

Frederick Factor - The Impact Factor Transcript

Sandy Dubai: Welcome to the Frederick Factor. Everyone who's lived in, worked in, or visited Frederick, Maryland, knows that there's something special about this place. One of those things is the incredibly diverse community that continues to grow. Here on this podcast, we will be bringing Fredericks underrepresented business owners, entrepreneurs, and community leaders into the spotlight to share their stories with you and find out: "What's your Fredrik factor?" In this episode, I got to speak with Dr. Jackie Douge, a pediatrician in Frederick who's been featured in places such as CNN, NPR, New York Times, Washington Post, and even the Today Show. Jackie is the creator of the media company and podcast *What is Black?*. After seeing the impact of health disparities on black children and adults in an up-close and very personal way, Jackie aims to help as many families and children as she can by bringing the conversation of what it means to be Black to the forefront. In our conversation, you'll learn more about her work in *What is Black?* and the impact that she's making in the world.

Sandy: Today, I'm so excited to be joined on the Frederick Factor podcast with Jackie Douge, a local pediatrician and Host of *What is Black?* -- a local podcast. So, I'm gonna dive into the conversation. Jackie, welcome.

Jackie Douge: Thank you for having me. I look forward to talking with you.

Sandy: Awesome. So, Jackie, tell me I'm super curious to hear more about your podcast, *What is Black?* Where did that come from? Tell me about, you know, some of the history of that podcast.

Jackie: So, the podcast really came out of some work I was doing with colleagues of mine, Dr. Maria Trent and Dr. Danielle Dooley; I like to drop their names because they're like, awesome ladies, we co-wrote a policy statement -- oh, we're in the process of co-writing a policy statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics about the impact of racism on children's health. And, you know, thinking about the topic of race, it really got me thinking about myself as a parent, you know, identifying as a black woman, and conversations I've had with my kids about race. And then all the things that were happening during that time -- the death of Michael Ferguson, Trayvon Martin -- so there were a lot of things coming up, and we were having more and more conversations, and they were older teenagers so we could have more complex conversations. And as we were talking, there was like a recurring theme, this idea of, you know, what does "Blackness" mean, right? How does someone identify as Black in media? How are Black people depicted? And so, you know, I kept thinking to myself, you know, I identify as a Black woman talking to my kids about how I look and how I show up as a Black person. And explaining to them, you know, also with their dad talking with them. And it got me thinking; you know what,

these are, like, difficult conversations parents have. Initially, this podcast was going to focus on the theme of race, culture, and identity. But the more I thought about it, it's like, well, I'm a parent, I'm a pediatrician, and I've struggled to answer these questions and talking about these topics with my kids, and then also being in public health, having public health background. So, could we dive in a little bit deeper on some of these conversations about what it is to raise Black children and raising Black children outside of just being a parent? I mean, there are other factors, like the social factors that impact how you raise children: education, justice, politics, the historical context, so all that to say that I really wanted to have conversations with experts in the field friends that are in the field, to talk about how parents can talk to their kids, and really expand on this idea of "How do we define Blackness? How do we define the identity and culture?" So that's the origin story.

Sandy: And you started this podcast in 2020?

Jackie: I started in 2019, early 2019. It was sort of incubating towards the end of 2018 because, again, we were still working on the policy statement, and the policy statement came out in 2019. And I'd already started the podcast, but it was just the perfect timing, because I think in my career, even in public health, when we talk about addressing, like health disparities, right, why certain groups die earlier than other groups? You'll notice this recurring theme always, always one of the risk factors was race, and really understanding that just because how someone identifies doesn't innately make them more prone or at risk, right? What are those factors, right? Those social factors where they live, grow, worship. Policy decisions influence what makes someone not receive services, or have access, or makes them more at risk for diseases. So, all those things you know are in my mind, and thinking about how to really address the issue, and then being a pediatrician knowing that if you can do prevention, and really start early and try to figure out how we can help children and families early, really was important to me.

