

# 35 Years of the APTA Minority Scholarship Award: The First and a Recent Winner of the Award Discuss Their Experiences as Black PTs



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**Christine:** Welcome to this APTA podcast. I'm Christine Scalora. On this episode, we will hear from two winners of APTA's Minority Scholarship Award: The first-ever recipient, Steven Newton, and one of 2022's winners: DeJ'a Crippen. They chat about their experiences as black PTs and why representation is so important in the field of physical therapy. Can you both introduce yourselves and tell us a bit about where you practice?

**DeJ'a:** First of all, I do wanna give like my respect to you, Steven, because I'm really honored and grateful to be doing this podcast with very first Minority Scholarship Award recipient. So that's just something that I'm very honored for.

After reading like about your background, I'm just inspired a lot about your accomplishments from I know you like started out kind of in the leadership field a little bit like managing clinics right out and then you opened your own and then you got your PhD and then you became a professor. So the list goes on and on and on. And then you sponsor things and it's just a lot of stuff. And I know I have a lot of dreams, but just seeing, like where you started and then to where you got to was just inspirational. So.

Thank you. Thanks.

**Steven:** Thank you for verbalizing that. I appreciate it.

**DeJ'a:** OK, so I'll start like introducing myself. So I'm DeJ'a. Dr DeJ'a Crippen. I take I am very happy about that. I won the APTA's Minority Scholarship Award last year in 2022.

I'm from a small town, Bridgeville DE. I obtained my bachelor's degree in health behavior science in 2018 at the University of Delaware and then I graduated last year from U Sciences in Philly with my DPT.

I'm very passionate about increasing awareness of the PT profession, promoting it, increasing diversity, equity and inclusion, and providing support and mentorship to everybody who's interested in PT. So like pre-PT students and even those who are currently in PT programs right now, and even peers who just graduated. I just tried to help out, like with the interview process and stuff because I know it took a lot of effort to try to negotiate and everything like that to get a good job.

So I currently work in outpatient clinic in Tucson, Arizona. I moved here because of the heat and I really like the warm weather here and I work for Therapy Partners Group but it's a network of like a lot of partnering companies and my company is specifically Body Central Physical Therapy. But I love vestibular rehab, neuro and geriatrics. And then outside of work, I just like doing anything that's active. So I like hiking. I like rock climbing, bike riding, going out, working out, going to the beach.

And I really, really love my family and hanging out with friends and my 2 godsons. So it's been really hard because there's still in Delaware, yeah.

So that's me.

**Steven:** My name is Steven Newton and I graduated from Loma Linda University in 1988. And so that is the first year again of the scholarship and I actually did all this because I needed the \$1,000 and at that point, I don't know what the award is now, but being a project kid, you know and pretty much you know, I never went home for any holiday when I was in college because I couldn't afford to go home. And so, I just took whatever job I could, you know, to make ends meet and ultimately somehow when folks say that they that there's no way in the world that they can afford school. You know, I go back and think I had \$350.00 in my pocket.

And I showed up on campus and I Pell Grant myself all the way through it and then loaned it up. And then, lo and behold, right before school was out, APTA had this award. And they said, 'hey, there's \$1,000 available' and I just poured my heart out. And lo and behold, they said you won. So I'm very grateful for the award. And it changed my life drastically. And I'll go into that a little bit later. I left physical therapy school went on to get my MBA from University of Redlands. Practiced in outpatient for the majority of my life.

I have ADD I'll just say that. And so I just can't stay in anyone place too long. And so I yeah, I started teaching at Loma Linda and I started. I started teaching in their PTA program.

I opened up my first practice in 1993 in Riverside, California.

Sold that clinic in 1998; started doing a lot of work in home health, also did a lot of work in the entertainment world. So I started training entertainers. They would call me the mad scientist. So I wasn't considered for the physical therapist, was considered the trainer. I used my physical therapy skill to assist me into actually working with my clients.

In 2009 that is when I was someone came to me again and stopped and said hey, you know, it seems to me that you understand how to how to run a clinic.

And I thought 'how would you figure that,' well your personality of this or the other days you have a business degree and they said would you be willing to open one up out here in Burbank, California. So that's where my current practice PerformaX Physical Therapy, Golf and Wellness Center. That's when I opened that.

I'm still my practice right now. I do a whole lot of stuff, not only in the orthopedic realm, but we do a lot of workplace solutions, so we actually go out to the city of Burbank, Burbank, water and power. We're involved with the studios, Walt Disney, Warner Brothers, etcetera, people out there that understand again the need to make sure that their employees are safe, that they can actually perform long term for them so.

Yeah. And I still teach. I actually, actually, I retired after 30 years of teaching at Loma Linda in 2018. And I am considered adjunct faculty at this point, so I still go in and I teach more administrative stuff so it's more on the business end.

**Christine:** So Steven, there are a lot of follow up questions I could ask you all about your career, but I kind of wanna go back to the beginning, what or who inspired you to become a PT?

