

Royel Johnson:

Before we jump into 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:

In 3, 2, 1.

Royel Johnson:

Greetings, ASHE family and welcome back to another episode of the ASHE presidential podcast where our theme this year is "I Am A Scholar". I'm your co-host, Dr. Royel Johnson, associate professor of Higher Education and Social Work at USC, University of Southern California and director of the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates. And shout out to the Rossier School of Education for being a sponsor this year. I have the privilege of working with Dr. Felecia Commodore.

Felecia Commodore:

Hi, everyone. I'm your other co-host, Dr. Felecia Commodore, associate professor in higher education at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. I'm excited, I'm ready to go. I had my coffee and my tater tots, so I'm really good to go. We're excited to keep our conversation going as we discuss this year's theme, "I Am A Scholar" and today we're back to have a passionate conversation with some really brilliant people about navigating being what some might call a mid-career scholar and the shifts and new perspectives that come with it. So tell us who's joining us today, Royel.

Royel Johnson:

So today we have Dr. Leonard Taylor, who is an associate professor of higher education and student affairs at Indiana University, and he's also director of the National Survey of Student Engagement, NSSE.

Next up we have Dr. OiYan Poon, who is a senior research fellow for education equity at the NAACP Thurgood Marshall Institute and co-director of the College Admissions Futures Collaborative.

Last but certainly not least, we have Dr. Shelvia English, who is vice president of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the American Dental Education Association. Welcome to the show, y'all.

Felecia Commodore:

Welcome everyone.

Royel Johnson:

It's so wonderful to have you.

Shelvia English:

Yes.

Felecia Commodore:

So before we jump into our round table conversation, we've got a fun little activity to kick things off and get to know you a little better. So the last few years we've done a little game called this or that, but this year we decided to switch it up a little bit.

Royel Johnson:

We're going to switch up a little bit.

Felecia Commodore:

And so we're playing a little game called QTNA, questions that need answers. And so we're going to start off with our first question. I'm going to go with you, Shelvia. What is your go-to karaoke song?

Shelvia English:

Ooh, that is hard.

Royel Johnson:

Because so many.

Shelvia English:

Right. Probably like an SWV, Xscape. I like to do nineties, so a throwback. We'll go with that one.

Felecia Commodore:

I like it. I like it.

Royel Johnson:

Okay. Leonard, tell us a weird fact that you happen to know for no reason at all.

Leonard Taylor:

That if you microwave grapes they explode.

Royel Johnson:

Because you've tried.

Leonard Taylor:

I learned that from a Snapple cap in 1997.

Felecia Commodore:

Snapple facts. I love that. Also a throwback. You're right in line with y'all. Okay. OiYan, if you could eat only eat one type of cuisine for the rest of your life, what would it be?

OiYan Poon:

I mean, I just got to go back to what I grew up with, which is home style Cantonese food. Not just Chinese food, but Cantonese food.

Felecia Commodore:

I love it.

OiYan Poon:

That includes dim sum and all kind of things that my mama used to cook me.

Royel Johnson:

Aw, very good.

Felecia Commodore:

I love it. That's great.

Royel Johnson:

Leonard be cheffing so I kind of want to hear his answer to this question too.

Leonard Taylor:

Tacos.

Royel Johnson:

Same.

Felecia Commodore:

I knew it was going to be tacos. I was very clear.

Royel Johnson:

Same

Felecia Commodore:

You going to turn into a taco. Okay. So we're really excited to have our scholar friends with us here today and these folks have taken on roles that impact everything from practice to policy in higher education. And so we wanted to talk a bit more about your journeys to these roles, how you got there and how you see your scholarly identity in relationship to your work and what you continue to experience as you navigate these roles in the higher education, scholarly community. So let's not waste any more time and let's get to it.

Royel Johnson:

So let's jump in. So tell us who you are, what you do, and a little bit about the evolution of your scholarly identity. Anyone can start.

OiYan Poon:

I'll get it started.

Royel Johnson:

Yes.

Felecia Commodore:

Let's get it started.

