's attention, like going through a depressive episode can affect your attention, pain abilities. A lot of illnesses can mimic ADHD, or cause inattention. Like if you're extremely

anxious, you have a hard time paying attention. COVID has some similarities. Yeah. Yes, long COVID actually does affect Well, in the similar way. Yeah. So I think for me, my my process took like several months, and lots of doctor's visits. I saw like three different doctors. So when I got that initial like YouTube video, I watched and I look at that checklist of questions. I'm a woman who worked 10 years in medicine, so I know how easily dismissed women's complaints were, especially when they come complaining about like their mental health, especially if they appear capable people with functioning careers and graduate degrees and they suddenly come to you and say like, Oh, I think I have ADHD like doctors would easily dismiss them. So I went armed, like I collected all the stories from Early childhood. And then I collected my later years how I experienced life. Not only that, how other people experienced me, so I came with a checklist of everything. So I can say that ADHD is not something that just comes or pops up. It's something that from early childhood to now, like, I was extremely sensitive kid, like I cried, from the smallest comments, like, I was so so sensitive, like I had physical symptoms, you know, like I was very uncoordinated. So I have dyslexia, which is another co occurring thing. And so I came ready to defend, but my doctor was an amazing woman. She was like, Yeah, I have family members who have this, they're highly accomplished, and they struggle, so I'm going to send you for the test. And then my next doctor, she had long list of questionnaires, because you know, I'm a person who came from like, turbulent early childhood, I come from Somalia, there was war there, we have to flee for our life. So they have to do a lot of trauma checklists, to eliminate that it wasn't trauma, and to eliminate, like if it was like chronic depression. So they have to do all these other things, as professionals. But we're really proved that was when I took the actual add test, you know, the one where you answer questions and do exercises, and all these things, I've passed that with flying color, I think that's the highest I've ever scored a test. And so all of it together, was able to verify that I in fact, had ADD, did I wish to have it? No, I wished it was something else. So it could be maybe managed much easier. You know, nobody wants to have a brain that's wired to be sensitive and wired to, to always struggle to remember and to struggle to keep a household and things like that. And nobody wants that. But it was affirming to know that what it was that I had a name for it. And that can I can stop beating myself up and comparing myself to neurotypicals.



Katy Weber 16:57

That's so beautifully said, right? Nobody wants to just casually have this label as an excuse for laziness, because we have dealt with the label of laziness our whole life, right and dealt with that. That's so yeah, that's so beautifully said. Thank you. Looking back. So how old were you when you did come here?



JoJo Abdi 17:18


It just turned 16 When I came to the United States. And then when I was diagnosed, I was 3536. So it's like, a while before I got diagnosed?




Katy Weber 17:30

So what were some of the ways that you sort of distinguish between childhood trauma and ADHD? What are some of the ways that you've reconciled it in your own mind? Because it's, it's a theme that I explore a lot in this podcast, I experienced childhood sexual trauma. And so I

feel like I'm always questioning, you know, how does trauma relate to how my brain developed? And there's so much overlap? And it it's does seem very confusing. So I just feel like is there a way you've reconciled it in your own mind in terms of your own migration experience?


 JoJo Abdi 18:03

For me, I've always suppressed that there was trauma, because, you know, I've always kind of dealt with life through laughter. And so it took a long time to even know that how I deal with life is from my, from my traumatized background, somebody once said that being traumatized is like responding to the present with your past memories. It's something there that I definitely would need to deal with. But I was recently reading Gabor ma textbook, on ADHD, it's called scattered minds. So he really talks a lot about epigenetics, and how even in utero, a child can experience what the parent is going through. And when they are born, he talked about the brain wiring of an ADHD child or a sensitive child, he calls it. So when a sensitive kid child is born, they actually he said, think about it, like having like a burn or a scaffolding on you. Like if you touch a normal part of you with your hand, it's fine. But if you touch a part of you that's burned and the nerves are closer to the skin, your image immediately go out. So a sensitive kid is wired in that way. So everything they experienced, they're, they're traumatized, because they're very attuned and they're emotionally open. And so they can become way more traumatized than other kids could who could go through the same events. So there's a nurturer component to it and a nature component to it. Part of wiring that you come into the world with it like sensitively wired, and then experiences affect you much more, because you are a sensitive, both physically sensitive, like, you know how we're always annoyed by tags, and tight clothings were also like, emotionally sensitive. We're always reading way more into the room. So that exposure kind of doubles everything for this kind of child.


