



## Transcript of Accidental Intellectual Episode 7: Do Good Work

Air Date: 24/12/2019

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[Intro Music]

**Lee Propp 0:08**

Hi, and welcome to the Accidental Intellectual, a podcast where we talk to people working in health related fields and get to know the human behind the expert. I'm Lee Propp joined today by Rachael Lyon.

**Rachael Lyon 0:20**

Hi guys!

**Lee Propp 0:21**

In today's episode we sat down with Dr. Christine Chambers. Dr Chambers is a Clinical Psychologist, Canada Research Chair (Tier 1) in Children's Pain, and a Killam Professor in the Departments of Pediatrics and Psychology & Neuroscience at Dalhousie University.

**Rachael Lyon 0:37**

Dr. Chambers is the scientific director of a national knowledge mobilization network, Solutions for Kids in Pain (SKIP). Headquartered at Dalhousie, SKIP's mission is to improve children's pain management by mobilizing evidence-based solutions through coordination and collaboration. She is also the incoming scientific director of the Institute of Human Development, Child and Youth Health at the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). Her research is based in the Centre for Pediatric Pain Research at the IWK Health Centre, and is aimed at improving the assessment and management of children's pain. She has published over 150 articles and peer reviewed scientific journals and was identified as one of the top 10 most productive women clinical psychology professors in Canada.

**Lee Propp 1:26**

We discussed her career trajectory, making your research meaningful and accessible to the public, multiple role management and delegation, and doing good work.

**Rachael Lyon 1:36**

We hope you enjoy as much as we did.

[Interlude Music]

**Lee Propp 1:43**

Hi and welcome to the Accidental Intellectual. We're so happy you're here today.

**Christine Chamber 1:50**

Thanks for having me.

**Lee Propp 1:52**

We should know how pumped we were... we were so excited that you agreed. I think [Really pumped!], when people who are sort of like high up in the research or the health world, which is who we're sort of targeting, get on board with chatting with us, I think, I mean, I think it speaks a lot to like, you know, valuing trainees and stuff but... it's just exciting.

**Christine Chambers 2:14**

Well, I still feel like a trainee [really?] in a lot of different ways, so it's always funny to hear people describe me that way.

**Lee Propp 2:19**

In what way?

**Christine Chambers 2:20**

Well, I don't know, you know, like we're all just trying our best and doing what we love to do. [Yeah.] So. Anyhow, I was just kind of find it funny that people wouldn't even want to talk to me.

**Lee Propp 2:30**

Still? [Yeah.] Okay, well we've been told that – we've been told that it gets... I guess like the imposter syndrome is still a thing?

**Christine Chambers 2:37**

Yeah, I don't think it ever goes away. [Never goes away.] Yeah, I hate to break it to you.

**Lee Propp 2:42**

So I think we're going to start right, I guess, back at the beginning. So can you tell us, like, is this what you envisioned yourself doing?

**Christine Chambers 2:50**

Well, sort of. I always wanted to be a child psychologist, I knew that. So I read a book in grade six about a child psychologist who helped kids, and I just knew that's what I wanted to do. So every year after that, you know, my mom had this like school Treasury yearbook thing that, you know, you put your class photo in every year and what do you want to be when you grow up and every year from grade six on I always wrote "child psychologist." So I was one of those annoying – [That's crazy!] yeah, who always knew what she wanted to do. But I didn't understand what being a researcher meant or any of that until I got to university and in my first year of university I went and met with an undergraduate advisor and I said, you know, "I want to be a child psychologist." And he said, "Well, here are the courses you should take and you're going to have to go do a PhD. And if you're going to get into a PhD program you probably should do some research." And so that's when I started to do research and really, kind of fell in love with research as a way to help children and families.

**Lee Propp 3:46**

It's, well – I don't think I even knew what a child psychologist was when I was 12 so that, in and of itself, I guess you were just sort of like... were you very studious? Or on a...

**Christine Chambers 3:54**

Yeah, I was always like, a very academic kid and very, sort of, achievement focused and you know if I got a bad grade on a test, you know, I'd be upset and my friends would be like, "Are your parents going to punish you?" And I'd be like, "No, I'm just disappointed in myself." [Oh no!] So I was always very academically oriented, always loves school, and I always loved kids – like from a young age, I was always taking care of other children, being around younger children, you know, had a like booming babysitting business, you know, in my neighborhood. So, this career path is really just brought together so many things that have always been a big part of me. Yeah.

**Lee Propp 4:35**

Were you an oldest child?

**Christine Chambers 4:37**

Yes. How could you tell?

**Lee Propp 4:40**

I don't buy too much into the birth order stuff but you sound like my older sister.

**Rachael Lyon 4:44**

Yeah. A lot of that resonates with me and I'm an older sibling, too. Yeah.

**Christine Chambers 4:47**

I sound like everybody's older sister.

**Lee Propp 4:50**

But I think what's interesting to me that you say, like, you sort of fell in love with research and like, now you're obviously sort of really big in the research world... Was it the same for the clinical stuff? I assume that's what drew you to, "I want to be a child psychologist."