Sandy: It's interesting; I actually had a very similar conversation this morning. This is gonna fall into the TMI category, but I went to the doctor this morning to schedule a colonoscopy. Now the recommendation is over 45, not waiting until you're 50, but at 45 going and you know, getting that initial. And we had the opportunity of working with an organization last year trying to connect with Black men that were at risk that we're putting these preventative kind of maintenance things aside. And so, I literally just had this conversation with somebody this morning about those different racial factors. You're right, it's all of the factors. It's the socioeconomics, it's that access to, it's understanding the resources, it's understanding the differences and kind of how they all come into play, definitely through a lens of health that you're wearing. So, you know that you have the experience and talking with you which is interesting. I'm curious, in the last, you know, year and a half, two years, since you've been working on your podcast, if you have found it easier to have the conversation of what it is to be Black? And you know, how that conversation that you're having with your children, and how

that discussion has changed? Has it become easier to talk about? Are you more comfortable talking about it with your children or even your patients?

Jackie: My husband and I, we've had to have the conversations with our kids very early. I think just by circumstance, they're not necessarily conversations, you know, want I have, but sometimes, you know, they're necessary, right? Something happens in school, or something happens in the media, or, you know, just in general, right? You know, you just think about something you think about, like how your kids may have interacted. So, the podcast doesn't necessarily make it easier; I think what it says to me is that it's vital. And it just underscores the importance of something you already know, like this lived experience, right? I know, there are generational, multi-generational conversations, right? My dad had a conversation with me and my brother, but they were different, right? So sometimes the gender makes a difference in how you have these conversations. But even with my patients, I think it is becoming easier to talk about it. But I think it's interesting in healthcare in general. I think it is sort of reckoning with how to really deal with patients about how racism or structural racism may be impacting their health and well-being. And I think more than conversations are done sort of behind closed doors with colleagues, like, how can we improve our unconscious bias, right? Or how do we uncover unconscious bias so that we can better prepare? Or just be aware of again, like you said, all the factors, right, when a patient comes into our office, what things might be in play, that may make it more difficult for them? You know, do they need food resources? Do they need mental health counseling? And how those factors might impact some of the choices that they can make. Or they can't make, right? And then if you even look at COVID-19, statistics, right, the disproportional impact on communities of color, on individuals who work and primary service jobs, you know, frontline workers. And when you think about why, you know systemically why there are certain groups that are disproportionately impacted. And so, having those conversations, if you can talk about racism, if you can talk about sexism, if you can talk about any kind of other "isms" that creates differences, right? Really confront them, that maybe we can kind of unpack why we're carrying this, and why we're perpetuating it, and how can we dismantle it.

Sandy: I respect that. I have no doubt at some point in this conversation I'm going to put my foot in my mouth; I'm going to say something that's wrong. So, I will apologize right off the bat! Know that I'm coming from a place of my whole heart, so my intent is not to say something wrong, or inappropriate or anything. But for me, the only way to kind of unpack these topics is to talk it out and to have those conversations and in a safe space. So that next time, I don't make the same mistakes.

Jackie: Yeah, and I totally agree. And I think even having a lens of you know, having different identities, right? Kimberly Crenshaw, right? She's famous. She has her podcast, and she's also a famous lawyer and academic researcher, you know, who talks about intersectionality, right? I

have multiple ways to identify myself, and so do you, right? Each person does. And again, we could be having conversations about politics; you may have a different political view than I do. And that kind of changes dynamics, right? All these things we unpack: our religious affiliation, our lack of religious affiliation, etc. But I agree with you. I think it's important. If we don't have the conversations, if we don't bridge the divide, then you can continue to have polarization and polarization works for those who want to continue to have this system exist as polarization exists. When in reality, I think it works better. If you can find commonality, I'm not gonna always agree with everything, even with my own family. I love my kids. I love my husband. But we don't always agree on everything.

