

Royel Johnson:

Before we jump in to today's episode, it's important that we acknowledge that this conversation was recorded on the land of the Tongva and Chumash peoples. Panelists joined us from colonized lands throughout North America. We recognize the Tongva, Chumash, and all indigenous nations, tribes, and peoples for being historical and continual caretakers of these lands.

Felecia Commodore:

And three, two, one.

Royel Johnson:

Greetings ASHE family, and welcome back to another episode of the ASHE Presidential Podcast, where we are wrestling with what does it mean to be a scholar? Our theme this year for the conference is "I Am A Scholar". I am your co-host, Dr. Royel Johnson, Associate Professor of Higher Education and Social Work at the University of Southern California, and I also direct the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates, and shout out to the Rossier School of Education and my dean, Pedro Noguera, for being a sponsor this year.

I have the privilege of working with a friend who needs no introduction, but let me do it anyway, Dr. Felecia Commodore.

Felecia Commodore:

Hi everyone. Welcome to the podcast. If you've gotten this far in the season, we have probably been in your home or your shower or your car, so basically we go together real bad.

Royel Johnson:

Real bad.

Felecia Commodore:

Real bad. So, I'm your other co-host, Dr. Felecia Commodore, Associate Professor of Higher Education at the University of Illinois-

Royel Johnson:

Wait, pause. You! We have not celebrated your new job this season.

Felecia Commodore:

I got a new job y'all.

Daniel Corral:

Wait a second.

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

Congratulations.

Royel Johnson:

Run it back.

Felecia Commodore:

I got a new job, y'all and such. So, I am now at the University of Illinois.

Royel Johnson:

My alma mater.

Felecia Commodore:

Urbana-Champaign. I'm a Midwest girlie now. Looking to go to an apple orchard and I went to the Indiana State Fair and ate a turkey leg and gained 30 pounds. It's, you know. I'm in my Midwest bag.

Royel Johnson:

Bag.

Felecia Commodore:

Cheese curds, all that stuff. So, yes. I have transitioned institutions and it's been a great time, and shout out to the EPOL fam who welcomed me with open arms and warm smiles. It's been a really great time.

Royel Johnson:

Yes.

Felecia Commodore:

So, now that Royel called me out, we're excited about today's episode. As we're going to discuss shaping our scholarly identities and, more specifically, for those who identify early career scholars, what that looks like and what that means, if it means anything. Join us and our wonderful guests as we talk about figuring out who we are, what we're doing, and once we've officially stepped into the world of being scholars and all the various ways that may manifest. So, Royel, why don't you let us know who's joining us?

Royel Johnson:

So, join us in welcoming our special guest Dr. Wayne Black, who is Assistant Professor in Sports Administration at the University of Cincinnati. Next we have Dr. Dorime-Williams who is a Senior Research Associate at MDRC's Postsecondary Education Policy Area. Marjorie is not an early career scholar by the way, I just want to flag that. Marjorie's been around the block.

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

That feels like shade.

Royel Johnson:

No, I was not. That's not shade. I was honoring-

Felecia Commodore:

That was very interesting.

Royel Johnson:

I was honoring your experience.

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

Okay.

Felecia Commodore:

I don't know, a little cinnamon-y.

Royel Johnson:

And Dr. Daniel Corral, who is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education at the University of Toronto.

Felecia Commodore:

Yes, so before we jump into our conversation, as you all know, we usually do a segment in our podcast called This or That, but we thought we would change it up a little bit this year. And so we're doing a little segment called QTNA.

Royel Johnson:

Questions That Need Answers.

Felecia Commodore:

Questions That Need Answers. And so we're going to ask each of you a little question to get to know a little bit more about you. So, I'm going to start off and I am going to go with you, Dr. Black, Wayne, when was the last time you tried something for the first time?

Wayne Black:

It was probably food. I'm a like a real real ... I eat like a kid sometimes. I used to eat like a kid. So, I eat very plain Jane stuff, but I've been kind of spreading out a little more, trying different types of salads. Getting my greens and getting the rainbow on my plate.

Felecia Commodore:

Okay, no beige plates, no beige plates.

Wayne Black:

Exactly.

Royel Johnson:

No low (stutters and laughs) vibration plates.

Wayne Black:

Listen, y'all would say my plates were very low vibration. Got the job done. That's what matters.

Royel Johnson:

Okay, Daniel, what is the best piece of feedback you've ever received?

Daniel Corral:

This is a tough one, wow. Best piece of feedback I've ever received. I think it's got to be keep it simple.

Royel Johnson:

That's what my aunt used to say.

Daniel Corral:

Keep it simple. I feel like in our current roles especially it's very tempting to use the \$5 word, right? But I'm all about how? Instead of the ways in which. So, just keep it simple.

Felecia Commodore:

Y'all be giving the ways in which to been 'em.

Royel Johnson:

Really my work examines the ways in which-

Felecia Commodore:

Y'all don't know how I feel about! I kinda like "the ways in which" and I feel like she be getting a bad rap, but I hear you. I'm just saying. Y'all can lay off "the ways in which." So Marjorie, we're at you. What is something you wrote off at first but loved it once you tried it?

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

Oh. Oh. That is so hard.

Royel Johnson:

We know.

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

These are really good questions. You know what? Okay, this is going to be the answer. I recently decided to learn how to swim.

Royel Johnson:

Okay.

Felecia Commodore:

Yes, I am pro all the people learning. It is a survival skill, so yes to you.

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

Thank you. I'm a whole adult with big middle school kids and I've lived most of my life not knowing how to swim, and decided, you know what? I'm going to just suck it up and do the thing. So, I'm learning how to swim and, in fact, last summer went on vacation and got in the ocean with just a vest off the boat and I did it, so I was really proud of myself.

Felecia Commodore:

I am so excited by this.

Royel Johnson:

Yeah, I ain't ready for all that yet. I still don't know how to swim.

Wayne Black:

You can't swim?

Royel Johnson:

No.

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

Don't let them shame you. It's okay.

Wayne Black:

You got to get out there.