**Christine Chambers 5:04**

Yeah, absolutely. And I think you know 12 year old me expected that I would be, you know, fully engaged in a clinical practice at this time and really throughout undergrad and grad school I think that's, you know, where I imagined myself going but by the end of my PhD I realized that, you know, the research was something that I couldn't give up, that it wasn't just a way for me to become a child psychologist. And you know, fortunately in clinical psychology, you have tremendous flexibility to balance and engage in a lot of different roles So up until, really, I guess was eight or nine years ago, I still did a day a week of clinical work in addition to my research. But after my last maternity leave, I realized something needed to go and with four young kids at home, I wasn't feeling like a burning desire to interact daily with kids at work. So you know, you go through different phases in your career and I still love working with kids, and I've just found another way to work with them right now.

**Lee Propp 6:01**

Yeah okay so you don't do the clinical...

**Christine Chambers 6:02**

Not anymore, not right now.

**Lee Propp 6:05**

Do you miss it at all?

**Christine Chambers 6:04**

I do. But again, I think my child psychology skills are being put to good use at home right now. But it's not something that I could ever imagine not going back to, so you know I think everyone needs to think about their career in phases and stages, and you know, you can do it all but you can't do it all at the same time.

**Lee Propp 6:26**

Yeah. I like that. Yeah.

**Christine Chambers 6:27**

Yeah. So you've got to make choices at different time points.

**Lee Propp 6:32**

So, between when you decided, "I really want to do research," so towards the end of grad school to now did something... you seem to do a lot of policy work. At what point did you decide that "I want to, I need to get this outside of the lab."

**Christine Chambers 6:45**

Yeah, so that was really a shift about, I'd say six or seven years ago. So up to that point so I started my first faculty position in 2001, so I've been doing this as a P.I. or a principal investigator, for 18 years. And, you know, I thought that I had found this way – through research – of helping many, many children, you know, through research not just one at a time, as I would as a clinician. But once I had my own children, I realized that all of this research, while, you know, giving me a really impressive list of publications and awards and conference presentations, wasn't actually being used to the benefit of my own children. So when my children went into hospital or required medical care, the research, this evidence that I knew existed just wasn't being used. And so I made a very deliberate shift during my last sabbatical, which would be seven years ago –2012, to make a move towards making sure that all of this research actually made a difference in people's lives. And that's where my interest in reaching parents and, you know, knowledge translation, knowledge mobilization, impacting policies, engaging more with the public, really started.

**Lee Propp 7:59**

Can you... I think we just said a lot of words that perhaps people aren't familiar with and I think for my own... I think I have a – an understanding of what knowledge transition, knowledge mobilization... I think I understand what it is... but boots on the ground, actually doing it. What is it?

**Christine Chambers 8:15**

Yeah. Well you know what, that's a really interesting question because it looks a little different for every single person and for every type of, of, you know, research that you're doing. For me, what it means is, you know, getting the right evidence-based information to the right people, at the right time, in the right format. Initially, I wanted to reach parents. I wanted parents to know about all this great research evidence on managing children's pain that they could use with their kids, that, you know, you didn't have to be a pain management expert like me who happens to read the journals and to go to conferences to be able to make a difference. And then that – that kind of spread and so you know some of our initial knowledge translation work started with just creating a YouTube video for parents and making research more accessible and interesting in a YouTube video. And then that grew into a larger scale initiative that we call: It Doesn't Have to Hurt. Again, packaging parent friendly science in compelling digital content and using partners to do that.

**Lee Propp 9:14**

And you also get, like, good science there because there's so much garbage on the internet.

**Christine Chambers 9:16**

Well that's it. I mean there's just, I think, you know, 10 or 15 years ago there was a problem in that there wasn't enough good quality evidence out there and now there's too much information out there and people can't figure out what to believe and what not to believe. And scientists have been kind of scared to engage online and to be present. And so the public has found other people to believe. And so, you know, that's a problem from my perspective.

**Lee Propp 9:48**

Yeah actually Rachael and I spoke to a journalist. I think the perspective we got from her end, translating science and health information to the lay public coming from a journalist point of view. Very interesting.

**Rachael Lyon 10:01**

She specifically writes about medical issues and translates research to the lay public through a medical journal. So it was really interesting to hear her talk about how people don't trust journalists, they don't trust physicians or clinicians or doctors. They trust the people in their circles around them... and that's where they get the bulk of their information and [these are] the people who they trust the most to provide that information, which is just so interesting.

