UCL Remarkable Stories\_Julia Interview

[00:00:00] **Gia:** We are UCL and these are our remarkable stories. My name is Gia Lulic, and I work in the Organizational Development team at UCL. In each episode, I will be in conversations with our UCL guests as they share with us their remarkable stories, experiences, and life lessons.

[00:00:26] **Gia:** In this episode, I'm excited to speak to our star academic, Julia Shaw, criminal psychologist and author of the Memory Illusion Making Evil and her latest book by The Hidden Culture, History and Science of Bisexuality.

[00:00:45] **Gia:** I want to begin with a little bit of a timeline of your professional and personal journey. So tell me a little bit about yourself, where you're from, what brought you to UCL, and just a bit of a milestone of your academic journey?

[00:01:05] **Julia:** So I was inspired to become a criminal psychologist when I was studying my undergrad degree in Canada at Simon Fraser University, which is in British Columbia. And I had this amazing professor called Stephen Hart, and he is a criminal psychologist.

[00:01:22] **Julia:** I thought what he was doing was really important and interesting. He was doing risk assessment stuff and trying to understand when people break the law, how likely are they to do it again, and how dangerous are they for society? And then accordingly, how can we stop them from being a danger to society?

[00:01:37] **Julia:** And he was also really cool, and I don't mean in a classist way, almost like he, he just traveled a lot. He did really interesting cases, sort of high-profile media cases that everybody knew. So some of the most, sort of, catastrophic but interesting cases in Canada. And so I was looking at this man going, I want to be like him.

[00:01:57] **Julia:** And he said to me, you seem really interested in this topic. Why don't you go to grad school? And I don't come from an academic family. My mom didn't finish high school, so she didn't finish her A levels. And I was just at this point, happy to be there because I was like, "Yay, I'm at University."

[00:02:12] **Julia:** And I'd never heard of grad school, I didn't even know the term. And so he said, "Go to grad school." And I was like, "What's that?" And he then explained it to me and then he said, "Go do a Master's." It was just because of him basically encouraging me to go and actually do this more seriously that I ended up becoming a criminal psychology and doing my PhD in it.

[00:02:31] **Gia:** And what was it about criminal psychology that fascinated you?

[00:02:37] **Julia:** I really liked understanding why people do the things they do, but specifically in a way that affects other people. So psychology in general, to me seemed really interesting. But it was often applied to clinical settings and therapy - where it's about an individual and their own personal struggles, which is important.

[00:03:00] **Julia:** But I thought it was more interesting to have personal struggles that also affect society in some ways. And of course, depression, anxiety and things like that also affect society. But if you have those kinds of things and you are murdering people, for example, that to me is another level with which to engage with someone and to try and help them and the people around them in a more fundamental way. So I just thought it was a more interesting challenge in some ways.

[00:03:22] **Gia:** One of the, really important themes that you are going to is that idea of the term "evil." So tell me about what inspired, that research into putting a new perspective on the term "evil" and us labeling other people as so because of their behaviors.

[00:03:43] **Julia:** So I wrote my first book, which was on false memories or memories of things that never actually happened, and that was based on my PhD work. And it was kind of by accident because an literary agent approached me, just before I published a study that went viral on false memories of committing crime.

[00:03:58] And she said, "Hey, do you want to write a book?" And this hadn't occurred to me that this was a possibility- freshly minted PhD. And so I did that. And then after that I felt okay, I've done this now, what is happening in the world? And so you're absolutely right that my book called Making Evil, which is a Nietzsche quote, which is that thinking evil is making evil, is this idea that there's something about that's subjective and yet we use it as if it's objective. And that's a really bad thing because the term is almost always used to dehumanize people. So it's a sort of an interesting circular thing where we use this term as the end of a conversation to sort of say, we'll never understand this person. And so I wrote this book, trying to deconstruct that narrative and to say, actually, all these acts and people we call evil, what are we actually talking about, and could any of us be capable of things like murder? And the answer is obviously yes.

