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SM: Sarah McConnell, producer and host

AS: Audio Sample

MM: Meg Medina

NB: Nishaun Battle

AQ: Allison Quantz

WL: Winx Lawrence

KM: Khadija Miller

Transcript:

00:00:00

SM [music]. From Virginia Humanities, this is With Good Reason. I'm Sarah McConnell. Almost half of all the people in the world are bilingual. But in the US, it's only 20 percent. It turns out there's some really great benefits to bilingualism, from higher paying jobs to a delay in dementia. Meg Medina is a Newbery Medal-winning author who incorporates Spanish words and phrases into her English language children's books. She recently spoke to an audience of young students at the Massanutten Public Library in Harrisonburg, Virginia. And the kids spoke too, sharing how they feel about being bilingual.

AS [clapping]

Hi, my name is Xavier. Mi nombre es Mary. Hi, my name's Olivia. Hello everyone, my name is Max Xenes. Um, hola, mi nombre es Sawyer Huff yo voy explicar porque es divertidos ser bilingual. Hi, my name is Sawyer Huff and I'm going to explain why it's fun to be bilingual. Being bilingual is something special. Not many people have it, so if you do have it, that is something special. Si solo hablo English, I couldn't talk with my

grandma and grandpa. I'm not saying that if you aren't bilingual that you aren't special. Everyone is special in their own way. Knowing two languages—in this case, Spanish and English, brings so many opportunities in my life, especially in career and employment wise. I am interested in being a biologist, banker, or maybe a receptionist. But it is important to be bilingual because you aren't going to have—you're going to have less chance of having dementia...eventually. Puedo ayudar otras personas. I can help other people. Sometimes when I'm having a conversation with my mom, I can't go on talking about bees without stuttering and taking the time to think about how to say bees in Spanish. It's abeja if you were wondering. [laughs] El dicen el lo mismo. I am different, I am único. El lo repete—I am different, I am bilingue. [clapping] [music]

SM Those adorable voices came from students speaking at the Central Library in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Later in the show, author and professor Nishaun Battle describes the adultification of Black girls. But first, here's an edited version of a presentation by Meg Medina on writing children's books that honor and celebrate Latinas, and her particular love for Spanglish.

AS [clapping] I start right off the bat with Spanglish because that, my friends, is the story of my life. When I'm all over this country, kids always ask me, so why are all your characters Latina? And I say, well, porque soy Latina. Right? You know? I lived like a lot of the kids who just spoke. At home, completamente en Espanol. Frijoles, arroz blanco, empanadas, lucha libra, that was my life after school. And during the day, Twinkies and pizza and my friends and ringalero and tag and Mrs. Zuckerman. All of those things were inside of me. Here's the weird thing though. I don't know if you know anything about Cuba. I'll tell you it's an island, right, south of Florida. And it's known worldwide for its music. It has this beautiful thing called clave. It sounds like this. Escucha. When you get it, join me, okay? [music] Aoda. Esa clave. It's a beat in Cuban music that's considered sacred. It does not change. You can put horns on it, bongos, a bass, you can put Celia Cruz, you can put dices Pitbull singing on it, whoever you want, no cambia, it's considered sacred, it's this one thing that can't change ever. So, I was growing up in New York in the 70s when these people hit. Johnny Pacheco, Héctor Lavoe, Willie Colón, and all those guys are top Afro-Latino jazz musicians from all over Latin America. And they turned the Bronx on fire in New York. That is how I learned to dance. I love to dance. Salsa, merengue, all Latin dance. I learned it listening to albums by Celia Cruz in hot overheated apartments with other teenagers, the way my mother didn't want me to do. But that's what I did. Everybody needs something inside of themselves that doesn't change—something that guides you from the time you're young to the time you die. A beat that is not shaken, a thing inside you that is sacred.