**Steven:** I wanted to become a pediatrician. And so my counselor back in college sat down and talked to me and said, 'do you know when I see your personality and I hear the kind of connection you're wanting to have with your patient. And I understand medicine. I don't believe that becoming an MD is the career path for you.' And she kind of expressed again the real quick in and out; you might have 5 minutes, maybe 10 minutes with

the patient, you know, you know, I think you're gonna need more quality time and have you ever heard of physical therapy?

And in all sincerity up until that moment, I had not even thought of it. It wasn't. It wasn't on my radar. I thought. What's physical therapy? And so I said well. Why not? And so I did it just because someone actually introduced it to me again, it kind of shows you that in my upbringing I had I didn't have a role model. I didn't have anyone that did it. I mean, in my community there was no one that did that. I had a lot of athletes I could look up to. A lot of musicians I can look up to, a lot of entertainers, but there was no one in medicine that was there. So this one counselor, just by suggesting that opened a whole land of opportunity for me. But it wasn't like again, that there was something that happened in my life that caused me to become more aware or there was someone that I saw that was really a role model for it.

**Christine:** DeJ'a what about you?

**DeJ'a:** So I knew that I wanted it to be of service in some way, especially like to my family in some way and nothing against nurses, nothing against nurses because like nurses are great. But I just knew I didn't want to be a nurse and my mom's a nurse. So I was like, I don't think I wanna go that route. And everybody I knew was kind of going in that direction. But I was wondering what else I could do. So when I was in high school, because I have scoliosis, I had PT.

And my mom was like, 'ohh I can see you being a PT.' And so I was like, sure, maybe I could, you know, like maybe. So that's the first time I heard it too, but I didn't know what it was until I had PT. So just like you, somebody had to, like, finally tell me about it. And then I was like, ohh, OK. But then I. I even got to like, undergrad for the arts. So I thought I was gonna be in digital design cause I like that stuff. My major in high school was dance, like I did not think I was gonna be in the health field at all.

And so I also never thought I was going to grad school like that. Definitely wasn't on my mind like I was like, OK, I'm not going to school.

And I'm not sure if anybody knows what they're Ronald E McNair Scholarship program is, but it's a program, and it basically helps students who want to go to grad school or give it tells you more about it, and then it you have to do research in undergrad and it pushes you like they push you to go to grad school and they pay for things. So. It paved the way for me to go to grad school too. So then I started thinking, alright, I definitely gotta go because too many people are invested in me now. So I was like, I can't just stop right here. So I took a gap year and I was like, I need to find out more about PT. So I got a job as a PT tech like I was a rehab tech.

And this was the true inspirational moment for me, and that escalated the process so quickly because I was like, I don't wanna be here. I don't wanna be a tech. I don't like being told what to do. I was like, I think I need to work my way up. So I applied that first year and I was like, alright, I'm going PT school and I was crossing my fingers that I got in and so I applied and then I finally got accepted. And there's no turning back now. So there's just no turning back. Yeah, so.

That's kind of what inspired me. And then because I really like vestibular rehab, so I like vestibular my grandma, she got Vertigo and I didn't know, like, how to treat it at that moment. So I was like, alright, when I go to school, I gotta learn about this and I need to learn how to treat this. So now that's what I treat like. That's what I really, really, really like doing is vestibular. So yeah, that that's what inspired me.

**Christine:** So DeJ'a, let's start with you. What did winning be Minority Scholarship award mean to you and how has receiving the award impacted your career so far?

**DeJ'a:** So just like you, Steven, where you said at the beginning how it kind of changed your life too. I do feel like this award made me feel recognized like I feel like my professor started to believe in me. They even reached out to me to apply for this award because I didn't even really know about it. So it was a great feeling knowing that they believed in me and it meant to me that like my efforts were being seen and it was a voice and my voice that was being heard and there was hope and belief that I could and that I will do so much more than what I'm doing right now. And I remember being, like, super nervous about it, that I wasn't gonna win because at the time, like I needed the money too. Like I was like ohh I want is the money because I'm a broke college student, but I didn't know like the recognition was going to be this significant as it has been. I did not know that. So when I went up to D.C. to accept the award, people kept coming up to me and they're congratulating me. And they were offering pictures and they wanted to take pictures and of me and with me. And it felt like a celebrity moment in a way. And I wasn't really used to that.

But my job, like my job even, was offering me opportunities to promote, like cultural competency, and I gain respect from, like, my coworkers and my CEO and it was just great. But more than anything, I think I gained motivation, more motivation in like a clearer view of my purpose, because I always liked mentoring students and I always liked, you know, giving back and doing different things and trying to just help. So I do feel like I didn't know where it could take me, but now people are like, yo, you can go far. So I'm like, alright, let me just keep going. Thanks for the recognition. I gotta keep going.

**Steven:** That's awesome. Again, the \$1,000 was really exciting. Being that it was the first year I actually just thought they were going to send me the check and I'd go on and there was a pioneer and someone who has been so influential in my life. Her name is Doctor Lynda Woodruff, and I didn't understand how important this award actually was.