[00:04:49] **Julia:** Trump had just been elected and the world seemed more and more polarized. The word evil was being used daily in the press it seemed, and I was really scared, and I felt like this was a meaningful way to try and combat that.

[00:05:04] **Julia:** So I think it's something for students and researchers to sort of keep in mind as well, that like you can almost use some of your work to process difficult emotions that you are feeling about the world that you live in, and to try and take active steps to do something about it.

[00:05:20] **Gia:** Amazing. And what's the response that you got from your peers or just generally after all the work was done and the book was published.

[00:05:29] **Julia:** Well, what's amazing is that it was published into many languages, and so thoughts that I had, which are very much trying to make criminal psychology and research that comes from my world really accessible. So the idea is that literally anybody who's, maybe 16 plus, could pick up this book and understand the concept in it and feel like something has sort of changed within their own way that they see the world and maybe they've rethought people, they would've labeled evil.

Maybe they've rethought some of their own tendencies and labeled things appropriately, as ooh, this is problematic behavior, like passive aggression, for example. Or you know, where's the line between being passively aggressive and just being aggressive? Introducing that nuance into things that everybody has experiences with. And the reaction was incredibly good. There were a couple of people who said it was oversimplifying, which I think is often a critique that is said to popular science communicators. And it's almost always coming from a place of, wanting to protect the ivory tower.

[00:06:31] **Julia:** Some people don't want everyone to actually understand what is happening in a book or in a field. They like the difficult language, they like their pet language. Those big words that almost nobody outside of your field understands. It's something we treasure because it makes us feel special and it makes us feel like this is our space and we can't just be easily replaced.

[00:06:52] **Julia:** Whereas I'm very much in all my work trying to break through all of that and say, no, but how do we explain this to people so it has an actual impact? So that simplification, I think that's something that, on the one hand I do struggle with and we do need to be careful of as academics.

[00:07:05] **Gia:** Do you get challenged from your peers or do they kind of object to the things that you choose to research or do they come forward with any kind of challenges?

[00:07:15] **Julia:** The biggest challenge I had was actually during my research. So during my PhD I was bullied by a couple of senior academics who made my life very difficult for about a year and a half. And I think it's because I had done a study on constructing rich false memories of committing crime. So I convinced people that they committed crimes that never happened. And that was the first time that was done in a lab.

[00:07:39] **Julia:** Building on previous research, I was with my PhD supervisor who was the co-author on it. It wasn't, it was like the Julia Show, but it kind of became that once the press launched onto it. Because it was my PhD research and so I was the one who was talking about it all the time. And so I think that from the beginning, that was seen as doing something I wasn't supposed to do. I wasn't supposed to be 25 and talking to the press about this field.

[00:08:02] **Julia:** I was supposed to be that person, maybe, double my age. Once I'd actually quote unquote achieved something real and had this long track record of a career, which I just didn't have yet. And sure, I'd been teaching for quite a few years at that point and I'd been, doing my PhD so it's not like I was totally naive, if you will. But I was still too young for it in their minds. Whereas I saw it as, why not me? Like I've just done this research, I'm mostly just talking about this one study and I do understand like I'm in the weeds. PhD students are crucially undervalued almost all the time because they are the ones who are spending like four years on one tiny little topic.

[00:08:38] **Julia:** So of course, they're one of the world leading experts while they're doing it. And yet we ignore PhD students as sources for popular science stuff. Maybe for that reason, maybe just because they didn't, like my methods, bullied me at various conferences and things, and I almost left academia.

[00:08:51] **Julia:** I thought I'd done something wrong. I thought that the field had rejected me and that I might need to leave. And then I didn't, and instead I co-founded a company that helps people report harassment and discrimination at work.

[00:09:04] **Julia:** And I was like, maybe this system is broken. Maybe a 60-year-old senior academic and her friends shouldn't be able to treat me this way as a junior person who's just, just stepping into the field. And so that's one of the reasons I co-founded Spot.