Royel Johnson:

People are always like, "I'll teach you. Don't worry, I used to be a lifeguard." No.

Felecia Commodore:

You ain't said none said nothing but a word, you're going to learn how to swim. We all need to know how to swim. It's a global moment!

Wayne Black:

You living in California, in LA, and don't swim?

Royel Johnson:

I don't even go to the beach here.

Felecia Commodore:

First of all-

Royel Johnson:

I've been five times.

Felecia Commodore:

With climate change it don't matter if you live in Nebraska, soon, you're gonna need to know how to swim!

Royel Johnson:

I know, right? We're all going to learn how to swim.

Felecia Commodore:

We going to make it happen.

Royel Johnson:

So, part of what we wanted to do in this conversation was to sit down with scholars at different stages of their career, whether you're early career, Assistant Professor to a Senior Research Associate working outside of the tenured track, we wanted to talk about, one, how you're navigating the field since earning your doctoral degree, but also what are the factors that are shaping your scholarly identity. What is a scholarly identity, right? And we want to jump into that and also think about what are the sort of challenges that are imposing on how you do your work in thinking about the current sort of politicized context.

So, to jump in, tell us a little bit about your journey since earning your doctoral degree and what's been your experiences that have influenced your current role.

Daniel Corral:

Can I start?

Royel Johnson:

Yeah.

Daniel Corral:

So, I think for me, my journey into this role ... Well, first of all, middle school Danny would have never ever anticipated being a professor let alone being a professor in another country. So, that's the first thing. So, I think my trajectory started off in undergrad. So, I tell my story by saying I went into undergrad wanting to be a high school history teacher. I majored in secondary education and history. I got my teaching certification, but it was the McNair Scholars Program that really changed my life.

Royel Johnson:

Shout out to McNair.

Daniel Corral:

So, yeah, shout out to the McNair Scholars Program at Beloit College. So, it was there where I did two summers of undergraduate research. The first summer I did it at Beloit, the second summer, that's where actually I met Felecia at the University of Pennsylvania.

Felecia Commodore:

Go Quakers.

Daniel Corral:

And it was through those research experiences that really exposed me to, wow, there are educational opportunities, ways that you can impact and shape people's lives that are outside of the high school classroom. And I think those are really important opportunities, but just other types of opportunities like those exist.

And so it was at that moment where I was like, "Okay, let me look into this graduate school thing," that I had never ever even thought about as well. Thankfully got the support to apply through McNair and then ended up at UW Madison. After being at UW Madison, and being part of McNair, they really drill in this idea of diversifying the faculty, so that was honestly my goal from the beginning.

It was tough because I think having that as your end goal, you go through graduate school, you do your course work, you do your comprehensive, you do your dissertation. Then it's like, "Wow, okay, what I've been reaching or striving for is almost there." But then you end up with facing the job market, and that can be incredibly brutal and incredibly devastating. Yeah, intense on someone's self-esteem.

But luckily I was in a good position at the time and I applied to several faculty positions, and somehow I saw University of Toronto and threw my application in there. They were the first place I went to go interview at, and the place I got an offer at, and here I am.

Royel Johnson:

Others?

Wayne Black:

I'll go. For me, what have I done since earning? So I got my PhD in 2022, and when I first went back to school, I really... wanted to be a college president. That was always why I even decided to go back to school.

Felecia Commodore:

And then you ended up studying higher ed?

Wayne Black:

I took governor's class. Honestly, I started reading some of your work and I said, "Yeah, nah. I'm cool."

For me it wasn't that I didn't think I couldn't do the job, it was just I couldn't be me in those spaces and I was just not that; all in negotiating certain parts of my identity, not for no job. At that point, I was just like, "All right, well, cool, I'm just going to get good at research." Because for me, I was a college athlete, I wrestled in college. So I wasn't really thinking too much about what I was going to do after school.

I was like, "Yo, we just trying to win a national championship and bounce," truthfully. So, that experience I felt like built me for the academia because to Dr. Corral's point, some people will say the job market is hard, and for me, any time I've been in academia I've never struggled with nothing because wrestling, and the experience I had as a college athlete, I done been down some roads through that alone, so this academics stuff, man, this is easy. People need just to write some papers and talk to some people, what are we doing here? Come on. I research sports, so for me, this just an opportunity to do a career where I can just vibe for real. I can research what I want. If some of y'all follow me on Twitter, I can talk all I want to talk about. I kind of do my own thing.

And so when I got onto the job market, I was in a higher ed PhD program, but I knew probably halfway through I probably wasn't going to stay in higher ed as a discipline. And so I switched over to sport once I graduated. I ended up getting my sport management faculty job because you seen what's familiar with me because I worked at University of Cincinnati before, and so coming back it was an easy little transition, where I knew I could kind of roll in a hybrid style. I still do a lot of higher ed-facing work because my main research area is college athletics, but I'm kind of pulling higher ed into sport management and really trying to pull some of sport management into higher ed.

Because I've always been a sort of interdisciplinary scholar, I've actually been able to expand. And now I really don't even ... Most of the stuff that I'm working on now is more from humanities, doing more historical work, doing more work as a writer, as opposed to being a researcher, because I felt like it's good research out here, don't get me wrong, but a lot of this stuff is trash to me in the sense that the topics we be talking about, we talking about the same things and it's just very, very surface level. And I got bored with that super fast.

So, I wanted to challenge myself to think outside the box and that's really been the big thing the last ... I'm in my third year on tenured track, so the last two-and-a-half years have just been, "Yo, how can I expand how I'm thinking? How can I read other people's work? How can I pull in new ideas, new concepts, and become and develop as a better writer?" As opposed to somebody who's just pushing out research for the sake of pushing out research because I, yeah.

I can sit here, I was trained as a quantitative scholar, so you give me some data, I can run through that quickly. But again, to me that got boring and I started to question, yo, what are people really doing? Why am I really doing this work? So, I spent the last three years asking myself that question and just challenging my thinking to be a better writer, a better thinker, and then let the research play itself out and let that kind of roll how it go.

Royel Johnson:

Yeah. How about you, Marjorie?