 Katy Weber 20:00

I'd like to take a moment to thank better help for sponsoring this podcast. If you're a regular listener of this podcast, you know, I am a big proponent of therapy therapy provides me the best opportunity for verbal processing something that is so important for my kind of brain and my sense of self. What I love about BetterHelp is that it's not a crisis line, it's not self help. It is professional therapy that's done securely online from the comfort of your home, they assess your needs and match you with your own licensed professional therapist, and it's available for clients worldwide. So you get access to a broad range of expertise that might not be available to you locally. It also tends to be more affordable than traditional offline therapy and financial aid is available. If you visit their website and read their testimonials. There are actually quite a few reviews that specifically reference help with ADHD as a special offer for listeners of the women and ADHD podcast, you'll get 10% off your first month, simply sign up at [betterhelp.com/women ADHD](https://betterhelp.com/women-ADHD), that's BetterHelp h e l p.com/women. ADHD, and there's a link in the show notes. This podcast is sponsored by BetterHelp. That's something I talk about with my kids, especially to both of whom have been diagnosed with ADHD but and also anxiety. And we kind of talked about the sort of sensitivity, right, and that idea of, we talked about that I call it the too much newness factor, where we suddenly like, you know, I'll be reading an article about, you know, the homelessness in a city or something that's sad, but you No, relatively contained. And I will take that and then go from like zero to 150, and my emotions, because it'll just snowball out of control. For me, in terms of my emotions were one thing that feels out of


control and hopeless, will suddenly become like this huge thing where I start thinking about how much is out of control in life, and how the environment and politics and race and everything where I'm just like, it becomes the two, I get overwhelmed by the too much this factor, and how it's like, and I think that that has to do with like inability to filter information, right, which is something that we struggle with, with ADHD, which is like, everything sort of feels important. Everything feels urgent. The same thing happens when it comes to emotions, and just getting so overwhelmed by things. So I guess the you know, that comes back to this idea of like when you are sensitive, when you have sensitive wiring to begin with, like you said, everything feels traumatic parenthood feels traumatic baby crying feels traumatic, right? All of these experiences that we've had over the course of our life feels so much worse. And then again, it goes back to this idea of like, I didn't realize this wasn't a universal experience.

 JoJo Abdi 22:37

Yeah, knowing that this is not how everyone feels all the time. For me, like being extremely anxious by the news. Like I stopped watching the news. I love Twitter, because it's just like so much bad news. And so many terrible things happening. And it was it was making me feel hopeless and feel like the whole world is pressing on me in a very negative way. And the way that click Beatty, the way that the news comes, like breaking news, urgent matters, things getting worse here and there. All of that feels very urgent, we respond to it with a very urgent way. And so it was very triggering to just go through like, you know, January 6, for example, like the kind of brought back actual war memories for me. And is that my sensitive wiring? Or is that my trauma? Or does it even matter? At the end, if you're experiencing what you are experiencing? putting a label on, it becomes less important than dealing with actually what it is, you know, so I will have some times friends who would argue with me say, but I think it could be trauma. And I'm like, Well, you know that kids with ADHD are more susceptible to trauma because of how sensitive they are. But then how do you know which it is, you know? So all of these things.