[00:09:21] **Gia:** Amazing. Well, good segue into that, if you could tell us a little bit about Spot.

[00:09:27] **Julia:** So Spot is applying what I was doing in memory research. I was implanting false memories of committing crime using leading and suggestive interviews. And so really what my research was on was how do we understand situations in police interviews or therapy interviews where someone might implant a memory. So accidentally lead you to think that something happened that didn't. And we know this happens because there's lots of cases where this has happened. So I wanted to know how it goes wrong.

[00:09:57] **Julia:** And that's what I showed in my research. And so then after doing that for a while, I decided, let's translate that into something. And so I created an artificial intelligence with my co-founders Dylan and Daniel. And we created an artificial intelligence that uses what's called the cognitive interview, which is best practices in memory interviewing to capture as many details as possible about a negative experience that you had at work. So we call it inappropriate behavior, but it's any form of harassment or discrimination or other inappropriate things that happen, including bullying.

[00:10:32] **Gia:** How has that been received and what's been like the consensus on that so far?

[00:10:37] **Julia:** Yeah, so Spot is available@talktospot.com. So if you want to check it out, there's also a free version that you can use to log reports and you text with it and it asks you questions about what happened, where it happened. All the things that can be actually easy to forget and easy to write down and keep outside of your brain.

[00:10:54] **Julia:** And so it walks you through that and then it creates a report you can submit. Initially we did about a year of research first and we were had. I think people tell spot that they love it. You know? Finally someone slash something has listened and actually asked me about this.

[00:11:10] **Julia:** Finally, I have a space to share this really emotional experience in a safe way because people really struggle to share these experiences - especially with their workplaces, but in general, there's all these reactions that a human being across from you would have that you don't get with a chat bot. Which is just asking you nice questions and not really reacting and just giving you that space.

[00:11:29] **Julia:** So that was really positive and it survived, which is also amazing. So we, now sell the management system, so you can send reports now to your company and then the company buys the management system for the reports, and then they can respond to you as well. And so you can even send it anonymously and they can still respond, and we're like the mediator.

[00:11:47] **Gia:** Oh, that's amazing. It sounds like it came out of all your research very organically. I feel like you've got, a lot of interests outside of academia, so it's almost beneficial to you to be boxed in and have to like branch out. It's just a perfect example where sometimes the obstacle is like the opportunity.

[00:12:06] **Julia:** It is, and there is always luck sprinkled in. Yes, I'm very gregarious and outgoing and I'm very much interested in doing new things and trying to do intersectional things and interdisciplinary things.

[00:12:18] **Julia:** But, there's always luck to everything that I do. It was luck that in undergrad I had this world-renowned criminal psychologist teaching me. That was luck. Then for Spot, it was luck that it ended up getting all this press coverage, which allowed me to write a book, which was luck because the agent read my interview in the Evening Standard on page 50.

[00:12:38] **Julia:** The Evening Standard being a free newspaper in London. And randomly sent me this email. And then it was luck that I co-founded Spot in that I was thinking about this AI and like doing something with this AI cognitive interview idea. And then I met someone from Silicon Valley who had an incubator and said, I'll fund you.

[00:12:55] **Julia:** So again, there's something to be said for yes, working hard and yes, opening up yourself to these opportunities and translating adversity into something good is important, but there is always luck. It's just that maybe you're slightly more, if you will, lucky if you open yourself up a bit more to the possibility of being lucky.

[00:13:14] **Gia:** Definitely. But I think it also takes an open mind to say, I don't necessarily need to be boxed in this way. I don't need to stay here and try and prove myself. There's actually other things that I can be doing that are incredibly beneficial and that are going to benefit others. And you did that.

