

# Looking Back and Looking Forward: 2023 Edition

Mon, Jan 30, 2023 11:05AM 19:31

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, ifas, change, florida, hear, university, food, families, substance use disorder, agriculture, extension, snap, associate professor, listening, substance, african american students, play, uf, science, slice

## SPEAKERS

John Diaz, Christine Chasek, Valentina Castano, Phillip Stokes, Andra Johnson, Ricky Telg, Movie Clip from Bridesmaids, Karla Shelnut, Heidi Radunovich, Carl Van Ness

---



Ricky Telg 00:04

This is Science by the Slice, a podcast from the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Center for Public Issues Education. In this podcast, experts discuss the science of issues affecting our daily lives, reveal the motivations behind the decisions people make, and ultimately provide insight to solutions for our lives.



Phillip Stokes 00:29

Hello, and welcome to season three of Science by the Slice, I'm Phillip Stokes, Education Coordinator with the UF/IFAS PIE Center, and I'm excited to be rolling out this new season. In 2022, we hosted episodes on a variety of topics, including diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education, honeybees, substance misuse disorder in agriculture, environmental contaminants, human nutrition, and agricultural worker health and safety. Be sure to go back and listen to any episodes that you missed. And in this episode, which is our first of 2023, we're going to look back on the previous season to revisit some segments from our guests while focusing on one theme. We did this a year ago at the beginning of season two, that was all about trust and trust in science. And for today's episode, we're going to think about change, and more specifically, people's willingness to change. I'm sure everyone has heard the phrase, the only constant in life is change, or change is the only constant. And even though change is so constant, it's also natural human behavior to resist change. People like routines they like to feel in control of their lives, and with change there can be a fear of losing comfort or stability. So let me ask you this. Do people's personalities, and subsequent choices reflective of their personalities, change or stay relatively constant? In the 2011 movie, Bridesmaids, actors Kristen Wiig and Rose Byrne play characters that find themselves at odds with each other throughout the movie, as they are competing for attention from their friend who is the bride in the movie. Here's a scene where the two characters are discussing whether people really change or not.

M

### Movie Clip from Bridesmaids 02:17

I didn't know you play tennis. Oh, yeah, I played a little in high school. I'm so glad we were able to do this. I'm really glad we could do this too. It's nice we get to hang out. I know, right? It's too bad Lillian couldn't play this today. Poor thing. She's so busy. She's not really that into sports. Even when we're little she didn't like anything that was too competitive. Oh, she certainly enjoys playing tennis now. It's funny how people change, isn't it? Yeah. I mean, I don't know. Do people really change? I think they do. Yeah, but I mean, they still stay who they are. Pretty much. I think we change all the time I think we stay the same, but grow I guess a little bit. I think if you're growing, then you're changing. But I mean, we're changing from who we are, which we always stay as. Not really. I don't think so. I think so. I don't.

P

### Phillip Stokes 03:09

Robert Sapolsky, professor of biology at Stanford University has stated that people change all the time, however, that people do not choose to change, but they are changed by circumstance. And this brings up a different but related question. Do you think people are more influenced by their biology, or their environment? Are people predisposed to certain actions and changes because of genetics, or cultural surroundings? Sapolsky, the professor I previously referenced, believes that it does not make sense to distinguish between aspects of behavior that are biological, and those that would be described as cultural. He says humans make decisions based on brain chemistry, hormones, sensory cues, prenatal environment, early experience, genes, biological and cultural evolution, ecological pressures, and the list would go on and on. I'm going to play a clip now from the first series we hosted in 2022, on the topic of diversity, equity and inclusion within institutions of higher education. This is Carl Van Ness, the now former official historian at the University of Florida. I asked him how land grant universities and other institutions of higher education have changed over time to be more inclusive.

C

### Carl Van Ness 04:31

Well, I don't I don't know that the missions of land grant universities per se have changed over over the years rather, all universities have changed. You know, every university in the country practically is taking part in this discussion on race, and diversity. And of course, this movement is ongoing. We haven't arrived at the final destination, and at least I hope we haven't still have a way to go. Historically, these changes have come in spurts. Usually precipitated by an event or a movement. More recently, Black Lives Matter has, again has is again looking at our racial past. In the university's past, a demonstration known as Black Thursday, which occurred on April 15 1971, was a watershed event. So on that day, about 60 African American students staged a sit down strike in President O'Connell's office making a list of demands and their primary demand was that the University of Florida finally addressed this the issue of admissions and make a greater effort to enroll black students. At that time there were probably less than 500 African American students at the University of Florida. The students were all arrested. And as a result of this turmoil, the university finally began to look at what it was doing or what it wasn't doing, and began to make changes in in terms of affirmative action. Black Thursday also occurred in the midst of other social movements. So this is the same period when college students are demanding to be heard. When we see the first stirrings of the gay rights movement. And this is when women are opening doors to professions that had previously been monopolized by men, including a lot of those we associate with associate with the land

grant mission in agriculture and engineering. Women were never prohibited from attending engineering classes. In fact, the first woman to graduate from a public college in Florida, Daisy Rogers received her degree in engineering. But there were very few places where women could find employment as an engineer. But all that is beginning to change in the in the 1960s and 1970s.