Sandy: If you did, I think you'd be the first family.

Jackie: Yeah, yeah. So, I agree with you. I think we have to have conversations. I haven't coined this phrase, but you know, these “uncomfortable conversations,” right? I think we have to be okay to be uncomfortable and be brave enough to just step into a place where, yes, and even be vulnerable and humble. And then, even as I come into play, yes, I'm a Black woman, but I have my own, individual experience, right? I can't speak for all Black people. I can't speak for all women. I can't speak for all doctors or however else I identify. I can't speak for all of them.

Sandy: Yeah, I agree. One of the challenges, I think that.... okay, we're going to put it in the category of ‘one of many very frustrating things during the pandemic,’ has been the lack of “together,” the lack of face-to-face. You know, Zoom is awesome, huge fan of it, you know, utilizing technology, but when you can't have that ‘water cooler’ time, or you know, that time to get to know somebody as a human, I think it like puts up these other barriers, and makes it harder for you to have those difficult, or have conversations, you know? And appreciate things at a point right now, kind of, you know, depending on when you're listening to this podcast, in a new normal in some element of sharing of ideas, connecting with others, we can be more forgiving. And want to help be better humans when we just stop and listen.

Jackie: I hope so. I mean, that's my, that's my hope that that's the case. But I know sometimes, you know, it's like, people come with the things that they come in with, right? Yeah. And so sometimes it makes it harder. But then that's the other thing too, right? Being okay to wait for them, I guess, too, right? It's like, they're going through stuff, I don't know what they're going through, and that may also kind of create a barrier, right? Or limitations. So, having the conversation and it's like, okay, so then how can I help or not? Well, then maybe you just have to move on and be okay with that. So, I think it's fascinating, right? How do we think about communicating with others, and even thinking about ‘what's my agenda?’ and maybe setting aside my own agenda so that I, like you said, will ultimately listen.

Sandy: One of the things, you know, over the last couple of years, you know, we've all, I think, done some interpersonal exercises, and you know, some reflection and stuff. I took a quiz through a program that I was doing -- it was about race. And my outcome was that I didn't see color. And so, at first, okay, cool. But when I dove in on that, you know, one fraction of a centimeter deep, I realized no, like, I, I have to see it. I have to be aware and respect and understand those differences. So, I thought that it was, this is great, "I don't see color, we were all just humans, we are just the same!" but we're not. And so that's been a piece for me to pause with, you know, and again, just learn about myself over the course of the last couple of years.

Jackie: I mean, I think we might also be subject to archived generations, right? So, I think at one point in time, you know, there was this good intent to think about, "Okay, so if we don't see color, then that will be a barrier, right? We don't have to deal with it. Okay, we're all the same." As we've progressed, I really learned a little bit more. It's kind of like, well, you see gender. If we want to be blinded, I really, you know, less blind gender, right? In some instances, or even socioeconomic status. But all these other things we see, but we're taught and socialized not to see race. And that's a learned systemic thing. And it's also sometimes caused from a place of privilege as well, right? If you don't have to, then you don't need to, but not in a bad way. I think, you know, it's how we're socialized. Or if you're socialized a certain way, then again, we talked about being vulnerable enough and being in a place where, "Okay, you know what? Maybe there's something else I need to learn, right?" If someone is telling me enough times that there's something wrong, right? I think even in any relationship, right? If your partner or friend is telling you know what, you're not hearing me, you're not hearing me right. Then at some point, you got to decide, "Is it me? Is it them? Or is there a third thing?" I think it's wonderful. I think we all have these, all these things, right? I grew up a certain way. My dad was very religious. So, being a religious household, there were certain things right in terms of sexuality, gender identity, gender roles, but you have to kind of at some point, like you know, kind of unlearn those, right? And if you're okay with unlearning and also open to learning, I think that's important. I think that that makes us grow.