 Katy Weber 23:57

And that's the other thing I feel like, you know, oftentimes when I get a psychologist or a psychiatrist on the podcast, where I'm like, Okay, let's get to the bottom of this, I want to find out what's in for all what this is. And then, you know, often I'll be met with like, doesn't really matter at the end of the day. These are the traits that we deal with his executive dysfunction, all of that stuff. Like that's the reality section of part of it, where I'm like, yeah, yeah, but, but I also I think it matters to me so much, because the label of ADHD was such a profound experience, right? It was so life changing to know that there was a name for this and that there was a reason behind this, right? The big why behind so many of these behaviors that confounded me so much in my life. So I'm like the label is important like and that's the thing that I feel like a lot of medical providers don't understand is how important it is to define this in a way that is meaningful to people. And not just be like, Oh, well, I guess I'm you know, I'm just can't get my act together. Anyway, that's a whole other side tangent.

 JoJo Abdi 24:59

Yeah. Yeah, I do. I do feel like, you know, for me having a label for it helped me understand my life much more like, and I understand better why big social gatherings bother me and drain me

I understand why. When I have when I like I have words like now burnout, you know, which usually we used to apply to like professionals who are grinding. But for us, we can easily be burned out. So when I, when I feel like I don't want to get up two days in a row, I start to examine what's going on. I'm like, Yeah, I feel like this situation, this matter is burning me out. So I kind of schedule my life in a way that prepares for me to have a day where I just physically can't move. And not feel shame or guilt about it before that. I would be like, Well, what's wrong with you? Why can't you get up and do things? Now it's like it's built in. So today's today is today's the day we just lay around and do nothing. And so an a take away the labels of lazy of like someone who's wasting our before before that used to be like I have such this so many opportunities that's not available to people who came from where I came from. And I'm wasting it. And that left me with a lot of survivor's guilt. And now I just would, kind of dealing with it in a way that's much gentler and much kinder, and not holding myself to standards that are impossible for even neurotypicals. And also have ADHD makes it difficult for a person to estimate how much time and energy things take. So we always like volunteer to do too much. And then we can't estimate like this will take this many man hours, it's impossible for me to think with my time blindness ever consider things happening and how many increments of time it will take how much energy it will take. So starting my mini ventures, it's really cute, like how we are like always infused with energy, and we just run off and start a thing. And we stay up till three in the morning, every day for weeks to end. And then we come up with this product and this business venture and all these things. But you know, we don't work like other people work, you know, we work in fits and starts. And so I have to adjust myself to catch one of when a fit is coming in just just kind of lay down and then want to start this company just grab onto it. Take advantage of that.



Katy Weber 27:30

I know right? Yeah. And to realize, and I think that's what's been so helpful to me too, which is that realizing how cyclical my energy is, so that when I am down, I can have grace with myself that that's a recharging moment, because I will have it come around again, where I will get into a crazy fit of hyper focus and, and then I can ride that wave and feel like it's contained in you know, in a way. So that was another thing when you were talking about like things that you can take care of yourself now like boundaries even right like boundaries. I always thought boundaries were around things you didn't like. But I also realized that boundaries are important around even things I do like because I get super excited about a lot of things. And sometimes I have to rein it in and have boundaries even around that because I can't get out of my own way sometimes. Yeah. Now I'm curious. So is your mother, is your mother in the US? Or is she back in Somalia?



JoJo Abdi 28:23


My mom and a lot of my siblings are in Michigan. So we're all came together?




Katy Weber 28:27

Oh, okay. She's here. Okay, I think because I was reading another one of your poems about your mother. And I was curious if she stayed here. So it's, that's another beautiful one, too. I'll put a link to put a link to it in the show notes too, because it's really sweet and very moving.