**Christine Chambers 10:27**

Yeah, it is interesting, and you know I think there was an article I saw just in the last week or two that said that public mistrust in science has never been greater. And, you know, never before has the importance of making sure we get science out there, you know, been greater. So it's just an interesting place to be and, you know, I do believe that we need to take a different approach to getting science out there and – and scientists need to be able to be more accessible. And the way that science works, it's really interesting, it doesn't reward impact in the real world. We talk a lot about all these metrics in science, like what your H- index is, and how many publications you have, and how many times your work is cited, and what the impact factor of the journal is, but none of those things measure whether your research is actually having a difference, like actual impact in the real world. And, you know, scientists are just rewarded on those metrics and, in fact, I would say, engaging in you know the kinds of things like we're even doing today like this isn't, you know, valued and it's not given a lot of credit in science. And so the way that science works, and the way that public needs and wants science, you know, don't necessarily match up.

**Rachael Lyon 11:45**

There's a lot of people who talk about like not wanting to push their research into like a public domain and affect policy just because it's, it's so challenging. Have you come across any of those challenges in trying to translate the work that you do?

**Christine Chambers 11:58**

Yeah, I mean it's not easy it's very time consuming, there's one statistic that shows that it takes on average 17 years for the results of research to find their way to the front line, and I believe it! Like, I've been at this for over 20 years now and that's how long it took me. Like I think that actually is how long it takes for scientists to establish their career, establish enough credibility, make the relationships that you need in order to be able to, you know, get your knowledge out there and influence practice and policy. And so this idea that this responsibility for knowledge translation, knowledge mobilization, should lie on

scientists, like, should be downloaded scientists, I think isn't really reasonable. And we need to look at other ways of mobilizing and, sort of, more effectively getting science out to people who need it.

**Lee Propp** 12:47

So how do – we had a great question from someone on Twitter, of how you challenge the, “this is how things are done,” you know, “this is how I did it,” like, the old sort of dinosaur... So, how do you how do you see that changing?

**Christine Chambers** 13:01

Yeah, I mean that's probably one of the trickiest things to counter against in health is, you know, “this is the way that we've always done things.” And I would say that that has been a theme that I've encountered across my career, whether it's in the health space or just in the other systems that I interact with, you know, “well, this is the way we've always done things,” and sometimes it just takes someone to ask, “Why?” Like, “Well, why is that?” And I think a lot of people would describe me as a bit of a disrupter in that I'm not afraid to ask those questions and, you know, challenge people to think differently about how we approach things. So I think it's important just to be like, “Well, why?” And not in an accusatory way, but in a way that really seeks to gain understanding and thinking about, again, most people are good people – or at least I choose to believe – and so when things go wrong, it's usually a system problem, right? So what's wrong with this system? And, you know, health, I think is a very, you know the medical system is a very entrenched system with a lot of hierarchies and a lot of traditions. And, you know, I think it's really important that we all step back and ask, “why?” And then, you know, try to dismantle it and maybe approach things in a different way.

**Lee Propp** 14:17

Yeah. There's so many things in there that I want to ask you about and I think I'll start with... what kind of... well you called yourself a disrupter and sort of challenging the system in a diplomatic way, not in an accusatory way, but what kind of feedback do you get as a woman, making noise?

**Christine Chambers** 14:34

Well yeah, I mean it's a tricky space -I'll be honest. You know, there's lots of research that show that the same sort of assertive behaviors that men display are regarded as, you know, well, “he's a great leader, look at his leadership potential,” and the same behaviors displayed by a women – a woman, are viewed much more negatively. And so, you know, I have not been immune to that, and it is, it's hard. I mean, I think it's really hard and I think we all need to be aware of those types of biases that exist, and how we all – we all, you know, play into them and I would say that I've seen a huge change in the last, you know, three years or so even, around public awareness around gender bias and the importance of equity, diversity, inclusion. I think for many years, people just, you know, assumed this was the way things were. And I think we've really hit a tipping point in terms of awareness and realizing that, you know, we're all better off when there are different voices and different perspectives and, and, you know, more diversity, you know, diversity drives innovation. But I definitely have had, you know, people say things to me that are negative and I'll be honest, like I get hurt feelings very easily. It's probably one of my biggest weaknesses. I take things very personally. And there's been a number of times where people have said things to me, you know, their perception of me that – that's not consistent with who I know myself to be. And it causes you to really think about, like, “Really? Could you give me some specific examples?” And really try to drill that down. And I think we have to be very, very careful when we give women feedback and really think about what are the examples, would I be thinking and feeling the same thing if I was talking about a man.

**Lee Propp 16:36**

Yeah. I have already...and I haven't been at this for that long and I think I've already been, you know, people perceive me as maybe a little abrasive, and perhaps sometimes I could be a little bit more diplomatic, but I think even when things are... and I think, I don't know if I would say that, like, the hurt feelings if it's like a weakness or maybe it feels that way to you but like, when someone says you're abrasive like, even to someone who's like has a hard exterior, it still hurts. [Yeah, it's hard to spin that in a positive way.] It's still hard to stomach that and, um... but you commented that like things we've reached a tipping point and things have changed. But I feel like sometimes that they've changed on the outside, like we know it's there, but on the inside... it feels sometimes that they haven't changed as much.