Sandy: Yeah, I appreciate that. I like the, you know, the 'learning and the unlearning.' You're right. Every day, something happens that changes our lens, our perspective on things, so that's good. What is it like for you? As a Black woman pediatrician here in Frederick, are you one of many? Have you been one of many? You know, you've been doing this here in Frederick for 15, 16 years. What is that landscape like for you?

Jackie: Well, not totally in Frederick. So, I sort of moved around. I was in a New Jersey practice after finishing med school and then came back to the DMV area about 15 years ago. Most of my time has been mostly in public health, and then just the last year going back into pediatrics. But you know, what? I guess if people aren't aware, that maybe like, 2 to 5% of physicians or pediatricians identify as Black and even lower for Latino and Latina. So, we are really -- I can't

even say... I hate to say the word -- but we're a smaller percentage of the total. So, they're not a lot of us, representatively. So, you know, but it's interesting. I think I've, because of my associates, right? Because I found other colleagues who were African American, whether female or males, right? That kind of helped where you found some collegiality, commonality, kinship, friendship, that made it easier. Where I work now, I think there are more African American doctors that I've worked with than I have in the past. I think that's great, but also want to really work on the pipeline, right? Why are there still so few? Given how far we've come? So that's really the crux of it is like, how can we, how can we decrease barriers for any kid to dream that they want to do something and be something and not have, you know, not have these constant disparities?

Sandy: Do you work in the school system or in the colleges and universities in the area or even community colleges? Do you talk about that? Do you try to recruit?

Jackie: In the past, I have; in prior positions. COVID has made it a little bit difficult, right? In terms of like kids, or even younger, younger adults, shadowing. It makes it a lot more difficult in terms of coming into the office, you know, when I can I mentor younger providers, or those interested in the field, I mean. I've had an opportunity locally to work with women in STEM. So, I do that. I haven't worked in the schools yet here. Again, just kind of coming back to Frederick, I worked in Howard County for like 8 to 10 years, and now coming back and just re-familiarizing myself with the community.

Sandy: Nice. Okay. So, respecting your children and your family's privacy, I'm curious what this conversation you talked about how you've, you know, have been having this conversation of *What is Black?* How do you think it has been received? You know, are they having this conversation with their peers? Is there a ripple effect? Do you see that happening through your podcast?

Jackie: I think so. I mean, from conversations I've had with my kids. But it doesn't take much for me to tell them, right? They're experiencing it, right? They have their own lived experiences. But we can touch base, and we can talk about it. But the good thing is that we don't have to talk about it all the time, right. But it does come up, and over the last, you know, last year and a half, right? It came up very frequently, because of the protests after George Floyd's murder. And then just as reckoning right of both the pandemic, again, being a provider, and knowing that there's this disproportionality of who's impacted by COVID. So even having those conversations, so I know, yes, they've had conversations with their peers, which is good. And then also knowing that friends and colleagues who have learned more about some of the things that I talk about, right, the work that I do, that's also sparked conversations as well. So, I think it's good, I think it's creating a ripple effect, which I think is important.

Sandy: Where's your passion?

Jackie: Oh, my passion? Man...definitely working with families. Also, media, I think is important. Because for me, it's like I get excited about media; that when I only have 15 minutes to talk to a family, there's this opportunity to create content that can kind of explore it even more, right? We can break it down a little bit more. And also, opportunities for partnership. So that's what I'm excited about, you know, working in helping primarily all families. I've chosen to focus on Black children and families because it's on being an underrepresented group -- even in media -- looking at health disparity. So how can I help broaden the conversation? And I'm also hoping that there are other colleagues as well, right, that if they have a particular focus on kids of color, or a particular group of particular group of kids of color, that we elevate, and amplify issues that are important, so that there's an understanding that there's a commonality, right? There's a through line for all of us, right? If there's one group that's not doing well, then how do we really address equity and equality? If we don't find out why it is individual; A doesn't have the same access as individual B, right? So that's what I'm excited about, how can I help make a difference, create a ripple effect?

