Kelly Bron Johnson (00:00):

Welcome to episode nine of the intersections on the spectrum podcast. The intersections on the spectrum podcast is the brainchild of Doug Blecher and Kelly Bron Johnson created to discuss intersectional issues within the autistic community and give visibility to commonly marginalized, repressed, underrepresented, or erased identities and issues. We aim to introduce you to the people and the stories you didn't know about, but needed to hear and hope that by seeing yourself represented in the community, allows you to feel seen

Doug Blecher (00:32):

Our guest today is Asiatu Lawoyin is an empowerment coach writer and podcaster. Thanks so much for joining us today.

Asiatu Lawoyin (00:44):

Thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

Doug Blecher (00:46):

We usually Start these, uh, episodes by, learning about your identities. So what would you say are the identities that would describe you?

Asiatu Lawoyin (00:58):

Yeah, so many, I would say queer, autistic, afab, a gender black person. I would say that that pretty much sums me up on.

Kelly Bron Johnson (01:13):

On your website. You mentioned growing up, living in predominantly white areas, but working with you pressed, it became clear that you wanted to also educate the privilege so that true equity can be reached. You want it to dismantle systems. So on both sides, working with the marginalized and advantaged. Can you talk about the system from both sides that you think is essential to be dismantled?

Asiatu Lawoyin (01:37):

I feel like when it comes to race, pretty much the main oppressive system is white supremacy being the standard and the dominance oppressive system. So when I said I wanted to work from both sides, I work with the marginalized to feel empowered and to find healing and support and resources as well as coping realistic coping techniques.

Asiatu Lawoyin (02:04):

And then from the opposite side, on the privileged side, I work with people to help them become an authentic ally, not just a performative ally, not just superficial, but to really understand the perspective and experiences of those that are oppressed so that they can connect on a level in which they can not only have a better understanding, but also be active and helping and supporting, you know, marginalized communities.

Kelly Bron Johnson (02:40):

That's a good point though, about people can only help when they know how to help correctly. I guess you could say yes or I think that's a big question. People always want to know, well, how can I help?

How can I help? And sometimes I think some of the smallest things that they don't realize are actually the most helpful.

Asiatu Lawoyin (02:56):

Agreed.

Doug Blecher (02:57):

You mentioned being an authentic ally. What are some ways you feel like people can be truly authentic ?

Asiatu Lawoyin (03:04):

First to do it for the right reasons, Not for outside validations, Um, not for an ego stroke and not because they don't want to be perceived as quote unquote the bad person, but to come from a space where you're open and willing to learn, which includes being able to be held accountable as well as empathizing with different perspective and experiences in which you don't share. So I think the first step to that is just listening and authentically listening, not listening to become defensive, not listening to, you know, try to invalidate or derail the conversation, but sit in that discomfort of accountability, knowing that you have to go through it to get to the other side, which is to fully understand where other people are coming from and to authentically help. So I think that connecting on that, you know, emotional empathic level is the first step, but doing it for the right reasons, for sure.

Doug Blecher (04:10):

Now words definitely can mean different things to different people. So you are an empowerment coach. So what, what does empowerment mean to?

Asiatu Lawoyin (04:20):

U ltimately at the roots, it's helping people be comfortable with who they are and comfortable in all aspects of who they are and the intersections, the many intersections of who we all are because we are all multifaceted and multilayered. So I help people work through basically their blocks within themselves that prevents them from seeing the totality of all that they are, and then feeling comfortable enough and proud to be all that that entails. And hopefully the next step would be to then not only empower them, but help them to facilitate empowerment of others. So to pay it forward.

Kelly Bron Johnson (05:02):

You just answered my next question. So I'll go to the other one, the next one. Um, oh, this is a biggie. Okay. So we, we know that there are certainly racism and gender bias in the medical field as a result, many women go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed when it comes to being neurodivergent, there needs to be much more support for neurodivergent people of color, especially women. And do you have suggestions on how to best support neurodivergent woman of color?