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

So, I appreciate, Wayne, your comment about being a college president because that too was my goal.

Royel Johnson:

Interesting.

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

And in fact the only reason that I was like, "Yeah, I'll do this tenure track thing." Because I was like, "I could be good at being in charge and telling people what to do."

Similarly, I was like, "You know what? I actually don't ever want that job ever." You could not pay me enough.

So, when the opportunity came to transition to my role now at MDRC, I was really fortunate in that they found me. And, in fact, I have a funny story but I'll save it for later. So, I was able to take on this role in doing policy focused research, which had actually been my goal when I was in my graduate program at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. And I had always wanted to do policy work. I'd always known that I wanted to have my work be in the hands of people who could do something with it. And I think as a PhD grad, I knew that I had the skills to do that. I just wasn't sure what that would look like.

So, I've been on a journey. I've done lots of different things in academia. Higher education sort of always being at the core, but I've served as an administrator, director of assessment, with a focus on student learning. I have also really spent a lot of time figuring out when I became a faculty member what my faculty identity was and how that translated into my work. And I think that's when I recognized, okay, I think I am really into action research and really wanting to think about evaluation from that perspective.

And so MDRC, for those who may not know, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research and social policy organization. And so everything we do is directed towards how do we get the work in the hands of people who can do something about it. And Daniel, to your point, how do we make sure that the work

that we're producing can be understood by folks who aren't in the field. And so I really think about my role and identity as a scholar and a researcher now as someone who helps to make information clear. And that I can use the opportunity to know that my work might be in the hands of people who may not have read my journal article or who maybe would never read a journal article by me. But because it's in this policy brief or because it shows up in this way, they're more willing to engage. So, how do I make sure that I'm taking advantage of this opportunity to really make a difference for ... In my case I think about promoting equity in postsecondary education.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah, that's really ... I really love that you all have all these different kind of stories of how your journey wasn't linear necessarily. And you ended up in different places but all doing really impactful work. So, I wanted to ask Wayne and Daniel, you two are in tenure track positions, Marjorie, you transitioned out of a tenure track position to more of a policy space. And so I'm curious, Daniel and Wayne, what would you say has been the most challenging aspect of navigating the early stages of your career on the tenure track? And then for you, Marjorie, how has your transition out of the tenure track shaped your career goals and your outlook on scholarship? So, I'll start with Daniel and Wayne. What's been the most challenging aspect of this tenure track process?

Daniel Corral:

I think for me, personally I came into the tenure track also at a really tough time because I graduated in April of '20. So, I got the job January 2020, graduated in April 2020, and then moved to Canada, July? Or, June 2020, right?

Felecia Commodore:

Wow.

Daniel Corral:

So, I had the two-week quarantine, very, very, very strict lockdown. And basically my first few years at U of T were completely online. So, brand new Assistant Professor straight out of grad school having to teach in a new country, new institution, new students online. That was super tough.

Even now, a couple months ago, I just finished my interim review, and I'm trying to reflect back on what those first two years were and I can't even remember to be honest because it was such a challenging time. And I think for those of us going through the tenure process, I think it's easy for us to say, "Oh, the pandemic happened and we were resilient and we went through it." But no, it was a very emotionally challenging and physically, psychologically challenging time to be a professor. And I'm just thinking about my position in terms of transitioning to a new country, new institution. So, I think that's probably the biggest challenge.

Something that I want to build on related to Wayne's point earlier about this notion of pushing out research, I think once you get put in this position it becomes really attractive or really easy to start thinking about, okay, these are going to be my 10 to 15 articles and I'm going to list them out and this is how I'm going to do it. But at some point you realize, well, am I just doing this just to do it or am I doing it for the reason that I got here in the first place? So, I think that tension of thinking about the purpose and impact of your research is something that you can kind of lose sight with at the beginning of your position. Especially now as I progress, it's like, okay, I really got to focus in here but I also want, again, to make sure that everything is impactful. So, I think those are some of the two challenges and I'm sure more will come to me as we continue.

Wayne Black:

Yeah, for me, I think the most challenging aspect has just been being comfortable in my voice. I know I can do the job. For me, confidence has never been something that I've lacked because I know who I am.

Felecia Commodore:

You don't say, Wayne. I did not get that. I did not get that take at all.

Royel Johnson:

Wayne said, "I'm good."

Wayne Black:

But the reason why I tend to be confident is because I know what work I'm putting in. I know how much time I spend studying and really thinking about my craft because I think about my faculty and really I'm a head high school wrestling coach too, so I think about both of those as skills that I'm just developing.

Felecia Commodore:

Shout out to you, coaching high school. Just because, MMM! That's tough.

Wayne Black:

As opposed to thinking about them as outcomes. So, for me, I look at every day like you're just trying to stack a day and just trying to get better and get better and get better one little percent at a time. But what I struggle with at first was just being cool with that. I never felt pressure from anybody else to do any work, but it was for me like, "Yo, what's your standard?"

I knew I was setting the bar for myself at and really stepping into that as a younger leader scholar in the field, particularly in college athletics. It was like, yo, you just got to trust your voice and really just be not confident because I was confident, but you got to really be confident. If you've been around me, you can kind of feel it. But it's not just that feeling, you actually got to trust it internally. That was really one thing I struggled with. It was in some ways imposter syndrome, but in other ways it was just like, "Yo, you just got to do it and trust that what you're doing is right because you put the time in and let the rest of it kind of fall where it does."

And so as I really ... I think in grad school I went too fast. I published and I think that I was able to network and put myself in positions to win. But I also realized that as I was doing that, I maybe jumped past some steps. That when I got into the field and I was like, "Yo, you better start improvising doc students." I really started asking myself, "Why are you doing this? Why are you doing that? Because you got to train somebody."

And so what I always told myself was I was always going to make sure my doc student had a good experience or better experience than what I had. And that's not to say I had a bad experience because my experience was dope, but I also know that there are things that could have better from what I hear from other people in the field. I was like, "Yo, you just got to make sure that everything that you're doing, you're solid on."