Sandy: What would you like for people to know about you?

Jackie: Oh, man. That I am creative, innovative, kind, I care about people. And my passion is to make a difference. And I think we can do that collectively, and I like to do it collectively.

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Sandy: So, we've been talking throughout this podcast series about trying to kind of break down some of these ideas and or misconceptions (or anything) that we might have come to the table with; is there anything that you would like for either the next generation, you know, that 13-year-old girl that identifies as Black? And, you know, thinking about, maybe she likes math, and doesn't know what to do with it? Or, you know, maybe doesn't have or does have a role model, but in a different area? What would you tell that, you know, 13-year-old in terms of their future an opportunity?

Jackie: Oh, I would say, you know, keep yourself wide open. I mean, because I've been thinking about this, right? I think as adults, we might put a little bit of pressure on kids and ask them, like, what do you want to be when you grow up, right? And you're only 13. So, I think what I want to tell a 13-year-old is to explore whatever you love; if you love math, if you love to read, if you love to paint, if you love to swim, do all the things, right? So that you feel you fill yourself up.

And then whatever you decide you want to do this time for that, right? There's no pressure, just be the best that you can be, make good friends, surround yourself with people that support and love you. And you know, be all that you can be.

Sandy: And you touched on this at SheWeek 2021 -- when we met, you touched a little bit on that unsolicited advice for a parent. What would you tell a parent that is raising a Black daughter and to try to figure out her future?

Jackie: Oh, that's a deep question. Because that's the thing, I think; unfortunately, I think there's sometimes there's like an extra extra layer, being a parent of color, or being a Black parent. But ultimately, I say just be a parent, right? Aside from racial identity, right? Because it doesn't really make you a parent, make you a good or bad parent, I think you have to be aware of the things you have to prepare her for, but at the same time, more of your job as a parent really is, you know, leaning into her leaning into who she is, who she wants to be, who she says she is. And you know, providing you know, structure, providing love, providing opportunities for her. The good thing about being a parent, right, is that you've had experience, and you can see things. So, helping her navigate that path, but doing it so that it's not so that she's fearful, right? And I think sometimes, as a parent, you could be holding on so tight, right? And we parent out of fear. But just... I'm not saying give up your fear because that is part of you. But I think ultimately, it's about preparing her to navigate the world she's going to expect but also hoping that you help open doors so that there are less barriers for her, and she can, you know, she's an advocate, she's an activist, she can be everything she wants to be.

Sandy: Do you have free time to volunteer? Do you volunteer your time in Frederick or in the region in your industry?

Jackie: I do. So, I serve in professional associations. And so, it really depends on the season, you know, if I have more time or not. Right now, you know, working with my trying to develop my media company, there's a little bit less time to volunteer, but there's a season coming up where I'll still mentor, you know, someone calls me, you know, I'll talk with them. But right now, most of my time right now is really kind of like creating the magic sauce, right, to really get the business off the ground with the hope that that creates ripple effects as well. I think that's also important too, right? Knowing, value your time, right? It's like if you don't have... if you are not pouring into yourself, it's harder to pour out to someone else. So, this season right now, it's about really working on the business, making that a success. You know, I have a course where I help to teach parents about talking to young children about race. And when I have opportunities like this to, to share, I think those are ways I volunteer right now, but I there'll be an upcoming season when I'll have a little bit more time to do that.

Sandy: So, let's talk about the business. Let's, you know... we've got the podcast on one piece, you know, courses and other materials kind of lay it out for me. What does the business look like?