But I'm curious from her perspective, or even just, you know, the smiley perspective, what is the perspective on ADHD or even mental health? What did she think about this diagnosis,

 JoJo Abdi 28:54

there's not a good language to explain mental illness in our community, there's not positive language, it's usually symptoms. So a friend of mine and me we were doing a lot of work to D stigmatize medical mental health conditions and treat them like they are physical ailments. Like if you have diabetes, you're, you're not going to have a language surrounding it. That's very disrespectful to the person suffering from it. It's like very limited things I can discuss about that condition. But I was explaining a lot of the symptoms and she was kind of when I was filling out the paperwork. She was kind of filling in the stories of my early childhood years like how I used to lose all my pencils every time and it was so like, it was really hard to afford education for a kid you know, when we were back there. So she would always I would lose my pencils, my books, everything. But she also recognizes how like I'm more creative and more outgoing than my siblings and how I like quick to handle problems for her. She experiences me in my in a holistic way. And now I just like focusing on on like the individual negative things, which she finds just as annoying as I do. But she also recognizes like, I'm super creative. And I'm always like, the problem solver in the family. But her favorite this symptom for me when I was talking to what do you like most about me, she said, you forget so easily you can even hold grudges. And that will be true, like, I will leave the room mad at somebody and then come back 20 minutes later, because I was looking for something. And I'm like asking them, Hey, where's that thing. So, the word for it, it's not even doesn't even exist. But there's a word for like to describe like being for that, which means being light. And it's it's a negative connotation for like being even as a female being a loose woman or something like that. So that that works, though, definitely needs to be done. But I feel like the Somali lifestyle is set up for ADHD persons really well, because of, you know, the timing, there's no strictness about time, everything happens between the different prayers, like the five prayers, so there'll be like, let's meet between the horror inertia, or between mockery Benatia or something like that. And there's like four or five hours in between. So if you come later than the, nobody's going to hold a grudge against you. And also like, being a person with ADHD, having a problem sleeping at night, or staying up way too late, that's fine. Because there's the siesta in the middle of the day, between one, one to three, nothing happens so you can catch up on your NAP hours. And my friends and I we really discuss this, what the lifestyle back home is like, much more relaxed. And not much more like the like you have to do this be driven, and be constantly attached to a job that starts at a specific hour. So things being more fluid, we always talk about how easier it would be to live there with our conditions. It's like geared towards the Add mind, you know?

 Katy Weber 32:03

No, that makes total sense, right? And I feel like, you know, when we talk about is this a disorder even, you know, because it's so so pathologized. And it's like, really, it's just a matter of being in certain environments that are either helpful, or you're in environments that are hostile. And so a classroom is often a hostile environment for children. And so especially ADHD children are, like you said, like we you know, I feel like I have that conversation a lot about this, this capitalist Protestant work ethic. And this is the drive and the drive. And that, you know, sitting at a desk from nine to five, like all of these ways in which environments can be super unhelpful to an ADHD brain. But yeah, if you're in an environment where it's totally geared

toward, you know, you moving at your own pace and following your cyclical energy, and you know, being having a more laid back mindset around kind of who you are, then yeah, wouldn't even feel like a disorder. Why would it?

J

JoJo Abdi 32:59

Yeah, yeah. You know, how they also say that the farmers versus the hunters Somali lifestyle is more geared to like, animal herding kind of culture. So it's always being on the move, moving from one place to another animal. That's the old lifestyle. So when we moved into cities, we also have this more relaxed way of the shop would open in a few hours, you know, there's no specific hours on the door, you know, and you just wait around, and you just like, things happen when they happen. And you're right, the environment, meaning everything, because for me, when I lived with my family, I never thought I had issues with ADD. It's just only when I relocated to Minnesota, and started running a household did I realize, hey, like, like, my family really helped me like, for example, I was driving a whole entire year with expires, expired license tags, and my mom every year used to remind me to renew my tags. And also keep an eye on my insurance. And, and the issues about struggling to do laundry. I never used to do laundry. I used to always sneak a few things with my sisters here. And then another one would do laundry. So I was sneaking a few things with her. And over time, they just kind of accepted and did my laundry for me. And I did the things I liked, like I loved cooking. So I did all the cooking. I hated dishes, so my sisters did the dishes. So it was sort of like that collaborative and environment was much more helpful to my ADD. And also my mom keeping track of all my paperwork. Like, as soon as I lived here for one year, I lost all my legal documentation. Every one of them, like my passport, my resettlement paperwork, everything like I did not exist. You know, it's all erased, which was extremely anxiety provoking when you know, there was all those Islamophobic talks. I was like, Well, I can't even prove up legal now. And it's because like My mom kept track of all those papers for me. So yeah, it was just so difficult just, and that's what took me to this diagnosis is that I was like, Wow, I'm struggling more than usual. And I don't think everyone goes through this that they always forget to do things, or lose track of things. Yeah, but what,