**P** Phillip Stokes 06:47

Yeah, it does seem to be the formula for for change is, it comes from those grassroots movements, right? It's from the people, right? It's it's more bottom up right then then top down is that has that kind of happened in colleges and universities as well?

**C** Carl Van Ness 07:04

Absolutely. Change has always come as a result of people making demands.

**P** Phillip Stokes 07:09

In that clip, Carl discusses some of the cultural realities of our past and gave an example of how social change took place. Of course, that change did not occur without resistance. Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, We shall overcome, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. Listen, now to John Diaz, Associate Professor and extension specialists in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication at the University of Florida. John was interviewed by Valentina Castano, who you'll also hear in this segment, and he discusses how he has noticed a shift in people's desire to be more culturally competent.

**J** John Diaz 07:52

So it is, you know, being in a leadership position, you really see that the demand is out there, not only for resources, but for folks to be more culturally competent to, to have the skills to navigate cultural difference. We're really in a time where folks understand how their own lived experience influences the way they look at the world. And so they're really wanting to gain that lens and framework. So they're able to have that same set of awareness and reflection, based on the lived experiences of others. So it's just really, really cool and exciting to see folks that are engaged and wanting to be engaged to develop their own skill sets and develop themselves as people.

**V** Valentina Castano 08:32

Yeah, absolutely. Would you say that this movement that you've seen of people wanting to learn about different cultures? Is that something that's happened in kind of recent years? Or has it always kind of been that way? Has that changed at all? What does that look like?

**J** John Diaz 08:44

J JOHN DIAZ 08:44

Yeah, so I think there's been momentum for some time, but the last couple of years really ignited the fire under folks, I think just with what's been going on in the world around us folks have taken time to reflect on themselves and the world around them. And it's manifests in a lot of different things, one of which is just being more in tune with the cultures around them, and how to better assimilate and connect with those cultures. So while it's been around for a long time, I think the last couple of years have really gained some momentum.

P Phillip Stokes 09:13

In that segment, John mentioned how our lived experiences influenced the way we look at the world. Furthermore, I would say that our lived experiences impact the changes that take place in our lives, whether for the better or worse. Next, listen to Christine Chasek, Associate Professor and Chair of the Counseling Department at the University of Nebraska Omaha. Christine spoke in our series on substance use disorders within agriculture. In this clip, you'll hear research findings about some of the common characteristics among ag owners and operators in the Midwest that identify one to be at a higher risk of having a substance use disorder.

C Christine Chasek 09:52

But when we gathered our data on the surveys we did with owner operators and producers in the Midwest, what we found was the risk at the most risk for somebody abusing substances, or having a substance use disorder had a couple different characteristics. So one was being a young owner operator that increased the risk that people were going to abuse substances, the other was being under high level of stress. And so When we looked at kind of those relationships across different variables that we had, the younger generation definitely is abusing alcohol at a higher level than any other age group. And then also those who reported a high level of stress, you know, were more likely to abuse the substances. And so you know, it's not the stress part is not a huge surprise, because just overall in the literature, substance use tends to, you know, occur more if people are under a lot of stress. And the the younger generation, abusing alcohol more was interesting to us in a lot of different ways. Typically, there is a higher level of use, you know, in the 18 to 25 category, but this was up to age 40. And so that was our considered younger group, what we're trying what we're kind of finding from the literature's and the nature of agriculture is such that, right now, it's, it's hard to get into agriculture, there is a lot of stress around, you know, owning and operating a farm or a ranch. And I think that that part, you know, it is what we're trying to kind of figure out what what is it what, what can we do, how can we help.

P Phillip Stokes 11:37

And here, Heidi Radunovich Associate Professor in the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences at the University of Florida, who also spoke in this same series, explains why it's not appropriate to take a stance of blame for those dealing with substance abuse.

H Heidi Radunovich 11:53

I think also having compassion for people who wind up in this situation. And I think a lot of times we like to blame people that you know, maybe it's their fault that they got into this situation, but you have to consider that this is something that cuts across all kinds of populations. And we know that there's very much a physical component at play. So, you know, trying not to take a stance of blame, or you know, telling people, if they were stronger, you could just get off of it. It's not true. Once you reach a point where it's a substance use disorder, you really need some professional help, and so encouraging people to get that help if they need it. And you know, that's something that you can do, it's not easy. So if you could be there for the long haul to help them to access treatment, advocating for better treatment is something else that we can all be working on.

