

## D&I Diaries Episode 6: An Interview with Dr. James Hagerty Transcript

**Speaker 1** [00:00:15] Hello and welcome to this episode of D&I Diaries, a podcast produced by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in the Biological Sciences Division at the University of Chicago. My name is Camilla Frost-Brewer, and I am one of the program managers for diversity and inclusion in the division, and I'll be one of your hosts for the show.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:32] And my name is Tobias Speers, and I will be your other host. And I serve as assistant dean of diversity and inclusion in the division. Through this podcast, Camilla and I hope to highlight and showcase the diverse voices of everyday BSDers. We want to create a space to authentically and candidly share our DIY stories where we get to know one another outside of our professional roles. And finally, we hope to engage a coalition of listeners who value DTI and increase interest in D&I work and conversations across the BSD. So without further ado, let's begin the show.

**Speaker 1** [00:01:12] Hello, listeners, and welcome to this episode of D&I Diaries, the show that uncovers diverse stories in the BSD. We are your hosts, Camilla Frost-Brewer.

**Speaker 2** [00:01:21] And Tobias Speers.

**Speaker 1** [00:01:23] And today we are joined by James Hagerty, who is a postdoc in the Staley lab working to understand circular RNA, biogenesis and regulation here at U. Chicago. They received their B.A. in Biology and a Ph.D. in molecular biology with a focus in parasitology from Case Western Reserve University in Ohio. So thank you, James. Welcome.

**Speaker 3** [00:01:43] Hi. It's nice to be here. Thank you, guys.

**Speaker 1** [00:01:46] Excellent. We are so excited for you to be here. So if you just want to give us a brief introduction of yourself, who are you?

**Speaker 3** [00:01:53] I'm a guy. I guess. Maybe. Excellent. Sometimes it depends on the mood, I think. Right. No, I guess I grew up in. In the Cleveland area, in the suburbs. Just just outside the suburb I grew up in was terrible in many ways.

**Speaker 2** [00:02:08] Shaker Heights. Were you going to say?

**Speaker 3** [00:02:11] Ah, no, no, no. Shaker...Shaker's. Okay.

**Speaker 2** [00:02:13] Okay. Cause Shaker movie about Shaker Heights.

**Speaker 3** [00:02:15] Funny story. My old PI is the president of the school board of Shaker Heights Schools. And their schools actually do a bunch of really great, great long history. You know, the town I grew up in, which is outside of Cleveland, was a sundown town until like, the eighties. Wow. So has some has some some flavor.

**Speaker 2** [00:02:35] Yeah. Yeah, I will.

**Speaker 3** [00:02:37] But I grew up grew up in the Cleveland area, stayed there for college and a Ph.D. Now I'm in Chicago, which is cool. It's a different a different feel, but still nice Midwest vibes. Uh, I have some kids. That's cool. I like. I like my kids.

**Speaker 1** [00:02:52] Excellent.

**Speaker 3** [00:02:53] We work a lot on, like, emotional regulation and stuff. I think that's great. Yeah, like they're doing a great job.

**Speaker 2** [00:02:58] That it was also wonderful. I worked on emotional regulation as well.

**Speaker 3** [00:03:01] Same. Same. I struggle. And like, they helped me a lot, actually, cause I can't ask them and then, like, not be doing the thing.

**Speaker 2** [00:03:07] Yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:03:08] That's like parenting.

**Speaker 3** [00:03:10] Thank you. Thank you. Putting myself on the back, I think that's. I think that's good. I think that's.

**Speaker 2** [00:03:14] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:03:14] A brief introduction of, of, of me and the the place I grew up I guess. Vaguely.

**Speaker 2** [00:03:18] Yeah. Cool. So I just want to say like, can we just like, go back and say how like you killed that introduction, Like you said all those words and like all, all the different degrees and specialties that James does. And so I just wanted to say that because like, you kill that introduction.

**Speaker 1** [00:03:36] That, you.

**Speaker 3** [00:03:36] Know, you did in fact do.

**Speaker 1** [00:03:37] A fantastic Thank you so much.

**Speaker 2** [00:03:38] I would have been like, wait, pharma? I don't know, right? I don't even know. But I want to start right by asking you to just tell us what that means. Like, what does that mean? What do you do as a scientist? Like, if I didn't know anything about science, right, Which, which sometimes might be the case, What what do you do? Like, explain your research to us in a way that you'd be talking to, just like a regular person on the street?

**Speaker 3** [00:04:04] Yeah. Or like my kids or whatever.

**Speaker 2** [00:04:06] Yeah, right, right, right.

**Speaker 3** [00:04:07] I'll go. I'll go above the, like, six and eight year old. Okay. Level. But yeah, I, I'd say what I do is so I think RNA has become a bit more popular in the mainstream or at least well known. Right. Because of, of the the pandemic that is, I guess, still ongoing or however it's existing. My work is focused on how specific kinds of RNA get made in the human body. So they aren't it goes to this whole complicated process. You have your DNA, which is this big giant book of instructions, but for any given job, you don't need all of those instructions. It's like a thousand recipes. You just want to make one. So

that specific recipe gets jotted down in your notebooks. You can go through the kitchen and and cook. Right. But for some reason, when this when this book was made, it has a bunch of extra junk in it that needs to get trimmed out and edited and fix you basically like a rough draft of this giant cookbook, essentially. Yeah. So you need to edit your final recipes and chop them into a nice form that will actually taste good and do the job that that it's supposed to do. So I really track how that process of producing and cutting up and splicing together. So the state lab is a splicing lab?

