

S5 E24: Providing A Spark

(AJ II & Krystal Redman)

Previously recorded on Saturday, September 21st, 2019

0:00 AJ: This week, public health doctor Krystal Redman of Spark Reproductive Justice Now, dismantles systems that affect our ability to live holistically. Stay tuned you're listening to *Max Out Time!*

0:13 Intro Song 'For The City'

0:50 AJ: Doctor Redman, how you doing?

0:52 Krystal: I'm doing great. Thank you.

0:53 AJ: What's up with DC this weekend? What you been doing?

0:55 Krystal: Oh, you know, I'm just here for a work conference, hopefully I'll have a little time to explore this city but as of now, no.

1:03 AJ: Have you been in the city before? Like you're not a new comer are you?

1:06 Krystal: No, I've been to DC more times than I can count, specifically for my national work that I do with, 'In Our Own Voices' which is a national Black RJ (Reproductive Justice) group, but outside of that, no, I don't really come for the nightlife.

1:20 AJ: Oh, you don't come for the nightlife? We got a lot of that. It's a Saturday, you know, a lot of festivals going on today, I think you might like it, you know. Especially if you got some friends out here or people like that.

1:31 Krystal: Maybe, perhaps. I'll see if I can check that out but from what I heard, it's a different nightlife than Atlanta where we based out of, so just a little bit different.

1:40 AJ: Different, but uh I was in Atlanta a few times this summer actually, and it's not far off, believe me. DC is a little smaller and we got a couple extra cultures thrown in there and it's very nice. But, let's keep on topic with the topic at hand, you're here to tell us about RJ. What is RJ, reproductive rights and social justice? Um what do you do with your organization SPARK Reproductive Justice?

2:05 Krystal: Yeah, so kind of just to set the stage a little bit, reproductive justice goes beyond reproductive rights and reproductive health. Reproductive Justice was started by black folks specifically in the south, because they realized that folks were living under the margins and their reproductive freedoms were oppressed. Reproductive Justice is rooted out of a system of oppression, not really centring parts of the body such as the uterus and things like of that nature, but really looking beyond the individual, and looking at systems that effect our abilities to live holistically. That's where I enter with into my work with SPARK

Reproductive Justice Now. We are based in south because of the long lasting history of oppression and injustices that are in communities explicitly black, brown, queer and trans young people of colour have been the most marginalized.

2:52 AJ: So which issues specifically do you tackle and currently, what are your main focuses?

2:58 Krystal: Well, Reproductive Justice lives at the intersection of our lives. So um Reproductive Justice deals with the multitude of different issues such as anti-shackling, shackling of pregnant people behind bars, HIV decriminalization, for being criminalized for being HIV positive –

3:15 AJ: In Atlanta, that's a huge issue, is it correct to assume that?

3:17 Krystal: Yeah, our criminalization, laws around criminalization of folks living and thriving with HIV is ridiculous and they are based on old science, bad science, um but they are still current, the laws are still current.

3:31 AJ: Are access to a lot of these healthcare issues um surrounding people of color especially in Atlanta and urban areas like this, is it affordable, is it accessible, like what are the benefits and the drawbacks in these scenarios?

3:45 Krystal: So, in trying to piece apart access, there's different definitions. Access assumes the person actually has the ability to access something. In order to access something, you need one; coverage, you need resources that can afford you that coverage and also the physical accessibility. There are a lot of counties in Georgia, that have no primary care physicians, no hospitals, no ED, no emergency rooms, no gynecological services etc or within 50-100 + miles. That's not access. There are a lot of areas that are clustered in Georgia that have no walkability, there are no sidewalks, there's no public transportation. That's not access.

4:23 AJ: So, we are talking about real raw areas in Georgia?

4:26 Krystal: Absolutely.

4:27 AJ: Not Atlanta per se.

4:28 Krystal: Yeah, there are some places in Atlanta and the suburban areas too, on the outskirts of Atlanta that don't have good – well Atlanta itself doesn't have good public transportation as a system, but um in rural areas, Reproductive Justice doesn't just stop in metro areas. We sometimes forget folks who live outside of those metro lines, absolutely.