It took me two years just to make sure I was cool, but I knew that in year three I was going to have a doc student. Because we just launched our PhD program this fall.

Royel Johnson:

Got it.

Wayne Black:

So, we building for it. So I was like, "Yo, when that come, you got to be ready. You got to be ready for that thing." And a part of that meant that I had to trust myself to lead somebody and to be a good teacher. Because I knew I could research, again that ain't never been no thing for me, it's yo, can you actually teach somebody how you doing what you doing. Because if you don't know why you doing what you doing, how are you going to teach them how to do it?

So, I really took that time to figure that out and really just being dropping some of them bad habits that I had. Yo, slow down a little bit, take your time, and really get good at one or two things as opposed to being a jack of all trades and a master of none. And so for me, that was probably the hardest adjustment just internally making sure that my voice was solid but also that internally I believed in that voice too, not just because people was hyping me up.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah, that's really real too. One thing I think when I was starting as faculty, it's so easy to just train students the way you were trained. And I don't even like using that language either anymore, trained, they're not puppies.

Royel Johnson:

Socialize.

Felecia Commodore:

Socialize. And then sometimes you'll do stuff and you'll be like, "What is the point of this? We don't need to do that." It is being like, "I just don't have to go through the motions of doing exactly what I experienced even if it works for me." But figuring out how do I really want to approach this or how I really want to do that. So, that resonates with me.

Marjorie, you have traveled through many iterations of higher ed, and so curious for you, as someone who was administration, who did tenure track, and now has transitioned more into policy from tenure track, though you still, I believe, teaching as adjunct faculty. How did transition off of the tenure track impact how you looked at your work and your scholarship and approaching that?

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

Interestingly enough the transition to not being on tenure track and taking on this role at MDRC was less about the research and actually more about, I think fittingly, my identity. And for those who may not know me, my parents are Haitian immigrant, so every stereotype, yes. Including we don't quit. You do a thing and you finish it. And I remember thinking, "Oh my gosh, people are going to think I quit. People are going to think that I couldn't do it or that I failed or there was something wrong with me as a faculty member."

I remember going back and forth. My colleague, my co-parent is also a faculty member in the same department, and I remember he was just like, "This isn't even what you want to do, so why are you so concerned about what other people think about what you decide to do with your life?"

And I was like, "That's a great question. I don't know." I think so much of my scholar identity at the time was very much, well, how am I perceived, what is my work perceived as in the field, how do people think about me as a scholar and as a faculty member.

I think now, at this stage of my career, none of that is really important. I care in a way that we care about people because we're human beings, but I get to engage in, one, research that I know matters. I get to develop my own research projects with a ton of support. I love my team. I love my organization and I love the way that I've learned to work around research. And so for me the exciting piece of this is I get to do new things every day. I'm learning a lot. I think I kind of ended up almost being on autopilot, back to Daniel's comments about you plan out the things, and then you execute them, and you just do. The goal is tenure. And then you get to think about what do I actually care about. Or I'm sure we've all had senior scholars tell us, "Hey, just keep your head down and do the things. The goal is tenure."

Now, that I've sort of removed that pressure, I feel like I'm much more free to explore subjects and topics that I may not have previously. I also think that it's really important to remember that while being a faculty member is great and it's why I still maintain an assistant adjunct role now, and there are phenomenal things about it, if this is about the work then let's make it about the work. It shouldn't be about ... Although the prestige is nice. Or, oh, we got this grant and so now there's more money. Those things are nice. But really thinking about ... And for me it was, well, why am I doing this in the first place. So, yeah, it's scope, it's scale, it's reach, it's wanting to do research and work that would have an impact and that people would act on. And that transition to a policy org lets me do that. We put out a brief in our comms person's like, "7,865 people read this article." What? Talk about impact factor.

Felecia Commodore:

Right, right.

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

Like right, yeah! Okay! Okay, yes, I will take that. So, for me it's been, it was a struggle, but I'm so glad that I ended up making that choice.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah, and I'm so glad you share that because I've heard this from some of our other colleagues who have gone into the policy world, funding world, who received higher ed PhDs, which is one of the reasons I was really excited about this theme. How sometimes, particularly in the ASHE space, they can feel like they're not seen as scholars because they're not faculty. When I would hear them talk about it, I'd be like, "That's wild because y'all have way more, in my opinion, don't get mad at me, faculty, impact than some of us do because you're sitting in a room with people who have the power to move funding particular types of ways, legislation particular type of ways." And that really excites me that we have people who understand our scholarship because they are scholars like us to be in those rooms and have conversations in ways, if we're honest, 20 years ago we weren't in those rooms having those conversations. All kinds of crazy things were happening.

But it's really wild to think about that we then can turn around and make policy folks feel like they're not scholars. And it's like, we really got to shift that because you are scholars and we need you where you're at.

Royel Johnson:

Yeah, that's what I love about this theme, I am a scholar who gets included, and we get to sort of broaden the aperture of folks who are not always thought of. And Marjorie, we've had lots of conversations about the work that you've done around assessment evaluation, and not always feeling like there's a space for that work in traditional higher ed spaces. So, I think it also pushes us to think

about what forms of scholarship count too. I'm excited to see in this year's sort of conference what gets included and how do we sort of broaden to include.

I had a question around, at least in the U.S., that there are social, political challenges right now with concerted attacks on DEI and other forms of efforts that have pushed us to think about how do we advance and better serve communities and populations. These attacks aim to take us back 50, 60 years. How are you thinking about your role and responsibility as a scholar, as a researcher in this particular moment?

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

I have two sides to that question. One, which is, and as I've said previously, MDRC is a nonpartisan organization, and those words mean things. There are federal consequences for how we engage in work, the type of work that we do. We don't do advocacy work. However, I think what is exciting is that if I can lead with the research and you're reading the research and you're engaging with it knowing that we are nonpartisan, that carries weight.

We'd worked on a project last year and some of the briefs and materials that we produced were shared with the Texas legislature. Again, getting back to I know nobody's reading my article from the Texas legislature, but from the MDRC perspective, it gives us an opportunity and a chance to still engage with individuals with various perspectives who otherwise may not. And that's something that's really important. That's something that I've learned being in this space to make use of that designation.