[00:13:31] **Gia:** Just to go back to the false memories, there's been a lot of people that come out with something called suppressed memories where somewhere down the line experience anxiety and then remembered that something happened to them when they were a child. I wonder what your take on that is.

[00:13:50] **Julia:** So the concept of repressed memories, the idea that which is actually from Freud, which is the idea that something so bad happens typically that you. Subconscious or unconscious sort of pushes it and hides it from you because it's too much for your conscious brain to handle.

[00:14:08] **Julia:** And that's sort of the idea behind it. Now, everything I just said is not widely accepted by psychologists today. So the idea of a separation between the conscious and the subconscious, or the ID and the ego, kind of that idea, that Freudian idea of how the consciousness works isn't really substantiated. Yes, there are lots of things that are not conscious in that you're not thinking about breathing, for example, and you have lots of biases that you don't realize are influencing how you behave.

[00:14:34] **Julia:** But that's very different than having a memory that is actively being hidden. In the stream of psychology that I work in mostly, which is cognitive psychology, the concept of repressed memories is mostly rejected. Not how the brain works. And so yes, people sometimes forget. Something for a long period of time and remember it because something has triggered them.

[00:14:56] **Julia:** That's possible. But again, this idea that there's an active mechanism that's hiding things from you is, probably not right. But there's a whole field of psychoanalysis who still likes the teachings of Freud, who would disagree with me on that. So the biggest problem though, from a cognitive psychology perspective when it comes to assuming that there are repressed memories, is that it can lead you to implant false memories in someone. So if you go to a therapist with anxiety or depression, the therapist responds with very helpful things like, you know, let's talk about it, let's work through that.

[00:15:28] **Julia:** And then at some point, if they're, let's say a certain kind of therapist who strongly believes in repressed memories, then they might say " if we can't find any other roots because something terrible happened to you in childhood" and you say, "I don't remember that." And the therapist says, "let's see if we can't unlock that."

[00:15:44] **Julia:** And that's where, as a false memory researcher, I go, Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no. From that point on, the problem is if you're saying, I don't remember that, and you start to then over often, weeks or months, slowly create details through imagination exercises, and you start to fabricate these details. The problem is that it's quite likely or at least possible, that those memories are entirely made up. And so that's what I did in my studies is I used those techniques and people made up entire detailed memories of committing crimes that didn't happen.

[00:16:12] **Julia:** So if you think you then experienced something terrible in childhood, which caused your depression, the problem is that becomes your reality. And that's what's so fascinating and dangerous about the field of false memory as like what we find interesting because it's like, Ooh, that distortion of reality, how do we deal with that?

[00:16:29] **Gia:** It blows me away how malleable the brain is because that almost means that you can implant some very positive memories. And feel like a happier person. I'm going to move into something that's going to be hopefully inspiring and beneficial, especially to our students, staff, and UCL community. What would you say today is your proudest achievement or impact that you've had?

[00:16:54] Most recently I wrote a book on bisexuality, and I found it really interesting and empowering also for myself, frankly, to dig into a field that I knew nothing about except for my own lived experience.

[00:17:08] **Julia:** And so I am bisexual, and I realized that there's available research and structured conversation about bisexuality, even though it's the largest sexual minority. So most people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bi, - most of those people identify as bisexual.

[00:17:25] **Julia:** So there's more bisexual people than there are gay people or lesbian people, and yet who's talking about it, right? And it's sort of seen as this, like homosexuality light, or half straight, half gay. And so if you understand both worlds well, you kind understand bisexuality automatically, which is wrong. And so I wrote this book and I actually went back to, Goldsmiths University and did a Master's in Queer History and that was also really exciting to be a student again.

[00:17:49] **Julia:** I don't think we should ever think of ourselves as like finishing learning. And I certainly would like to continue learning and doing maybe more degrees, but certainly reading lots of literature that I you know, haven't yet, and pushing those boundaries. Not just within my own field, but in general into other fields and this book on bisexuality. And it's also connected me with a community.