4:48 AJ: So, what are the methods of addressing these issues with your company specifically?

4:52 Krystal: Being a reproductive organization and specifically centering queer liberation for queer and trans and people of color and black women, allows us to kind of go beyond the

body and look really at self determination as well as lining up our different issue areas. A lot of issues that media likes to highlight is abortion – or things that--

5:14 AJ: That's the big one.

5:15 Krystal: Yeah, absolutely. Also, it's important to note that even if black communities and brown communities or all communities achieved equitable access to comprehensive sexual education and services including abortion, reproductive justice is still not achieved. It goes way beyond the uteri or you know specific reproductive organs, and looks at the whole person's ability to live holistically and free.

5:38 AJ: At the top would be abortion, what are the undervalued issues?

5:41 Krystal: I wouldn't say the highlight at the top would be abortion. Abortion is part of self-care, the fact that we have to argue for someone to make an autonomous decision is reproductive oppression. It goes beyond abortion. Like I said, comprehensive access to care, Georgia is one of the states that didn't expand Medicare. There are a lot of people that fall within the Medicare gap. There are a lot of people that are underinsured and also are not insured whatsoever. What does that look like when they are trying to – when they are sexually active and believe they may be pregnant or have an STD/STI or etc, or just want to see a physician just for you know their day to day primary care services? What does that truly look like? Especially if you are living in multiple identities, and you're a trans person, and you would like to talk about your fertilities, is that even a conversation that we are willing to have as a provider? Exactly.

6:38 AJ: What are the ways that you aside from going to conference and speaking, what's the day to day work that you might do?

6:45 Krystal: Oh yes, so the conferences and the speaking and the traveling and everything, they're just kind of like things we need to order in order to expand our narrative and expand our reach in getting folks to talk about reproductive justice. Outside of that, our day to day, we're on the ground, we're organizing, we're door knocking. We're phone banking and canvassing, we're at the Capitol doing action –

7:05 AJ: So ya'll are really hustling.

7:06 Krystal: Oh yeah, we're grassroots.

7:08 AJ: Okay, so you're the executive director and you're really putting that into motion?

7:11 Krystal: Absolutely, and it takes our entire team. We are small but very mighty. We have a team of seven folks, but all with different levels of expertise and we're on the ground supporting each other and supporting our communities.

7:23 AJ: Something that I have found interesting in your bio is, the reasoning behind why you are so interested and involved in these narratives, and I guess it'll be three fold. You are

a black woman, you're also a doctor, and then you've also dealt with a lot of these issues in your personal life.

7:43 Krystal: Yeah, absolutely.

7:44 AJ: So can you tell us about your latest book, which is entitled, *I am Amyracle and I was born early*, what that means to you, and why you are trying to highlight a personal story.

7:56 Krystal: Yeah, so I think that Reproductive Justice is built off of our personal stories and our personal lived experiences. Everybody that is part of this movement because it is a movement, not just a framework, comes to the movement because of a told story or an untold story. For me, I had many stories in my life at intersections of my identity. Recently, two years ago, I became pregnant, I became pregnant while living in the south, which we know the south has the worst maternal outcomes and birthing outcomes in our nation. Which is comparable to underdeveloped countries.

8:34 AJ: Because it's a conservative part of the country or?

8:37 Krystal: Um yeah, and also underinsured, lack of insurance. You also have to think about the south being rooted in racism and what that looks like on a day to day. People make up systems and people are racist. Systems can't be racist, systems were built by people, policies and laws were built by people. Then something that I am expanding my narrative in the ideas of birth equity, infant mortality/morbidity, maternal mortality/morbidity is discussing the true weathering on our bodies. Because--so weathering is what long term stress looks like on the bodies of black and brown people, specifically black folks, and how long term stress from our ancestors have bared on our bodies and results in poor healthcare outcomes. The fact of the matter is, people want to speak about social determinants of health and social economic status affecting your health outcome. The truth is, I'm I'm a very well educated person, I make a good living and I was still more at risk for poor birth outcomes, so why is that?

9:45 AJ: And you're saying it goes back hundreds of years?