Now, as a person and an individual, I have very strong feelings about lots of things. But there are other spaces where that can show up. I still publish with colleagues. We can have the fire and brimstone language there, but I do think that being able to speak to people who come to this from very different lenses is something that I didn't expect but is a valuable tool.

Royel Johnson:

How about you, Daniel?

Felecia Commodore:

And I know that you're in an international context, but everybody got they something. I know it's not quite what's going on here, but I'm sure there's something going on.

Daniel Corral:

It's not as, I would say, intense as what's going on south of the border, but yeah. I think in the Canadian context, being a U.S.-based scholar, then transitioning to a Canadian institution, I think my perceptions around race and studying racial inequality, I was coming in to this position with some assumptions. And one of those assumptions for me was there would be detailed race and ethnicity data of counting students, looking at demographics when it comes to postsecondary institutions. But that's not the case.

So, I think there's a lot of movement right now in Canadian postsecondary institutions and a lot of it was fueled by the stuff in 2020 with George Floyd and this real sort of awareness around race and inequality where, hey, postsecondary institutions do not do a good job of collecting any race and ethnicity data. So, actually now there's been quite a bit of uptick in institutions trying to survey their students systematically to get a sense of what students are we enrolling, how are we serving them, what are their experiences, what are their outcomes, those types of things.

So, in many ways it's the opposite of what's happening in the U.S. with the non-consideration of race ethnicity data when it comes to admissions decisions. But in Canada this is actually just happening. In

many ways it's exciting to see this work progress, and I think it's something that a part of my research is looking at the development and evolution of those types of initiatives. But I think across both of these contexts, I think they underscore just how ... I think there's been a lot of progress when it comes to postsecondary equity, but I feel like every five, ten years, there's something that happens where it exemplifies kind of the world and the society that we're living in right now. As scholars, we have to take that seriously and use our research as a way to impact policy, impact practice, those types of things.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah, sounds good.

Wayne Black:

For me, I study college athletics. My work has always been fairly political in the sense that I talk about ... There are a lot of people who talk about college athletes through the lens of identity development, things like that. Where I think that work is super important. But for me I try to politicize it a little bit more by looking at the social structures and systems that kind of shape higher education and how those impact college athletics. Because right now you got a bunch of people just continually advocating to legislative federal government for name, image, and likeness stuff. There's a lot of people writing about that, and I think that's great.

For me, what I try and get people to understand is how does who you vote for impact who is advocated to. Because that's going to affect college athletics. So, getting people to think a little bit more broadly and really trying to push people to understand that every aspect of college athletics is a political one. From who we hire, from the games that get scheduled, from how contracts are made. All of that stuff, it really comes down to how people navigate that, the political landscape. But people don't really talk about politics and sport because sports and politics don't mix. Well, you literally can't have sport without having politics if you understand kind of the history.

So, for me it's always been kind of pushing that work and challenging people around issues of race, inequity, class has really probably been the biggest thing that I look at from a political standpoint. So that we can move beyond identifying and kind of count data or count analysis and really look at how do we address and change policy. How do we train new thinkers coming through? Because that to me, teaching in and of itself is a political act. And so when I walk into my classrooms ... Well, I teach online, so when I log into my classrooms, when I'm writing my papers, I take all of the thoughts about how I view the world, how I'm thinking about the world, and the issues, and I try and get people to not necessarily think what I'm thinking because I don't really care if you agree with my opinion. I could give a shit less personally.

What I really want you to take away is how to think about these issues and ask deeper questions, so that you can come up with your own opinions. Again, whether or not we agree is immaterial to me around certain things. It's how are you truly coming in to your own politics and what decisions are you making around those politics because that's going to affect this larger system of college athletics.

Felecia Commodore:

And I'm really glad, first of all, all of you, really great context and insight into that. And Wayne, I want to thank you for talking about the interconnection of college athletics and politics, because I don't think it's talked about enough and I think a lot of time "academics" look at athletics like the enemy. It's very weird.

Wayne Black:

Super weird. Man, don't get me started. I almost don't want to think of higher ed no more. Man, y'all had me messed up. I'm going to go get paid somewhere else because I don't have to stay here. Go on dude. I'm out. I see what the job market like it going be like.

Felecia Commodore:

I didn't mean to get Wayne triggered. I'm sorry.

Wayne Black:

Hey, (laughs) listen, listen I got a session to ask about it. We'll talk about it.

Felecia Commodore:

But I said that because I've become really good friends with a number of athletics; practitioners and scholars, and I feel like I thought I knew a lot because I was a dance team person. I lived on a floor with the basketball team, so I thought I really understood athletics-

Royel Johnson:

No comment.

Felecia Commodore:

Don't do that. They were really nice young men. That's what we'll say. Kudos to Drexel Dragons. But just seeing the different kind of both institutional politics and then politics outside of the institution that have to be navigated, I think it's really an area of scholarship that we do need to kind of lean into a little bit more. Especially those of us who are in my little neck of the woods in org and admin because we integrate with it so much. So, just really thankful that you kind of lifted that.

In that respect, we've been talking about the scholar identity and you all's journeys to becoming scholars, figuring out what that meant to you. This year's ASHE theme focuses on the identity of scholars and the scholarly community at large. How do you define your scholarly identity within your current role? And how do you see your work contributing to the broader community of scholars?

Wayne Black:

I just talked, so I'm going to let somebody else go.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah, I want Wayne to take a deep breath because he was really-

Wayne Black:

No, man, just that conversation just be like. Girl! I just be like, bro, what y'all on for real. What you mean about the team? Come on, man, now stop playing.

I think at the same time some athletic scholars could do a better job of incorporating higher ed into their work as opposed to just saying that higher ed doesn't include you in the work. I think sometimes it could be a little bit of a cop out, and I think there has to be a little bit of a middle ground there.

Felecia Commodore:

You said it, I didn't.