Asiatu Lawoyin (05:36):

I'll go back to what I said previously. I think the first I won't say it's easy. The simplest and first step should be just listened to black women. Just honestly allow us the space to express our personal experiences without having, you know, defend ourselves without having to be invalidated. And with

people actually wanting to support and to, to listen, I personally identify as agender, but growing up afab, I think that played a huge role in me being a late diagnosed autistic.

Asiatu Lawoyin (06:16):

I wasn't diagnosed until last year the age of 41. So I think that the intersectionality of not only my race, but also, you know, my gender or gender presentation at the time is what, you know, delayed that reality because I was diagnosed with other neurodivergence at puberty. So I was diagnosed with ADHD, depression, anxiety, auditory processing disorder, and some other learning disabilities, but nobody suspected autism and it was never brought up. And the only reason why I even have a diagnosis because I self-diagnosed. And then, um, I was hesitant to actually go back to the medical field because I was so invalidated going to different therapists growing up that I just, it just left a bad taste in my mouth. And I believe that the system itself is so oppressive and their education of therapists, which is very racist and abelist.

Asiatu Lawoyin (07:20):

So I was very hesitant honestly, to get a medical diagnosis until I found a therapist who they themselves are autistic and black. And so that's when I was like, okay, well, I, I think I'll have, um, you know, at least a ground to stand on, you know, to stand on to, to get a diagnosis. If it's someone who's has shared experiences, you know, of existing in this world's being autistic and black. Yeah. Just finding, finding them was the only reason why I got a medical diagnosis and I'm glad I did because nowI have one and it's just very validating and I'm able to help people even more.

Kelly Bron Johnson (07:59):

You know, representation matters so much. Yes. I just got matched with a black woman counselor last year and it's everything. I didn't know that I needed, you know, all this time. I never had one.

Kelly Bron Johnson (08:16):

Like then I thoughtI've, you know, I've never had a black woman therapist and it's going so well. It's the most amazing thing it's, it's life-changing so that's, you know, that's also important for all aspects of the medical field, not just when it comes to counseling or psychiatry or anything like that. Um, but you touched on something too, you know, where it seems that so many women especially are misdiagnosed and we're often misdiagnosed with similar things rather than autism. So often be ADHD or they'll diagnosis with bipolar. I, I see that most of the time or borderline personality disorder. Anything else except for autism and I'm sorry, I'm like, I'm just wanting to understand, because one it's it's harmful, right. And we know the stigmas against all of these different conditions in the first place, but, and then people are getting also medicated they're recommended different medications for a condition that they might not have.

Kelly Bron Johnson (09:15):

And most likely don't, it's just interesting how it's like, they'll find any other possible excuse or diagnosis kind of thing, rather than just autism.

Asiatu Lawoyin (09:26):

I completely agree and dealing with my clients and just the autism community, like you said, the misdiagnosis is, is rampant. Uh, and I think there's two things that are, that are coming into play specifically as it pertains to autism is one, because it was rooted in basically traits for white boys and

white men. So a lot of the characteristics aren't even, you know, they manifest differently obviously in women and people of color. And that's not to say that it's necessarily a biological difference, but just because of how we're socialized. So I definitely feel that, you know, socialization obviously plays a key role into everything, but specifically that in that, you know, the traits manifest differently. So in boys, it's usually more quote, unquote obvious or they're have different manifestations, whereas girls, we mask better and because pretty much have to, we're pretty much forced in a, in a world, in a society where so much of our value is based on our interaction and connection to others.

Asiatu Lawoyin (10:32):

And, uh, we're also hold held more accountable than men. So it just, it looks different. Like the reason why I went down this journey is because I read a post from autistic goggles, um, on Facebook and it was specifically traits of autism representation in women. And I think there were like 13 traits listed and I matched all 13. And then I was just like, wow, like, I can't believe like literally just reading that started me down that path. And this was last may. And so this there's so much misinformation and it's based. And even in, in, in entertainment, you don't really see you pretty much just see white boys or white men, right. Within, you know, entertainment who are autistic. And so people's and it just reinforces people's perceptions of what autism looks like. So of course, when someone is a woman and, or of color or both, they, you know, the first response usually is, oh, well, you don't look autistic or you don't seem autistic or you can socialize.