9:47 Krystal: Oh yeah! Also, the current state of our system. Like policies, laws, procedures etc all systems, including the healthcare system, education system etc, are not built for black and brown people to succeed. In our health care and in anything. So, what does that look like when we're trying to navigate these systems, and expect to have comparable health care outcomes as white, quote on quote, counterparts? But that's not reality.

10:13 AJ: You're talking about a lot of the system and and the people who are running these systems aren't black and brown people, by and large. But when you talk about a lot of the issues that you deal with um Supreme Court for example, there aren't many people who look like us. They're on the extreme of that conservative narrative. When you think of the justices

who have been appointed in the last few years, is that part of the huge oppressive problem or is that just within congress? Or where does that lie?

10:42 Krystal: I think it lies everywhere. You know um so I think these lofty terms of systems really just mean people, like I said, people build systems. So um if you're in--for instance, I had my child at a hospital, a higher quality hospital in Georgia, and the geographical location is very isolated so that only certain people can access this facility. There's no like bus routes there, you have to be driving and predominately the people in this area make 100k plus plus plus--

11:17 AJ: What area of Georgia is this?

11:18 Krystal: This is North Georgiaish or what not and um

11:24 AJ: Marietta? I'm way off?

11:27 Krystal: It's like Sandy Springs, Dunwoody ish area --

11:30 AJ: That sounds good.

11:32 Krystal: Yeah, it's really nice, it's by Buckhead. So, so, I had my child there and not just to say, only providers because there are amazing providers. But, predominately the providers are not people of color.

11:45 AJ: What were they?

11:46 Krystal: If they're not people of color, they're just white.

11:54 AJ: Like old white men, young white women?

11:55 Krystal: To be quite honest, so in I can tell you my experience, I didn't notice a lot because I was in an emergency situation where I almost lost my life and the life of my child. In thinking about the demographics of that area, it's predominately white, middle age folks who are very successful and rich. The children's hospital, located across the street has the same demographic to it as well. Kind of the expectation of who will be a patient in that hospital is what I am referencing. In my situation, I became pregnant, typically your pregnancy is 40 to 42 weeks, I delivered at 27 weeks, my child was one pound 12 ounces. Yeah, yeah. My kids name is Amyr so you know the play on words *I am Amyracle*.

12:38 AJ: But he is, literally, he is a miracle.

12:41 Krystal: Yeah absolutely, absolutely but then navigating that system for the four months that he was in the NICU. The different levels of treatment, you know, the one thing I will say, is that I had amazing insurance and that still didn't play a factor, other than the fact that my kid's services were paid for. We know that from research, black infants receive the worst care, they have the worst healthcare outcomes. That's not surprising to me, but most folks would be surprised especially navigating the health care systems. One thing that I can just quickly cap is that when my child was transferred to the children's hospital, because he

needed emergency surgery a week after birth. I remember we got a call at 3 AM in the morning, I went into the hospital and you know there is the whole transport team is there, there's about maybe 15 medical professionals and emergency professionals around my kid's incubator. Me and my child's father walk into the NICU area and no one greets us, no one says anything. We--we kind of find a seat, nobody asked us if we wanted a seat or anything. It took a black surgeon to come up to us, a black woman came up to us and said, 'I'm the surgeon, before I talk at you, can you tell me what's going on' and at the moment I remember actually feeling a physical snap in my head, telling me 'turn on Dr. Redman.' I remember repeating and reciting all of his diagnoses, the treatment plan, the course of action, all these different things. After saying all of that, as if I was one of the providers, I remember distinctly, everyone in that room turned around at me and said huh. A few people can over and said would you like to sit down, would you like any tea, any water. I almost had to show up in the space and show how quote on quote how 'unblack' I am to get the respect and the treatment my kid's needs.

14:32 AJ: Did your doctor not know that you were a doctor before? The one that you were going to?

14:36 Krystal: Oh, everything was an emergency, at this point, I was at the children's hospital. When you're pregnant, you're not really searching children's hospitals, worst case scenario you want. But, no, nobody knew anything and that's a thing, we shouldn't have to wear our titles at all. But it's expected that if you're not a person of color, you receive a level of respect. But, if you're a person of colour, you almost have to wear all these titles.