Katy Weber 35:19

but at the same time you were able to recognize that, like, it takes a village, right. Like, there's certain things that other family members are good at. And there's certain things that you're good at. And together, you make a hole. And it's a wonderful kind of copacetic relationship. And I think sometimes, especially as women because of how we're socialized, I think so many times we feel like we have to be good at all the things. And then if we're not able to do certain things, rather than ask for help, we just get down on ourselves, because we can't figure out how to be good at everything.

J

JoJo Abdi 35:48

Absolutely, yeah, that that's why women suffer in silence. Men are good at being themselves in every situation. So if, if they want to stem, they will stem if they want to be loud, they will if they're impulsive, they will. But for us, we just suppress ourselves so much, that we reach a point where we don't know what we're feeling, because we just kind of mask our emotions, so

much to just appear, as others expect us to. And that pressure can just really drag someone down, which is why a lot of women in their 30s and 40s discover that they have this condition because because it becomes too much to contain all of that for that minute for those many decades.



Katy Weber 36:29

Right? Well, I think it also is about obedience to like my other theory is that the reason why women are more likely to get diagnosed well into adulthood is because we're just tired of being obedient. Like I'm done. Right. And so that's what I always come back to that where I'm like, is this ADHD? Or am I just an angry, feminist? Tired?



JoJo Abdi 36:50

You had enough of that? Yeah, it could be that too. I felt like I feel in my 30s, I feel more comfortable speaking my needs than I did in my 20s. My 20s was just hitting all the targets that are supposed to be finished school this year, which took me by the way, it took me nearly 10 years to finish my undergrad I dropped out twice. And all of those are silently struggling. And when I graduated, I left with enough credits that I could actually have two degrees. I think for me, part of the big part is just grieving. The picture I had for myself, because I always was reading self help books, like I read over 13 self help books through just this time, I will nail it down, I will stick to a schedule or focus, have a good life, I will do this and it will last for two weeks. So I was reading all those books about the brain. And neuroplasticity because I was like this thing I'm gonna conquer. So I, so I was just always pushing myself hard and hard. And so when I got diagnosed, I felt sad because I'm like, That person you were trying to reach or you felt it was possible to become, it's not possible. So it was sort of also grieving all the dreams because you know, the problem with ADHD is not an inattention. It's just aiming your attention at what you want, when you want you know, we have plenty of attention, which is cannot for the life of us focus when we need to. And so just always like struggling with that and just knowing that it was never possible no matter how many books you read. And also like, when I reflected back all my art was speaking about my ADHD like imposter was speaking about my ADHD and even my graduate thesis. We did a craft Talk where we teach for summer we teach writing skill. So I was teaching about how to carve time for to write how to be consistent with your writing schedule. And so I had this craft or call, how to capture an elusive beast and the elusive beast I was talking about was definitely attention. So it was like hindsight. 2020 Why didn't someone stopped me said Hey, girl, go get you a diagnosis. Oh,