[00:18:11] **Julia:** I get letters from people every single day saying that this is the first time they've ever felt seen. And the first time that someone has put their experience into words, the first time that they have a language to talk about who they are and how they love.

[00:18:25] **Julia:** And I think that is what I'm really proud of at the moment, and it's just been a really nice book to write.

[00:18:31] **Gia:** So without going too much into it, maybe tell our audience like a little bit about what they can expect from that book.

[00:18:39] **Julia:** So, in Bi, The Hidden Culture, History and Science of Bisexuality, I basically look at all the research that I could find on bisexuality. Everything from psychology, so what are the psychological implications of being in the closet because most bisexual people are in the closet, and what does that mean in terms of mental health, in terms of anxiety, in terms of loneliness? So those are the sort of sadder sides. The even sadder side is I have a chapter on human rights and how in general, human rights abuse is against people who are queer, but specifically focusing in on bisexual people and how they are also often forgotten, stigmatized, or stereotyped as well because they're not really gay.

[00:19:21] **Julia:** They for example, don't deserve asylum because they can just go be straight. The assumption again there is if you're bi well, you can choose which gender you fall in love with. And so we'll just go choose the quote unquote right gender that makes you safe, which just isn't how love works though is it.

[00:19:37] **Julia:** And there's horrific implications for bisexual people because of those bisexual stereotypes. But then there's also the positives, like the amazing activists, and researchers who have been researching bisexuality since the late 1800s, which would totally surprise me.

[00:19:52] **Julia:** I mean, it's often talked about as this trend as if like, oh, it's this thing that all the young people are now. No, already 150 years ago people were writing about this. And that's incredibly empowering to see that, wow, we go back that far and even research on us goes back that far. And people like Brenda Howard, who is one of the reasons we have Pride, who is a Jewish bisexual activist in the US in the, 1970s.

[00:20:16] **Julia:** So there's all these queer people in history and bi people in history. There's the positives, like interesting questions around relationship structures that bisexual people are more likely to ask themselves about things like consensual non-monogamy, and the most common word which bi people use, which is freedom.

[00:20:33] **Julia:** That the freedom to love beyond gender or, so the definition of bisexuality, is attraction to multiple genders.

[00:20:40] **Gia:** It sounds like you're definitely touching on very kind of controversial topics that, not many people would be brave enough to take on. So I'm wondering what's next?

[00:20:51] **Julia:** The theme between all three books is who are you? So one is, who are you and do you remember your own past?

[00:20:56] **Julia:** The second is, who are you and are you bad or evil? And if so, how? And the third is, who are you in terms of your sexuality and how do we reconsider sexuality and talk about the real nuance that's in between. what's typically presented us as acceptable, which is heterosexual or homosexual?

[00:21:12] **Julia:** So what's next for me - I have a podcast, a BBC podcast called Bad People, which actually for pride week, turned into Bi People. So we had four special episodes just on bisexuality, which is really fun. But mostly it's a true crime podcast that lives in the science unit, which means that we tell fascinating stories from classic murders over to human rights abuses to trolls, like online trolls, to scientists doing terrible things.

[00:21:40] **Julia:** And we use that as a launchpad to talk about research that is related to all of these really interesting issues. And often the question comes back to again, how can we make this relatable? What are the systems that made this behavior possible? And who does this kind of thing, but also, could you be capable of it.

[00:22:00] **Gia:** You're giving a backstory to that, which is often the thing that's ignored.

[00:22:04] **Julia:** Well, it's also often critiqued, correctly because it's sort of the idea that while we glorify the villains and we only talk about the offenders, and so the victims get pushed to the side. And it's like, yeah, we hear their story, but they're secondary. We mostly tell the story as in the crime that happened.

[00:22:19] **Julia:** So it's more about like the situation, like how a case was, like how the police, for example, solved the case. And then within that it's sort of motivations and other things that have happened and it's more like a plot point rather than profiling.

