

JCSCORE

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JUST A UNICORN

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Just a Unicorn

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Kat J. Stephens is a higher education Ph.D. student at University of Massachusetts Amherst. She's earned a Master of Education from Teachers College, Columbia University, in Higher & Postsecondary Education. Her larger research interests are social justice & identity development. As an Afro-Guyanese immigrant, her research interests reflects: Caribbean students, Afro-Caribbean racial identity formation, transnationalism, Black women students with ADHD & Autism, & gifted community college & transfer students. Her work here is inspired by her life and those of other Black women & girls in educational spaces. This poem serves to highlight her frustrations, while encouraging Black women to take space in disability centered environments, and universities to *adequately* support such individuals.

Just another Model Immigrant

Dem: Yuh mek yuhself dotish or wah?

Mi: But

Dem: Yuh nuh ave' no dis-ah-bil-uhTEE

Mi: But

Dem: *suck teeth*

Dem: Yuh too smart for alluh dat

Just another Misunderstood Gem

Reading at Two

Gifted Programs

Skipping Grades

Honor Societies

Gifted kid gone rogue

Wasted Potential

Bored in the classroom

Almost failed out of high school

Gifted college dropout

Just another Monday

My brain pains me
Thick, translucent fog
Cradling then choking with overwhelm
Professor's words, I cannot follow
Fog from my shoulders to my eyeballs,
Brows furrowed more deeply with each directionless thought
Is this real?
Left tilted head; hearing words and sounds that mean nothing
Right tilted head; open stance begging and inviting focus to select me
30, 40, 50, Minutes into class and my brain finally gets in formation
Blue stained fingertips, Adder*ll dust visible
Finally note-taking with intention
Flick of the wrist-dance, nails tap dancing on my keyboard
Just in time for the wind-down of class
A jumbled race of questions, thoughts, points of clarity and eagerness
My supernaturally molasses brain is now quickened quicksand
Emotions on a thousand, contained to my body, chained to this seat

Just another Tuesday

Mistake number seventy-five
Deleted another final paper
Three minutes to eleven fifty-nine's deadline
Obsessively reminding my mind to not forget
Only for anxiety and adrenaline to quarrel it out
Sweat bridling down my left temple
Heart racing, making Timbaland-like beats
Yet another begging email being composed
"Dear Dr." insert [Whiteness] here
"Would you please grant" insert [Black] here
"Me an extension" insert [Woman] here
"I do apologize" insert [First-Generation] here
"For the inconvenience" insert [Immigrant] here

Just another life

What I would give to be typical [neuro]
Somebody's embodiment of diversity [neuro]
Living as a Black woman with ADHD
Learning as a Black woman with ADHD
Zipping through elementary and middle school
Honors student throughout
Around grade nine, I was just & barely fine
Dipping from honors & AP to gym for a GPA boost
Secondary school life without a diagnosis

Just another Life

Passing high school one point above its minimum
Never did the homework, barely did the readings
Found the most in class, to say
Teachers perplexed day by day
“So much potential” they’d say
School carried the pain of a thousand papercuts
I was bored anyway,
And learning did me nothin’ [but harm]
College was a repetitive rubber stamp
Except I didn’t *have* to go to class
So... you could guess I didn’t

Just another Urban Fairytale

My school was poor
My hood far too Black & Brown
My boredom meant I walked away
There was nothing nobody could say
I loved to learn; I hated school, so
Dropping out saved my life
Because when I finally re-enrolled
It was me and this journey
Public community college
To elite liberal arts
To the Ivy League
To a fully funded doctorate
Riddled with imposter syndrome
Familiarity in reading, writing
Forgetfulness along the way
Amplified by fear and tears

Just another differently abled student

Would they realize
They made a mistake
By admitting me?

When fortitude
Resourcefulness, and creativity aren’t enough
This professional student felt d*mb, inc*pable, sl*w
Internalized ableist language and feelings
Reflected upon myself
My ADHD symptoms internalized as personal defects

Just another Ableist University System

I'm working twice as hard
In neurotypical university spaces
That lack universal design
Pretending not to see us outside of disability office spaces
Where we need supportive accommodations
OH! the anger, the loss, the relief
That came to me in doctoral studies
And FINALLY, a doctor said
"I think it could be ADHD"
I cried tears that were thick and hot
At my big age,
Decades spinning in barely functioning schoolhouses
Where different means push out
Where different means jailhouse
Because I lived my whole life afraid
Internalizing my neuro-diverse self
As a br*ken, no-good, intellectually inferi*r
Forgetful, careless, dimw*t self

Meanwhile the involuntary hacks
Built in the recesses of my brain???
Routines for survival...
Helped me to thrive, so...
Despite
Failing and falling through the cracks
And no one ever investigating
I'm having to relearn again
Reading and writing, and being skills

Just another Invisible Disability

New vocabulary like
Executive functioning and
Comorbid and
Rejection Sensitivity and
Time-Blindness and
Motivation-less and
Adder*ll and
Cognitive Distortions and
Inattentive and
Emotional Dysregulation and
Working Memory and
Hyperactivity and

It's so much more than
I lost my keys
Or
I forget a lot
It's an invisible game
And I am the Jenga

Just another Realization

ADHD is the validation of my life
Before I was diagnosed
I owned w*ird, or brok*n, or *dd
But rather; I was invisible and ignored
Like many score before
Black girls in urban/poor/any/all schools
In the educational jungle
An educational ecosystem
With barely enough staff or resources
Become Black girls in liberal arts colleges
Referred to inaccessible private practice
For expensive testing
That didn't take Medicaid
Become Black girls in the Ivy League
Willing themselves to perform excellence
Because the ancestors...

Just a Unicorn

Become Black girls in Ph.D. programs
Finally learning how they learn
Even when it feels too hard
Even when the stigmas are real
Even when good island gyals don't...
Ask. For. Help.
Get. Diagnosed.
Take. Medication.
Use. Accommodations.
Write. About. It. Publicly.
Look for the healing in the message.