**Christine Chambers 17:19**

Yeah. I mean, I think a lot of these gender issues are so entrenched into our sort of day-to-day workings. I don't think, you know, everything's changed at all, but I think, you know, as someone who's been in this for a while, these are conversations that just didn't happen [Yeah, that's true.] 10 or 20 years ago. So I think the fact that the conversations are happening is really, really important, but absolutely like we have a long, long way to go. And, you know, and we are all learning, sort of, how to – how to approach these issues in a – in a sensitive way and I think we all like, you know, most of the women I know, you know, over a glass of wine can share their stories of, you know, being wounded or getting feedback around “your abrasive,” or, you know, “you think you're more important and valuable than anybody else.” And it's like, “Really?” Like how, you know, how can we break this apart a little bit and how can we be kinder to each other, and as women, how can we help to raise each other up and – and better understand... you know, and I really strive now to be like can you – you know I'll actively say, like, “Can you help me understand, you know, why you have that impression? Because that's certainly not my intent.” And I think it helps you to hear the feedback and also sometimes, the people who have concerns are, you know, and it's not to say everyone's coming to me with concerns, but I think these things come up, right? Like, and once they try to explain it, they realize they just can't. [Like, there's no substance to it]. It's just a feeling I had.

**Lee Propp 18:49**

Yeah. It just didn't feel right to me. Yeah. I think actually you must – you maybe posted on your Twitter that Madeleine Albright...? [Yeah.] “There's a special place in hell for women who don't lift up other women.”

**Christine Chambers 19:01**

Yeah, no, it's true. [I like that.] And my Vice President of Research at Dalhousie University, Dr Alice Aiken, who's been a tremendous positive force at our university, she uses that quote all the time. And I think it's, it is a great quote, because it reminds us all that we all have a responsibility to raise each other up.

**Lee Propp 19:21**

Yeah, and I think you really hit the nail on the head. We just, in general, we just have to be kind and I think that goes such a long way. And it's so sad that I, you know... you feel yourself having to say it but I don't... yeah.

**Christine Chambers 19:32**

Yeah. I tell my kids all the time, “Most people in this world are good.” You know? And I think sometimes things just get blown out of proportion [100 percent] and again it's what happens when you

have diverse perspectives, there's bound to be differences of opinion and, and I think we really need strong leaders to help facilitate those conversations and developing mutual understanding.

**Lee Propp 19:55**

So, you went from knowing that you wanted to translate research and now you're about to step into a leadership role in, like, the highest office in the country of health research, congratulations. [Thank you.] What is it was that something that you've had aspired to?

**Christine Chambers 20:09**

You know, it's interesting, not really. I mean, I have always been engaged at CIHR as a researcher and reviewing for committees and – and over the last two years, I've been serving on an institute advisory board for... so CIHR has 13 different institutes, so I was fortunate enough to be able to serve on the Institute for Musculoskeletal Health and Arthritis, and you know a year later, here I am looking forward to this opportunity and it's – it's a tremendous opportunity to be able to, you know, help identify research priorities, develop funding opportunities, develop partnerships, and help to make sure that researches is actually translated into improvements and practice and policy.

**Lee Propp 20:56**

Yeah, that's exciting. Do you have sort of a vision of things that you'd really like to... broad base things?

**Christine Chambers 21:02**

Yeah, well obviously I'm going to work really closely with the whole child health research community and across Canada to really build this out and we are going to do a strategic planning process in the New Year, because we'll be needing to launch a new strategic plan for the Institute in 2021. But, you know, the things that I bring to this role as scientific director and the things that, you know, most people who know me well, know that are important to me include things like putting children and families at the center of the Institute. So we're going to develop a Youth Advisory Council for the Institute so that the voices of Canadian children and youth are heard and present. I'm also really passionate about addressing inequities. And so looking at how some of the funding initiatives through ITSE can be used in a way to address that. I'm a big believer in the power of partnerships and working together with people, in particular outside of the box partnerships, so that's something I'm keen to bring. And, you know, I think, for me, this whole idea of, you know, every scientist I talked to wants to get their grant funded, right? like this is... [No one is immune to that.] Right. And in order to get your grants funded I mean there needs to be a robust investment in Canadian science and, you know, in order for that to happen I believe that Canadians really need to see and feel the impact of health research they need to know what it is they need to understand how it impacts their lives. And so, you know, the approach that I've taken in my own research area of getting information out there, helping to disseminate and implement science. We really want to kind of work in that model at CIHR.

**Lee Propp 22:58**

Yeah, I think that speaks also to – it seems that a big part of the success in getting your research out there is sort of harnessing the power of social media and those kinds of campaigns. And I guess is that sort of out of the box partnerships that you're alluding to?

**Christine Chambers 23:12**

Yeah. I mean, I think it really depends what your goals are in terms of what kind of research you want to get out there and, you know, the different kinds of partnerships that are, you know, possible and available. And, you know, when it comes to children's health there's so many people that want to help and be a part of that and I think one of my strengths is I am able to connect dots between things that

maybe people don't always normally see or think of, and so I'm prepared to kind of, you know, take some chances and do things a little bit differently, and see what happens.