**Speaker 2** [00:05:12] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:05:12] That splicing. Process works and with a particular focus, this unique subclass of Ana's, that instead of being kind of a linear string, that's normally how this molecule looks. It's a big long string, these ones circular, right? So they basically, when they get spliced back together their parts, they do some of it backwards and they get turned into a circle instead of being a linear molecule which has some benefits, like they stay around longer, so they're harder to degrade. They can do other regulatory roles and interact with different proteins or or control these little things called microRNAs that change expression level so it can make a certain recipe be like consumed more or less or produced more or less.

**Speaker 2** [00:05:53] Right. Okay.

**Speaker 3** [00:05:53] So that's that's the gist of what I do. And then it has a lot of interesting, like therapeutic potential, Right? So if you want a a vaccine or some other delivery of RNA to last longer or to elicit a specific response, they have a lot of potential for doing longer term treatments or treatments that would have different specific responses basically. So there's some some interesting Yeah, kind of like downstream stuff. That's not what I'm looking at, but downstream possibilities of what these answers could do.

**Speaker 2** [00:06:23] Thank you. Okay. And what is a for our audience? What is a postdoc?

**Speaker 3** [00:06:29] So it's something that's kind of in between. In between jobs, I guess so.

**Speaker 2** [00:06:36] Yeah. So like, your.

**Speaker 3** [00:06:37] Role is is is kind of interesting. So you're not a grad student, more like you have a Ph.D.? Yeah, you're a doctor. So you have that kind of, I guess, level of privilege or status or like that specific kind of like weight is not held over you when you're like, thinking about your power dynamics, which I think are important to always be thinking about. But basically, you're a researcher that is often supervised by a more senior researcher, so you're working a bit more independently than you would as a grad student. But within the structure of an existing lab, usually, yes, some people do it and some people do it independently, completely, where they have their own set of funding. But usually you're you're working within the structure of someone else's lab and your focus of training is a little bit different. So it's it's more to produce a specific kind of line of research that you'll take on so you can start your own, your own work, or if you want to gain very particular skills to transition into an inside job. So it's additional training that is is more independent than grad school, but not at the level where you need to maintain an entire kind of like small company, which is effectively how labs work on your own.

**Speaker 2** [00:07:44] Yeah. And so what's your goal at the end of the postdoc?

**Speaker 3** [00:07:49] So at this point, I guess all these things are kind of amorphous right at this point, My my goal is to try to get a faculty job at at a place like this.

**Speaker 2** [00:07:57] Okay.

**Speaker 3** [00:07:58] An hour, one kind of institution, run my own lab, teach a little bit, do research all the great stuff, train the future generations of scientists, all the all the good, all the good stuff.

**Speaker 2** [00:08:08] But that's like a.

**Speaker 3** [00:08:08] Really hard road. And most people don't make it to the end of that road. They kind of fall off in different ways for different reasons, you know, and there just aren't a lot of those jobs. So a lot of really depends on kind of what kind of fellowships I get, what kind of papers I can put out. So a lot of it really depends on how effective I can be in certain ways. Some of that I have control of or some that that I don't.

**Speaker 2** [00:08:30] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:08:31] And if that doesn't work, then there's a few other other paths. So there's more teaching focused jobs, which I'd be interested because I do, I do enjoy teaching. Um, and then there's also industry jobs.

**Speaker 2** [00:08:43] But yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:08:44] And those come in all, all kinds of different flavors. And that's not, not my focus at this point.

**Speaker 2** [00:08:48] But yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:08:49] But I think I could, I think I could do any of the things I remember.

**Speaker 2** [00:08:51] I appreciate that because I feel like you talk about both the sort of the privilege that it comes with to be a postdoc, but also being in this sort of weird position of not this and not that. Right. And so, yeah, I like that.

**Speaker 3** [00:09:06] Yeah. So like, I guess just like an example of kind of the weird position postdocs are. And so here like there are certain benefits that staff get, but postdocs don't get all those, they get some of them and then there are certain benefits that students get, but postdocs don't get, although so like I was, I was trying to look up something on how to purchase.

**Speaker 2** [00:09:23] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:09:23] And I can't log in to the internet because I'm not the right kind of staff to find the help site for like buying stuff or the mental health services that are available for staff. I can't access the internet to get the full suite of those things like I can I can still access the benefits from it, but I can't like learn about the details of it or find them as easily. Yeah, so we kind of fall through the cracks in some ways and the some of the privilege I think is in that like my current boss, Right. Can't stop me from having a Ph.D..

Okay. I think it might be a bad recommendation. He could say that I'm a bad boy. I don't think he's going to. John, my boss is great.

**Speaker 2** [00:10:00] Right idea.

**Speaker 3** [00:10:02] Very, very supportive. But I think there's that different kind of limit where when you're in grad school, there is this kind of like looming credential that you're looking for where if you don't get along with your API in certain ways, then like that credential can be effectively just like taken away from you and there's not a ton of of recourse. And like that's something I think about a lot is the accountability of certain levels of, of academia.

**Speaker 2** [00:10:26] But yeah, yeah, maybe.

**Speaker 3** [00:10:28] That's a different, a different question.

**Speaker 2** [00:10:30] Yeah. No, no, I was just going to say and I think that's why we are privileged in a certain way to have an office that focuses specifically on postdoctoral affairs led by Nancy Swartz and people. Sharma And that's how we met James. We actually, Camila, myself and Tina from our office. We have a, I guess a quarter and a half long course where we work in collaboration with postdocs on diversity, equity and inclusion to help them be prepared for what it would be like in the classroom. And they help us learn about science like James just did and Rene. So, yeah, so glad you're here and I'll go to Camila for the next question.