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AS And some my clave is family and culture and where those things intersect. Like a lot of you, I have two cultures inside of me just like what you said. They're all mixed up in there. You'll notice that my name is Meg, well that's what people call me here, but

really it's even worse. It's Margaret Rose. Okay. Porque? Because when my father left, my mother was so angry, she said, I want the most Anglo-sounding name—nada. So my entire family has people named Carmen, Maria, Diego, Conseulo, and Margaret Rose. She has to make a statement. Pero bueno. Okay. So, I write out realities, I write our families. I write what it is to be us right now. So, how do I honor that? The first thing that I do is that I honor it through language, which is—makes it so exciting to me. I think language is the most important thing in my books to connect readers to Latino culture. So, I love Spanglish, and I do not make any apologies for Spanglish. Here's what it looks like... Here's from Mercy Suarez Changes Gears. The first page. To think only yesterday I was in chancletas, sipping lemonade and watching my twin cousins run through the sprinkler in the yard, and now I'm here in Mr. Patchett's class sweating in my polyester school blazer and waiting for this torture to be over. That's how the novel starts. It's picture day which is torture for everybody. Pero mira, las chancletas. Everybody who is Latino, as soon as I say chancletas, raise your hand if you knew exactly what I was talking about. Claro? In my mind, it's the pink rubber runs that my mother always bought at a [inaudible]. They come in handy, so it evokes immediately in one word, when the reader comes to the book, they see their family there immediately. And I use it sparingly enough so that someone who's never seen a chancleta in their life can still know what I said and can turn to their friend in the classroom and say, "What's a chancleta" And you can say, "Oh they hurt, they're rubber." Right? You know what I mean, right? Okay. So that's how we sound. I honor our culture through language, I honor our culture by writing us into American history, because we've part of American history, we are part of American history. I love to write the story of family, with love and respect. Now more than ever. Because there are so many characterizations right now that are not representative of the people I know. The people I know. Where family is everything. In a word, it is everything. Everything begins and ends with your family. I also write about very hard things in families. Even for little kids. This is Mercy Suarez Changes Gears that won this year's Newbery which was just a wonderful experience for me. But it is about hard things. I'm gonna give you the inside school so you know. It's based on some things that were happening really in my own life, as a little kid and as an adult. My grandmother from my father's mother, we called her the General, el jefe, right? Y la oca a ca, that's my mother's mother, abuela Bena. Abuela Bena sweet. She was nervous, she was always worried that something was going to kill me. Nina! Amarrate se abrigo. Tie your coat. El autobús te arrastrará hasta la muerte con tu chaqueta. [laughs]. You're going to be dragged to your death with your jacket by the bus. She was great though. If I wanted to eat 10 Twinkies at a sitting. Si mi vida, como no? La suca no hace daño a nadie. A little sugar doesn't hurt anybody. Okay? Nothing like fefa. Fefa, the general, was one of those relatives that you're not sure likes you. Does anybody have one of those? Okay. She was that one. So if I had to go to her house, I had to look nice, which was not my normal state of being, I had to say por favor, muchas gracias, I couldn't speak loudly in her apartment, I couldn't run outside when I wanted to, she had to have her eye on me. She was really really strict. She made me eat tomatoes and radishes, which I really hated, right? But she did this one really nice thing.