Asiatu Lawoyin (11:39):

So you, how can you be artistic autistic or, you know, you're not like a super science savant. So like, you know, that's the only representation that they know. And so it just, it feeds into the cycle. Also the medical field is just so blatantly ablest and racist. It's like pretty much any other system within society. So I'm glad that you found a black and I found a black, you know, therapists that are good, but I've also had really bad experiences with black therapists because the ableism was just so rampant and that's how they were taught. It is not even a matter of, you know, necessarily them obviously intentionally or consciously being that way. But a lot of what they were taught was just wrong. And so, you know, it's just invalidating because I also feel like within the medical field, there's a sense of like, it's very European and Western mentality in the sense of like, there's a hierarchy of the therapist versus the client.

Asiatu Lawoyin (12:35):

And so the therapist is the one with all the knowledge and, you know, God forbid you as a client or a disagree or, you know, don't agree with their perception of you. It's not usually taken very well. And as someone who's autistic and very self-aware, I was just like, yeah, no, that's not, you know, your assessment isn't accurate. And because I was a child, you know, and a black one at that, I didn't know any better, or I didn't have enough life experience or whatever, excuse that they gave what I was always right. Like, because it's me and I know me better than anybody, but I'm also very self-aware and I see connections and patterns clearly that many others don't. So yeah. therapists tended not to really like me very much.

Kelly Bron Johnson (13:22):

That's where the culture comes in, where, you know, when you have somebody who's culturally appropriate, um, or relevant to you, you know, like my black therapist speaks to me in a way that no other therapist has spoken to me. And she even said, it feels like mental, I'm talking to you like this, but she's like, I wouldn't say this to somebody else, you know, because yeah, because I it's you and it's okay.

Um, and that works, that approach works for me too. I don't, you know, I, I, sometimes I need to be spoken to in a certain way, but yeah. Um, what was I also gonna say, you know, just when we talk about the ableism in the medical field, there's a few things that you touched on. I actually did post on these recently. One was about soap dispensers, not seeing hands that are dark because they're tested on white people. And I know it explained so much for me because I'm like, why does the sink not turn on for me? How come the soap doesn't come out for me, I'm waving my hand and nothing happened. And that's one of the things, and that's, you know, that's not a life-threatening thing, but when it comes to things like oximeters and things like that for white skin, all the rashes and skin issues, they're all made on white skin. The pictures that they're taught are on white skin, and they're not recognizing issues on black people.

Kelly Bron Johnson (14:37):

But the other thing you were saying too, you know, about, um, you know, a lot of what I do, I find that I'm trying to break those stereotypes because I've, I've, I've showed up at conferences if they haven't seen it before. And they don't know who I am, I show up at conferences. And they're like, oh, I thought I was expecting somebody with red hair. Cause your name's Kelly, Kelly Johnson, like that would be, you know, an Irish name, Irish man. And I'm like, yeah, well, it came from Irish slaves for sure that went to Barbados and were brought there, not by anybody's free will, but you know, um, you know, I kind of liked that idea of going in and kind of blowing their minds, you know, from everything that they expect. So, um, I got a bit of a rush out of that. I would like it to stop, but it is fun to kind of see their brains explode when they go. And they're like, this, this woman is she's autistic and she's black and she's talking to us. I don't understand. That's fine.

Asiatu Lawoyin (15:33):

Asiatu since your discovery, your diagnosis, have there been some things that have been helpful to you? Like what have been some things have been most helpful?