For the most part, I was I was really believing that I would finish physical therapy school and go back and do my music.

Again I had no intentions of actually, no, I could have practiced physical therapy, but my true heart was in my music. And whether it was singing, whether it's playing keyboard, I mean, and definitely contemporary Christian music was my passion at that point.

Umm, but when I received the award and I actually went to Las Vegas to actually receive it, I walked into a room of eight folks on the board who had worked like crazy to develop what is now the minority academic excellence scholarship. And they were more proud of me than I was in, in a sense that, I mean, they were so happy that this had actually happened.

And I was still like, OK, what's really going on? And I really didn't have a true understanding of the profession of physical therapy, how, you know, who, you know, the APTA itself, how big that is, you know, what the House of Delegates is, I mean, all the things that go into a profession. And it was really funny because Linda and a few of the others, I remember another man by the name of Joseph may, maybe his name from the University of Connecticut, all this group.

They were saying, OK, so you're going to do this, and you're gonna do this, and you're gonna do this. And I'm thinking about, who are these people orchestrating my life? Like, I don't know anything about all this. But before that meeting ended, I had 150 business cards in my pocket.

I had met the CEO, Bill Coghlan, of the APTA. I hadn't met so many folk and I could really understand that there was a passion, you know, something burning deep within them about what was actually going on, what I was going to represent.

I did an internship right, right. Immediately following that when I met the CEO, I said I know nothing about this APTA. And he said, well, if you really want to know something about it, maybe you should sit still and create an internship.

And I said, well, you know what I'm going to do that. I think they thought I was kind of joking or that, you know, that wouldn't thought with it. But I went back, I started typing. I stopped and says this is what an internship would look like. It would be this long. And this event I submitted to the APTA. Next thing you know, they stop and says, hey, yes, we're gonna do that for you. So for three months of my life, immediately after school, I went to the APTA headquarters.

I live with one of members of the board there, Doctor Virginia Neelon. I stayed in her place in Springfield, Virginia. Janet Medals. It was her first year. Agatha Davis Johnson. It was her beginning. And I remember just sitting there and watching them come in and hearing them express all of the responsibilities that take place at our headquarters, government affairs, you know, I would go up to the Hill on a regular basis and look at the books and try to understand what athletic trainers are doing, what exercise physiologists were doing. You know, I really got a good understanding of what we do as PTs and to a huge degree, that's what kind of set the foundation for me. That's what changed everything. I got to really understand there was something much bigger than I at work and I was ready for the challenge then. Actually, I think that the most difficult part of all of it was I hadn't done much clinically at all, but I knew so much more about the profession so quickly and I wanted to get into the business of the profession and make sure that, hey, these guys are kind of to kind of move in on our territory as practitioners then I wanted to get there and fight and fight and fight. And so eventually I had to stop and say whoops, you know, let's not quite get into the to the, to the office quite yet. Let's go out there and practice as a clinician, but it's good to have an understanding of what's going on with the profession so.

That alone changed my life drastically.

**Christine:** Steven, in 1997, APTA magazine article you spoke about how we were grateful for receiving the award like you just mentioned, but you also acknowledged that being an African American PT and businessman had been difficult and at the time you said, "There is no question that I have had to work harder because of my color. I've had to excel beyond my peers at school, in the clinic and in the community." So, from your perspective now as a PT and businessman, where have you seen improvements in society and where do we still have work to do?

**Steven:** The hardest challenges that I faced initially really had to even deal with putting my hands on a patient. There were some communities here in California for the first practice I worked at the owner kindly let me know. 'Hey, you're good physical therapist. But on a few patients here, you don't need to touch them.'

I didn't quite understand and he didn't quite blatantly express what was going on, but it became pretty clear later on that hey, because of the color of my skin, these patients didn't feel comfortable with me being there. That was a hard blow I that that didn't feel very good at all.

**Steven:** I'm trying to think about how I there there's just so much change that is happening out there. I think I think the world is more open and more understanding that there is that a minority person who can have a skill set that they can be as educated as a white counterpart.

**DeJ'a:** So I do feel like I had to work twice as hard because of my color. There was moments like as a student where I felt like my classmates would disregard my input or professors would have like implicit or explicit biases. But I will say that as I progressed through the program, I gained more respect. Like I feel like my value definitely showed through. And I think for my company at least my small clinic that I'm at right now because I spend most of my time here, they do a great job at wanting to improve and accept advice or suggestions that

can make us grow; things that we can be proficient in such as like non-discriminatory statements publicly displayed or updating like intake forms when patients first come in.

These are things, suggestions that I think we should do and they are open but they we haven't did this yet. I'm still trying to like get it to happen but there are things that I've expressed before because with them, you know telling me about, like, the whole cultural competency thing and giving me the idea that I can lead that and kind of push to help educate more people about it, which is something that I'm still trying to work on and strive every day.