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She was a seamstress, which means she made clothes. We lived in New York City, so she worked in the fashion district. So she would get those big dummies and she would make the pattern. And she made really fancy clothes. So every year, on my birthday, she got off the yellow bus at the corner, and she'd come with her bags filled with my clothes. Lots of clothes. I have a picture every year of my life with clothes on a bed. Because my mother would lay them out like little dead bodies and sit me down and say, "Look grateful." Right? And I did. So, you know what I say to kids is that sometimes in life we meet people who we think are really strict or not good for us in some way, et cetera, who we think don't love us or whatever. But who maybe love us in their way. Who are maybe offering us something we need that we don't even know we need. And what I needed from Fefa I think was certainly clothes because my mother worked at the transistor factory. She had no money to clothe me. And I think I needed from her that sense of control, behave, there's a way to be. I didn't like it, but it helped me in some way. So when I was writing the novel *Mercy Suarez Changes Gears*—when you read it, abuela is afraid of everything. Alligators in the canal, crossing the street without looking todo todo todo from abuela. She has one of those dummies in the, you know the, mannequins. She sews, which is Fefe. So I took these two abuelas in real life, and I squeezed them together and I made abuela in the book. As I was writing this book, I had lots of old people in my life. I was here in Virginia. Javier's mother, my husband's mother, Adeja. We call her Ola. Adela was living with us because she had fallen in New York City in her apartment. Nobody had found her for many many hours and we said, "Que vaya ella, you have to come live with us. Yeah. You need to be closer to us." Okay, she came to live. Tambien, my mother came to live. Unfortunately, my mother was very sick. She had started to lose weight, we didn't know why, my mother had advanced stage cancer. And she didn't come alone. She was like a salt and pepper shaker with Diaisa. Diaisa was her sister and Diaisa had had a stroke and was in a wheelchair and so I said, "Okay, bring Isa." Now who's keeping count? How many old people is that? So, there's 3 old people, there's 3 teenagers in the house, there's Javier and me, there's a dog, and there's 2 cats, and one of the cats needs medicine for her nerves. So that's the household that we're working with here. So in the beginning, it was kind of cool. But then things started to get tough. We had hospice workers coming in and out and doctors and tons of medicine and my kids started to feel very squeezed out. And they were teenagers. And they had had enough. When I was writing *Mercy Suarez Changes Gears*, I was thinking about all of that.

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I was thinking about my son in particular. Him. Here he is with Ola. He came to my bedroom one night and he said, [clears throat], he woke me up, he was really angry. He had gone down to get a sandwich in the middle of the night as 16 year old boys do. And I said to him, "What's the matter with you? Why are you so angry?" And he said, "Ola came out to say goodnight." And I said, "Okay. So what's the problem with that?" And he

said, "She wasn't wearing pants." [laughs]. So stuff like that happened, right? It was like, my husband still says he will never unsee that. That's always going to be with him. That's forever. So, mira, it was hard. And then we started to lose people. My mom did pass, and all of that went down in our family. Here's what I thought. I said, I'm writing this book for kids who are 9, 10, 11, 12. And usually that's a really fun part of life. But I think that kids who are 9, 10, 11, 12, hard things happen in families than 2. And kids are not blind. They see these things. They hear the conversation about financial difficulties, about job difficulties, about illnesses, about death. They are present. And they need a roadmap. So when I was writing *Mercy Suarez Changes Gears*, I tried to make a funny book that would capture what it is to be 11 and have to deal with a girl like Edna Santos everyday, pero tambien, I wrote a book about hard things that you see and how 1 family figures out how to pull together and face that. Because there will be hard things, and that's when you need your family and your friends to help you through those things. So, I love it, to see kids reading my book and asking questions and connecting with it. Probably my favorite thing that happens is when a kid comes up to me and says, "Oh my gosh, my tia is just like Tia Ines, or I have an abuela just like that." I love it when it happens from a Latino kid and I love it when it's from somebody who's completely outside the culture, and says their aunt, their grandmother, their father, their mother is exactly that way. Because the truth is, there are so many ways that we are similar. There are so many ways that we love each other that are exactly the same en Ingles, en Espanol. That's what I want to celebrate. [music].

- SM Meg Medina is the New York Times bestselling author of *Mercy Suarez Changes Gears*. We thank the Kellogg Foundation and the Virginia Center For the Book for their support of this program through the Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Initiative. Up next, in 1915, Jamie Porter Barrett opened a school for young Black girls in trouble. She taught them important life skills and instilled in them the self-esteem they sorely needed while so many of them were being treated and punished like adults. My next guest is Nishaun Battle, a criminal justice professor at Virginia State University who says this perception and treatment of Black girls continues today. Nishaun, where do the prejudices of stereotypes of young African-American girls come from?
- NB Well, historically, they were considered property. These Black girls were not afforded the opportunity to live out their girlhood because their bodies were being used as commodities for economic prosperity.
- SM The legal system actually wrote this into the law.
- NB Yes, it was written into the law, and so there's this geneology of a lack of protection of Black girls that stems from slavery but has continued a legacy going on into modern day movements such as Say Her Name.
- SM You also write about the case of Virginia Christian.