[00:22:33] **Julia:** So sometimes I go into classic psychological research. But a lot of it is like right now we've just recorded one on ghost guns. It's like, how do people procure unregistered weapons? And how can people 3D print guns and why is that even allowed? And so we go into the legality of that, but then also who becomes a middle man in terms of gun sales? Who sells guns? Who is that person? And so that isn't really going into that specific perpetrator. It's more like in general, zooming out a bit and saying, what does research say about these kinds of people?

[00:23:03] **Gia:** Out of all the research that you've done into the human mind, is there something that really shocked you or surprised you or really kind of changed the way you see people?

[00:23:15] **Julia:** I'm constantly shocked and surprised by research. I don't think there's one specific moment. I think in general what drives me is that's a sort of insatiable curiosity to just know more and you have that moment where you're reading something, you're like, I've never thought about it that way. And so I think that is more selfishly what drives me is that pursuit of the joy in finding new knowledge and like a new realization, a new way of thinking.

And because of that, I think I can't really pinpoint specific major things except that when I was in undergrad, the main crack point that I think really changed my life was when I did my first class on psychology. And I learned about things like broken realities in schizophrenia and I'd had some personal experience with that with my family and I was like, wow, realities are really different.

[00:24:11] **Gia:** It's an endlessly fascinating topic. I think you touched on this a little bit before, but I wonder who has been your big inspiration. It could have been your professor you mentioned, but is there someone in your life that has inspired this journey and these milestones or someone that you look up to?

[00:24:33] **Julia:** I have different people I look up to for different parts of it, and that's because I do stuff that is really intersectional and interdisciplinary. And so I think there aren't many people I know, who do quite as different stuff as I do. And so again, I didn't know that most of the things that I would call my jobs now.

[00:24:56] **Julia:** I didn't know you could be a science communicator. I didn't know you were like allowed to write books when you're 25 on a field of research. I didn't know that you could just go create companies. Like all of these things I didn't know. And so I don't really have role models for them cause I feel like I just fell into them.

[00:25:09] **Julia:** But when I was younger, definitely two of my role models for research and showing me that women can also be leaders in research were Elizabeth Loftus, who's one of the leading figures in false memory research. Also a bit of a controversial character, but, she's really a powerhouse for research and for expert work, and has worked on some of the most interesting cases certainly in US History.

[00:25:35] **Julia:** And Jennifer Skeem, who works with psychopaths and is one of the few people who doesn't give up on people. And she has shown through her research that people who are have low empathy and who are highly predisposed often to crime, can basically get better as in become less criminal and that they're not necessarily broken, quote unquote forever.

[00:25:57] **Julia:** And that's really important for rehabilitation and that's really important for how we think about them as human beings, because they're often written off as like the monsters of the criminal world. So those two women were really my inspiration because I did have a lot of men otherwise, like my PhD - all the heads of my department for most of my life, all men. So having these female figures in high research settings was really crucial for me to be able to see myself going into this field as well.

[00:26:28] **Gia:** And just on that note actually, do you think we've come forward in giving people the tools to come around and be able to participate back into society more than say what was the case 50 years ago? Or are we still really struggling in that?

[00:26:44] **Julia:** Compared to 50 years ago, we've certainly come a long way in trying to think about rehabilitation and when and where we should be offering education, for example, like prison education, that that should be a thing that you should be able to do your high school or university degrees in, because then also when you come out you have these qualifications and of course psychological help and training so that you can reframe and rethink how you see the world so that when you leave, you are less likely to be violent and less likely to commit further crimes.

[00:27:13] **Julia:** But basically, all of that is for not, as long as there are such structural and systematic differences in income and poverty. And there are not very good pathways out of poverty at the moment in places like the UK. And frankly, the funding to prisons, never mind prison rehabilitation programs is abysmal.

[00:27:38] **Julia:** And so as long as we treat people, put them in cages, aka prisons, we will continue to have recidivism and we'll continue to have people who do bad things coming out of prison because what else are they going to do?