15:04 AJ: You didn't feel valued until they realized that oh, you were not just another black woman.

15:11 Krystal: Exactly. Exactly. The thing is, if I was just Krystal walking into that space, and I am just Krystal, I should still be able to receive the same level of care, my child should still be able to receive that same level of care regardless of how I am presenting. That's something about like equitable access, birth equity and really trying to navigate these systems of oppression. With the book, I wanted to kind've, I could've wrote a literature piece or medical piece, or anything like that, but I wanted to speak to communities. I found that black and brown communities do not speak about maternal health, and birth outcomes, we don't speak about it.

15:51 AJ: Do you think most people know that the maternal mortality rate of black women is four times as likely as a white woman?

15:57 Krystal: I don't think most people know that but I think people need to know that. Especially, the folks we're speaking about, our black communities. We need to know what it

looks like for us. We need to have these conversations, not just when someone else is going through it but before then. Which is why I wanted to create this like animated children's book. I wanted to make it palatable for families who are navigating the same type of situation.

16:20 AJ: How's the book doing?

16:22 Krystal: Really good, yeah, we did a little tour.

16:23 AJ: You ain't bring no copies?

16:24 Krystal: I have one copy if you would like to purchase it.

16:29 AJ: I'm all about the kids, all about the health spreading awareness.

16:31 Krystal: That's right, thank you.

16:32 AJ: That's why we're doing this podcast interview.

16:34 Krystal: Absolutely, I appreciate that.

16:35 AJ: What I was going to say is, it sounds as though – it's very unfortunate what happened to you and thankfully your child is doing a lot better than he was before. But it sounds as though this is a reoccurring problem for women of color in general, and it seems though, like we've been time and time again undervalued in this country. You being in Georgia, you're also affected, like we talked about this subject, with a lot of the abortion laws and the restrictions that are going on. We think about Alabama and Missouri, and Texas and a lot of these kind of conservative places that have enforced a lot of laws in the last year or so, or even less than a year, do you think that's going to be a trend in in these places?

17:21 Krystal: I think that the administration has a very strategic plan that isn't new, I don't think randomly that local officials shifted and suddenly, these new local officials shifted and these local officials, you have new governors, and things of that nature, have like this new idea to like, shift access. One; access has always been on the chopping block, abortion has always been a question that has been pushed in the political environment. In Georgia, we had a ban, I believe it was a 20 week ban or so, it's not that we never had bans. This is just now a 6 week ban –

18:02 AJ: Is that the heartbeat one?

18:04 Krystal: Yes, so the heartbeat, house bill 481 I believe, so yeah.

18:10 AJ: What's SPARK's role in this kind of this huge fight? Because I know that you all are definitely fighting back against a lot of these legislations.

18:18 Krystal: Yes, SPARK has taken a front seat role. All of the attacks have been on the bodies black and brown people historically with SPARK since we've been existence for 12 years. We've always taken a front seat role, so what that looks like as I've said before, being at the capital, organizing, mobilizing our communities, but also leading different coalitions in our state. We are one of the founding members of our Georgia's reproductive health rights

and justice coalition, that I believe 11 different organizations that are reproductive rights social justice groups. We sit on and collectively do work around issue areas on intersections of reproductive justice. This passed legislative session, we're pretty much at the capital every day, we were speaking at –

19:03 AJ: You specifically?

19:04 Krystal: Our team, our organization –

19:11 AJ: Like with signs?

19:11 Krystal: Absolutely, and also digitally too as well, we're getting people –

19:16 AJ: We're not far from the nation's capital...

19:18 Krystal: Yeah, we actually have a plan to be there for some issue based organising.

19:25 AJ: This week?

19:25 Krystal: Yeah, this week, so we're doing that with some of our other partners from across the US. Speaking to different legislators and things of that nature, and we have partners from California, Louisiana, Philly, some in Georgia like us, and Tennessee and everything so we will be and some other folks too as well –

19:45: So definitely on the forefront of the fight.