Asiatu Lawoyin (15:45):

Uh, the biggest thing is giving myself grace. Like I, my self perception completely shifted from, you know, always struggling and comparing myself to neurotypicals and why haven't I achieved the same things as you know, those within my age group or for whatever reason. And it shifted from that to, wow, there's, I've accomplished so much not having this, had this diagnosis nor the support that I needed throughout my lifetime. So I was able to give myself so much more grace, so much more support, and it has also helped me connect, you know, to different behaviors and struggles that I can now say, you know, it's, it's my autism and it's okay, because it's just a part of who I am and that doesn't make me any less valuable or capable or whatever the case is. So I would say that has been one of the things, the other major thing that's helped me is just finding a community that understands me.

Asiatu Lawoyin (16:52):

So for so long, which is this classic, you know, autistic, I felt like the outsider or the alien or that nobody understood me constantly being invalidated and misperceived. And I thought it was me and there was something wrong with me and having a whole community say, no, it's not you it's the world. And I'm like, oh, okay. And then having the support of just people that literally for the first time in my life, there are people out there that understand how I think, understand how I perceive things, understand me that I don't have to mask that I don't have to change my wording. That I don't have to worry about being

misperceived or, you know, stereotyped as, you know, weird or, you know, like being overwhelming or too sensitive. And, you know, the list goes on with the classic, you know, autistic comments that we get.

Asiatu Lawoyin (17:48):

So yeah, those two things, just grace and a community has helped me immensely and as helps me to just pretty much live my life on my own terms and to help others on a whole level, another level, which I'm just really happy about and connection and just connecting to other people there, you know, read my posts and they're just like, oh my gosh, I've never, I've always felt that way, but I didn't know there was someone else out there who felt that way. And I was like, oh, there's so many of us welcome. Like you have no idea. So yeah, it's just, it's beautiful to see other people feel validated as well. So yeah, that's also helped.

Doug Blecher (18:28):

Now you mentioned earlier that you are a podcaster and you are the co-host of the audacious autistics podcast for those listening that may not be aware of your podcast. What can they expect once they start to listen?

Asiatu Lawoyin (18:43):

thank you, everything autistic. So for me, autism, my autism pretty much include my neurodivergence, but it also includes my social justice work, the intersectionality of things. I have a lot of parent clients who are neuro-typical, who don't know how to connect with their child or don't understand. So basically pretty much everything, autism, astrology, intersectionality, social justice work, current events, you know, sociology. Yeah. That's pretty much, pretty much everything.

Kelly Bron Johnson (19:21):

So what kind of stories do you think we should highlight if there's anybody that you have in mind or the kind of stories that you would like to hear? Um, for our podcasts.

Asiatu Lawoyin (19:34):

I would just like to hear more non white autistic stories and also the intersectionality of disability, you know, people with co-occurring diagnoses that aren't really talks, you know, much about people just think like, oh, you're autistic and you just have autism and that's it.

Asiatu Lawoyin (19:54):

And autism not only is the spectrum, but it also tends to include so much other, you know, connective traits and manifestations and things of that nature. I'd also love to highlight or see more stories of non-speaking autistics. I don't think that they get representation nearly enough nor understanding within the community as a whole. So just more, more, more variety of ethnicities and experiences, just so that we can validate the stories and experiences of those who are nonwhite, because there's so many of us out there.

Kelly Bron Johnson (20:32):

So, where did you mention, where's your podcast? Where can people find it?

Asiatu Lawoyin (20:36):

Oh, sorry. I did not. You couldn't find audacious autistics on YouTube and Spotify or go to audacious, audacious autistics on Instagram and Facebook. Excellent. Thank you.

Doug Blecher (20:52):

Well, well, thanks so much for joining us today. You know, I followed you for a while on Instagram and just love what you post on there. Um, if you're on Instagram, definitely follow, Asiatu and asiatucoach, um, and, uh, you know, so glad to, uh, have a chance to talk with you today.

Asiatu Lawoyin (21:12):

Thank you for having me. I appreciate it. Being here.