



# Crutches and Spice Podcast S1E1

## Transcript: **Internalized Ableism**

Imani:

So this podcast is brought to you by all of you. Thank you to all of you that donate to my Patreon on a monthly basis. It is greatly appreciated and makes so much of this work easier knowing that I'm not over exerting myself financially to do some of these things. So thank you. Thank you. Thank you. And please encourage your friends and family to subscribe to my Patreon as well. So today we're going to talk about internalized ableism. Oh good Lord. It was just as a young child, I thought disability stereotypes wouldn't affect me, but here I am nearly 30 and still terrified of my shadow in some ways. Internalized ableism makes us feel so small all the time. And most of the time we don't even know that we're, I don't know, just at the mercy of ideas that were passed on to us by media, TV, friends and family even.

But we don't have to keep going in that direction. We don't have to keep absorbing the things that make us hate ourselves. I couldn't exactly tell you the exact moment when I knew that internalized ableism kind of ruled the way I moved about the world. But I could probably tell you the first moment that I remember performing abled for somebody else. It was an after-school program. I was about 9, 10 years old and it was being run by a very religious woman and she was always praying for a miracle for me. And I wanted that miracle so bad. So I remember one day just putting my crutches in a trashcan and running around the gymnasium without them. And it made sense to me. It was like a triumph over my disability. But at the end of my run and after everybody clapped for me, I still had to take my crutches out of the trashcan in order to go home.

And I think that's kind of the moral of it, is that regardless of how much I perform non-disabled or abled or whatever you want to call it, I still need the things I need to get around, and there's no shame in that. And for the longest time, the idea of overcoming my disability or living a day without it or having this life that was no longer ruled by access needs or IEPs or physical therapy was appealing to me. But everything that I shirked back then that I needed for my disability, now I look forward to, I want my physical therapy. I have those access needs and I don't shy away from them. And to be honest, I do look back at the little girl running around the gymnasium pretending like her disability didn't exist and I feel sorry for her. I feel sorry for her in the same way that abled people feel sorry for me. In that why was I living a lie for somebody else's gratification?

Internalized ableism is so rampant in our community that we hurt one another thinking



that it's helping. Us and it doesn't, not even a slightest bit. We constantly compare one another to ourselves and say, "Well, if I can do it, you can do it. Or if they can do it, you can do it." And that's not entirely true at all. We're all just trying to do the best that we can, especially in a society that doesn't value our access at all. Because we live in a capitalist society that dictates how much we're worth based on how much we can produce, they see no need to build ramps to buildings or to give accommodations to employees. They think it's an extra or special treatment, but it's not. You need those things. It's okay to say that you do.

Back in 2014 when I started the blog [crutchesandspice.com](http://crutchesandspice.com) I didn't really know what I wanted to say and I decided that the very first thing I should do is make myself appealing to non-disabled people to make myself inspiring or to try and capture their attention. "How do you talk with disabled people? Oh, well, here's 10 tips on how to talk to disabled people." But after a while that rang false and the whole idea of me trying to gratiate myself to non-disabled people was my internalized ableism working. I didn't believe anybody would take me seriously if all I talked about was disability in a way that made and challenged non-disabled people. And now I laugh because I do what I do because I can still do that and talk about disability in a realistic way.

But back then I was terrified at the idea of being the angry disabled person because angry disabled people don't get paid attention to. They don't have their ideas shared. Nobody cares what they have to say. And I was terrified that it would be irrelevant and people would just ignore me as they had before. But after seeing how much internalize ableism in society affects us. How was like "Fuck it. Why am I creating and molding myself into this image of what a disabled person is supposed to be when people aren't even looking in my direction in the first place? Who cares? Who cares?" So when I talk about internalized ableism, it affects us in so many different ways professionally, privately, even just walking down the street.

I used to notice that I was walking so fast for no reason. I would be walking with no one, no one at all. Nobody's around me, not trying to keep up with anybody. I was walking so fast and that's because that was the pace that I thought I should be walking. That if I went slow then people would think that I have nowhere to be or nothing to do or no appointment to go to. The time I got to where I was going, I was so exhausted. I could barely function in the room with the people I wanted to be with and that's the sad part.

We beat ourselves up over this idea. We act like we're trying to work towards getting abled. I understand some people's lives are ruled by their disability and I understand that some people don't feel like they want to be defined by it. But for better, for worse, it's a part of our lives that we can't ignore. It makes no sense that we would hurt ourselves in the hopes that somebody would look at us or that somebody would pay attention to our needs when they had every opportunity to do so before and they didn't.



And I wish I could say that these things don't affect me now, that they don't matter, but they do. I'm still working through unraveling the ways in which I'm holding myself to a standard that I could never meet.

Normal quote, unquote is not the standard. It's not who we should be aspiring to be. You have needs that are unique to you, so please, let's stop comparing ourselves to other people. It doesn't have to be like that. We don't have to work in this competition. Who wins in that arena? Who wins on that global stage? Nobody. When we compare ourselves to one another in the hopes that we can be more abled or be more appealing, we're only really damaging our own psyche at that point.

Internalized ableism is so devious because we don't even know that we're taking it in. It could be the quiet comment from a relative or a friend. Things like, "Oh, well you're not like those other disabled people, you're actually trying. Or things like, "You know, you don't need those glasses or those crutches. You don't need to start portioning your diet like that. You don't really have those allergies." Those are dangerous thoughts. And even though they come from the outside or people that are not us, we take those in and start believing them because we want things to be better for ourselves. We want things to be more comfortable, but comfort is a privilege and we're not privileged in that way. And it's sad to say that so many people think that we could never be.

But I have hope for this community, our community, the disability community, that if we work together and if we hold one another up and be one another's strength through the ableism we experience. And even though the ableism that we weaponize against ourselves, that we can get where we want to go, we can reach the mountaintop of accessibility and inclusion. And my greatest hope is not non-disabled people. It is not the charitable organizations, it is not the donations or the charity. It's every single one of you. My greatest hope and triumph has been the disability community. It has been people who saw me when that's all I really asked for was to be seen and who don't want to pass along the hurtful thoughts that are so often shoved in our face and make us feel small. That's my hope. That's my genuine hope is that we see one another as the decolonizing force in one another's lives, that we validate one another's bodies and we don't shirk away from the tough parts of facing a world that is not built for us.

I love the disability community. It feels like family 90% of the time, the other 10% of the time somebody is doing something racist, but that's a Tuesday. And I think that once we start to realize our power as a community, we can go far with one another, but we can't forget that. Internalized ableism tells us that our problems are an individual issue and to be tackled in an individual way. So as individuals it's our individual problem. But access and inclusion is a community problem. Your access does not affect just you. There's somebody else coming along who needs the fight that you have in you to make it a little bit easier for the next person. And you may not feel like you have it in you, but that's



why you lean on me, or somebody else or somebody closer who's not on Twitter all the time. That's why we need each other because we can break down the walls of internalized ableism. We can make ourselves feel like we've always wanted to feel valid, seen, and in community with one another. That's my hope for all of you.

Thank you for listening. Please, please, please tell all your friends to sign up for my Patreon. If not, just tweet it, tag me, tell me you love me. I always love that. But thank you all for listening and I will see you next time.