**Speaker 1** [00:11:11] Yeah, thank you. That was fascinating. As Tobias mentioned, I love the language of science, so anything I can learn, Please, please, please share with me. And I love that you're also a scientist for the science that's just, like, really awesome and wanting to connect with the next generation. And of scientists. And I think that kind of leads into our next question. And you touch a little bit on power dynamics and things along those lines. So how does diversity, equity and inclusion connect to your work? How do you incorporate it or maybe see it as integral to the work that you do?

**Speaker 3** [00:11:47] Yeah, I think I think that's a great a great question. I guess I guess for me, I think it's it's directly integrated in kind of how I try to engage with people and whatever kind of relationship I have with them. So whether that's coworkers partner or yeah, like acquaintance or whatever, I try to, I try to kind of lead with with empathy and kindness and try to learn people's stories. I think I think it's much easier to give people grace and really understand where they're coming from. If you take a lot of time to allow that vulnerability to exist.

**Speaker 2** [00:12:16] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:12:18] And I think I think that is a kind of bedrock of effectively creating equitable spaces and spaces where people feel safe, is having some understanding of the people and letting them feel feel okay enough or feel comfortable enough to communicate when things are good, when things are bad, different parts of their identity that could maybe frame certain parts of your communication or frame needs, they may have that you wouldn't necessarily know otherwise.

**Speaker 2** [00:12:45] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:12:45] So I think I think when when kind of working in a lab space, even if you're not someone's technical superior, setting up those structures and being a place where people can come and communicate, I think is really, really important, I think and, and from a more pragmatic standpoint. People that don't feel terrible and that feel safe coming to work like they do more work and they get more stuff done and they produce more. So like.

**Speaker 2** [00:13:12] Can they hear snaps? Yes. Snaps. Yeah. Snapping. Go ahead.

**Speaker 3** [00:13:16] Yeah. So like, I mean, even even from a kind of like cynical standpoint, it has other benefits. It has benefits for me. It has benefits for other people. It has benefits for the product that I'm trying to produce.

**Speaker 2** [00:13:26] Yeah. Um.

**Speaker 3** [00:13:27] But also, like, I want to be treated that way and I want to, I want to create a world, if I can, that that treats more people that way because it just, it just is nicer to exist in a space where you can be comfortable and other people can be comfortable and like you're not afraid to communicate about sensitive things or to say, Hey, I think you messed up or Hey, I messed up and I'm going to do better, I'm going to respond differently in the future or and it allows people to even come to me and say like, Yeah, you were a jerk then, or You said this thing and it hurt my feelings or Yeah, or whatever the case is. And I don't think I don't think you can create that without kind of learning about people and being somewhat vulnerable yourself within within reason.

**Speaker 2** [00:14:08] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:14:10] Not certain I answered the question, but I did my best.

**Speaker 1** [00:14:14] No, you did.

**Speaker 2** [00:14:15] That's all we ask is that you do your best.

**Speaker 1** [00:14:17] Yeah, You did wonderful. Yeah. I just wanted to touch on that, that there's kind of this double sided coin that having equitable spaces allows for people to feel safe, vulnerable, comfortable, welcomed, like they belong at their place of work. And it also works. Work is just done better, faster, more efficiently. So, like, there's two benefits to being equitable and inclusive.

**Speaker 3** [00:14:44] I believe they call that a win win.

**Speaker 1** [00:14:46] It would be called a win win, indeed.

**Speaker 2** [00:14:51] Cool. So, you know, you started talking about spaces where people feel like they belong. Right. And I, I remember just a few weeks ago talking to Camila about what it meant for me to work and be on the South side of Chicago. Right. Which is the place where lots of black folks exist, lots of black cultures here. And it's just a it's an epicenter for a lot of things, including, you know, thinking about systemic racism. Right. So I just wanted to ask you, what does it mean for you to to be a postdoc on the this outside of Chicago. Right. And living and being in researching here.

**Speaker 3** [00:15:27] Yeah, I think I think it's it's interesting. And my experience my experience I trained for my Ph.D. is up in Cleveland and Case Western is where I was at before. And you Chicago I think have some some pretty significant similarities in in that respect where case is kind of this structure within a much different neighborhood socioeconomically it's it's much different than kind of like what the campus has and you Chicago is obviously a very fancy, prestigious place and lots of friends.

**Speaker 2** [00:15:59] Are like that.

**Speaker 3** [00:16:00] Yeah. And they're they're put into two different neighborhoods where like a simply the land was cheap at some point and they can extract from them and and all those kind of things. I guess my feelings generally are kind of negative about, about, uh, universities roles in these kind of neighborhoods. And like a big broad, a broad sense doesn't mean they're not doing good work or people aren't trying to do better.

**Speaker 2** [00:16:21] But yeah, I.

**Speaker 3** [00:16:22] Think kind of historically it's, it's just like colonialism. But at home, I think I think for me, I enjoy I enjoy being on the South side. I enjoy the the kind of like food and other other bits of culture that I get to experience being here.

**Speaker 2** [00:16:38] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:16:39] I'm kind of like, I'm in Bridgeport is where I live, so I'm like South Side adjacent. I guess it's just just the beginning of the South Side. Yeah. And like, that's a really interesting neighborhood and it's nice going from a suburb to have like places I can walk to and yeah, lots of different food and like, I'm, I can go, I can go and like, explore Chinatown. I can, I can get some barbecue down the road like it's, it's.