**Lee Propp 23:44**

I'm excited to see, sort of, as a trainee and, sort of, hopefully moving up in the world, how things change. I want to circle back to – I think this seems to have been woven through your entire discussion, which is lovely and you seem to bring your family, sort of, into it... like you talk about your kids being the impetus for getting into a lot of this research [Yeah.] in the first place.

**Christine Chambers 24:09**

Yeah, I mean, I'm a mom, I'm a wife, I'm a friend, I have a lot of different roles and my family and my kids are, you know, immensely important to me and really motivate me, and they're a big part of my life.

**Lee Propp 24:24**

Right, I think, especially in, sort of, science and clinical work there's this idea that you... it comes back to sort of the old 'dinosaur way of thinking,' that you just need to be sort of like closed off and silo the different parts of your life and you're this dispassionate clinician. And, I mean, I think, and it seems from the interviews we're doing and the conversations we've been having, that it's so much richer when you can carefully but nicely meld them together.

**Christine Chambers 24:49**

Yeah. Yeah, it's interesting I mean I was trained as a clinical psychologist, you know, that you should never disclose anything personal and you kind of have to segment yourself. And I think in this day and age, you know, with social media, I don't think there's this division between your professional self and your private or personal self anymore. I mean, I don't think we have the same access to privacy that we used to have. So yeah, so I, and also for me... nothing shuts off or on really, like, it's not like I'm at work and then I go home and you know when I'm at home I'm not thinking about work or when I'm at work I'm not thinking about my kids. I mean, the boundaries are very blurred for me and perhaps for some people that would be really hard, but for me it's – it's just very natural. I sort of am who I am and carry that through. And my kids really motivate me and remind me of why I wanted to do this. And, yeah, I think, again, it's, it's, it's what I call... I hate the term "work-life balance" and people always ask me to give talks on work-life balance. Like, "You're asking the woman with four kids to give a talk on work-life balance?" Like, I – yeah I don't, I don't know what that is. I mean, so I don't use that term, I talk about "multiple role management." So that is my preferred term... it's like we all have different roles that require you know different type of management.

**Lee Propp 26:13**

It's funny that – I think maybe people ask you to give those talks because they see that you have four kids and they're like oh she must do it all. Yeah, but I think it's prioritizing.

**Christine Chambers 26:25**

Yeah, Yeah, I saw someone tweet that when you guys were asking for questions. Like, "How does she do at all?" And I like quickly replied and said like, "I don't, like, I drop a lot of balls." And, you know, and again, I think getting back to my, you know, "you can do it all but not all at the same time." And there's times where, you know, I'm a better mom than I am at other times. And there's times where I'm a better scientist, or a better leader, or a better friend, but it's impossible to be your best at all of those things at the same time and, and I think being really, you know, good to yourself and forgiving. And a lot of us are, you know, who get into this kind of work are really perfectionistic, right? [It draws a certain kind of person.] And I would say that's probably been my biggest enemy over the years, is that you know

you just you, when you have a busy life and you have multiple roles to manage, you just can't be perfect at everything and, and that's okay. And, and I'm also really good at delegating, and for the most part, I've had like really fantastic people around me both at work and at home, you know, attracting – attracting really hard-working, smart, caring people, treating them well, you know, working together as a team. So that part is, is really, really important.

**Lee Propp 27:43**

Yeah, I think that's the bit I'm missing. The – the learning how to... I'm one of four children, right, and I think that my mom is like – she's gonna be so happy she's getting a shout out – the master delegator. She, like, it's just, just like that, and I think she'll also just like if she's like saying her professional accolades and all that kind of stuff to people, I think people's eyes just still bugged out about the four kids, even though we're all adults or sort of adults and living out of the home. So, I think, yeah, I think maybe that's the, yeah, the secret sauce that I'm missing.

**Christine Chambers 28:14**

Well, yeah, and I think... Yeah, the delegation piece and also being honest with people about what you need in order to be successful and, you know, I get really annoyed by these super successful career women who have children, and you never hear about the childcare that they have, or anything. So they give the impression that somehow they're doing this all themselves and that is not possible. [There's not enough hours in the day!] And I mean it's like, "Well, when you're traveling for work someone else is looking after your kids." And so, you know, I am very fortunate to have like, you know, amazing nannies in our, in our family who are like third parents, who are very engaged. We have an extended family... I live in a place where we, you know, my mom lives a few blocks away, we have a lot of grandparents nearby, so you know I think I am very honest with people that I am not doing this alone and I have nothing invested in making people think that somehow I am. My husband is immensely supportive, you know, it takes a village and I think people need to be honest about the help they have, and you need to know what kind of help you need. And the kinds of things that you want to invest your time in, and the kinds of things that you need support with.

**Lee Propp 29:25**

Yeah, I think there's going to be, we hope that some trainees will tune into this... and a lot of whom likely have professional aspirations and I guess this is in a few parts. The first part is like one to two pieces of sort of nice sage advice?