NB Yes, it was in 1912. She was accused of murder, and she ultimately was executed, and she was the first female of any race to be executed in Virginia during the 20th century. Now, at the time, there was also the Virginia Federation of Colored Women's clubs who galvanized together to try to stop the execution of Virginia Christian, but she still was executed.

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SM Was this treated as a sensational murder case at the time?

NB Well, at the time, Virginia Christian was constantly referred to as a woman in the newspapers when she was indeed still in fact a girl. And she was referred to as extremely stocky and dark and the employer was referred to as petite and frail and an established woman in the community.

SM But was there an outcry against executing this child?

NB There was an outcry by the Virginia Federation of Colored Women's clubs, but there also were some in the Black community that wanted to disassociate themselves with Virginia Christian. There was not, from my research, any type of outcry from white communities.

SM What was the law for how the state was allowed to treat youthful offenders?

NB That really leads into the center of my research that is really interested in what spaces are created by Black women to promote social and legal justice. And so three years later, what you have is the establishment of the Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls by the Virginia Federation of Colored Women's clubs and Jamie Porter Barrett who was the president of that club. And the case that actually spearheaded the opening of that school was an 8 year old girl who stole a lollipop and so Jamie Porter Barrett said, well, I will take the child. And the judge did not know that Jamie Porter Barrett was a Black woman. But the decision had already been made before he realized the race of Jamie Porter Barrett.

SM Tell me more about that case. Where did that take place and what had happened?

NB It was around Hampton, Virginia and the little girl stole a lollipop. The sentence was going to be 6 months in an adult prison.

SM Are you kidding me?

NB No.

SM That's shocking.

NB Yes. It—well, I guess, depending on who you're talking to. For some people, it can be shocking. And for certain groups of color, it's not shocking at all.

SM So help me understand who Jamie Porter Barrett is.

NB Jamie Porter Barrett claimed to have been a child of a slave owner. She never knew her father, but her mother was a former slave. Her mother worked for a rich white woman who took care of the both of them and, at the time, that woman actually suggested that Jamie Porter Barrett try to pass for white and live this more privileged life. And her mother was against that idea. And so Jamie Porter Barrett went on to receive an education. She went to Hampton University and the classes that she took and the professors that she had really influenced her to pursue a life of activism and community service. And so she was the first president of the Virginia Federation of Colored Women's clubs. And that was their first act to establish a home for girls who were considered delinquent. The home was opened in 1915 with roughly about 15 girls. And Jamie Porter Barrett had a really unique method of really encouraging girls to find their life purpose, to identify who they were and who they could be, and she wanted them to not only have self-love but she wanted them also to develop a sense of sisterhood. This idea of, I'm my sister's keeper, and no girl would be left behind at all.

SM How did—How was she so wise? How did she understand what they needed and what would help them grow?

NB She viewed them as humans and she realized that most of these girls were viewed as threats to society, never given a chance, and girls who never had a voice. One thing that Barrett always did when the girls would enter her home is she would make sure that they received a bath and that their bedding was clean, because that was symbolic for them having a renewal of self. She believed that every girl who entered her home could be transformed.

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She believed it. And when you actually believe that, and I know that even as a professor, when you actually believe in your students, when you believe they can really be their best selves, that alone is often motivation for them to want to present their best selves.

SM It's so interesting that she created what they came to call the Jamie Porter School for Colored Girls in Virginia. And it was, I guess some would call it a reform school, but it sounds like a finishing school.