But just things like such as supporting like Black History Month you know. So there are things like that that I feel like we could be more proficient in and get a little bit more support, but my patients I feel like they love me. I love my patients. I feel like they love me. I know I'm not for everybody, but I haven't ran into anybody who didn't enjoy like the vibes that I was giving them. But when I have patients who are minority or are people of color, that energy and that trust and that understanding is a little different.

And I do think This is why representation matters. I went to the doctor's office the other day, and my doctor was black, and I just wanted to hug her. So I do feel like it really matters when you see that. And I do feel like I still had to work twice as hard to get where I am and to be recognized. But it's like, once that recognition is there and they know what you can do, then I feel like, but you still gotta prove yourself like I, and. And when I mentor students and they are minority and they feel the same way then it becomes a thing where I try to just be real and be honest. And the way of the world sometimes, which is hard because it feels like you shouldn't have to prove yourself. But until we have more representation like us, I feel like we always, in a way, sadly will.

**Steven:** You know, it's really interesting because I, when I hear that now, I'm wondering when I hear you ask how it has improved. I think my difficulty is I don't know how much it has improved. You know, I think I've become wiser. Examples you know in in marketing my practice, there are times where I will go and see a doctor or a referral source, a physician and they would slam the door in my face.

I became wise to that and I had my and for lack of a better way of saying this, I have my Blondie, blue-eyed friend that worked for me, that I would send out and make the initial contact, we would get the relationship with that referring group. We would get those patients and then it's much harder for a referral source to cut you off when you're they're already sending you patients. If by chance, after they had already been sent me patients for a month or two and now they decide. Oh, they see me coming the door and go, oh, he's a black guy and it's racism would be blatant at that point. I just learned how to kind of work around the system a little bit there. So do I feel it still exists out there? Oh no doubt I feel that but I just don't wanna waste my time. I'm smarter in the way that I approach anything that may actually come my way there.

Yes, you can tell when the patient feels really uncomfortable around someone that's different. And so I have a very diverse staff. So what I do is I think I'll give that patient to someone else. I mean so.

I'm looking at this. I mean, just like you, I have a lot of patients that you can see the smile and the you know, the excitement when they see someone that represents them, that looks similar to them. You know that gives them a little more confidence and a little you know they feel a little more at home. It's like that it's like when I speak broken Spanglish or Spanish and I'll have one of my team who speaks fluent Spanish, speak to that same patient and their eyes light up and they can talk forever. And I'm like, thinking, what did you say that I didn't? And there's just something about that commonality, that reality that makes everyone come alive, you know? So yeah, the world is, as you can see today. I mean from '88 into now we just have gone through some extremely exciting times as a country as we as we've exposed some of the deep-seeded racism that still exists.



And so to really stop and say, well, it's so much better now I can't really say that. But I again I will stop and say you know we each have to pick and choose our own battles and I am you know, hypertension is huge and African American community especially with men and to allow myself to be stressed over you know how someone else might treat me you know because of something so senseless as the color of skin I'm not gonna go there. So I would just find another way to still get my result and I've learned over time I can I can make that happen.

**DeJ'a:** Yeah. And I agree because now I learn to be strategic like I was like there's a certain way and I try to teach that and I understand, but it's like a safe space that you wanna have for like, other minority students too, where you want them to, like they might come to you and say, hey, has this happened to you? And I'm like, yes. But the way you go about this is like, you know, it's a strategic way because in the in the end, you know, if you have, if you have this goal in mind, nothing can really like get you from it, and if something like you said you have to pick the battles that you just, you know, some of them, you're just not gonna win. So it's not even worth your energy or your time.

And it's crazy to hear how much maybe change didn't come since then, because even when I was applying for jobs, my very first CI like, I loved her. She was all about like, you know, women power and all this stuff. And she was so good. And she told me she was like DeJ'a, when you apply for jobs they may try to lowball you, but it's OK because you know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna call, and I'm gonna pretend I wanna apply for that job, too. And she was like, and I'm gonna see what they give me. And if they give me something higher than you, then no is or something, you know? And she was gonna try to make similar profiles. It was just her versus me. But it's just like the fact that she even wanted to do that for me. And she was she was a white woman. But the fact that she wanted to do that for me, I was like. And the fact that she had to, you know, was like, yeah, that's. But, you know she was going to do it.

**Steven:** I'm glad that you shared that because I guess if there if there is a change I have more folks that are non-minority or non-Black that will stand up that will speak out than ever before. So you know typically if something does happen to me, I can usually find someone else in the room or someone around that's going to say that's not right. I'm gonna take care of this. And so I'm really excited that that there are folks that have chosen not to stay silent you know cause the staying silent doesn't help it doesn't change anything at all and it actually puts you in the same boat as everyone else.

And so that's where actually seeing that there are folks that are willing to open up their mouths that are that that may not relate to me completely because of my skin color there, there willing to put themselves out there.