OiYan Poon:

I will get it started because probably the most confused. So I started my career in student affairs like so many of us did particularly in multicultural affairs long before there was a thing called DEI and then got my Ph.D. and learned that, oh wow, I really like research and the power of research to change narratives, to really move the needle on justice issues or its possibilities. And somehow did not plan to become a faculty member, but became a faculty member, Loyola Chicago, and then got tenure at Colorado State University and decided I need to live where I need to live for my family and we needed to get back to Chicago. So I am in Chicago for good.

And what am I doing now. So I was a program officer at the Spencer Foundation. That was the job that brought me back to Chicago and as co-director for the College Admissions Futures Co-Lab with Julie Park, Dominique Baker, Kelly Rosinger, a whole bunch of good folk. I got invited by the governor's office here in Illinois. Shout out JB Pritzker to serve as a consultant on higher ed equity to the state so have been doing that for a good part of the last year. So it's been a lot of fun. I've been bringing in some of my scholar friends. Dr. Commodore, do not be surprised when I knock on your door very soon.

Felecia Commodore:

Okay, I'm waiting.

Royel Johnson:

(singing)

OiYan Poon:

So that's been a lot of fun and doing some research post-SFFA for the Legal Defense Fund Thurgood Marshall Institute.

Royel Johnson:

Yes. Very nice.

Felecia Commodore:

That's great.

Royel Johnson:

Others?

Shelvia English:

I don't mind going. So you started with who am I? I'm Shelvia English and I always like to share, I came from Boston, grew up in Boston with my Jamaican family in the Boston Public School system. And so some of those early experiences really shaped who I am. I'm definitely a city girl. And so starting out in Boston and really going off to college as a first generation college student, I didn't know kind of what to expect and having to navigate this system on my own. While my parents did encourage me and support me, they didn't know much about the system so I really learned a lot from gaining mentors along the

way and residence life was my pathway into student affairs. I did that for quite some time and bounced around to different institutions and also continued to pursue my education through getting a master's and a PhD and then eventually realizing, okay, residence life is great, this is fun, but my peace was worth more. And so I wanted to separate that world of work and home more.

And I actually found myself during my doctoral program at the University of Maryland College Park, found myself interacting with folks on campus who were working with first generation college students, low income students, and I had some of those same identities and wanting to work with that population. And I got the chance to work with the Incentive Awards program for about six years. And so it was really great to dive into access and retention work, being on the academic side of the house while pursuing my PhD and trying to think about the field that I'm in and the things that I'm interested in. And so that kind of really shaped my interest and my pathway as well as getting involved in my own program. So getting to be a TA and then getting introduced to ASHE and going to all the conferences where I met many of you is through ASHE. And so that kind of shaped my path in ways that I didn't anticipate.

And then I found myself wanting to work more with graduate students. So I actually am an affiliate faculty member as well at the University of Maryland College Park and the Student Affairs Concentration. So I got to teach there since I've graduated, mentoring students there and then ending up here at the American Dental Education Association. That was not on my bingo card of life, I think God was like, "Here you go. I got a different plan for you." But I would say the biggest thing is the new impact that I'm able to have. I have a broader reach outside of just the campus. We get to work with all dental schools and US allied programs across the US and Canada. And so just to have a further reach, but to still kind of be in this world of higher ed has been wonderful and amazing and challenging at the same time.

Leonard Taylor:

Love that. So, I'll hop in. So many similarities. So I am from Milwaukee, like 90 miles north of Chicago and I live in Indianapolis like two and a half hours southeast of Chicago so I'm always in Chicago, so I love that you are there. That's actually one of the two places that I feel like I would want to settle. And then Shelvie, I too am a city girl, so (collective laughing) in a slightly different sense, we're on the same page. More JT than Caresha.

So my path to this moment was similar in a lot of ways. I started as a practitioner in higher ed, but I usually go back to my student experience. For a long time, was a recovering engineering student from the University of Wisconsin. I spent three and a half years majoring in mechanical engineering and then changed my major to education arts with an emphasis in rhetoric. So quite the pivot. And started working for pre-college programs and realized that what I cared more about was not the types of design and efficiencies of technical systems that I was focused on in engineering, but really thinking about design and efficiencies in the context of social systems, social enterprises like education.