[00:27:49] **Gia:** Someone said that the work you did on that was oversimplified as if calling someone "evil" is simplification and disregarding everything else. What do you think has been your most important message that you've done through your work?

[00:28:03] **Julia:** Oh man. I think the most important part of all of it is humanizing, and it's complicated. So there's nuance everywhere. And don't forget the nuance. Memory is true or false, you could have experienced something, but you could be, you know, totally wrong about some of the details, which is really important. For example, in witness settings. So if you witness a crime, maybe the crime happened, but maybe you got really important details wrong. But also how do you tease that apart and then how do we think about that in between area?

[00:28:27] **Julia:** Because there's this sort of human rights abuses and really terrible things. Then there's our perception of what good means, which is also fraught with complications. So nuance is important and we're all human beings. And let's focus on our similarities, not our differences.

[00:28:41] **Gia:** I love that, it's kind of like the common thread is widening perspective and giving people like another side to this story that they need to take into consideration.

[00:28:50] **Gia:** For our students who are considering a post-grad degree in psychology or criminal psychology, and that kind of have their own ideas about where their research should go. Do you have any tips or advice - anything that they could take away on their journey if they're just starting out?

[00:29:09] **Julia:** My main piece of advice if you're starting out and are in or are thinking about grad school is to approach professors or lecturers around you who are doing research that you're interested in and say, "Hey, I'm interested in your research. Are you accepting or looking for research assistants?" Or, "Hey, is there any way I can get involved?" And the answer will often be no.

[00:29:33] **Julia:** I think one of the main lessons in academia is most people will not have open doors for you. For various reasons, they're busy, they don't have time, they don't have money, fine. Expect so many no's. I got no's from PhD programs, I got no's from people. I've gotten no's from researchers, I've gotten so many no's from publishers, of course.

[00:29:50] **Julia:** There's a lot of rejection so be prepared for that. But keep going. Ideally you find someone who says yes and then you can become part of their research team and A, that can show you whether that's something you actually like that field of research. And B, best case scenario, you get some publications out of it. And publications are really important for academic careers in particular.

[00:30:10] **Gia:** You seem really kind of grounded in all the million things that you're doing. During your journey, was there something inside yourself that you had to overcome that's been the biggest thing for you, that you had to get past yourself? Something like imposter syndrome or something that was not letting you go forward as fast as you wanted?

[00:30:30] **Julia:** I think everybody has imposter syndrome, especially in grad school. I definitely thought that they would find out that I wasn't supposed to be there. Until a couple of years ago, I think when I didn't base my entire identity on my academic achievements when that shifted, because also beware of basing your entire identity on academic achievements, because that is a fragile place to be. Try to have something else in your life that also gives you meaning because otherwise it could be really hard. But I didn't have many other things and I was basing most of my identity and happiness on my academic achievements. And I think as long as I did that, I had imposter syndrome. I just assumed that I wasn't good enough that someone will find out that I don't belong and kick me out.

[00:31:10] **Julia:** I just thought someone would look at every study I've ever done and been like, nah, that methodology just didn't make sense, that was, that was my fear. Even though, of course they've all passed ethics boards and like they've gone through all this testing. And also methodologies do change and we do get better at science, which is a good thing, but it doesn't mean I did it wrong.

[00:31:27] **Gia:** Yeah, I think when your name is on something, the stakes go up so much more. So when you, like when you're working for an organization, it's one thing, but when your name is on something, then you start to question every single thing that's involved in that thing that you are producing, I imagine.

[00:31:44] **Julia:** Yeah. And because there's such a culture of critique within academia where all you ever really hear is the bad stuff. Undergrad, you still get some like positive feedback. And from that point on, it's mostly just the stuff you do wrong. And so actually, when I moved into publishing, and I started writing books, not academic books, I was like, "Why are people so nice to me?"