Katy Weber 39:13

I know, tell me about I used to work with binge eating recovery. And I you know, I often feel like I should go back and contact all of my coaching clients and tell them like, you know, guess what, we all have ADHD. When I was diagnosed with ADHD, it completely turned my world upside down. I looked back at so much of my life, my grades in school, my multiple careers and hobbies, my friendships, my marriage, motherhood, my relationship with food and my body like all of this with a new lens. And it was overwhelming to say the least. If you've been diagnosed with ADHD and you're feeling blown away by this new insight into your brain and how it operates. I totally understand I can help You begin to sort through this chaos, explore who you

are and how your brain operates. So you can finally start to lean into your strengths and begin to use them to your advantage moving forward. Together, we can work to identify what obstacles you've been facing, and create strategies to help you start living a more fulfilling, gratifying life, head over to [women in adhd.com/coaching](https://www.adhd.com/coaching), to book a 30 minute initial consult with me, so we can figure out if my brand of one on one coaching is right for you. Again, that's women and [adhd.com/coaching](https://www.adhd.com/coaching). And you can find that link in the episode show notes. Now, as a professor, as a teacher, are you do you see that same thing? Are you able to recognize it in your students who might not be outwardly struggling? Do you see? Do you feel like you kind of armchair diagnose some of the young people in your classes?

J

JoJo Abdi 40:47

Yeah, I do see when someone is like, kind of eyes glaze not paying attention. So I'm like, Are they just tired? Or is it add like daydreaming? So I always think like that, but I arrange my teachers. So it becomes friendly to people with ADHD, and autism and all these other issues. And I'm always trying to tell my students because they will do like, oh my god, Professor Abdi, I miss this. And they would have a 20, like a long paragraphs of excuses. And I just say, you don't need to explain anything to me, take care of you, and just get back on track when you can. So just providing that space that's free of guilt. And shame is very important to me as an educator, which is what I didn't have I used to I had a teacher once tell me, and and when I was taking composition, in college, my first composition class, he said, I think you should drop out of college and pursue a vocation because higher education is just not for you. And this was the person who was like, teaching me how to write, write. And many years later, when I graduated, you know what, I really wanted to write my aggressive, like an fu letter as an indication to him. Because I'm like, when I listen, like my Somali stubbornness was like, you don't know a thing about me, for you to decide that for me. But when I listen, I would have had a totally different life.



Katy Weber 42:17

Right? Oh, yeah, seriously. Oh, that reminds me. So what would you do? You've talked a little bit about the creativity element, too. But what are some of the things you love about your ADHD? I like that, I would say Somali stubbornness goes under there. I call myself oppositional. That's what I like to say.

J

JoJo Abdi 42:34

Yeah, I love that. There's always there's no shortage of ideas. With add, it's like I wish, you know, would be the perfect job. For me. It's a job where I think, creative solutions to problems. And then I move on to the next project. So it's like project management, but for coming up with business ideas, so I'll help I'll come in I'll construct your business from beginning to end because I'll be really energized and excited about it. And then I'll move on to the next. But yeah, for me, it's like I feel like when I was first being treated, like I tried a lot of medication. And the like Strattera was one of the medication I tried and Strattera stopped my like my thoughts from going off all the time. It really calmed me down. But guess what I realized that I could not write a single poem is suppressed. My creativity.



Katy Weber 43:25

Yeah, a lot of artists to sort of go off their meds when it's time for them to really kind of tap into that creative energy. Yeah,



JoJo Abdi 43:33

yeah, so like, I'm like, no more Strattera. For me. It just like I don't want anything like, like, it really helped with my impulsive talk, you know, or just always say things offhand. But it was definitely like, I would spend hours and hours editing the same sentence. And so any drug either just made me feel very frustrated. So now I'm off stimulants, I'm just taking guanfacine which is sort of, like quiet down sort of the what it does that I my provider didn't even expect was that it really helps with the with the rejection sensitivity, dysphoria, you know? And I don't know why, if it's just me believing that's what it's doing. But yeah, I feel less sensitive to people's comment with guanfacine.



Katy Weber 44:22

It's funny, I was just at a lecture talking about guanfacine as as working with rejection sensitive dysphoria and I am not a medical professional by any means. But like, it makes sense to me because I know guanfacine is being prescribed more and more to women because of the racing thoughts and the you know, like having some sleep issues especially if you struggle with like waking up at the middle of the night. guanfacine can really help with just keeping that keeping the like the two muchness at bay right? And I think rejection sensitive dysphoria also has that where you sort of go from zero to 100 with that ng social anxiety of like, oh my goodness, they're not getting back to me. Did I do something to offend them or all of that you A lot of that comes from the catastrophizing and the racing thoughts and the constantly ruminating about things. So it makes sense that that a medication like guanfacine would, would help with that. So yeah, interesting.