**DeJ'a:** Yeah. And I wish that like in school, I know a lot of people who seem things like happen and they knew it made me feel some type of way they would message me personally and they would say DeJ'a, I'm so sorry. They said that to you. I'm so sorry it happened. And in my head I'm like, well, why didn't you say anything in the moment? But, you know, they said something to me which let me know that they knew. And then the friends that I had who were Caucasian or white, the friends that I had, they would notice too, and that I would like tell them like, hey, you're not doing anything to make it better or to change it because you hear it, but you still didn't do anything. And like you said, now they are doing stuff. They're like, how can I help? What should I do? What should I say? And I'm like, now, we're talking. So it's like it takes that like, push and they apologize. They're like, I'm so sorry. I was just stuck in my bubble. I didn't try, you know. But now I'm like for it. And now. So now you're right. They changed.

**Steven:** You know, I'm this just reminds me of a time in a faculty meeting, when we think that this, that racism doesn't exist and some folks don't take the time to even now or they don't want to acknowledge that that is still there, we'll have a kid that will come in. And if the university is very GPA dominant, when it comes to their selection criteria, they still don't quite understand that that GPA of that minority kid might seriously be much lower than it really should be.

Um, they'll just see it in terms of what this is, what their GPA actually is. And I've been the person to stand up and say, wait a minute.

They've been several times that there was a speech class I was in and my professor I did I thought the most wonderful speech ever. And when I went and talked to the professor, the professor stop and says yes, that was a great speech and he gave me a B. And I looked and said so help me if that was a great speech, then why did I get a B?

And the professor looked dumbfounded. Had no idea why, but from that point on I got A's all the way throughout. I let him know. You know what? I'm not in this class to get a B. I'm in this class to get an A. And if I'm not, if I'm not performing, if I'm fixing at a B level, let me know what I need to do to get to an A. But there was. I felt there was some kind of a bias and I thought he thought I would be extremely excited by getting a B. What would? What would did that happen then if I didn't speak up, what would that have done to my GPA?

And then again, now I'm competing with this other kid. I'm in way over here that it's coming in with a higher GPA and then it's so unless you have that understanding, unless you're willing to listen and recognize that those biases still exist that, you know, you know, then then you're not going to see a big change. And if we're really trying to grow and increase the presence of minorities in our profession, then they have to be accepted. And if they are being accepted because there's bias in the room of folks that accept them, then how is it ever gonna change? And so they're just needs to be some sensitivity.

And I heard someone mentioned something at the Graham Conference, I was just at. They said during their interview process they asked the students, well, your GPA is this; do you think that is indicative of your performance? To actually ask them that question. Hey, you're coming in with the 3.5 do you really feel that you're 3.5 student and give you a chance to respond? I would have loved that because then I would have been able to express to them, you know, hey, this happened and this happened and that happened and so really. I'm not a 3.5 student. I really think there was some bias toward that, but so I was happy to hear that some institutions out there would take that extra step to try to get some clarification, get to some understanding.

**Christine:** Yeah thank both for sharing their perspectives on what's changed and what still hasn't. And so, DeJ'a, how did you work to build community when you were a student? I know you've talked about mentorship. How did you build and find community on campus?

**DeJ'a:** So I can't take credit for this alone. My 2 colleagues Dr. Nijera Addison and Dr. Margarita Munoz because yeah, they helped me cofound the BIPOC PT club at our school during the hardest time of our lives. So during our second year PT school and we just realized that like students of color were struggling like tremendously both emotionally and academically like after the death of George Floyd.

So we noticed that the supportive space and encouragement and mentorship that was craved and that we needed to like thrive it just wasn't there like it did not exist. So after months of like proposing, planning, presenting, I finally got to become the President of that club. And when it was established during our third year of PT school, like the mission that we created, we just set out to create a more appealing environment for like other students coming in who were people of color and minority students, but they were interested in PT. We did some volunteer work and service events. What they're doing now, they just took off. So we graduated and we're not there anymore. And we picked, you know, new officers and everything. But they are taking off, like it's just so great. They still reach out to us now if they need help. But I see that they're building like this good community and this trust and this academic and moral support that we need.

Umm, so it just it just brings me so much peace and joy and just love and like any help that I feel like all PT programs should have that also I feel like they all should have a lot of stuff. But they I think they should have that because they will create a space. For these types, for minority students to just thrive, and it matters, yeah.



**Christine:** Steven. You talked a lot about working with students. What advice do you have for students and really just early career PT's about sort of finding mentors and people to help them at the beginning of their journey.

**Steven:** I tell you, experience counts, experience matters and to actually to be somehow involved with someone who's done it before. You know, I tell folks to create or duplicate and there are times that you wanna start from scratch and do something totally different. But there are times though, that experience actually does matter. Those mentors are also pretty well connected and so they actually bring that only with them a lot of information, but they also bring information from other you know as they introduce you to their network and you become part of that entire community. It's amazing how much you can actually grow so.