Jackie: Oh, man. So right now, it's *What is Black?*. So, the podcast really was the flagship. And I just decided, like, okay, I just like, I like that name. So, the media company is called *What is Black?* and is still the heart of what I want to do; creating media content that looks to uplift and affirm Black children and families. So, I'm continuing with the podcast right now. I'm working on a documentary series that celebrates Black children's literature. Because, again, it combines multiple passions that I have. I love to read. I'm also a writer, but I also know the power of a story, right? And knowing historically, these books have been around, but they haven't really had the shine that I think they should have. And especially given last year, you know, social justice, racial justice movements, books became an important resource for parents, right? They were like, you know, like, 'Okay, how do I become anti-racist? Right? How can I expose my kids to different peoples in different worlds?' So, there was a consciousness-raising. So, then it's kind of like, well, you know, yes, there are these, these wonderful books by new authors and established authors. But there's this history, and just kind of thinking about how children's books can really be used to celebrate, to be provocative, to jumpstart conversations, but also, I mean, just books in general, I think are great. So, I'm working on that. And as I mentioned before, I created a course, because again, a lot of the dialogue over the last couple of years has really been talking about 'How do I help parents have these conversations about race?' And so, it's part of the course I use media because I love media right so how can you use books? How can you use every day experiences...if you're watching a television show with your kid to have those conversations? And I've decided to focus on really young children -- like the two to five, preschool-aged children -- because there's data that shows that kids at that age already internalizing racial bias. So again, you know, I always say parents, as kids' first teachers, there's an opportunity for us to really start to have these conversations. I mean, really heavy, heavy, deep conversations, right? But just introducing why it's important and why we need to stand up for kids and really play up our family's values of kindness, compassion, empathy, and those are really essential, I think, in making better humans, right? Or helping to create better humans.

Sandy: How does that story change, or the conversation change, when it's a mixed-race family?

Jackie: I think what's interesting in those instances is how parents raise their kids right in terms of how they how they have their children identify racially and being open to talking about both parents' racial identities and how their benefits and privileges and opportunities and then culture. So, I think that's how it changes it a little bit because depending on the family you're not talking about in abstract, right? It's like if you're a white family talking about a Black family, or a Hispanic, or Indigenous family. But if you now have multiple races or multiple ethnicities in the family, then you kind of have like it's... one parent may not solely identify with another parent's

experiences and vice-versa. And then your children now are going to have a different experience and space. So really, kind of having that conversation about each person's experiences and celebrating each person's identity.

Sandy: Really hearing and validating and you know that entire experience. Okay, okay, nice! What else? What would you like our audience to hear? So, we've got, you know, a general audience of Frederick and beyond what would you like them to know about, you Jackie, or about *What is Black??*

Jackie: That we're out there, and they can listen, subscribe to the *What is Black?* podcast. We're working on our fourth season, so that should be coming out probably in late fall. And if they, you know, want to learn more about how to stay up to date about *What is Black?*, we have a newsletter. So they go to the website, whatisblack.co, they can sign up for the newsletter, and then also learn more about the course over these next few weeks and months. We're going to have information about really letting people know, advertising, and promoting the course.

Sandy: Awesome. We'll have all those links in here in the show notes. So that's super exciting! Jackie, the last question that I asked all of my guests is, what is your Frederick factor?

Jackie: Oh, my Frederick factor. I love the downtown, the walk-through Baker Park. I love eating, so I love the restaurants. But it's just... I just love walking! You know my husband, we'll take a walk-through Baker Park, and it's like, it's just so beautiful to know that you kind of have, it's a city, but when you actually go to the park, it kind of feels like it's just different. And then even just Frederick County in general, all the great parks. I just love nature, so I love that opportunity to get out into nature.

Sandy: I love it. Thank you very much. Is there anything else you'd like to add? Any final remarks?

Jackie: It's been a pleasure to talk with you and thank you so much for extending the invitation.

Sandy: Oh my gosh, I don't come to these with any expectations. I like to come with a clean slate and have a great conversation, and you just, you filled me up. So, this is awesome. I loved everything about this conversation. Thank you so much. So, until next time! Thanks, Jackie.

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