**Speaker 2** [00:17:03] Kristen's right there as well. Yes, yes.

**Speaker 3** [00:17:05] I love it in Pilsen. So I think I think for me it's I get to explore explore different cultures but then like. The way I see the kind of dynamics at the university are. I guess Less. Less. Less positive in that I feel this kind of like conflict of like I'm not necessarily personally, like, exacerbating these things, but also I am benefiting from the privileges, benefiting from the kind of like the specific spaces that are that are created where like, I don't have to deal with the the different things that come with the social understanding of a lot of people in the surrounding neighborhoods like like Washington Park or these other nearby nearby areas. So like, I can be kind of like I can basically be as shielded or as integrated as I want from from those things.

**Speaker 2** [00:17:50] You know, the choice.

**Speaker 3** [00:17:51] Yeah, exactly. There's there's like a quote that like, comes in my mind reaction from the show Atlanta And like, it's a really weird quote but in one of the recent seasons they they had a thing with like Liam Neeson where he was he was on and as they as they're talking he basically says like he didn't learn anything from when he like got in trouble for saying racist stuff or whatever and like he's like mad or whatever. And the character on the show asked him like, well, how? And he's like, well, that's the great thing about about being white is you don't learn anything if you don't want to.

**Speaker 2** [00:18:21] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:18:22] And I think that's like kind of how these spaces exist. Like you can kind of have them be as as distanced from the realities around them as as you want to be. Or you can you can be fully integrated if that's, if that's your choice.

**Speaker 2** [00:18:35] Yeah, that's fast. That's. Yeah. Okay. I'm thinking, I mean, I've heard that, but I'm thinking it's just wow, it just hits a little bit when you say Yeah, yeah, and all.

**Speaker 3** [00:18:46] I'm like, and I guess like, like part of my background, right? Like the way I look, I'm pretty ambiguous looking, but like, my mom is from Haiti. Uh, black. Okay. My dad is a white guy from the Cleveland suburbs.

**Speaker 2** [00:18:59] Yeah. Hmm.

**Speaker 3** [00:19:00] So then, like, like growing up that there was this the same kind of dynamic where, like, I'm in this, I'm in this very. I guess I guess it was kind of like I'm in this very white space, but my identity is known to everyone, right? They see my family and like, it's a space with a ton of racial history. So like.

**Speaker 2** [00:19:15] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:19:16] It was kind of dealing with those remarks. Like, I guess like I wasn't able to hide from those things, but people could pretend or exists how they wanted around me. So like seeing that, that distance that people can create and like the times where it's like, oh, like you look like me close enough. So like I'm safe to say what I want to say. And then they say some wild shit.

**Speaker 2** [00:19:35] Yeah, yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:19:35] And I'm like, Hey, I actually care about this. Yeah, yeah, whatever. And then people have to kind of like, Yeah, catch up for it. And like, maybe I'm shooting off onto a tangent, but it's not relevant to me.

**Speaker 2** [00:19:45] They see, they, they see that you've made the choice to be inclusive and to, and to check them. Yeah. So as like, like we like to say check them, but. Okay. Yeah, cool. Thank you. Yeah, thank you.

**Speaker 1** [00:19:56] Something about the Atlanta story really stuck with me because even though I lived in Atlanta for four years and love Donald Glover, I have never watched it, but I was watching this Tik Tok earlier this week. If anyone knows me, they know I am chronically online and will have a tick tock for everything.

**Speaker 3** [00:20:12] Like same sex.

**Speaker 1** [00:20:14] Great. We'll just trade off back and forth. But it was this white father who has a daughter who is maybe five or six. So in kindergarten, and he was reading this book with her about racism in America and what children, black children specifically were experiencing. And the daughter says, I understand why mommy doesn't want me to read this. This is a little scary and hurtful. And he's like, Correct. And do you think black children have the same choice that they can just not read or learn about these things? Yeah. And the daughter said no, when he's like, that's exactly why I'm teaching it to you, because black children do not have the choice. You have the choice. And we're making the choice



to learn about what is really happening in our country as opposed to sticking our heads in the sand. And I think that was a really important moment. Somebody who's not a parent that you can make those choices, but also involve your kids in the decision to be inclusive and understand diversity and equity.

**Speaker 2** [00:21:13] So yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:21:14] Moving in a completely different direction a little bit, this is more personal to you, but can you just tell us or talk to us maybe about a moment or experience when you really started to think differently about diversity, equity and inclusion, either personally or professionally?