And so that kind of drove me down my educational path, getting a master's degree, getting into practical work, also working in res life and fraternity and sorority life and leadership education and pre-college programs and all of that stuff. And they're realizing that higher education is messed up because all of the stuff that I learned that felt like good knowledge, I was not allowed or empowered or encouraged to apply in my day-to-day work with students. And when I brought up those discrepancies, those challenges, I was met with bureaucratic responses like, "Well, we need to wait until it's right for this type of change. We need to wait until this other person gets hired."

Felecia Commodore:

These things take time.

Leonard Taylor:

"So that they can lead," blah blah, blah. And I was like, "Well, there are real students who are suffering while y'all are waiting," and I'm not with that so I got a doctorate. And with the goal of creating broader systemic and social change within our institutional context, right, social change within, we're real good at cultural, well not cultural. We're real good at structural change in higher education. We are slightly better at cultural change and not good at social change at all in my opinion.

So that's really the focus of my research right now in the context of student success and some other things is what are the social mechanisms and levers important phenomena to consider as we think about moving higher education from what it is to what it could be. I was not interested in a faculty job at all. I was a reluctant applicant because I had a committee member of color who was like, "You want shake a lot of tables and they just going to fire you." So we might think about that.

And because I had been in administrative roles beforehand, he emphasized the fact that understanding how higher education institutions work from a faculty perspective could be invaluable to my theories and perspectives related to change. So me coming into a faculty role was really a heuristic in me trying to understand through a different lens how this system that I was so frustrated with worked and I ended up liking the shit. So now I'm on my third institution at IU Bloomington, director of the National Survey of Student Engagement, who I had been a critical friend of for the entirety of my career and now I'm directing it. Lots more stories to tell.

Felecia Commodore:

No, this is great. And I love that you all share your journeys weren't completely linear. You may now be in places that you didn't originally intend to start. And I think that's really great. And so particularly for those of you who've transitioned out of quote unquote traditional academic roles, what motivated that decision and how has it shaped your approach to your work and your identity as a scholar?

Shelvia English:

Although I wasn't in a traditional faculty role, I wasn't academic affairs, I didn't intend on leaving higher ed brick and mortar actually. When I was applying, I was applying to jobs within graduate schools and things just was not panning out the way I would have wanted. So like I said, my current role in organization, not on my bingo card, but the fact that I'm still in touch with higher ed is what I, it expanded what I thought was possible. And I've always wanted to stay in education to have an impact. And so it just means my impact looks different. It means my reach looks different. And when it comes to scholarship and stuff, I would say that having opportunities currently at the ADEA, American Dental Education Association has been rewarding.

When I came on board, they were finishing up the first dental wide education climate survey and now we have all this data and so there's opportunity to write with members across various institutions and we're actually going to be rolling out some of the writing on that really soon. For me to be able to be a part of that has been amazing because I'm kind of getting stretched as a scholar in a different lens, in a different lane, but I'm still engaging in research and scholarship with my colleagues who are still faculty members and trying to write in those ways. So it's been kind of this amorphous thing and opportunities are presenting itself again in ways I wouldn't have imagined so I'm glad that I'm being stretched to think beyond what I thought was possible.

Royel Johnson:

Love that.

OiYan Poon:

So I feel like I'm part of the, why it..., Great Resignation among some tenure tracks and your faculty out here. I don't know what I'm doing. All I know is that what really motivated it is my love for Chicago and having a partner with a career as an urban planner, not just an urban planner, but an urban planner of Chicago. We had to get back here.

Royel Johnson:

Got it.

Felecia Commodore:

Right.

OiYan Poon:

Yeah, be an urban planner of Chicago in Colorado. We learned the hard way. So that was really what motivated me to leave.

And I think sometimes in the traditional tenure track career, you're just so beholden to an institution hiring you and I wasn't willing to wait anymore. So my first kind of step out was the Spencer Foundation, and at first I thought that was like a, oh, cool, I'm stepping out into academy adjacent, but then being in Spencer and any of y'all postdoc or fellows know Spencer is the Illuminati, I feel like. It is not stepping to academy adjacent, it was stepping into academy core.

So that was an illuminating journey. Learned a lot in those three plus years that I'll always treasure and the people I got to meet. And it was amazing. And that first one I left because I grew up working class also in the Boston area, Shelvia and working class, immigrant family. And when my family heard I was leaving a forever job, they looked at me all kind of sideways, like, "What are you doing?" Right. And I am like, "I have to go." Right. And it's a temporary job when you go to Spencer, if you ever have the opportunity to do it, do it. But I also had to leave behind my tenured position.