Wayne Black:

It's the truth, hey, I'm just saying. You got to hold both people accountable.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah, so how do you all define your scholarly identity and how do you see yourself contributing to the larger scholarly community?

Daniel Corral:

I can try to address this question because I feel like just to give some broader context here. I got the email, the invite to do this podcast, and this idea of scholarly identity I think about so, so much. But I think about it ... I haven't really talked to anybody about it. So, in some places it's not a great place to talk about it.

Felecia Commodore:

Yes.

Daniel Corral:

But yeah, I think the scholarly identity piece is something I struggle a lot with because I think, at the end of the day, as scholars, we have a particular goal in mind, which is to impact policy, impact practice for whatever reason. For me it's making sure that we provide the best conditions for students to succeed in postsecondary education, particularly for underserved students.

But I think how we get there is really challenging because we all have these very unique experiences in how we're socialized. Because I think for me in particular, I went into graduate school wanting to do qualitative research, and then going in to my second year that changed when I got accepted into this institute of education pre-doctoral fellowship program, where it was just focused on quantitative methods. So, that really shifted the type of work that I do. It didn't shift the focus or the topics, but it shifted the type of data I collect or the type of data I analyze.

And so I feel like in particular there's a quite a bit of a divide as you kind of have to be quantitative or you kind of have to be qualitative, at least in the way that I was socialized. But I think now, as someone who has published in both qual and quant, at the end of the day I want that research to have an impact specifically on supporting undocumented students and then addressing the issue of sticker shock for historically underrepresented students.

And so yeah, I think there can be a lot of ... I don't know. You kind of have to pick your path and stick to it, and that also applies in the way that you actually go about conducting your research. You have to be very strict in the epistemological approach or the types of theoretical frameworks you take. But I think, I don't know, if there's any field where we can try to break down those silos I think it's higher education because of how interdisciplinary we can be and ASHE is a great example of the type of research that's presented there.

But, yeah, I think this notion of scholarly identity is something that I've wrestled with throughout just because of the way that I was socialized, but I think now as I'm starting to get more further on toward tenure and trying to crystallize what my research contributions are and those types of things, I think at the end of the day what matters is that impact. So, I guess for me scholarly identity just relates to what you want that outcome to be.

Felecia Commodore:

Mm-hmm. Others?

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

I really appreciate sort of thinking about how we go about the work versus who we are in the work. And I think that when I hear identity, I think lots of things. I think who am I as a person and what do I bring to the space and how does this inform the way that I think about research. So, obviously being a student of color going through postsecondary education, that's one lens and perspective. I'm a parent to two middle schoolers, and so now I'm thinking about college is four years away. What is this going to look like when you get there? So, very much how can I fix it. How can I make this better in the next four years? The clock is ticking.

Felecia Commodore:

Right, right.

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

But I also think about that not just in terms of what I bring to the work but also what does that mean in terms of output. In that some of the evolution of my scholarship and my scholarly identity has been being to open to thinking about other populations or assessment in student learning takes place in lots of different institutional contexts, for example. And so now a lot of our work takes place in community colleges. Or thinking about other ways of considering marginalized student population.

Currently I'm working on a research project looking at transfer students, and not surprisingly, transfer students are also students who are predominantly women, students of color, from low income backgrounds, not traditional students. You name it, they're doing it. And so a lot of what I think about now, in terms of my scholarly identity and what do I bring to the work but also what do I put out, is the ability to look across being an administrator and understanding the university systems from that perspective and a faculty member. Having this really strong research and methods background, and now pulling all of that in to feed into this policy piece.

And I feel like when I think about my scholarly identity, the most important thing for me is how does this make a difference. What is the impact that this is going to have? I could have a thousand publications, but if no one reads them, what does that mean? And so I always feel like what I think about in my work and what I'm learning is what's the so what, get to the so what, get to the thing that's going to help people do something differently.

And so I guess really leaning into, again, that action research piece and really wanting to make sure that the things that I produce are worthwhile. So, that's really important.

Wayne Black:

Mine is slightly different than both of the answers in the sense that for me, I don't really care about a scholarly identity because I've been Wayne Black way longer than I've been Dr. Wayne Black. So, I tend to think sometimes people take that stuff a little too seriously. Again, what are we really talking about here? We're writing research papers. Again, this is not to say these topics aren't important, again they're important, but for real? Come on, bro. You're sitting at a desk. You got a white collar job.

I come from working in factories, working delivering pizzas. So, for me, this career is just about vibing and learning how to treat people. That's what I think about when it comes to my scholarly identity. I don't care about the publications. Again, for me, it's yo, how are you treating that person that just

walked in here? How are you helping the next person the same way that people have helped you, like [inaudible 00:48:48] Dr. Johnson?

I will never forget sitting in there in Portland at that table, and then just rapping with you and then you plugging me in with ASHE. That was a random conversation at a table. He didn't know me from a can of paint. I knew him from Twitter. He was sitting right there writing with his headphones and I said, "Hey, aren't you such and such?"

He said, "Yeah." (Laughs) Ain't that what happened? And we got to talking.

Royel Johnson:

It is.

Wayne Black:

Yeah, no, he connected me with all kind of people.

Royel Johnson:

I said, "Do you know Derek Houston?"

Wayne Black:

He said, Do you know Derek Houston? I said, "I kind of know his work."

He said, "Oh, I got you." And so for me, walking into that space, coming in to ASHE as the only PhD student in my program at that time. We had the EDD program, but I was the only PhD student, so I was just like, "Yo, man, I'm just trying to figure this thing out on my own." And I had a lot of people looking out for me, so because of those people who did look out for me, I try and just bring a good energy as a human into the work that I do.

And I'm just trying to vibe. Again, we writing papers. Let's stop playing. You collecting some data, you running some code, or you coding some stuff with your hand or whatever you're doing. Again, I'm not saying that the work isn't that important, but like. Let's be real. You're much more than just the doctor or whatever that scholarship. I could not care less about publishing in some of these journals. It's more about, yo, how are you treating people? Are you helping the next person up? And are you being authentic to who you are?