**Speaker 3** [00:21:30] Yes, I think I think there's like a somewhat a somewhat recent shift in in my thinking. So it's something that's something as you as you brought up, I kind of always have been interested in and needed to to know about just based on like my family situation growing up and dynamics of of where I grew up and the people I was around to like, I was essentially kind of like forced to understand how these things work from an early age. So something like has been kind of like integrated in my life. I'm sure the same with you guys for the same reasons. But yeah, I think I think more recently engaging with this idea that a lot of these structures so like white supremacy, imperialism, misogyny, like all of these structures that they have this this supposedly protected class within them. Right. That should be benefiting significantly from these things like white people should be benefiting from white supremacy and men should be benefiting from patriarchy or or misogyny or like colonizer should be benefiting from colonialism. But in reality, these things screw over everybody. They're bad for everybody and they cause just like significant harm to all groups. I think those harms look different and the cost of those harms is is much different. So yeah, like there is still obviously a benefit to being white in a white supremacist society or being male in a and a patriarchal society. But it also does a lot of damage. It puts people in these very small boxes, right? So you can't exist outside of these norms and still be kind of like safe or protected, which isn't a societal structure. And you have this kind of forced dissonance where you can see horrible things happening, but you have to kind of match those with this worldview that says those things shouldn't or can't happen, or that's not how the society works or I haven't been exposed to that. And you have to kind of like maintain this, this strange dissonance of your existence the whole time and like, can't really fully exist as a person. So like there is a kind of like psychological and social trauma that that comes from kind of like existing within the structure. No matter what position you are in, the structure, like that's often something that is newer to my, my thinking in the way I kind of build my framework of how I think about these ideas. And I think it's it's useful as a sort of like olive branch or kind of like way to reach out to people that may not see the value in participating in this work. It's like, yes, it has just like mean like it's the right thing to do, I think. But it also has material benefits for anyone, no matter what they look like. Yeah. And they can exist as a kind of like more actualized version of themselves and liberate themselves in many ways from the kind of like cognition that is produced by by this like oppressive structure and the kind of like position that the people that are the kind of like oppressors, quote unquote exist within. MM That's like been a big, a big shift in my framework at least for, for thinking about these things and kind of integrating, integrating that into my framework has been interesting and really reformed how I give grace and how I, how I think about these things. And just, just a another quick one going back a little bit farther. Just when I first started engaging with things as structural critiques and thinking about the structures of issues instead of thinking about them individually, which is just having a lot of like really reaffirmed with like reading racism without racist. Like I'm sure you guys have heard of the book or whatever. Great book. You

should read it if you haven't read it. But like really, really deeply integrating this notion of thinking about things in a structural context and not necessarily just from that kind of like. Interpersonal aspects or like that person said, rude thing or whatever. And then also seeing how those structures negatively affect the breadth of society and not just those that are kind of like explicitly like minoritized or marginalized.

**Speaker 2** [00:25:23] Yeah, Yeah. It's what you're saying makes me think about black feminism, right? Because black feminism has this tenet that basically articulates how systems of oppression impact everyone. Even when you think that you are in that system of oppression a little bit higher than someone else. Right. So, so it's like patriarchy is not good for anyone, right? Like, sexism is not good for anyone. Homophobia is not good for anyone. And it makes me think about a part of my dissertation where I talked about this scene in the TV show Pose, where there's these two trans women right there at a bar, you know, a gay bar in, you know, the eighties New York called Boy Lounge. And they're talking about their houses. Right. Which are like these non-biological family houses where they build community. And they're in this game of love.

**Speaker 3** [00:26:18] We love those kind of communities.

**Speaker 2** [00:26:19] Yeah. Yeah. We love them. And they're in the gay in a gay bar and they experience like this animosity and hostility from the patrons, Right. Who are mostly white gay men. And they get kicked out and when they're outside of the bar, they start having this long discussion about, like, what it means to be minoritized and marginalized and what it means to have a vulnerability that exists right in a way where other people who are oppressed don't understand. Right. So, like, I think as a gay man. Right. I understand that in some ways I'm oppressed and minoritized, but I perhaps don't understand the vulnerability of someone who might be trans or someone who might, you know, be queer with a disability. And it's this way in which because I don't understand those vulnerabilities, I can sometimes take on the the perspective of the person that's doing the oppressing right. And so black feminism taught me that. And so it just it resonated when you said that.

**Speaker 3** [00:27:24] Yeah, I think I mean, I think I think I said it earlier, I'm not certain, but I probably did. But I think I said blind spots which like is a, an omission for for me, a space where I don't recognize how like maybe that isn't just a turn of phrase for everybody and like can can resonate in a really negative way. Like if you have a disability that I'm not consciously thinking of, like it's easy to do. And I think I, I think I did it earlier. I know. Go back and check the tape.

**Speaker 2** [00:27:51] Well, roll back.

**Speaker 1** [00:27:52] No. Well, yeah. And I this work is being done in different spaces and it's on varying scale. So there is this one guy, I forget his name, but he basically does like men stopping violence. And he works from that framework of misogyny and patriarchy. Hurts men, too. How can we kind of flip the script, rely on vulnerability? All of those things tap into that psychological harm that is done and kind of break those cycles. And I think you're right that there is psychological and social trauma that happens from systems of oppression as well as structures of oppression. And we see the real fallout. Right? So like I think some of the fallout can be some of the interpersonal stuff, right? Oh, yeah. So it's all connected. And I really loved your answer. I thought that was really fascinating.

**Speaker 2** [00:28:42] And I remember my nephew, who my mom is retired and she has a sewing studio set up in her in her basement. Literally. It's a legit studio, too, because she

has, like this Pfaff sewing machine that embroidered and it it moves and writes names on things and stuff like that. And my nephew was like, obsessed with this, right? And when my mom engaged him about sewing, he was like, But, you know, I can't do that. Right? And so it's it's this way in which these limited notions of masculinity and what it means to be a boy and what it means to be a man. Right. Impact what he think he can do. Right. And so that's how patriarchy and these limited notions of maleness right impact this young kid who is fascinated by sewing.