**Christine Chambers 29:45**

I mean I'll, I'll give the advice to your listeners that I give my own trainees all the time, which they probably would smile when they hear me say this because it's very familiar to them, which is to do good work. And I know it sounds really basic, but at the end of the day, you know, there's a lot of politics you can get distracted by, you know, rejections. I mean, being a trainee is just so much rejection. And I'll say I – I've been rejected, like anyone who wins a lot of stuff because people say, "Oh, you won this prize," or whatever it's like you're, you're getting rejected, you know, 10 to 20%, or like you only win 10 to 20% of the time so you're getting rejected 80 to 90% of the time. [Yeah.] So yeah. So I think that the do good work. Don't lose sight of that. Just always have that as your core foundation and I feel that across my career, I am very confident that the work that I've done is good, and everything else just grows from that, and if you don't have good work at the core, you know there's, there's nothing else. So just stay focused do good work. And I guess my second piece of advice kind of relates to that whole rejection piece, which is don't give up. I have become, I have been so close to giving up at so many points in my career, including as recent as the last couple of years. [Really?] Yep. And, you know, persistence. And at some point, you know, you have to pivot, or reposition in some way. But don't give up. All of the failures that

I've had – and there have been many along the years – in retrospect, I look back and see how each of those experiences or disappointments, you know, helped me be positioned or better equipped to deal with something down the road. So – so, yeah do good work and be persistent.

**Lee Propp 31:39**

Yeah, and I think, you're right in the like in retrospect, like, “oh, like that didn't work out,” but at the time, like even a few years ago when you thought you were going to give up, what drew you back in?

**Christine Chambers 31:50**

Well, again, I think it's just believing in yourself and believing in the kind of impact or work that you want to do and, and it's not that I don't think you should ever pivot and, you know, in my career I've taken a few pivots, right? Where it's like, “Okay, well maybe I need to take a slightly different approach.” So I think you do need to know when to pivot, but you know just always reconnecting with, “Why am I doing this?” You know, “What kind of impact do I want to have?” And, you know, for all those overachievers out there... I mean, it's hard when you go from being, you know, top of the class as an undergrad, to being in a small group of PhD students who were all at the top of their class at, you know, their different universities, the, the pool changes and again, I think, not being focused on being the best, but doing good work, doing the best work that you can do, is a much better focus for grad school and beyond.

**Lee Propp 32:54**

Oh, a hundred percent. Yeah, and I think, like we sort of, like, in the cohort I'm in, we get along and I think raising each other up, the way we were talking about before is... it goes a lot better cuz I mean, I try to remind myself these are going to be my professional colleagues and friends and things like that... and celebrate the successes and mourn the failures a little bit. But I think, it sounds so hopeful, but I know like when you get that rejection can feel so shitty [It does.] and like, like reminding yourself that like why you got into this work... like, but it's kind of hard to.

**Christine Chambers 33:27**

Yeah, well, and there's times where you just need to take a break, you know, and I joke with my trainees even though I know this isn't how, you know, probabilities work... like every rejection, you're just one rejection, away from a win. You know, like, you're gonna get rejected four to five times, so, you know, when my trainee's, “Oh, I didn't get that.” I was like, “Okay, well, you're one step closer to a win.” [Four more times.] But I think keeping that in context and normalizing it, and yeah, I mean it's, it's a – it's a weird space like academia and grad school, and you know where else are you going to get rejected more often than, you know, and – and it's what you attribute to that. And I also think it helps to, as students, to volunteer and, you know, or have opportunities to observe how these grant review panels or awards committees work. You know, be a student reviewer because then you start to realize just how competitive it is, but also how random it is sometimes like... And, you know, if you happen to be the applicant they reviewed first or last, it can change the...

**Lee Propp 34:33**

There's a science to that, I think. Where you are in the stack.

**Christine Chambers 34:35**

Yeah, there is. Yeah and – and you can't control everything. And I will say that, another thing I tell my trainees is that with every rejection, you know, if it was a student research proposal or something... you just got your work in front of a bunch of people who, there may be there may be some benefit to you down the road that you won't see. And it was funny because I did an internship in Clinical Psychology at

Brown University, and I had really wanted to go to this internship in the States. It was like a top pediatric psychology internship and I applied and, you know, interviewed and was thrilled when I was selected. And at the end of the internship year, I, you know, thanked one of my supervisors who had been part of the selection process and I said like, "I'm so glad I had this opportunity. Thank you for choosing me." And she said to me, "Well you know what, Christine. When I came across your application in our pile, it wasn't the first time that I had heard of you." And I said, "Oh?" And she goes, "You'd applied for, you know, a Student Research Award from this division at the American Psychological Association, and you didn't win, but I remembered your application and thought it was interesting, and then when I came across your name in the pile of internship applications, I was like, 'Oh, I remember her.'" And who knows, I mean maybe if she hadn't reviewed my rejected award application before, maybe I still would have, you know, stood out or maybe not. So again, you just never know the way that these rejections could benefit you. And, again, you've just gotten your good work and I think that's, you know, get your good work out there, but you may have just gotten yourself, you know, further along for another opportunity.