[00:32:07] **Julia:** Because even the critique was so much gentler than in academia. The critique in academia is you did this wrong, you don't understand the concept and also your methodology sucks. Every level of your thinking is undermined potentially. Whereas this is just like, change this sentence - it was so nice.

[00:32:23] **Gia:** It's good armor though.

[00:32:25] **Julia:** Yes. Well, but I think it contributes to imposter syndrome because again, you're just hearing the negatives and so beware. But I recently overcame it because again, I no longer base my entire identity on my academic achievements, which frees me up to feel like I'm more stable across various aspects of my life.

[00:32:43] **Gia:** Imposter syndrome's, one of those things that's never ending on some level. What's the conversation you have in your head, or you had at that time with yourself to be like, you need to get past this. Because it can be very debilitating for people.

[00:32:58] **Julia:** I think there's two things that help me when I feel imposter syndrome. One is focusing on something else for a while. So generally stepping away from the thing that's giving me the anxiety, and whether it's a research study or a course or a job and trying to do basically anything else. So it can even be taking up a hobby and getting good at that, which makes you feel like you're good at something.

[00:33:19] **Julia:** The other thing is it's so easy to ask yourself, why me, why do I deserve this? Or why am I allowed to be here? And reframe that as why not? Why shouldn't it be you? You probably are the right person and not trying to like find all the reasons why it shouldn't be, but the reasons why it should be you and how you are maybe coming from a background that's underrepresented in your field or you are bringing a new idea to the table. Or you have something else about you that makes you unique, which is why people are excited for you to be there.

[00:33:52] **Julia:** It's what I asked when I asked myself about whether I was allowed to write my first book is I had very much like, why? Like, why me? Ask somebody else. There's so many more qualified people. There's always more qualified people, right? In stuff, not necessarily in the one thing that you're the best at, but in your area there's always more qualified people, just like there's always skinnier people and always more beautiful people, and always more intelligent people.

[00:34:11] **Julia:** You can't win at all the things, and so when I was asked for write my first book, that was basically the main thing I said is why not? And then I realized, we also need young people to write books. Surely even younger people. So me as 14 year old would've found it cooler to read a book by a 25 year old than by a 50 year old. And so you have totally different access points to also communicating knowledge and doing research when you're different points than all the other people who are doing the same thing.

[00:34:36] **Gia:** That was amazing, Julia. I think particularly for our students, you are really an inspiring person because of all the things that you're doing. I think one of the things for me that I got stuck into for a while is if you're doing this, you're doing this and you pigeonhole yourself. And I think you're such a great example, that you shouldn't be pigeonholing yourself and you can do it all if that's what you want and so it's really inspiring.

[00:35:03] **Julia:** Thanks. And I think the idea that academia, isn't the world, it is a tiny part of the world. It's also really important. So I was also… I also very much bought into the lie that like, you should be doing this one thing. You should become like the expert on this small topic and just go deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper and just stay in academia and go the traditional route.

[00:35:23] **Julia:** And I did that for a while and then I realized you don't have to do that. And actually most people aren't doing that because it's actually a little bit of a pyramid scheme-y where only a few people actually get to the top and get to reap the benefits of all the free labor at the bottom of the research assistants and the sort of the whole system.

[00:35:40] **Julia:** And so ultimately a lot of people are going to leave academia, and that is A, not a failure. B can be totally fun and C, you can do it at any point. And there's this lie that then you will never be able to come back into academia. That's just a lie. So feel free to come in and out if that's what you need to do in your life.

[00:35:58] **Gia:** Is there anything that you wish people would ask you more? Because I know you've done quite a few interviews now.

[00:36:05] **Julia:** I think every interview's different because there's so many sort of things that I do. But I think I liked talking about university and, you know, inspiring teachers because I think we sometimes undervalue how much impact also instructors can have on students and how, you know, people like me are then inspired to go do education and write books and stuff.