**Speaker 3** [00:29:32] Yeah, it's like like kids can paint their nails if they want to or like, I think I think a way it kind of like I way we're really seeing a lot of in the recent past politically and like I guess like warning for kind of like talk of horrifying violence is like you have a lot of these like 18 ish year old white men who historically write like you have this this specific position within capitalism, within patriarchy, within the United States, where success looks a very specific way. But the availability of those opportunities is essentially gone for for most people. Then you have these these men that are living these very isolated and disconnected lives that haven't garnered any of these metrics of success. And the one thing that they view that they have control over is like, well, I have the capacity to like, do violence. And in America, like the way you kind of like do violence is with a gun. So people will shoot people to show that like, I actually have some component of of traditional masculinity that I can wield against people. Yeah. And like, that's bullshit. Yeah. And they they're just fine. Kind of, like, existing. Yeah, comfortably. And like, maybe we should try to make sure that people have better material needs. Yeah. So that, like, they're not feeling so disconnected from society and can integrate meaningfully.

**Speaker 2** [00:30:53] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:30:53] But like, that's not the only way that they can. They can really show that they are a man, whatever that means. Right.

**Speaker 2** [00:31:01] Thank you for going there. Yeah. Okay. Was there ever a time when you had to show allyship or camaraderie for someone else? What was that experience like and what did you learn or take away from that moment?

**Speaker 3** [00:31:15] Yeah, so I can think of a pretty recent example. Yeah. So like, it was, it was just like in a communication with, with some.

**Speaker 2** [00:31:23] Coworkers, you know.

**Speaker 3** [00:31:25] Someone said something kind of like inadvertently that made somebody else uncomfortable. And they had a sort of immediate response. Yeah, that was a joke. But like, like basically made the whole situation worse and even more even more problematic.

**Speaker 2** [00:31:42] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:31:44] I brought it up in the moment, was like, Hey, you shouldn't say that out loud to other human beings.

**Speaker 2** [00:31:49] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:31:50] And like, don't want to, like, put anybody on blast or whatever.

**Speaker 2** [00:31:54] Please, please don't. Yeah. No, no, no, no. We don't want that at all.

**Speaker 3** [00:31:58] No, no, no, no, no. So. So they said this, this out of turn thing, and I brought it up in the moment, but it was kind of like a lot of things were happening and everyone was feeling, like, vaguely uncomfortable.

**Speaker 2** [00:32:08] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:32:08] And then kind of later talked to that person, was like, Hey. It's like, I think I know you decently and I think I know your intention. So, like, I'm happy to talk to you directly, but like, you shouldn't say that it can take a situation that, like, isn't a problem and make it a problem. Like, I don't think your goal is to to make this a problem for anyone or make them feel genuinely uncomfortable or like.

**Speaker 2** [00:32:29] You know.

**Speaker 3** [00:32:29] Or more unsafe.

**Speaker 2** [00:32:31] Um.

**Speaker 3** [00:32:32] And it worked out. It worked out well. Like, the person listened and, and was gracious and was like. Yeah, I made a mistake and they communicated with the person that they had been interacting with. Yeah, in a positive way. So, like, hey, it turned out it turned out good. Obviously, that's not necessarily how how it always works out, but.

**Speaker 2** [00:32:48] But we love to see it when it working. Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:32:51] Yes. Yes. And like, I think I think part of it like I've had a few situations that have worked out well that way. But I think part of it too, is like I have certain privileges where it makes it easier for me to engage with some of the things, especially when it comes to do, like things around sex as I'm like, Yeah, I have a privilege and many ways to communicate about sexism, like to other men.

**Speaker 2** [00:33:11] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:33:12] The like that they'll, they'll take it seriously. When I say it is different than if the person they've effected says it sometimes. Or if like a woman or if I'm presenting person says it to them.

**Speaker 2** [00:33:22] Yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:33:23] Yeah. I think you bring up a really great point about kind of stepping into our identities where we may hold privilege and showing camaraderie or allyship for folks. So can you just tell us a little bit about what it means for you to belong somewhere, either at work in one of your communities or somewhere else? What is a sense of belonging feel like for you?

**Speaker 3** [00:33:49] Yeah, I think I think for me it's kind of going back to one of my my, my earlier answers. I feel like I'm doing an interview now.

**Speaker 2** [00:33:57] You know, this is the Camilla and Tobias show. I mean, I.

**Speaker 3** [00:34:00] Guess an interview for a job. I've been I've been doing I've been doing I've been participating in a faculty search. And like, this feels like positive faculty search that I'm helping with. But anyway.

**Speaker 2** [00:34:10] Oh, I know.

**Speaker 3** [00:34:12] But anyway, I think I think for me, it's it's really about vulnerability and having space for for vulnerability. Like, I think in many ways, like my my fuel is existing deep within vulnerability with myself and other human beings like that is that is a sweet place for me. That's the that's my nirvana. So for me, yeah, really having an ability to safely be vulnerable and to help other people feel comfortable enough in communicating with me that they can be vulnerable and I can be a a safe person.

**Speaker 2** [00:34:43] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:34:44] Like that for me is really the kind of like, deepest sign that that I belong in that space and I have camaraderie in that space is is when there's a shared sense of of openness and vulnerability and clear communication. And we can talk about the the sad things, the gross things, the yeah, the weird stuff we can engage with, like the problematic takes we may have or we can we can correct each other in a in a safe way.

**Speaker 2** [00:35:11] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:35:12] We're like, we're not all feeling terrible about it.

**Speaker 2** [00:35:14] Yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:35:15] I love that. I, I really appreciate your point around belonging and vulnerability doesn't mean heart stars and horseshoes and rainbows. It means working through the difficult pieces to get to the other side. And it might be uncomfortable, but you know, you are safe and respected and valued. And I love that.