So, for me, again, I've been Wayne Black for 33 years. I've been Dr. Wayne Black for two. That's how I kind of view my scholarly work. The work going to be good anyways because I know I write well and I know I put the time in to do it.

Royel Johnson:

Wayne, we're go, go.

Felecia Commodore:

Can I? I was going to ask a followup question.

Royel Johnson:

Go ahead.

Felecia Commodore:

No, please. (laughs) We love it.

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

What do your students call you? What do you tell them to call you?

Wayne Black:

Dr. B.

Felecia Commodore:

Okay.

Wayne Black:

It just be Dr. B. Here's the thing, I'm not crazy, I'm a young looking Black dude, so you're not supposed to be in there calling me Wayne because then I know what that could be also. Just because I be chill like this, people be thinking they can kind of step to me. Don't play. Because if I have to I will. I'm just going to be on that. Don't try to creep to me! I'll pull the cord if I have to. I try not to though.

Felecia Commodore:

He said, what he said, just don't push it.

Daniel Corral:

I just wanted to follow up. I think what Wayne was just saying right now in terms of his identity really being solid and tight to who he's always been. I think for me, that. You know, the streetwise identity, it's something that's really attached to my job and the work that I do. But I will say having a kid, my kid's almost going to be two, I think that's also helped put things into perspective. And I know Marjorie was just mentioning the importance of family and how that kind of helps inform and shape the work.

I think also, at the end of the day, I can have these really complex thoughts in my mind about who I am and who I perceive myself to be and how other people perceive me to be, but then at the end of the day I come home, I got to take care of my kid and change diapers. So, I also think also having ... Going back to the family and going back to your roots, I think is a really important exercise too. I don't know. I feel like we can get really wrapped up in this whole academia thing, and just there's always something we could be doing where there's always this idea of we're never enough or whatnot. Yeah, being grounded in your family and where you came from, I think, is also a key piece to this part of identity and how it shapes other types of identities.

Felecia Commodore:

I really like what you all are saying. And one of the things I hear is one of the contributions I think you all are making, and what you're sharing, and what I think all of us can take away is a contribution to the scholarly community is authenticity. And not getting caught up in what does it mean to be a scholar and performative kind of ways of doing that. But being like, "This is who I am as a scholar and what I bring to the community is who I am." And I think that's so important to not forget yourself and to be your whole self in whatever it is that you're doing and however it is that you approach scholarship or being a scholar. I think that's so important.

And I also, as you all were talking, I'm thinking a lot of times I feel like we talk about scholarly identity like it's static but it's not. And I think every year I have to write a bio, short, long, whatever, and every

year it changes. Every year I'm thinking about myself differently in my work and my scholarship and how I want to communicate that and how I want to communicate myself. So, I think it's also great to say, "Who I see myself today as a scholar may not be how I see myself tomorrow and that's okay." So, I really like that too.

I also am advocating for a T-shirt that says, "We're just vibing." I just feel like now that's what do you do as faculty, I'm just vibing. That's what Wayne told me.

Royel Johnson:

Period.

Felecia Commodore:

I'm just vibing. So, I like that.

Royel Johnson:

So, last question. Wayne, wait, where did you get your PhD?

Wayne Black:

University of Kansas.

Royel Johnson:

Okay. I want you all to think back to your first year as a PhD student at Kansas, at Wisconsin, at Illinois.

Felecia Commodore:

Midwest in the house.

Royel Johnson:

What would you tell-

Wayne Black:

You said you went to the Indiana State Fair. I was gone from Indianapolis though, I've been over there on the state fairgrounds.

Felecia Commodore:

I do state fairs.

Royel Johnson:

What do you tell your first year PhD self? What advice do you give that person?

Felecia Commodore:

Marjorie, I wish y'all could see Marjorie.

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

Buckle up. Buckle up. Strap in.

Felecia Commodore:

Marjorie had a whole moment just now. Y'all missed it.

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

This is not a visual medium, but as the senior amongst this group, I'm a , ugh (laughs) say most distance between now and then, and Felecia, I feel like I was saying this to your students recently. I think you never know what's going to come along and I think this conversation about identity is a great connection. If you remain fixed in that identity, you're going to be in for a lot of disappointment. And so I think I would tell myself that whatever comes is okay. And it may not be what you expected, but that's okay too. And the most important thing is to learn and grow and continue to build for whatever comes after that.

Royel Johnson:

I love that.

Felecia Commodore:

I love that too. Daniel, Wayne.

Daniel Corral:

I think these are just really hard questions. I wish we had more time to talk about these things.

Royel Johnson:

We'll see you at ASHE.

Daniel Corral:

Yeah.

Felecia Commodore:

Part deux.

Daniel Corral:

I think for me what I would tell that Danny first year PhD is be thankful for what you have and then know that you can plan everything out, but it will absolutely not go according to plan. So, you have to be okay with changes. And I don't know, I feel like part of this too is just there's growing up, becoming an adult, and getting into these more really important positions, where you're advising students and you're making really important policy decisions and whatnot, you just never know how you're going to get there or if you'll even get there, but just be appreciative of everything you put in to get to that position and then know that you don't know what the future's going to look like, but if you keep on trusting yourself, you'll end up making it there.

Royel Johnson:

Love that.

Wayne Black:

I would tell myself truthfully, man, just love your mind. Love who you are as a person and trust creativity. That was probably a big thing. Bro, you not a mule. So, don't work like one no more. You don't have to. You're not hustling and wrestling no more.

Felecia Commodore:

Oh to my spirit.

Wayne Black:

Feed your mind the same way that you would feed anything else. Your mind is a muscle and it needs rest and it needs breaks and you need to tap into creativity and be okay with that because they're going to tell you just write, write, write, write, write. No. Write what? Trust your mind and again just love it. Love it like it's not just for what you can accomplish but for how it thinks and for how it can grow and for what it can contribute to the world.

Royel Johnson:

I love that. Felecia, what would you say to yourself?