JoJo Abdi 45:11


Yeah. So yeah, like, yeah, I love add for the creativity, I feel like it informs a lot of who I am as an also what I like is being able to be have empathy, like, always know what's going on, like, read the room, how people are feeling, be sensitive to that, you know, and just, just always, like, I feel like my ethics come from the fact that I'm sensitive, like, I don't want to feel this way. So I'm never gonna cause other people to feel bad or cause situate put them in situations where they will suffer emotionally because of situation I created. So I feel like I am nicer person. Because of that. Yeah.





Katy Weber 45:54


Yeah, that's so true. I feel that way too. I feel that way with my kids especially they are have like an abundance of empathy. I'm almost like trying to get them to get a bit of a thicker skin as they get older. How old are your kids? So you're they're teenagers?


 JoJo Abdi 46:09
I do not have kids. Oh,

 Katy Weber 46:10
you don't have kids? Okay. I thought I read that you had a daughter, but maybe it was it was the metaphorical in one of your poems. Yes.

 JoJo Abdi 46:20
I write a lot of poetry to my future children. Oh, that's beautiful. Yeah.

 Katy Weber 46:27
Now, now, if I love to ask if you could call ADHD something else would you? Would you rename it?

 JoJo Abdi 46:34
Oh, you know, there's this talk about Dr. Ned Halliwell and others, about calling it vast, vast variable attention. What was it stimulus? Stimulus trait? Which I feel like, you know, first, it takes out the disorder out of there. Yeah, for sure. It can be a disabling thing for people if it's not managed well, or if they go through trauma. So yeah, it can be a disorder for someone, but it's not for everyone. And also the fact that it talks about it being variable, like our attention is variable, you know, so what I can focus today on something and tomorrow, not give a crap about it. And so just have an understanding that part of it really helps me. So that I feel like that would be like a good name for it, and a less stigmatizing name for it. Right?

 Katy Weber 47:31
I almost sometimes I feel like we should come up with two separate names. One, that's a name for the brain, which a lot of us use the term neuro divergent, right? And which is this idea that there's like a name for the kind of brain or the sensitive wiring are highly you know, that there's a way to refer to the brain, and how you think in one way that's not stigmatizing. But then on the other hand, there is the disorder element, which is if left untreated, or if you're in an in a hostile environment, or, you know, if it's not managed or not, you know, respected, then it turns into these. Yeah, what I love to call it right, troublesome troublemaker where it's like you're a troublemaker,

 JoJo Abdi 48:14
but you're just extremely eager. Right?



Katy Weber 48:16

But you can see how with your teacher calling you a troublemaker, your mother's reaction was, oh, no, how do we stop this? How do we, you know, how do we get Georgia to behave? Right? So it's like, it starts this cycle of pulling yourself back and trying to conform and trying to not be who you are, because who you are, is somehow inadvertently offensive to people. And it's like, I don't even have the time or energy to figure out what I did that offended you. But I'm just gonna try to not do that again. Right. And so then it becomes all of this behavior management, where you didn't even really need to behavior management. You know, you really didn't even need it in the first place. Yeah, yeah. Anyway, I'm like getting like something you never hear like talking so fast. I can't even get the words