**Speaker 2** [00:35:38] Yeah. And in a lot of ways, that's what a safe space means. And I think sometimes people don't realize that that a safe space isn't just a place where everyone's like, you know, trading cookies back and forth. Right? We are engaging folks. We are challenging folks, we're supporting folks. And we're also coming to these moments where we can have these differing perspectives but still see each other's humanity. Yeah, yeah, I.

**Speaker 3** [00:36:05] Agree. I agree. Yeah, yeah. I think I think that is like to your to your point, safe spaces oftentimes are a place where like, there's some certain kind of in community conversations they're like aren't safe to have an example because they're really difficult. Yeah yes almost always misconstrued conversations but like it's amazing being in spaces where like you can deeply engage in those and those conversations that like, you know, aren't broadly, broadly safe and like, yeah, it's, that is something that, that I appreciate a lot.

**Speaker 2** [00:36:33] Yeah. And speaking of safety right there is a for you in particular right. And my knowing you from being in the classroom face with you and talking to you after our classes, I know that there's a richness to your identity because of the fact that you have a past history with substance abuse. And so I wanted to ask, how does that layer add on to what it means to be a scientist, what it means to be in a space that is like you,

Chicago, like Case Western, right where the prestigious Ms. is just, you know, all right, there there is a a scientist is a particular thing. Yeah. What does it mean when you come into spaces with those layers of identity?

**Speaker 3** [00:37:15] Yeah, I think. I think like a way. I've been thinking about it recently. I was talking to another another post-doc colleague about it, and we were talking about, like, just like the language you use and like I've said, some curse words so far. I like to use curse words from time to time. I appreciate them. But I think I think a framework that's been really helpful for me to to keep in mind is just like, if I'm doing something, that's how a scientist does it. That's what it looks like for a scientist. Do it. If I'm speaking, that's how a scientist speaks, because I am there. So you can you can appreciate my vernacular, you can appreciate the use of my language or the hat that I'm wearing or whatever my silly T-shirt. But I'm still a scientist. And my, my, my experience is still valid. And I am a part of that kind of like amalgamation of what that archetype or whatever that that thing means. Like I am I am part of that.

**Speaker 2** [00:38:07] And you will appreciate my Ph.D. Yes.

**Speaker 1** [00:38:11] I think that's the tagline for this episode. But I'm still a scientist.

**Speaker 2** [00:38:15] Yes.

**Speaker 3** [00:38:15] Yes. And I think I think more getting getting more more directly to your question. Yeah. I think for me there was this dynamic of like growing up, I felt very separate from the community that I was I was in and I built a lot of those those structures like for my safety, like I kept myself kind of detached and aloof. So like the the vile shit people would say wouldn't impact me as much as I'm not invested in those people. And I learned I learned how to be really mean. Also like something that I. I learned I learned really fast, like how to read a person and say something that will, like, really make them feel bad. That kind of like trauma and isolation and just like having depression really fueled me getting in into drugs. It was a kind of safe escape.

**Speaker 2** [00:39:05] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:39:06] I guess not safe. It felt safe. It was not safe. It was an escape from from that existence.

**Speaker 2** [00:39:14] Mm hmm.

**Speaker 3** [00:39:14] And it gave me a kind of some some vague kind of community to be a part of, because, like, it's not a healthy community, but, like, there is community in in kind of like, living that life.

**Speaker 2** [00:39:27] Mm hmm.

**Speaker 3** [00:39:28] Because it takes up almost all of your time. Like, it doesn't seem like it would be that. But, like, they're like, trying to find resources, trying to find the substance that you want. Mm hmm. Like, all those things take up and consume your life. So then, like, if that's all you're doing, the only community that you can really have is just other people that are also doing that all of the time. And it really reinforced itself. Yeah, And I think. Transitioning out of out of I mean I'm in recovery now was really helpful. I did I did just like tons and tons of group therapy. I'm like, I really love I really loved group therapy.

Yeah. And like, do group therapy, just like, it's like, I guess like when I'm talking about these safe spaces, essentially, like it's a space where, like, it feels like at any moment, this could basically be a group therapy session. Yeah, I'm not a licensed professional in any way to actually run therapy.

**Speaker 2** [00:40:18] Neither am I clear.

**Speaker 3** [00:40:19] But having those spaces where, like, you feel that same sort of of safety is really important. I think that was a kind of side benefit of going through. That whole process was like one, I had to do a bunch of therapy, so like, got to do a bunch of a bunch of kind of like personal and interpersonal groundwork for like when I had kids and for just like, interacting and move around these spaces in therapy really good. And then like some of the kind of like interpersonal things I learned from, from existing and the kind of like hostile environment of, of drug addiction, uh, are really useful in like reading situations, reading people, uh, communicating in ways that help keep you safe.

**Speaker 2** [00:41:00] Yeah.

**Speaker 3** [00:41:00] Uh, and like, learning essentially, like how to talk shit but not get beat up. Yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:41:06] Skills are skills.

**Speaker 2** [00:41:08] Life skills. Yes. Yes. Okay, cool.

**Speaker 3** [00:41:11] Not certain I answered the question, but I did my best.

**Speaker 2** [00:41:14] No, you.

**Speaker 1** [00:41:15] No, no, no. Yeah. Yeah. I also want to just thank you for being so vulnerable with us and our listeners, because who knows who this is going to reach. So I just want to thank you for that.