NB Well, you know, they did really great things in that home. She taught them sewing skills, she taught them how to garden, she taught them entrepreneurial skills from 1915, for decades until she retired.

SM Are you still seeking Black girls today in the judiciary system being adultified in this way?

NB Yes, I think of the incident that occurred in Texas where Black children were at a pool party and there was a police officer who was sitting on top of a Black girl in her bikini. We know of a case of the girl who was body slammed by a security guard when she was in class. And when you have the young man who was not going to be able to graduate because he had locks in his hair—

SM Oh yeah, he was at the Oscars.

NB Yes, so, when you say that in 2020, we're still having a conversation about laws that need to be in place based upon how someone's hair naturally grows out of their head, what that does to the mental capacity, what that does to a psyche of a race. So when you ask, "is any of this shocking for me or any other people in the Black race?" it's almost like please just reflect on these various basic rights that we have to face on a daily basis, and then wonder again, "is it shocking for any of us?" And then the answer would be, undoubtedly, no. [music]

SM Nishaun Battle is a professor at Virginia State University and the author of *Black Girlhood, Punishment, and Resistance: Reimagining Justice for Black Girls in Virginia*.

AS Aw that's cute.

That's a good one.

SM Welcome back to *With Good Reason* from Virginia Humanities.

AS A cupcake model. You have beautiful hands to be a cupcake model.

SM This is an after school mentoring program that pairs pre-teen girls with college women.

AS Will you take a picture for my Instagram?

SM Middle school can be tough. And the psychologist who co-founded this program says, actually, young college women can relate.

AS Aw that's cute. That's a good one.

SM Later in the show, even women who get to the high ranks of academia still need support from their peers.

AS The sister colleague circle has really provided a safe space for us, and we can empower ourselves.

SM But first, ages 11 to 13 can be rough years for girls. With Good Reason's Allison Quantz brings us this story of the special bonds that are formed through the young women leaders program.

AQ When the college mentors of the young women leaders program get together with their middle school partners, they take it very seriously.

AS Okay, we'll start [inaudible]. Angle, angle, [inaudible].

AQ Okay, maybe not that seriously. But one of the things that distinguishes the young women leaders program from similar programs is the amount of training that mentors are given.

AS Okay guys so start working on this sticky situation.

AQ Part of the program is an actual college class, where they discuss tactics for working with what they call their littles. This kind of training is important. Stephanie, one of the mentors, puts it like this...

AS So you don't want to be their parent and you don't want to be their friend. You want to be their mentor. So you've gotta be a little bit of everything at the same time.

AQ It can be hard to imagine the kind of honest relationship that the mentors say they have with their littles. So they invited us to their weekly group session held at Burley Middle School in Albemarle County.

AS Hey, everybody. You guys, who wants to lead highs-lows for me? You guys?

AQ They start each session by going around the circle to say one good thing and one bad thing about their week.

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It gives the girls some support if there's something bad going on, but it also gives them a place to brag without looking stuck up.

AS Um, my high is that I won nationals for cheerleading and [clapping]

AQ Highs and lows does a pretty good job of capturing what the young women leaders program is all about. It's women and girls celebrating each other's successes and helping each other through their problems.

AS My high is that I got a 95 on a math packet [clapping]

AQ That's a little, and here's a big.

AS My high is that I have a job interview tomorrow so that's really exciting [clapping]

AQ Both the middle school girls and the college women look forward to these meetings as a way to relax and unwind. It gives them stability at a time when a whole bunch of things in their lives seem to be changing.

AS My low is that I'm moving in a couple weeks, so that sucks, but yeah. Just make the most out of it.

I'll miss you.

I'll miss y'all too. [laughs]

AQ That's Brittany. Her big sister in the program is Eun Lee. They love the group sessions but they really like to hang out one on one.

AS We are the international pairs. Both of our parents are from the military.

So we understand each other very much.

Yes.

We're practically sisters just long lost. [laughs]

AQ Listening to Eun Lee, you can tell that she has a lot of respect for Brittany.