Yeah. I really just believe you know, we've all gone through a little bit of something and to try to make the journey a little bit easier, you know to be able to actually have someone that's actually been there that can kind of guide you through that, that you can use as use as a resource that can and to a certain degree they can inspire you as well you know so. So it's of extreme value to have someone that you can actually count on. You can turn to that can give you some guidance.

**DeJ'a:** Yeah. And I think a lot of people did not have that like a lot of the people who are in a place that they want it to be in, to make it easier. So I do agree, just like not knowing about PT at all or help just help with like the application like PT cast, you know, it's just multiple steps to this and that nobody really knows about. And that's something that all of us who went through it we really know. So it's like very simple or easy to just like help somebody go do that process. It does take time. But I feel like that.

We'll make a difference too.

**Christine:** Yeah, thanks for sharing that. So we've sort of touched on these questions a bit, one about. Like, why is representation important to you and the other being that research shows that racial similarity between clinicians and patients is associated with higher trust, satisfaction. Was there anything either of you wanted to add about those questions?

**Steven:** I've been asked several different several times. Why teach at a predominantly white school. Now, I've had very. I've had several opportunities to go and teach elsewhere, but I've just stayed where I where I am and one of the classes that I taught was anatomy. And then and if you understand anatomy, it's a very dense class. I asked folk over and over if you reflect back on your experience, in education, how many times have you been educated by a black man?

How many Black male teachers have not? They're not your Phys Ed teacher. I mean, I mean, and especially if you start looking at your again, your sciences.

How many times have you had the opportunity to be educated by a Black man?

And most say they've never.

And then I looked at myself and think, wow, for almost 30 years I've been up front and I've been able to be a mentor. I've been able to inspire some students. I've been a person that's become very close in connected with my students and so a lot of them it's a unique opportunity to see someone of my color give them some valuable tool beyond again and I'm not. I'm not saying, you know, being an athlete is wrong or being a musician is wrong or being an entertainer is wrong. But I'm saying that somehow we get put into this box, that that's what we do and I think. Or I know that over the last 30 years I've done so much for. I've represented my folk in a way that has really changed the mindset of so many of these students that have gone through the field and so to me to be a representative of what we can really do beyond what the, you know the say. The

folks are so myopic at times that they only see one side of that, but to really, stop and think, hey, I can learn something very valuable. That's very important for my career. You know that that's very important for my life from someone of color, it just changes everything for them.

You know, and I had a friend one time I was at dinner with she and her husband. And she made a comment that I think she thought was a compliment. She said, wow, Steven. We love you so much. You know, we don't even see you as black.

Representation right then and there I really had to stop and I looked and I stopped and said, you know what? I'm trying to understand. I know what you're trying to get, the point you're trying to get across. However, you know what? I want you to see me as black. I want you to see what you can learn. I want you to see how a Black man can conduct himself. I want you to be inspired by what you know but by what this Black man is actually doing.

And so, you know, representation again is so extremely important because they can change the mindset. They can change the, you know, the stereotypical thinking that so many people have out there about who we actually are.

**DeJ'a:** Yeah, I agree. I agree. It definitely matters. It's crazy. You know how people say, would you trust this person to treat your grandma like, that's the number one thing they say in like PT school. Like you gotta be a really good therapist because would you trust this person or would you trust your friend or classmate to treat your grandma? And I just feel like background has a lot to do with it, too.

If outcomes were based solely on like our skills and biases like weren't a thing too, then maybe we wouldn't really have to talk about like representation too. But I do think representation builds that trust, and I think it can influence outcomes when the patient is a little bit more trusting in you and they feel more confident and they feel more compliant to do their work. But I do agree that you know like what you said about us actually making ourselves or working really hard to get the skills and get the necessary tools and things that we need and even to other people it may not look like or they wouldn't expect it out of us. They may just expect you to do the bare minimum, but every time like I go above and beyond they it, it is shocking to some people or they're like, huh, or they're just impressed. Or I found myself in this thing where it's like, even family. They're kind of like a I don't know who, where you were born. Like what family you came from. But it is not this one or it's just so much and even on our side it isn't just like the other side or the white side, which, you know, it isn't that where they're saying like ohh you don't act Black or we wouldn't expect you to act this way. It's like on my family side where they're like you act white and I'm like wait you I'm like how do I act you know like a certain way. But I think I'm just representing us in a different way, like you said, like it's just how you present yourselves and what like services and what you give out to people, yeah.

**Steven:** Well, if it's again, if you remember, I got in a PT because of a counselor. A counselor who helped me to understand that the profession was even out there. I had no idea it existed and had there been other physical therapists in my world along my path to represent to help me recognize it. That's something that looks interesting. Who knows? I might have been inspired by them to get into this field. It took a counselor to do so and so and that. That's kind of where I look at the profession today and I start wondering like, Oh my goodness. Where are we? I mean, if back in 1988, they were saying, hey, the profession of physical therapy was 4% minority; today I read I saw something at the last conference that said it's about 4% African American.