**Speaker 2** [00:41:25] Millions of people.

**Speaker 1** [00:41:27] That's the goal.

**Speaker 3** [00:41:29] Fingers crossed.

**Speaker 1** [00:41:31] So, yeah, thank you for sharing that with us.

**Speaker 3** [00:41:33] And you guys, you know, created a safe.

**Speaker 2** [00:41:35] Space that you could feel comfortable.

**Speaker 1** [00:41:38] Well, you never know who's going to listen and need to hear that at that moment. Yeah. So thank you.

**Speaker 2** [00:41:44] And I think the reason why I asked that question is because I am from the Bell Hook School, right? So I don't believe in asking questions of people that you won't answer yourself. And while I'm not and I feel.

**Speaker 3** [00:41:56] Like, yeah, I feel like you are bringing up the will to change essentially.

**Speaker 2** [00:41:58] A.

**Speaker 3** [00:41:59] Great book. If you haven't read that, read that too. But don't take it wrong. Don't take it wrong. You still got to do the work, you know, if you're a man.

**Speaker 2** [00:42:05] Right, right, right. I bring it up because my dad is and is an addict and has been in recovery for at least 30 years now. And so when I was in New York at his house, I saw a book laying on the table that was basically about being in recovery. And I didn't realize that it was an everyday thing. It was part of his life. It was who he is. Now, I get this idea that like, you know, I go to any meetings with him and he says he introduced himself. He says, I'm an addict. He hosts the meetings. He's a sponsor to people. Right. I learned all the slogans, all that, all that. But I didn't realize that it didn't hit me that like. It. It is something you have to do every day. And so that's why I ask the question, because I know that you talked about being a father. You talked about being a scientist. You talked about being someone who is thoughtful about inclusion. Right. Who is thoughtful about anti-racism. And so I ask that question because I know, you know, from knowing you personally, but also just what that means to have that other layer as a part of your identity. And I just wanted to hear you talk about that. So you answered the question. Perfect.

**Speaker 3** [00:43:19] So awesome.

**Speaker 2** [00:43:19] Awesome. Awesome. And so I'll wind down I will wind down today and ask from our conversation right in reflecting on anything else that may not have come up. What is one piece of advice or actionable item or a takeaway that you want to leave our listeners with?

**Speaker 3** [00:43:38] Oh, man.

**Speaker 2** [00:43:40] It's the culmination.

**Speaker 3** [00:43:42] There was there was a few thoughts I had from earlier, but I think. I think they've mostly been addressed. Mm hmm. Yeah, I guess. I guess, uh, just like, try your best to lead with. With empathy. I think any person you're interacting with has, like, a whole life and a whole bunch of experiences that you don't know anything about. Uh, it's like you don't know what's motivating their behaviors or what's going on with them. Uh, so, like, when, when possible, give people. Give people grace if you can. But like, that doesn't that also doesn't mean that you need to, like, just let people have kind of these habitual toxic behaviors and be okay with that. I guess also like, well, I guess, yeah, sometimes feel like you need to cut a motherfucker off and and that's that is the that is the, the that's like safe and appropriate and healthy thing to do. Like that is, I guess going back to my at my time recovery that was honestly some of that saved my life was, was realizing I understand that there are certain relationships that either now or maybe forever are bad for me and I can't maintain them and maintain the person that I want to be and maintain the safety that I want to have and maintain that stability that I want to have and like I have, have formed this view of relationships that kind of like any any relationships that I am a part of, needs to be productive for me and the other people. And and that's what I mean by productive is like it needs to be safe and help help either person grow or be comfortable or increase space for that vulnerability or be able to have that that vulnerability. And if if relationships are kind of producing the opposite of that, like it doesn't matter who the person is, like



that's not a relationship that I have the energy or can maintain in that, that if that's a family member, if that's anybody like that's that's something that like anybody can get cut off. Yeah. If they're toxic.

**Speaker 2** [00:45:34] So yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:45:34] We support boundaries.

**Speaker 2** [00:45:36] Now that was a closing. That was the closing.

**Speaker 1** [00:45:39] Yeah. So we just want to say thank you so much for joining us on our podcast today.

**Speaker 2** [00:45:44] Lively conversation.

**Speaker 1** [00:45:45] Yes. It was so wonderful to talk to you and I don't think I'd be stepping out of bounds if I said thank you for your prophetic words. I think we got a lot of like short little bites out of it that we would love.

**Speaker 3** [00:45:57] They're going to be on TikTok.

**Speaker 2** [00:45:59] Oh, you just activate it.

**Speaker 1** [00:46:03] It only takes one idea. But yes, thank you so much. And we have to stay in touch.

**Speaker 2** [00:46:10] Yeah. Cool.

**Speaker 3** [00:46:11] Thank. Thank you guys, like, for giving me some space to communicate for for just being one of the guys doing a great job. All you guys. Christina also, like, it was, like, is doing all kinds of shit. You guys are doing all kinds of great shit, and I really appreciate it.

**Speaker 2** [00:46:23] Yes. Thank you so much. So we enjoyed the conversation and over and out. We want to thank our guests today and all our listeners for tuning in to this episode of DNA Diaries. We hope you learned a little bit more about our colleagues and practices at work. Remember to stay in contact with us through our website, our listserv, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter to receive updates about new episodes and how to engage with our podcast.

**Speaker 1** [00:46:52] You can find us on all platforms where you listen to podcasts and we drop a new episode the third Tuesday of every month. So join us next time for a conversation with another best colleague as they share their DIY journey and truths. Until then, be safe and have a great day.