AS The best thing I like to talk to her about is when we are facing something that we are anxious about, and sometimes I feel like I am not that mature as her.

AQ Just like she learned from training, Eun Lee asks questions and then listens carefully while Brittany responds.

AS So, if you had the chance to do the best thing you want to do, what's the thing that you want to do the most?

I want to become a singer who will raise money for all different kinds of cures and fundraisers and just like help the world because...

AQ 13 year old Brittany is wise, and she has a clear sense of right and wrong.

AS If you can only summarize one sentence to say this to your love persons before you leave, what's the one sentence you'll say to them?

You know, I'd just tell everybody in my life that I care about here, live life to the fullest and if you feel like you're doing the wrong thing, just stop because you are. If your heart tells you that it's wrong, don't do it.

AQ Brittany was supposed to sing in the school talent show, but because she's moving, she has to miss the performance. With her quarter in hand, Eun Lee asked Brittany to perform anyway so that she could hear her little sing.

AS I'm really nervous.

What the song you want to sing?

Um, I'm singing the female version of How to Love.

Are you ready?

Yes. [singing]

AQ Seeing Brittany with Eun Lee makes you remember what a strange time middle school can be: somewhere in between being a little kid and a teenager.

AS [singing]

Done?

Yeah.

Yay!

I think I did pretty good.

Yeah, I like it. If we get like music background, I think it will be better. It's pretty good.

[singing]

AQ I'm Allison Quantz reporting.

SM The young women leaders program was co-founded by clinical psychologist Winx Lawrence who now serves as a professor emeritus in the University of Virginia's Department of Human Services. Why this particular age group? What are they, 12, 13?

WL Yeah, between 11 and 13. We chose this age because it's really a transition. So they come from elementary school where the world feels fairly safe, they're very connected with their teachers, to a world where everything is changing for them. So, amongst all these changes, we wanted to provide some support for them to make healthy decisions.

SM Why do they need support?

WL Because in middle school, girls begin to think that their moms are not as smart. And certainly my children thought I was not as smart as I used to be. They're beginning to think we're not brilliant. So it's really nice to have an adult other than their parents that is a mentor to talk to.

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SM What do you think is the key area you try to bolster? Self-esteem I'm thinking?

WL Actually it's not. Part of what we encourage the girls to do is begin to reconnect with the supports, the competencies in their life that they've sort of lost track of. So we work at reconnecting them with their moms, reconnecting them with their dads, teaching them again how to connect with their teachers and make use of their teachers.

SM When you started to look at this group and think, "I wanted to put something together," was it because you yourself had teenage daughters?

WL Two things, I'm a clinical psychologist and so I was working with adolescent girls. Mostly with girls in trouble in high school. And as I traced it back, I realized that they had started thinking about that during middle school and nobody was watching. But I was also struck by my own daughters. They were so confident in elementary—they were going to be president, they were going to everything. They got to middle school, and their knees started shaking, and they were allowing boys to pluck their bra straps and talk meanly to them. And the girls were talking meanly to each other. And I thought, with all their privilege, how is it that they're not able to stand up for themselves and why aren't they using the teachers more or why aren't they using me more? And as I investigated, I realized that I could have a college student giving the same advice that a teacher or a parent would give and they would think that was cool and brilliant.

SM What do you teach the college girls? They're taking a course with you for course credit.