19:46 Krystal: Oh yeah, and in Texas, let me not forget that [AJ: That's a huge one] because Texas has been fighting. Our partner, Texas has been fighting yeah. We will be doing some actions there, but specifically for Georgia, we have led those actions. We speak at hearings, we try and get our folks to speak at hearings and test--tell their testimonies, which is really the forefront of the fight. There are groups in Georgia who have filed a lawsuit against the state, so I believe that's in the works too as well, so we can stop this law from actually rolling out at the top of 2020.

20:15 AJ: In order to uplift reproductive health, and women and empower women, and their their right to choosing how they feel in their own skin, and in their own body. What can we, and when I see we, just people in general, anyone listening, people who aren't black women especially listening, what can I, what can we, what can creatives and people out there do to help look out for women of color?

20:42 Krystal: Absolutely, I think there is two parts to that question. Empowerment is something I think we use as a term that assumes that folks don't have power. I want to uplift that because, we have power. We want to build political power but historically, we've always had community power, collective power. When I say community power, we've always built collectively together to shift narratives and uplift our voices. I think that the issue isn't just really showing up for people in a way that it's helping them to like be powerful but really allowing them to lead. Allowing communities to lead. Folks that are creative, giving them a

space like you did here, on a podcast or on TV, on just different platforms, so we can have our stories told by us for us.

21:36 AJ: You were going to say FUBU?

21:38 Krystal: Right. Haha exactly.

21:38 AJ: That's a recurring theme on this show. Everybody want to be FUBU. I get it.

21:40 Kystal: Yeah, yeah, right all of that but seriously, in shifting the narrative on a national platform, but also shifting it in black communities, trying to dismantle gendering language and things of that nature, something we have to talk about in black communities too as well.

21:57 AJ: It's multidimensional.

21:58 Krystal: Oh absolutely, but I think with creatives can definitely do is give small RJ groups, reproductive justice groups and community like collectives, a voice or a platform to use their voice rather.

22:08 AJ: Thank you, I appreciate it Dr. Redman and I hope that we can continue and move this conversation forward, because I think it it's a problem and an issue in our communities and in and in general. As always my special guest Dr. Krystal Redman. Is there anything you want to leave us with? And shout out your conference and your team, and all your experiences and your appearances coming up.

22:30 Krystal: Yes, thank you. For SPARK, you can find us at SPARK RJ NOW dot org. Or is it SPARK RJ dot org? I believe it's spark rj dot org. But either way if you find us we are there. We're on Instagram, we're on Twitter. You can look at some YouTube and SoundCloud, we're just everywhere. In addition to that, we have a large national conference that's coming up, next year November 2020 –

22:58 AJ: DC?

22:59 Krystal: No, it's in Atlanta, what? Of course it's going to be in Atlanta!

22:02 AJ: I can try.

22:03 Krystal: Yes you can and –

23:05 AJ: If you're footing the bill for the ticket [laughs]

23:08 Krystal: We're not doing that. Not for you, but for folks who are listening that are um you know identify with being in those margins, and want to access a space but historically don't have the resources to access it–

23:19 AJ: What's the name of the conference?

23:21 Krystal: Justice Now 2020. You can contact us when we roll out our call for proposals and registrations at the top of the next year, and we'll pay for you to get to the conference, we will provide scholarships. Like I said, maybe you [to AJ] have resources to get there but other folks, they can hit us up. Also, yes, justice now 2020, I believe it's justice now con,

c-o-n dot com. So yes, that's our conference page. But, definitely look us up, keep your eyes on what we're doing, we're doing a lot, so please look us up. For the book, you can go to Amyracle.org, Amyracle is spelt with a 'y,' so a-m-y-r-a-c-l-e, yes, iamamyracle.org.

24:08 AJ: Thank you, thank you, justice now 2020, Spark RJ. Thank you very much, Dr Redman.

24:16 Krystal: Yes, thank you so much.

24:17 AJ: Please continue subscribing at *Max Out Time With AJ II* on iTunes. Add @sparkrjnow on social media. Like me on Facebook, follow on IG and Twitter, and rate and review this podcast on all podcast streaming services today, AJ out!

24:35 Outro Song: 'For The City'

25:02 –End–

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