But that really did open up a whole lot of doors in rethinking what's possible as a scholar and to continue writing and producing research, not in the academy. So today I feel like I've told a few people, I have a different relationship now to the academy in that I kind of use the university as my accountant for grants.

Royel Johnson:

Right. Fiscal support.

OiYan Poon:

Without a contract. Yeah, fiscal support. So if I have 0% appointment at the University of Maryland, and so if the grants dry up, so does my bill payer. So it's a little different, but I think after a couple of years now I'm starting to feel like I'll just roll with this. I think especially at mid-career, we've established ourselves. My brother recently told me a few months ago, he was just like, "Why do you still act like you're early career?" He was like, "You have years, decades." And I'm like, "What?" And he is just like, "You have options. You act like you don't have options." And I'm like, "Oh, okay." And I don't know if that's just conditioning as a woman of color or what it is, but I was just like, oh, these are conversations I have with my therapist, so I'll just stop there.

Royel Johnson:

Well, it certainly hasn't slowed you down. Congratulations.

Felecia Commodore:

Oh, yes.

Royel Johnson:

As the ASHE Book award recipient.

Felecia Commodore:

Book award this year.

Royel Johnson:

Still producing scholarship.

OiYan Poon:

Thank you.

Royel Johnson:

But also scholarship that has sort of broad relevance. I saw you posting on Twitter one day about just sort of seeing your book in a public bookstore and what that means. Most academic books that we write will never have the kind of reach that we sort of aspire. And so now being able to even lean more into public scholarship and connect is really inspiring.

So this year's ASHE theme is "I Am A Scholar". With that in mind, how are you all defining your scholarly identity if you had to? And then second, as we think about the current attacks on DEI and the work that so many of our predecessors have done over the past 40, 50 years to advance equity, what role and responsibility do we have as scholars to meet this sort of moment currently?

Leonard Taylor:

I guess I can start. From a scholarly identity standpoint, that's the thing that I talk with my students about often. In a lot of ways our role as a scholar is based on how we see ourselves and also how other people see us. There are spaces where we see ourselves as scholars and other people might not. There are spaces where we don't see ourselves as scholars and other people do.

But what I've really been harping on for the students that I've been working with and for myself is that not to conflate being a researcher with being a scholar.

Royel Johnson:

I get down.

Leonard Taylor:

Because a lot of students are putting a lot of emphasis on learning very technical skills and being able to wield and mobilize codified knowledge, but not necessarily about how to advance or innovate the applications of those skills and knowledge to advance a particular purpose. And not that that's a bad path. So in NSSE, there are a bunch of folks who are brilliant that are scholars who are also research scientists. There are faculty who are on a research track. And so while the scope of their work is not



necessarily advancing knowledge in the same sense that maybe a tenured or faculty member, they all do. So it's not to say that you can't do both or be both, but really to understand the technical aspects and not to conflate those with the more kind of social and consequential aspects of the work that we do or at least imagine ourselves to do as a scholar.

So when it comes down to that from an identity standpoint, I think a lot about who cares about what I do and do the people who care about what I do are they the people whose work I care to impact, whose lives and experiences that I care to impact? If the people who I want to impact don't care about what I do, then I'm probably doing the wrong shit. And if the wrong people care about what I do, then I need to be vigilant about not getting pulled into or away from myself and my commitments because that's also easy to do in this enterprise. Some university folks are like, "Oh my God, yes, you got another grant. You got another grant? Oh yes, love that." And I'm like, "Oh, let me make sure that I don't get distracted," as we work to continue feeding these parasitic institutions.

And then the role in the current moment in meeting the moment, I mean I think about Toni Morrison often in these moments around her just ongoing very pensive and also very cutting analyses of decisions related to whiteness and the literary imagination. The way that she would be intentional about not having to write explicitly about race to talk about racial issues and the ways that she would critique and really call out the people who had the audacity to ask questions of her about her attentiveness to whiteness in her work. And there was one quote where she talked about the very serious function of racism is distracting and goes on to say that not only does it distract you from your work, but there'll always be something else. There'll always be something more that you have to produce to convince these people who have already decided that they're not invested in who you are of something.