Felecia Commodore:

Man. First year PhD. I want to give a little content. I'm a qualitative researcher, so I got stories. Transparency, I wasn't sure I was going to stay in my doctoral program my first year. I had a really tough adjustment not academically but socially. And there were some fit challenges I felt like, and I didn't always feel that my fit challenges were understood.

And I was able, thanks to some great advice from Dr. Sean Harper and support from people like Kian Maguire, shout out to him, to navigate that. So, I think, looking back, I would say, one, hold on to yourself with all you have. Regardless of what comes, don't lose her. And then the second thing I would say is you have no idea who you haven't met yet.

Royel Johnson:

I want to give a plug. That's beautiful.

Felecia Commodore:

I have met some of my closest friends through this journey, people who are like family to me now, both in the academy and out of the academy. And people I thought were going to be super instrumental were not the people who were instrumental. And the people who I didn't know yet were the people who helped me hold on to myself and helped me become the scholar that I am today. And if I had walked away before that moment, I would have never met those people. I'd never be who I am today.

Royel Johnson:

Wow.

Felecia Commodore:

And so that's what I would say. And then the last thing I would say is stop eating Doritos. Because now I am still, many moons later, need crunchy things when I write or I can't write. And so you really got to train your brain to do other things because I can't keep eating Doritos and chips when I write. And I just been doing that-

Royel Johnson:

You are hilarious.

Felecia Commodore:

Since first year. Girl, walk away from the chips. Pick a apple or something when you write because you never going to be able to stop this.

Royel Johnson:

You are wearing me out.

Felecia Commodore:

Just so you know. If I could go back, no chips when you write and no Doritos.

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

Are banana chips okay?

Felecia Commodore:

It's not the same, got the crunch.

Royel Johnson:

Got to have the crunch.

Felecia Commodore:

It's got the crunch.

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

You want the crispy.

Felecia Commodore:

Now we weaned off of doughnuts and wine from dissertation phase. I did get past that. But the chips I can't. I got to go get chips and sit down next to the laptop. Y'all pray for me because I have yet to be delivered. So, that would be my advice. How about you?

Royel Johnson:

Oh my gosh. I was young.

Marjorie Dorime-Williams:

You were very young. Very.

Royel Johnson:

Marjorie saw me as an undergrad. And I went straight into my program at Illinois before I went to Ohio State and transferred. I would tell myself a lot of things. One, I was young and I had a bit of a chip on my

shoulder. I felt like I needed to prove myself. I would tell myself wait until you see what is on the other side.

Felecia Commodore:

That's it, man. It's crazy.

Royel Johnson:

And I live a life that I could not have imagined, and I'm so grateful for every experience, every person, every challenge. Because there have been many. All that which have prepared me for today. I would tell myself that I'm right where I'm supposed to be. I'm not late. I'm not behind. I'm not deficient. And trust yourself in the way in which you trusted yourself when you left Illinois to transfer a program after two years in a doctoral program despite everyone who warned me otherwise to go to Ohio State and get the training and mentorship that I knew would be needed for where I wanted to go. Trust myself.

I would trust myself when I left Ohio State to go to Penn State and really culturally remote and isolating place and everyone was like, "You're going to hate it there," and it was one of the best professional experiences I could have had. Trust myself. Trust myself. Trust myself. And just wait. Be patient. And yeah, that's what I would tell myself. It's all been worth it.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah, I am doing exactly what I think I was designed to do, and I think there's no better feeling in the world, and that's what I hope for everyone.

Royel Johnson:

Yes, yes.

Felecia Commodore:

That's what I hope for you all however that looks. It may be faculty, it may not be faculty. It may be policy, it may be working in the philanthropy world. It may be being a community organizer or activist, but I think using this "training" that we get as a tool to unlock who we've already been designed to be and finding ourselves being the best version of ourselves and the best version of who we were designed to be to help make this world and this thing we call higher education better for all and not for some.

Royel Johnson:

So, if you're listening-

Felecia Commodore:

It's great.

Royel Johnson:

And you are questioning yourself, it's okay to trust yourself. It's okay to pivot. It's okay to make the unpopular decision. It's okay to spend time with family even though it feels like I can't miss this and I have to do that.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah, man.

Royel Johnson:

Trust yourself. Lean in to the moment. I was going to say something else but I don't want to get in trouble with Jason. I was going to say a cuss word. (laughs) With that, thank you all so much.

Felecia Commodore:

Thank you all. This has been a great conversation.

Royel Johnson:

Yes, thank you for being here and being a part of this conversation. We can't wait to share it with our listeners.

Felecia Commodore:

Yes, and we're just vibing.

Royel Johnson:

We just vibing. That's it, period.

Thank you to our guests Dr. Wayne Black, Marjorie Dorime-Williams, and Daniel Corral for such an enlightening and engaging conversation about what it means to be a scholar to them, but also what it doesn't mean.

Felecia Commodore:

Those of you that have been rocking with us know that at the end of each conversation, we like to engage in a segment called Scholar Soundtrack as we reflect on what musical selections rang in our minds as we think about the day's conversation. Today the song that came to mind was It's a Vibe by 2 Chainz, Ty Dolla \$ign, Trey Songz, and Jhené Aiko. Because in all of our figuring out our scholar identities, as we build our higher education careers, we should always remember not to neglect being open to the various opportunities and evolution of ourselves and our work. None of us have to subject ourselves or our scholarly identities to boxes or narrow understandings of ourselves, but can prepare ourselves to let experiences, moments, and passions continue to shape how we define our scholarly identity. In the words of our beloved guest, Dr. Wayne Black, we're vibing and there's nothing wrong with tapping in to that vibe to help us along our journey.

(music interlude)

Well, that was today's song for Scholar Soundtrack. We are so excited that these conversations continue to motivate and invigorate us.

Royel Johnson:

Buckle up and get ready for the conversations to come. You don't want to miss this. Join us next time as we continue to discuss this year's conference theme, "I Am A Scholar", with Drs. Leonard Taylor, Shelvia English, and OiYan Poon. Until next time, I'm Royel.

Felecia Commodore:

I'm Felecia.

Royel Johnson:
And remember.

Felecia Commodore:
You are a scholar.