JoJo Abdi 48:57

out. I know that feeling. Because I did have experience with with teachers who actually embraced my and actually directorate to add another source, they would like to do the side project, and I'll be so busy that I will not, you know, and it depends on how the teachers deal with me. Because I was so close in Asia with my sister. I went to school with her and teachers will always compare like, she's calm, she gets homework done on time. She's really neat handwriting. You know, and then there was me, and I knew from early on, like how adults experience me was not good. When I was younger, and I didn't know better i i knew better I fought against that. But then later I just kind of like kind of went along as suppressed. And then even later on I just kind of completely exited the classroom like I was like, building characters in my head. I was daydreaming I was gone for like And then like my school was suffering, my education was really bad. And what really saved me was in high school, I was almost failing every class. And my high school counselor was like here, she put me in, in a program that's used by migrant children of migrant farmworkers. Because it was self study, because I was always distracted by other students, like someone would be twirling their pencil or playing with their hair. And that will take away me away for like, 20 minutes. So when she put me in this, I was self studying. Like, I'll get like a few booklets, I will go home with them, I'll fill them out, I'll study I'll read the books, I'll return them. And I'll sit in a room somewhere, take a quiz. And you wouldn't believe it. I had like A's and B's like the highest grade and I was like, way ahead when I could do self study, when I wasn't being distracted by other students like I was thriving.



Katy Weber 50:54

Right? It's just amazing if you just take a little bit of attention from the teacher in terms of like, what does this child need? Right? And and then you know, and think about now you as a teacher, how that one student who you know, missed a deadline or something and find came to you with all of this shame and guilt and sadness, you were able to like destigmatize that and to be an accepting voice in her life. What a change that makes.



JoJo Abdi 51:22

Yeah. So we just need to have a movement of locking our students holistically, looking at their homes. they're coming from the social situations that coming from. like what they're dealing

with in their personal lives, and then then see their life, their education through that lens. If they're struggling, identify them early, and then refer them to tutoring and other resources as much as you can do.



Katy Weber 51:48

Here here. I agree. I'm listening to that book. Laziness does not exist by Dr. David Price right now. So good. But he you know, talks about that idea of the fact that, like, the people who are struggling are the least lazy among us, right? They are the ones who are working, you know, extra jobs and doing all of these, you know, I love how you said their backpack is heavier. That's so true. Oh, my goodness. Well, thank you so much Jojo. It's wonderful, too. I loved getting interviewed. You hear your story. Now? Is there a way we can share some of your poetry? Do you have a website? Or how can people find out more about you?



JoJo Abdi 52:27

I have couple of manuscripts that I've been trying to publish. So I'm looking for publishers. So the ones that are published, you can find them in a link tree that's on my, on my Instagram. So it's miss if you find it through the handle of Miss Jojo, AB with MZ Jojo, and then AB. So click on that link tree will take you to my secret blog, and also a few of my published poems. So yeah, I'm trying to find a book agent and find ways to publish my poetry and also got a couple of novels that have



Katy Weber 53:04

blue Perfect. Okay, well, I'll definitely put a link to that in the episode show notes, too. All right. Well, thank you so much. This has just been absolutely wonderful. I really appreciated your perspective.



JoJo Abdi 53:15

Thank you for having me. And thank you for having this space with all of us can chime in our stories so somebody can say the to have been through that. And I just want to tell the ladies when the center just yeah, just know that you're not alone. And we'll all go through it together.



Katy Weber 53:35

Beautifully said thank you, Jojo. And there you have it. Thank you for listening. And I really hope you enjoyed this episode of the women and ADHD podcast. Also, you know, we ADHD ears crave feedback. And I would really appreciate hearing from you the listener. If you're a fan of the podcast, please take a moment to leave me a review on Apple podcasts or audible. And if that feels like too much, and I get it, then just take a few seconds right now to give me a five star rating, or share this episode on your own social media to help reach more women who maybe have yet to discover and lean into this gift of neuro divergence assy, and they may still be struggling and don't even know why. And if you'd like to find out more about me and my one

on one coaching for women with ADHD, head over to [women and adhd.com/coaching](https://www.womenandadhd.com/coaching) and you can always find that link in the show notes. I'll see you next week when I interview another amazing woman who discovered that she is not lazy or crazy or broken. But she has ADHD and she is now on the path to understanding her neurodiversity and finally using this gift to her advantage. Take care till then