And so I think our role is not to be distracted in this current moment because when you talk to older generations, they're like, "Oh yeah, they attacking DEI. I remember when they attacked affirmative action." I remember being an undergraduate student in Wisconsin and being in a sit-in the capitol building because that Black guy that they got to go around all of the campuses kind of challenging affirmative action, I forget his name in the early 2000s, but he was at Madison and he was advocating against affirmative action in the state of Wisconsin, even though of the eight statutes, only one of them dealt with race. The rest were with women and people with disabilities and veterans.

Anyway, all of that to say folks who are longer in the tooth are not surprised by these attacks or this moment. And that gives me some insight and inspiration to also not be distracted by the moment.

Royel Johnson:

Politics as a distraction. Yeah.

OiYan Poon:

Let me tag team on what Dr. Taylor just shared because it ties to what I feel like I want to do in contributing towards the broader community of scholars now is I've been really engaged in pushing, not just pushing back, but really offering and contributing towards efforts to reclaim movements forward. There's so much anti-DEI backlash. What's the opposite of backlash? Forward lash?

Felecia Commodore:

Whiplash. I'm not...

Leonard Taylor:

Lash, lash.

OiYan Poon:

Whatever that is, just not getting so bogged down by the distraction. And I believe it was Ward Connerly, you were referring to, Leonard? Yep. The Black man from California who went to different states and said, "Ending affirmative action is for civil rights." It's the same language. He called it his civil rights initiative. And so we get really distracted and we try to respond and react and it's too reactionary and we lose our way. So then how do we just push forward and not go back?

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah.

Shelvia English:

If I could add, yeah, I definitely agree with that. And so when I think about defining my scholar identity, I don't know that I have the best definition. I'm kind of still working through it. Actually, I'm going to be presenting at ASHE this fall, which I'm excited for, and working with one of my sister scholars and us talking about being Black immigrant women and engaging in scholarship. And I've been kind of reflecting through my writing and working on this project of where do I fit my professional administrator all these things and have more of an integrated approach on how I view myself and therefore how I view my work. And so I think that's kind of the space that I'm sitting in. But Leonard, I like what you said about not conflating these perspectives of scholarship and research and those kinds of things.

I think the biggest thing is what helps to keep me as a scholar, I would say, is to keep asking questions, to keep interrogating because there's just more to find out and there's more to advance. And so that's kind of I guess how I would approach it. And so to that point, what's my role in this present state that we're in. I think it's interesting that I'm sitting in this position of being a VP of DEI at this organization and all of our members are looking to us like, "Hey, all these laws are happening, what's going on?" And when we're offering workshops and resources, they're like, "Sorry, can't come, sorry, I can't access your resources. My state's not going to support it," this, that, and the third. And so we're sitting here like, "Okay, how do we meet the member's needs? How do we still do this work?"

And then other people calling us out to say, "You can't just go and rename everything because we still need to name the thing." So needing to be a little bit more innovative, needing to see what other folks are doing, needing to come back to the table. But I think it's also hard when we're also being pushed to stay in crisis mode, but it's like can we really ideate in ways when we're constantly in crisis mode? So I think part of that is how do I do that self-care, how do I engage in this important work and how am I collaborative in this work? I think I'm still trying to figure all that out.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah, that's really insightful. And all of you in your respective spaces have taken on significant leadership roles at this point in your career. And so I'm curious, two things. One, how has stepping into these roles influenced your scholarship and the impact you hope to make in your respective areas and in the field at large, but also how are you balancing all of this with your personal commitments, with your own personal life and your wellbeing? How are you navigating that as well?

OiYan Poon:

I do a terrible job of balancing, I'm going to confess right now, but what's gotten me better over time has been my daughter who's now nine and a half, and the inspiration to my book Asian American is Not a Color, the title being her words. She actually tried to argue for co-authorship.

Felecia Commodore:

I like it. Negotiate for what you want, negotiate.

Royel Johnson:

She said, pay me in equity.