OK, great. So that's not minority but so, but still 35 years later.

And then I wonder where in the world are, how are you going to inspire these kids? How are you gonna find these minority men out there or females? I mean, who are they gonna see? You know? Yeah. You look at a, you know, there may be a TV show that has a physical therapist played here there. But there there's nowhere

there, there's no serious recruitment or there's again there there's no serious representation right now of us for a lot of the younger generation to really be able to cling on to, to inspire, to be like.

You know, and so, so even right now I'm. I'm taking that that a little serious inside of myself and thinking of what can I do. You know There's a sense of, hey, I'm gonna wait for them to do something.

I'm realizing more and more that and especially after this last meeting I just went to.

But in the end it's just going to have to be me. You know, I do certain outreach things out on my own right now to, you know, when it comes to going to the local schools and just making sure that you know, I'm the physical therapist and especially the some of these lower income communities. So, I really make sure that they understand a little bit about it. But I realize there's something more that needs to happen and it's it really means that I've got to get outside of my comfort zone and what that means that the invite these kids into my clinic and create little fun days or something that can really you know.

I can be a little over the top and I want them to see the over-the-top-ness a little bit, you know.

And yes, I think sports is a good way to kind of encourage folk, you know, because there are the physical therapists that work with sports teams, et cetera. So that might get their interest there to a certain degree, but something has to happen though, to make sure that there's some representation of our kind to really inspire these youth.

**DeJ'a:** Like you said increasing like the awareness going out to the schools and stuff those when we created that club as well, that's something that we like wanted to do and aimed to do. And like at the job I'm at now, that was a part of like my plan and my proposal and I wanted to do it around the high schools here in Arizona and just to ask like those schools do you have like any like clubs or minority clubs or you know how, like all different, like type of clubs and just show up and try to just educate them on it?

Also, with like the McNair program that pushes you to go to grad school. I feel like they had the resources like the financial, the money like because I know a lot of people struggle with money too. So, I do think that having more scholarships and actually telling people about the scholarships because people like, there's so many but not a lot of people know about them. And even I didn't really know about it. But that program is what really like told me I could go because I didn't have any money to really apply, but they were like, we're gonna apply to as many schools as you want. We're gonna cover it. So that was what they said and I was like, OK, so I'm gonna get in because I'm gonna apply, and I'm gonna do the work. But then there's all these other factors that play into it. Where if you don't have the money or if you don't have the support, you don't have the mentorship or the education to even take the steps or what to do. So, I think that awareness part, scholarships and even mentorships can hopefully help us get more minority students in the profession.

**Steven:** With no doubt, I think mentorship is a big plus. That's something we definitely have to do.

So, I won that award again that was '88. I will stop and say the first oh, three or four years I was really deep involved with the APTA and I really, I mean more than just a member. I tried to really understand the workings behind the scenes.

I disappeared except for doing some, I spoke with the national student conclaves. You know, because I love students. That's my passion were those. I probably did that three or four times and then I got involved in electrophysiology and I did a lot of stuff for Combined Sections Meetings. But if I look at my, my resume over the last 10-15 years, I've pretty much just pulled away. And lo and behold, I got the, you know, the e-mail that talked about the Graham meetings and the private practice action and two weeks ago, I just said oh well, let me just go to this thing in New Orleans and I think I'm ready to go back now.

I there was one out of, let's say, 150 people that were there, there was one other man of color. And there were, you know, again, several, a good handful, maybe six or seven females that were there, but it still showed me again. Wow.

35 years later, I'm sitting in this room. I'm hearing all these folks from the private practice section talk and I'm going wow, a lot hasn't changed and I'm on the sidelines right now. I think earlier again, I promoted myself too young to a desk job or an office job would be really involved in the old political aspect of the association. But now, as I look as I'm older, I'm a bit more than a different part of my career now. I still see a need needs to be met. And I'm willing to do that.

And so there, there, there was another Heidi Jennings, I think that may have been her name, which was speaking again of some mentor program. Should reach out to me. And then again there was one gentleman, one of my best friends, Dwight Sulky, an African American male that graduated the year a year ahead of me. So, I'm already reaching out to him. I'm trying to find any minority male that I know that's out there to stop and say hey guys, let's kind of team up together a little bit here and see what can we do together to try to see you know to create the representation that's needed to actually influence some of these folks to join a field that we know is wonderful.

**DeJ'a:** That's just great. It's just great. I'm happy you're getting back on board with things and I do feel like, you know, like coming out is that passion. It's that fire that is just like there. And you see it and you went through it just so fresh and you're just like, oh, what can I do to help? And I hope I don't get burnt out. I hope I don't. But I think for me, it's also of a how and a what else can I do to make it like happen and to support. I'm definitely gonna reach out to you. Say you're definitely gonna become a connect in some way, so yeah, it's just it definitely. I learned that it takes more than me, like, more than myself I, its gonna take, like, a lot of us connecting and support and connections and people were in different states and cross country. And it's just gonna take a lot of us to make something that can be impactful. But I do believe that we can also impact where we are and keep moving in the direction and help the people around you at the local level, but to make something bigger change than that's where I think it's something more, it's something like bigger than just us.