**Lee Propp 36:20**

I like... that's a feel good story. That's a nice story to hear.

**Christine Chambers 36:24**

Yeah, just do good work, get your work out there, persist, you know.

**Rachael Lyon 36:29**

I'm wondering if you have like any advice... I talk to like a lot of my colleagues who are in Clinical Psychology, which has such a great research training program, who are like, "Yeah, what I'm done the PhD, no research me. I'm only going to do clinical work." And there's so many people who say that. Do you have any advice, or...?

**Christine Chambers 36:49**

Yeah, it's so interesting to me, I mean, I suppose I was one of them, originally, and one of my mentors at UBC, Charlotte Johnston, used to talk about this a lot, which is I think as researchers, we do a terrible job at showing our trainees the good parts about being a researcher, right? So I think we do an awesome job at sharing all the bad parts which is like the deadlines and the grants and the rejections and the work and all of that, and I don't think we talk enough about all the good parts of doing research. You know, the opportunity to, you know, ask questions and answer them, to work in collaborative networks, to travel the world. I will say that the flexibility that my schedule, that I've had over my schedule as an academic, you know, is unrivaled... like none of my friends who have quote unquote normal jobs have the flexibility that I have to make sure I can nip away from my kid's school concert during the day or take my kids out to lunches every Friday when I'm in town. So, you know, so I think I really, I mean, I think my training is the probably say that a lot of the time, you know, I've only showing them the bad part like the deadlines and the frustrations, but I think there are a lot of good parts. And I think, you know, I think we need to do a better job at – at reminding, reminding ourselves of those good parts as well and, and you know I also think that the type of work... you know, again, we're so lucky in clinical psychology because a lot of my friends, you know, they get in their 40s and they want to change career directions and they have to go back to school. I mean in clinical psychology, you don't have to, because you've been trained to wear a bunch of different hats and, yeah, you would might have to brush up on your clinical skills or brush up on you know teaching, but you have tremendous flexibility to move among very different career roles, either full-time or part-time so I think we need to kind of embrace the flexibility that clinical psychology offers us as a profession in our training. And, you know, being open to different ways of being engaged in research.

**Lee Propp 39:12**

I like that. But that part also kind of fills me with a little bit of like existential dread... there's too many options! I don't know what I want to be when I grow up!

**Christine Chambers 39:18**

Yeah. Well, again, phases right. You know, thinking about what the what the right fit is for you right now. And what is it, what kind of impact do you want to have, what kind of work do you enjoy, like, what kind of schedule, you know, do you work effectively on. And, and I hear from a lot of trainees who go from sort of more of an unstructured, you know, schedule that suits their rhythm as grad students and then all of a sudden they're on internship and they have to be there at eight in the morning and leave at six... and what if you feel more productive at nine o'clock at night that night? But no, you know, so. I think – I think, looking at our career paths in stages and phases and figuring out what's the best match with your personal life at different stages, as well, is really important.

**Lee Propp 40:07**

Yeah, I love my work at home days. My dog loves my work, too! I think, as we sort of think about wrapping up, I want to go back to the... “file drawer problem” or the “bench to bedside problem”, but how we inspire and engage, sort of, the next generation of trainees but also of providers to... like a call to action of how we can all do a little part in getting it all out there.

**Christine Chambers 40:37**

Yeah, I think it's, it's important for trainees to think about and we're, sort of, that it's a – it's a new breed of academic, I think, that – that, you know, there wasn't the same expectation on scientists or academics before around getting their research out there. And, and I think we just need to think about what's one small thing that every trainee could do. I encourage my trainees to be active on social media, to write a blog post, you know, for a forum that's already set up, for every art scientific article they publish to help promote, you know, public interest and drive things. So I mean those are just some small things that people can do. And I think what you guys are doing with this podcast is just a really creative, innovative example. And, you know, not being afraid to create your own opportunities and asking people to help you and, and – and I remember feeling super overwhelmed with the idea of having a full out research career, like I remember asking my undergraduate advisor is like, “How can I ever think of the whole career’s worth of questions?” Right? Like, I just like, it was like I can't even think about you know I know what study I want to do next. But yeah, I can imagine you know when you're 20, and you think of having like a 40, 45 year career like you know what that would be like. But I think kind of just being okay with riding the wave and this is speaking as somebody who is like the ultimate planner of her life. That I'm much more comfortable with just riding the wave and just look for opportunities. You know, you can't plan to have a big rewarding career. I think you can just plan your next best step, doing good work, you know, keeping connected with why you wanted to do it to begin with.

**Lee Propp 42:28**

I feel like I should make a sign over my desk that says, “Do good work.” We should all have them, maybe.

**Rachael Lyon 42:32**

Next best step.

**Lee Propp** 42:33

Yeah, yeah next best step. And it sounds like you've gotten more comfortable with just going one move at a time.