OiYan Poon:

She was like, "Shouldn't I be co-author because Asian American is Not a Color was the words I said when I was three?" And I was like, "You said. You didn't write," but she does a really good job of saying, the other day she was like, "Hey, can we do something together because I'm nine now, but in a few years now, maybe 12, 13. I'm not really going to want to spend time with you."

Felecia Commodore:

Oh, not foreshadowing.

OiYan Poon:

"You probably should take some time." Yeah. Like now?

Royel Johnson:

Get the capacity and interest.

OiYan Poon:

Yes, this is, "In a few years you're going to complain that you can't spend time with me, so just warning you."

Felecia Commodore:

Let me help you, help me help you.

OiYan Poon:

So she has become my accountability partner, I guess.

Felecia Commodore:

That is funny. I love it. Others?

Shelvia English:

I would say, what is balance? I think I'm trying to adopt more of a mindset actually that my pastor shared as management. So different seasons call for different things. I'm a little bit newer to my role, and so I'm in transition. And so just trying to keep all the things in the air when it comes to work, being called into more meetings and so more meetings talking about strategy and forecasting and all of these things, but trying to make sure I still carve out time for me. Today is Black women Mental Health day and I worked today, but I need to reclaim my time at some point. So things of that nature. And I think just continuing to engage in my faith community, asking for help. I think when I'm a better me, then I can show up better at work and I can show up better in my scholarship.

Royel Johnson:

Love that.

Felecia Commodore:

Love that.

Leonard Taylor:

Asking for help. Oh my God, yes.

Felecia Commodore:

Say it again, Dr. Taylor.

Leonard Taylor:

Listen, I'm going to get a beer today with George Kuh who's like the inaugural director because I was like, "Hey, George, I got some questions."

Royel Johnson:

It is I.

Leonard Taylor:

And I could use your perspective. So I think one of the things I would think about, yeah, I don't think about balance that much anymore because I realized that balance assumes that things aren't overlapping. Sometimes I'm doing two things at once, you know what I mean? And I'm just like, "I don't know if I can spend equal amounts of time on things," but regardless, I've been thinking more about rest. How do I feel right, right. How do I feel rested? And me and my therapist have been talking a lot about this. Shout out to Keenan, is do I know what rested me feels like. Because often we don't pay attention to ourselves when we are resting.

Felecia Commodore:

I feel that.

Leonard Taylor:

We only pay attention to ourselves when we're stressed. And Stretched.

Felecia Commodore:

I feel attacked. but that's...

Leonard Taylor:

You should, you should because I know you.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah, I know.

Leonard Taylor:

You live down the street. Okay. So that's taken me on a journey to really kind of check in with myself in down moments to see how I feel. And that's been a good practice. One of the things I was committed to do when I moved into this nasty job that I had no plans on taking was living in Bloomington was not going to do it for me so I live in Indianapolis. It's a 45-mile commute. It's about an hour door to door. And wow, can I leave all of the BS that I sometimes deal with on I-69 and get home and just be ready to sit on the couch and re-watch Scandal, shit like that I like to do.

The other thing, last thing I'll say, I was having this conversation with a colleague for a different podcast about rest, and the other thing I've been thinking about is what am I resting from? And that has been something that has helped guide my efforts as well because sometimes it's like I'm resting from social interaction, transitioning from being a more autonomous researcher who managed a bunch of grants to running a research enterprise. I have to interact with people way more and those interactions are less negotiable than they've been in the past. So sometimes I need to rest from people.

So when I get home I'm like, "Oh, I'm not talking to nobody for the rest of the day." I have to rest from whiteness often because so much of the work world that we exist in are plagued with the violences that come when you're in these spaces that you are not of. And so sometimes I'm like, "Ooh, when I get done doing this thing." Felecia, I want to interact with people, but I want to interact with my people. So I think that's another thing that I've been thinking about with regard to balance is not this, how do I keep all of the trains running, but how do I really know what my aspirations are as far as rest and fulfillment and how do I prioritize those aspirations?

Royel Johnson:

Yeah, that's beautiful.

Felecia Commodore:

That's an interesting thing you all of a sudden in one way or another that I do think is interesting at this quote unquote mid-career space, is being able to be more, I think unabashed about I need certain things or this other thing won't work. I need community. I need space to reprieve. I need those things. And if this job or this space cannot provide it for me, I have the capital now for lack of better words to say, then I got to walk away from this space.