P

#### Phillip Stokes 12:50

Hearing Christine and Heidi speak about the choices people make around substance use further sheds light on how change takes place, even if the changes are harmful to one's health. There are so many factors that contribute to the ways in which decisions are made. In this next clip, you'll hear from Karla Shelnett, Associate Professor and Registered Dietitian in the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences at the University of Florida. Karla is involved in teaching families how to make better food and physical activity choices, and the program she leads provides the tools to help families change behaviors related to their diet and food purchasing habits.

K

#### Karla Shelnett 13:31

So SNAP is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. That's the benefits side, right. That's where families qualify for benefits based on income and other factors, and they receive an EBT card that they use to purchase food at the grocery store. The UF/IFAS Extension Family Nutrition Program is SNAP Education (SNAP-Ed). So we are the education arm of the SNAP program. And we are funded by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service that goes to Florida Department of Children and Families that comes to UF/IFAS Extension. And so the purpose of SNAP-Ed or FNP is what we call it, the Family Nutrition Program is to provide nutrition education to families who are eligible for SNAP benefits. And so, EFNEP also serves the same audience, it's just funded a little bit differently, but both programs teach families to make better choices. We also teach families to stretch their food dollars on a limited budget, right. So we're teaching food resource management skills, teaching them strategies at the grocery store where they can maximize their nutrient density on a budget, which is important. So we're addressing food security in that way. And also increasing their nutrition knowledge and changing behaviors is our goal, right? We want them to improve their dietary quality, increase physical activity, and save money at the grocery store. And so we do that through nutrition education. But we also get to do this really fun piece it's called policy systems and environmental approaches. And this is where we change their environment, as I said before, to make the healthy choice, the easy choice. So whether that's a policy change, whether it's helping put in a community garden in a food desert, a school garden at an eligible school, partnering with a farmers market and farmers so that they accept SNAP benefits or even Double [Up Food] Bucks so that our families have access to healthy foods near them. Our faculty and staff work on all of those issues to support SNAP eligible families.

P

**Phillip Stokes 15:35**

Karla explained that through these programs, they want to make the healthy choice, the easy choice. People are more likely to make healthy lifestyle changes when their circumstances are more favorable to do so. I am going to play one final clip from our 2022 season, which continues this idea of creating positive change. This is Andra Johnson, Dean of UF/IFAS Extension, and he shares how Extension can be a catalyst for positive change by providing information and education to the public so they are more inclined to change for the better.

A

**Andra Johnson 16:12**

So when you really look at the land grant and land grant mission, you can certainly see how those roles have changed, we've been really impacted by this continuous change, if you will, we're seeing change in demographics, we are seeing change as it relates to our environment. And so all of that change is really creating what I feel is greater opportunities for us to as a land grant system to better serve, particularly as we think about diversity, equity inclusion, as well as justice as we kind of think about it in that frame, there's an opportunity for extension and opportunity for the land grant to really become a part of that, to really help guide that and, and we have certain strengths that I think others do not have. And because of those strengths, I think we're in perfect position to kind of lead some of those efforts to be really a part of that to be a catalyst, in some cases, really facilitating conversation and bridging the gap. So I think Extension is in is in a wonderful position to really kind of take the lead, if you will, as it relates to, to some of the some of those things, those things that we've been challenged with for a number of years.

P

**Phillip Stokes 17:38**

You know, I really do enjoy listening back to the phenomenal guests we've had on Science by the Slice, and all of us here at the PIE Center are very excited to release a whole slate of new episodes with new speakers and topics for 2023. Make sure you're following Science by the Slice wherever you get your podcasts and stay tuned for the rest of season three. Next up, you'll hear about regional food supply chains and what happens when there is a disruption in food systems from a disaster such as a pandemic, hurricane, or anything else. We delve into leadership development and why we need more leaders that are better suited to handle conflict, the Burmese python in Florida, and residential landscapes and just what our yards mean to us. And these are just some of the topics that we're hosting episodes on in 2023. So once again, stay connected and thank you for listening to Science by the Slice.

R

**Ricky Telg 18:40**

Science by the Slice is produced by the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources. Thanks for listening to today's episode. Subscribe to Science by the Slice on your favorite podcast app and give us a rating or review as well. Have a question or comment? Send us an email to [piecenter@ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:piecenter@ifas.ufl.edu). That's piecenter, all one word, at ifas, I-F-A-S, dot ufl dot edu. We'd love to hear from you. If you enjoyed today's episode, consider sharing with a friend or colleague. Until next time, thanks for listening to Science by the Slice.