**Christine Chambers** 42:41

Yeah and I mean, the trainees that I work with often are anxious like, “What kind of job will I get? Where will I go?” And, and I mean, I was that person too. And I think I, and I used to worry a lot about where my trainees would end up... would they get... and now I just have faith. Like, if you do good work, things will come together for you, and, you know, I've supervised enough students and seen that happen. And it may not be what you were expecting but it may actually even be better.

**Lee Propp** 43:09

Yeah. That's a hopeful note to leave everyone to leave everyone on. I'm leaving feeling good. Thank you so much. This was a real pleasure,

**Rachael Lyon** 43:15

Yeah, thank you so much for talking to us.

**Christine Chambers** 43:17

Thanks for having me.

[Interlude Music]

**Lee Propp** 43:27

That was such a wonderful interview with Dr Chambers... I feel like just even sitting in the same room with her and sharing a conversation was like I wanted to just soak up even a little bit of her intellectual prowess.

**Rachael Lyon** 43:41

Yeah, I'll admit, I'm a little starstruck

**Lee Propp** 43:44

Yeah, definitely. And also just one of those people who was so over the top, enthusiastic about what we were doing and helping to promote us on her social media and like taking pictures herself, right after we just finished to do... to put on it. It's like, I don't know why it still surprises me when people in those positions still are so keen on helping.

**Rachael Lyon** 44:12

Yeah, that was really cool.

**Lee Propp** 44:14

Yeah, and I think part of what I learned and I think part of what I want to take with me is the doing good work, but also doing good work in the face of what can be a huge amount of rejection. And she was wonderfully upfront about backs and how much rejection you go through when you like you see someone at her level and it seems to me that it must be so easy for her.

**Rachael Lyon 44:45**

Yeah, it kind of seems like, you know, people get all these awards and you're like, "Oh yes, they get everything they apply for. That must be great to be funded all the time." But the reality is there's so many failed applications for grants and funding.

**Lee Propp 45:00**

And not even... I don't even think she called it a failed application. She was... I think she – I can't remember the term she used but it was just like you can't – you're not going to get them all. And I think putting yourself in that mindset and not letting each one be so soul crushing... I'm gonna try and carry that with you. It's not, it's not a personal failure, it's just that's how the system works. And understanding that is important to developing the resilience that you need to...

**Rachael Lyon 45:31**

...continue applying. [Continue applying. Yeah.] I really liked, also how she talked about the different phases and stages of your career: that you can't do everything all at the same time but you can do everything I think especially as women, at least I've been told several times like, "Oh, well, if you want to do that then you can't do that." Or like, "If you want to have a family, you can't also have this big successful research career." Like, you have to pick which one you're invested in. And I liked that perspective that like, yes you can do everything just not all simultaneously.

**Lee Propp 46:12**

And just, just realizing that they are like... triaging the things that are important almost, like I think it's, you know, she was very upfront about the fact that she has helped with childcare and it's taking a village to raise her family and why try to hide that when that is a huge part of why you're so successful? Yeah, I really, I really love that and I think that it gives me a little bit of hope. I think people like her are really paving the way for the next generation of women to be successful and to, you know, find meaning and work that can seal isolating.

**Rachael Lyon 46:55**

Totally. What she said about being a perfectionist and the field really attracting that personality type. The type-A, the perfectionistic, sort of, tendencies, really resonated with me. I know maybe less so with you, but like knowing your limits and changing sort of your perspective and your expectations about what good enough looks like. I think is really helpful.

**Lee Propp 47:23**

Yes and yeah, I think – I don't know if I relate as much with the perfectionist but the delegation. Maybe that's perfection so coming out in a different light but just like feeling comfortable letting other people do things. And it's not going to be the way that you would have done it. And that is more than okay, because that is how you get things done. So, I'm gonna... yeah, I think I'm gonna work on finishing the rest of the term and the rest of the academic year just doing good work. [Yeah.] So I thank her tremendously for helping teach that lesson.

**Rachael Lyon 48:01**

Absolutely.

**Lee Propp 48:02**

We hope you enjoyed as much as we enjoyed learning from her.

**Rachael Lyon** 48:07

Yeah. What an amazing interview.

**Lee Propp** 48:10

Yes.

[Outro Theme Music]

**Lee Propp** 48:45

You've been listening to the Accidental Intellectual. Today's guest was Dr. Christine Chambers, interviewed by me, Lee Propp, and Rachael Lyon. Our podcast is produced by Bronwyn Lamond, Rachael Lyon, Harrison McNaughton, Stephanie Morris, Lee Propp, and Ariana Simone. Our theme music is by Alexandra Willett and our branding by Maxwell McNaughton. You can check us out on Twitter [@accidental\\_pod](#) and on Instagram [@accidentalintellectual](#). Our website is [www.accidentalintellectual.com](http://www.accidentalintellectual.com). We'll be back next time with more stories from the humans behind the experts.

[Interlude Music]