Royel Johnson:

Yeah, and it being a non-negotiable. This is where I am. I want to ask the last question before we go. OiYan and others, how are you curating, creating, cultivating joy? Where are you finding joy in the work or outside of the work in this moment?

OiYan Poon:

Other than trashy TV? I mean, that's not really good.

Felecia Commodore:

I mean, trashy TV is good. You won't be the first to...

OiYan Poon:

I mean, Salt Lake City and Potomac and the Real Housewives. Love is Blind. All the things. But for real, for real. I mean, do, I do orange theory at 5:00 AM four or five days a week.

Felecia Commodore:

Oh! Salt Lake City is something else. OOOH! That does not sound joyful to me.

OiYan Poon:

I like the endorphins.

Felecia Commodore:

But this is your joy.

OiYan Poon:

[inaudible 00:37:17].

Felecia Commodore:

This is your joy.

OiYan Poon:

That is part of my joy. And then there's just a lot of sitting on the couch too, but also walking outside my neighborhood, hanging out with the kids in the other families in my daughter's school in our neighborhood, going to bookstores and just hanging out our local bookstores and just reading a lot. I had been reading a lot of romance novels lately. Pia Williams, I love her work and just spending time with family and just being really intentional about, okay, I have a block of time. Let's plan a trip. Let's go away for the weekend. Or just being real intentional and having that thing to look ahead to just go away.

Royel Johnson:

Love that.

OiYan Poon:

Visit family, things like that.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah, I like it.

Royel Johnson:

Leonard, you want to say something earlier. I cut you off.

Leonard Taylor:

Oh, no, no. I was really resonating with what you all were kind of talking about around just the choice and prioritizing ourselves. And I was going to retweet OiYan's comment about, or her brother's comment about you're not a new scholar.

These places need us more than we need them. And I think that that brings me joy, is understanding that perspective. No, I mean a colleague, a good trusted colleague of mine asked, "Well, what does NSSE do for you?" And I was like, "Oh." That's a perspective because a lot of us have been socialized to be in service to the academy, and then we work to advance our own goals in a way that's secondary to the

service that we play to the academy. And so I made more space for joy by realizing that the academy is lucky that I'm here because I don't have to be, I choose to be regularly.

Shelvia English:

Say it.

Leonard Taylor:

Yeah. And that's it. That's it. So it allows me to make space for joy. I think the other thing is aspiring to things that make me happy that are not offered by the academy, rather than thinking about like, oh, I want to get full professor. Sure, right? But I'd rather be affirmed by my parents and family and friends than my peers and colleagues here. Two of my best friends are in town right now and we drank too much last night and we're talking until two o'clock in the morning and I had to get myself together because I had to meet you today on campus. But that brought me joy and I was not going to let my responsibilities for today stop me from being present in that moment.

And then the last thing that brings me joy, I think is just continuing to be in community with people who pour into me just as much as I pour into them and whose experiences are improved by the things that I've learned. So we have this Black queer writing group Black and this is going on our fourth year of doing it. And it's just like there were folks who started off as students and now are faculties and creating and the community is authentic. We actually like each other. We text every day in our group chat. To be able to find relationships with people through the academy that exists beyond the academy is one of the things that I'm like, "You know what? Honey, you're not going to steal my joy. I'm reclaiming my joy in that way."

Shelvia English:

Listening to all these responses, it made me think of how we find joy in being seen and being heard and being valued. So I say for me, joy is also in being present. I tend to be more future oriented and I'm thinking about the goals, but sometimes I need to pause and think about the day and being grateful for today. So sometimes that's me just sitting and listening to gospel music. Sometimes that's me sitting and laughing with my friends. Sometimes that's taking a walk outside or I'm finally building a habit and going to the gym during the week. It's like what am I doing to be present and grateful for the moment that I'm in because I don't know what the next moment is going to bring.

And I liked what you said earlier, Dr. Taylor rest and being unapologetic about it. So whether that is a five minute pause, shout out to my therapist who was like, "Okay, think about your five senses to bring you back to the present moment." And it almost sounds silly, but it's like that's literally what we need to do because we're always juggling so many things. So just I'm finding joy in being present and sometimes that's being in my emotions of whether I'm frustrated or exhausted from the work and naming that and working through that versus trying to quickly get past it and check off the next thing.