WL Well you know one of the biggest things we teach is how to be an active listener. Many of us think that listening is telling somebody what they need to do, and it's not. The hardest thing for us adults is to listen and keep our mouths shut and invite the young person to tell us what their thinking is even when it seems a little wacky. So I teach them how to do that, I teach them how to problem solve with the little sisters in a respectful way, I teach them how to help the little sister find resources in their community to help

them make healthy decisions. For example, a little has felt insulted by a teacher at school and she wants to go off and call the teacher names and lose her temper. What we teach them is they then come and talk to their big sister about it and the big sister listens first. She feels wounded, what that wound is about, but then how to go and talk to the teacher in a respectful way about her concern so that the teacher and the little can then mend their relationship. So one of the things that I have to encourage the college women is to slow down. The girls down initially when they first meet them say, "Hi, here's my deepest darkest secrets and can you help me with them?" It is about slowly building a friendship so that the middle school girls can trust them. But when they do trust them, they are just so willing to share. They're so hungry for a woman who's been through this that they can talk to about it. So we teach for example the ABCs of problem solving: Acknowledge there's a problem, then B is breathe. Just take a deep breath so you can let your mind catch up to your emotions. And then C is choose a different choice is what we call it. So, ABCs. Acknowledge, breathe, and choose.

SM What have you learned since you started this? What did you find worked and didn't work?

WL I thought we could initially do it in a semester And what I learned is relationships take longer than that to develop and we need to be respectful of that. So that was one thing. I think the other is how magical it is when girls and women support each other. I don't think we get enough reinforcement or support for that. And several years ago, one of the middle school girls, her low was that she had been picked on at school that day and she was in tears about it. And the other middle school girls in her group said, "When does this happen?" She said, "At lunch." They said, "Well that's wrong. It shouldn't happen." And she said through her tears, "Well it's some of your friends who do that to me." So they started talking about it and they decided the next day, they invited the bigs to join them, and they joined this girl at lunch, and the whole YWP group sat with her at lunch and supported her. And that changed a bit of the dynamics at school for that girl.

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The next week, her high was that everybody came and supported her at lunch and it made her feel wonderful. [music].

SM Winx Lawrence, thank you for sharing with me today on With Good Reason.

WL I've enjoyed it.

SM Winx Lawrence is a clinical psychologist and professor emeritus in the Department of Human Services at the University of Virginia. The young women leaders program is now in its 23rd year. To learn more about it, visit our website at withgoodreasonradio.org. Coming up next, sisterhood in higher education. Studies show that women in academia are often relegated to lower ranked positions while their male counterparts ascend to the

top. Dr. Khadija Miller is head of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Norfolk State University. She helped form a support group that helps women faculty succeed in both their professional and their personal lives. Dr. Khadija Miller, tell me what you see as the current climate for women in academia based on your own experiences?

KM I would say that in a general picture, women are doing well in academia. We have women who are presidents of major institutions, we have Dr. Brown at Brown University, an ivy league, you have Jenetta B. Cole, who had a historic reign as president of Spelman College. When you look though at faculty levels, you'll find that women among faculty are often relegated to the lowest levels.

SM Well, how does that happen? And who is doing the relegating?

KM Well academe, historically, academe, has been a male institution. Higher education, you think of professors, you think of an older white male professor. And that is shifting. In the lower ranks, instructor, adjunct, you have a larger number of women. When you look at tenure rank, the system is usually 3 tier based on teaching, scholarship, and research. And that takes a lot of commitment and time, not that a woman cannot provide that, but with the other obligations that she has, it becomes challenging.

SM You have tenure yourself.

KM Yes, I am a tenured associate professor at Norfolk State. I'm also department head of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies. I came to Norfolk State ten years ago as an assistant—well I started as an adjunct. My daughter was 6 months old. So I worked part time and then they had an opening for a tenure track assistant professor. I applied and received it. And then I had my 2nd daughter, and I was fortunate because I had some significant mentors who gave me good advice on how to try to negotiate and to balance the many responsibilities and obligations that were being thrown at me. Honestly, before I came to Norfolk State, I was at another institution in Pennsylvania and when I was pregnant with my first daughter and I went to tell the provost, he said to me, "Don't you know women in academe get pregnant so they can have their children in the summer." And that just blew my mind. So that really gave me some perspective of where motherhood falls. As a matter of fact, I can name many 6 or 7 colleagues of mine whose children were born between June and August. And then I could name another 15 colleagues of mine who decided not to have children or who had their children but decided not to enter academe until after their children were considerably older.