**Steven:** It's interesting that you say that because I think that's my when, when, when I'm at the meeting. My concern typically is man, it's like racism. Racism is so big. And you look at and you stand, there isn't gonna change. And they go, wow, I don't see how you know. And I think you see the news they you know something happens you think OK now the world's definitely gonna change everything is so clear and you know there's still half over here and half over there you're thinking 'oh my goodness. How does that work?' So, you can really become disenchanted you can be really just frustrated and think if nothing is gonna work at all and actually being that was the downside of being at this meeting because I it reminded me of the politics that's involved.

You know, when I look at, you know, how much change has or hasn't happened now, but the you know the APTA is I'm sure they're doing their best and so and I'm a person that likes to see change and I I'd like to if I'm putting effort out I want to see something actually happen.

But I think this time I'm looking at it just strategically a little differently, how I've dealt with racism in this sense, I'm looking at this as well saying that change starts with ourselves. The change starts with me and my family. Me and my friends; it's my patients, my staff, my community. You know, those are the folks that I can directly connect with. So, change, you know, even you know, I call it a positive virus. You know you're on fire for something you hope you touch someone and they become on fire. You know again some folks have really good on the on the bigger scale which committees and the other thing there.

Even as a faculty member, I was never one to be like one to be 'faculty' faculty. I wanted to be with the students. I wanted to be on the field, you know, I wanna be in the middle of everything. And so I think when it comes to all that we're speaking of at this point here, it really just kind of starts with being internally on fire and

making sure those that are close to us can see and understand our passion, our reasoning, why we do what we do. And hopefully, you know, somehow something will shift their brains that they join on board and someone else joins on board. And then we just create our own cohort to a certain degree and then we actually create the change that we're that that we're looking for.

**Christine:** What do you hope to see for the future of the physical therapy profession?

**DeJ'a:** So I just hope that we continue to improve that we open up a space and push for more diversity and like the leadership positions too, because I remember when I checked like there was still like a small amount like a, a lack of minority representation among the like board of directors for the APTA. So to fully like ensure that cultural competence and the core value of the profession is upheld, then I think representation, minority representation is crucial in those higher positions as well, so that maybe we'll start, you know, seeing something come down.

Just support and allowing us to do these things at a small level too. And the more support you get from it, then it can just grow. So I think we have to start from top up, but then also work from the bottom and still get there somehow because I know a lot of there's a lot of pushback or a lot of fear of with some programs about creating this tension and making students feel uncomfortable because you're trying to do so much for the students of color and people who are minorities. But they're just like resistant to it. So I think they have to reach a certain point where they're allowing it to happen and it's accept that people want to create a space and just support like just support and then that's all you have to do. Just support it, yeah.

**Steven:** You know I when you say this, the thing that comes to mind most of all is that I want everyone to feel safe.

And when I mean maybe, but I mean by that is safe to be themselves, to feel that they're not gonna be judged because maybe their dialect is a little different. Their skin is a little different. Their color is a little different. I mean we all approach things a little differently and I think that difference sometimes or the ignorance of understanding that other culture kind of scares people off and makes you prejudge and this or the other. I just want to get to a place that at least we as in this profession understand that hey you know what: It's OK for people to be different. It's OK for people to talk different. It's OK. And I think our goals, I think, I think what we're wanting at the end is the same, but very commonly folks aren't seeing that and or they don't stay where they are long enough to try to, to really understand how we're really all on the same page. I think there needs to be greater access to physical therapy by the minority community, which means there needs to be some kind of a mechanism for that minority kid that's injured, who doesn't have insurance to be able to be exposed to the mental health system or to be exposed to a physical therapist.

Anyway, I really think that that that. There's a whole bunch of folk out there that have no understanding it with physical therapy is because they don't have access to it and if we can do something on in the physical therapy field that in some of these clinics, some, I mean, I'm not gonna say everything needs to be free, but find a way to get these folks some exposure to what we actually do so that they can become inspired by it. But it's just not happening a lot right now. And since and in truth be told, there are a lot of, there are a lot of minority friends that I have that that rarely ever go get a physical that that, you know, the only time they ever even get into medicine/health at all is if there's some major catastrophic event. And so if it weren't for that, they had, you know, they would say forget all about medicine, you know. But we've got to somehow make it affordable, you know, so that again, they can see that, hey, there's someone on the other side that looks like me that cares for me, that does something that hey, maybe I enjoy. And in the future but that starts somewhere and they so I think just as the profession, we have to recognize that that. There are a lot of folks out there that that need our services that that can't do it and they'll never be exposed to us and never understand the great field that we actually have.

**DeJ'a:** Yes.

**Christine:** Thank you both so much for taking the time to chat with us today.