Felecia Commodore:

As you all are talking and talking about making space for things and having time to be present to think, to actually have the time to reflect on things. And then I'm thinking about this in relation to where you all are at your careers and the different places you found yourself. And I want to call back to something Leonard shared earlier about students learning the technical movements of research, but not necessarily sitting and thinking.

And it made me think about when I was a doctoral student, I had an opportunity to take a African-American philosophy course in the philosophy department, which stretched me as an education

student. And one of the most pivotal things that happened there, we had to write a paper. And my professor I sent in my first draft and she was like, "Hey, I want to meet with you." And I was like, "Great, this is probably bad because I don't know who Kant is or something." So she called me and she was like, "You're over in education, aren't you?" And I was like, "Yeah." She was like, "I can tell." She was like, "Because over there you all like to tell us what everyone else has said and what everyone else is thinking." She was like, "Over here, I don't care what those people thought about. I want to know what you think." She was like, "I don't want 800 citations." She was like, "What is your argument and what is your thought?"

And it really shifted how I thought about my work because what I realized is I hadn't had the time or the space or been trained to think. I had been trained to prove and talk about how to apply, but not to think. And what I see with you all in your work and where you're at is that you've taken the time to think and really that's expanded your opportunities for what you can do beyond how do I just prove and apply and I think it's very inspirational for emerging scholars that if they take the time to sit in thinking and re-imagining and not just proving and applying then the option-

Royel Johnson:

Or synthesizing.

Felecia Commodore:

Yeah. The options for what their scholarly identity can be and where they can exercise it can be broader than just the traditional go through graduate school and get a faculty job. And so I think that's very inspiring.

Royel Johnson:

Yeah, passive versus exercising agency around it. It has been so wonderful to be in community with you all. Thank you for saying yes to join us on this journey for the podcast. We can't wait to release it and share. Any final words, Felecia?

Felecia Commodore:

No. Just thank you all for being here and sharing your stories and your perspective. OiYan had to leave, but thank her as well and all of you are doing work that's impactful and I hope you know that.

Royel Johnson:

You feel seen.

Felecia Commodore:

Right. I hope you feel seen. I think mid-career can be a weird space where people are recalibrating and that can often make you feel under the radar. So I hope you all feel seen and I hope that those of you listening can see these folks as possibility models for what you can do as a scholar in this field and who a scholar is.

Royel Johnson:

And what you can say no to and reject as part of your socialization. I mean, I think we heard some really powerful stories about folks creating non-negotiables and say, "Hey, it's important for me to be in Chicago. I don't care how few opportunities there may be," but we can create new possibilities once



we're firm about what it is that I want out of my experience too. And I think you all role model that for the next generation. So thank you.

Felecia Commodore:

Thank you so much.

Royel Johnson:

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you to our guests Drs. Leonard Taylor, Shelvia English and OiYan Poon for joining us today and offering such rich insight into the complexities of taking on new and exciting roles while also staying true to yourself.

Felecia Commodore:

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. For this episode, the song that came to mind was, I choose by India. Arie and Bonnie Raitt because as we figure out and become more comfortable in our scholarly identities, we have an opportunity to choose the what, where, and the how when it comes to how we show up in this thing we know as the higher education ecosystem. That may be as faculty, it may be directing a center, it may be in policy or it may be at an association, but either way, it's about where you believe your work will have the greatest impact. Wherever you are, you are a scholar. In the words of the song, "You never know where life is going to take you," but today you have the opportunity to choose. Choose what works best for you, choose what doesn't work for you, and most of all choose you.

Speaker 6:

(singing)

Felecia Commodore:

Well, that is today's song for our scholar soundtrack. The season continues to roll on with one more episode that you don't want to miss.

Royel Johnson:

Buckle up and get ready for the conversations to come. You don't want to miss this. Join us next time for our last episode of the season with Dr. James Davis and Sharon Fries Britt. Until next time, I'm Royel.

Felecia Commodore:

I'm Felecia.

Royel Johnson:

And remember.

Felecia Commodore:

You are a scholar.