SM And your colleague also had an experience where, when she goes to pick up her daughter at 3, people give her a certain look they don't give her male colleagues.

KM Yes, that's true. We find that when we come across male colleagues who are active in their children's lives, they're patted on the back, they're commended, "Oh wow," you know, "you're such an active involved father," where my colleague, she was looked at

as, “well,” you know, “you have to make a decision of, are you a faculty member or are you a mother?”

SM What is the difference in terms of teaching load and experience for a woman faculty member trying to balance family and work between a primarily white institution and what is called a historically Black university.

KM Sometimes you have situations at, say, HBCUs where the history of the university is to serve an underserved and underprepared student who has great potential but just hasn't been given the tools and skill sets to develop that to be successful. And so therefore there's a lot of additional services, advising, and teaching that is a part of the load.

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Dr. Bernadette J. Holmes at Norfolk State has done work on emotional labor and emotional labor is this concept where women not just do the requirements or responsibilities of the job but they also are relegated the emotional labor that comes with the job. So that if a student has personal issues or needs, counseling or needs, academic advice, the student is often sent to a woman, a female professor.

SM Why do you think that is? Men are certainly capable of providing those services also and, as you've pointed out, in some cases, women are in the administrative track and therefore could be assigning those roles more evenly.

KM That is true, but I just think that historically women are just assumed to be caregivers, are assumed to have the time. Some may say it's even a good thing that women are—well you could do it all. You can teach, you can do service, you can do scholarship. So we'll just give you more because you can do it. But it becomes an enormous load to carry. And that becomes difficult for women, because they spend so much time working on those areas that do not lead to tenure and promotion.

SM Something that you and your colleagues have done to ease the burden and make the transition between family life and academic life more palatable was to form a group called the Sista Colleague Circle.

KM Yes, so the Sista Colleague Circle has really provided a safe space for us to work on our research areas of interest, but I think what really has been extremely beneficial is the opportunity to vent and ask questions. It has been a space to kind of move from the periphery of how things work in academe, where we can discuss it and challenge it, and we can strategize, and we can empower ourselves as Black women faculty members, but also as mothers, spouses, as caregivers. In women's studies or gender studies, they'll talk about how the personal is political and the political is personal. And for us, it's the same thing with our work. The work that we do is personal but it's also general. And I'm hoping that it's worthwhile.

- SM The research by another of your colleagues has focused on something called the imposter syndrome among female academics. What is that? The imposter syndrome.
- KM The imposter syndrome, and that's Dr. Ernstine Duncan. Her Master thesis was on that. This idea that women in general are—you're successful but that you question your own success. And you question how others view your success. But the self doubt, I would say, is framed in a context of you're in an arena where there really aren't a lot of other people like you there. You start to question, "Wow, am I an imposter? Do I really...do they really believe that my credentials are as solid as they are?" And the imposter syndrome has an impact on what you say or do not say. Sometimes we take the safe route because we don't want to ruffle any feathers or we don't want to shake up anyone.
- SM Have you found that women in other colleges have been eager to form chapters?
- KM Yes, actually, we did. We've come across women even in our own institution who said, "Oh, we want to join." Or, "We need to have something bigger." [music]
- SM Dr. Khadija Miller is head of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Norfolk State University.
- SM Major support for With Good Reason is provided by the law firm of McGuireWoods and by the University of Virginia Health System, pioneering treatments to save lives, UVAhealth.com. With Good Reason is produced in Charlottesville by Virginia Humanities. Our production team is Allison Quantz, Matt Darroch, Allison Byrne, Lauren Francis, and Jamal Millner. For the podcast, go to withgoodreasonradio.org. I'm Sarah McConnell. Thanks for listening, and I hope you and your loved ones stay safe. With Good Reason listeners, we want to hear from you. What are you doing to cope with COVID-19? Let us know by leaving us a message: 434-253-0396. The number's on the website.